
MARTIN, SCOTT C. *Killing Time: Leisure and Culture in Southwestern Pennsylvania, 1800-1850*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995. Pp. 309. Notes, bibliography and index. (\$29.95)

One of the most common observations that my colleagues in Europe have made to me in the periods when I have lived and worked there is that Americans work more than Europeans do, that most Americans seem to live and work. According to Scott Martin, this was true as early as 1800 in Southwestern Pennsylvania and, as a result, it was very difficult at first to convince people to make any time for leisure activities. Martin defines leisure in this period as “unoccupied time or time free from obligations.” In a sense people had to learn to savor leisure time and to develop an interest in it and an ability to satisfactorily act on that interest.

Martin’s book is organized thematically embracing the entire 50-year period at once and then scrutinizing it more closely within the context of his themes, which include gender, class, commercialization and privatization, cohesion, and diversity, as well as a case study of one holiday (the Fourth of July) and the leisure events surrounding it. The documentation of the book is extremely thorough and relies upon various newspapers and magazines of the period, proceedings of meetings, diaries, letters, and other family papers as well as excellent secondary sources reflecting research on the history, geography and culture of the region and illustrations of America’s sporting heritage of the times. Betts’s *American Sporting Heritage*, Stephen Hardy’s *How Boston Played*, Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, and Steven Reiss’s *City Games* are among the scores of well-known (and lesser known) sources cited throughout this book, which is based on Martin’s dissertation from the University of Pittsburgh.

It is interesting to see how the definition and the activities that were engaged in as leisure changed over the brief 50-year period. At first individuals had to overcome the notion that leisure time was wasted time, the idea that killing time would plague you and eventually kill the leisure participant (or at least adversely affect him or her). Idleness was decried; industry glorified. Even on Sunday, there was little time or respect for those who chose to use their time idly. It was feared that idle time led to drunkenness, crime, and other vices, and people needed to be shown that having leisure time would not necessarily lead to these downfalls. Around the 1830s a new sentiment became more prevalent, i.e., that “making money to the exclusion of all else...threatened to distract people from worthier goals that might be pursued during leisure time” (p. 11). The pursuit of self improvement through literature, music, and study was seen as noble and useful

to the individual and the society. In addition, leisure activities were seen as helpful in assisting people to adapt to the rapid pace of social and economic change.

Leisure both brought people together as they engaged in leisure practices and divided them into groups of people who chose to engage in such activities with only members of their own group, whatever that might be. At first leisure, as noted, was for self improvement with education being one of the most popular functions. Independent schools, academies, and itinerant tutors became sources of learning for individuals, a number of whom were able to significantly improve their lives through education. This sounds like the stuff of legend, but Martin documents these improvements through letters, diaries, and autobiographies.

Gradually leisure began to change as it became a source of groupness and became more commercialized. The traditional group enterprises such as quilting, sewing, flax pulling, mowing, repairing, etc., which brought groups of people together in a common vocational enterprise; began to be rivaled by hunting, fishing, billiards, cards, dances, walks, and sleigh rides. Men, of course, had much more freedom and choice in these group endeavors, but some activities were left only to women. Commercial events that drew much interest were traveling theater groups, circuses, animal shows, lectures, and concerts.

From early on differences became more sharply drawn along ethnic, religious, occupational, and gender lines. Militia companies were formed on ethnic basis and ethnic music, obviously of more interest to the particular ethnic group whose music was represented, became more popular. The major ethnic groups that populated Southwestern Pennsylvania were Germans, Irish, and Blacks with a smattering of other groups occasionally forming some separate entities. Dances, religious celebrations, and lodges were formed or partaken of by each of these three separate ethnic groups. As in so many neighborhoods today, taverns were frequented by particular workers such as drivers, boatmen, or mechanics. As transportation systems improved, more types of leisure—different kinds of entertainment performers—became accessible. The improvement of the roads and the creation of the canal system were credited by Martin with a rise in various types of leisure activities including “rope dancers, fencing masters, sword swallowers, ventriloquists, lecturers, dance teams, acrobats, and panoramas” (p. 49).

It was not long before even leisure became exploited in a politically partisan manner by both the Whigs and the Democrats, leading to separate celebrations of events like George Washington’s birthday. Leisure also became more privatized as people sought to disassociate themselves from excessive commercialization or partisanship. Thus, people turned to private clubs or began to look inward at their own homes as sources of leisure. This notion was assisted by the availability of inexpensive books, newspapers, periodicals, sheet music, and instruments, among other things.

Regarding class Martin divides it in a simple and arbitrary manner with upper, middle, and working being the three components. Upper classes, that is, “large landowner, prominent members of the learned professions, owners of substantial commercial enterprises and influential politicians” (p. 103) favored exclusive private parties and formal social gatherings such as balls, which could

be held in large private homes and both keep out “riff raff” and allow for ostentatious shows of consumption to both peers and lower classes. The middle classes such as farmers and landowners of more modest means, prosperous merchants, and industrialists also chose to celebrate leisure time with balls and cotillions, but having no homes large enough to accommodate such events would rent public facilities for such enterprises. Dancing schools and other private instruction in art, music, and language was common among this class as were fraternal and professional organizations and religious societies. Working-class members “partook of traditional, informal patterns of amusement and sociability, rather than newer forms of leisure that emphasized consumption and display” (p. 115).

No chapter is as timely as Chapter 6, “Engendering Leisure,” in which Martin describes how women were limited in their leisure activities and then in the nature of such activities. At first all leisure for women was linked to home and family like knitting, baking, and letter writing. Gradually women responded to what was an unequal distribution of labor by resisting or escaping oppressive situations. This allowed them to make their own decisions including their choices of leisure, which featured female spas and health resorts. Martin notes, however, that women’s successes at leisure like art instruction, music lessons, or higher education often became a source of pride for the families or the men involved. Thus, women, in this sense, were viewed as a leisure commodity of men.

Some women recognized this in areas like education and sought to control and upgrade women’s education. Emma Willard, the great social educator who founded the first female seminary in Troy, New York, in 1821 is presented by Martin as she speaks in Ligonier, Westmoreland County, to the pupils of a female seminary in 1844. Willard waxed indignant regarding the poor education females received compared to males and demanded better. Although this was certainly off putting to some, Willard and other reformers often presented their cases in less caustic tones seeking instead a right education that “enables us to be more efficient Christians—makes us better in all domestic relations—and enlarges our minds to comprehend, in our good desires, our sex, our country, our world” (Willard in Martin, p. 174).

Martin illustrates many of these differences of class, ethnicity, gender, and occupation with his case study of the Fourth of July (Chapter 4). Occupational associations sponsored dinners as did certain employers and religious groups. Other so-called outgroups like women, young people, and minorities celebrated together fostering group solidarity. As the century progressed, celebration of July Fourth also took on more decidedly partisan appearances as politicians sought to wrap themselves in the flag in order to help their election possibilities. As partisanship soured people’s notions of celebration on the Fourth, they began to turn to more private celebration and to commercialization and finally to the more raucous celebration that today’s holiday has become. In the 1840s firecrackers and other fireworks became the order of the day but were decried by many. “Firecrackers became so prevalent and bothersome that proprietors of steamboats and pleasure gardens warned patrons that their use would not be tolerated on the Fourth” (p. 98).

Martin closes his book with a brief epilogue on leisure in the 1850s and beyond, though there is really little he discusses beyond the 1850s other than a few attempts to illustrate how the seeds sowed in earlier years were carried forward through that period and into later years. Despite this minor qualm, one should be very satisfied with Martin's narrative, which is well presented and integrates anecdotal data throughout his generalized statements. He structures and supports the narrative well, though at times, his analysis of why something began is left unaddressed. Martin provides an excellent view of leisure in one small geographic area over a 50-year period, but he draws on larger works to reinforce that this pattern is reflective of the larger pattern of leisure development in the United States at that time. The book is easy to read and impressive in its scholarship. It will appeal to sport and cultural historians alike.

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