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***In These Decoy Shops, Kindred Spirits Meet:* Social Commentary and the 19th Century Ontario Tavern**

Guillet identified the tavern as the fundamental location for amusement for both rural and urban nineteenth-century Ontarians. For every six miles of road, he suggested, there was a tavern. Through the 1800s legislation increasingly targeted taverns, grog shops, groceries, and bawdy-houses as lobbyists and social reformers sought to cleanse the streets of public nuisances and ‘rowdy’ behavior. Restricted hours and days of operation, liquor license control which lead to widespread vote-buying, and revenue generation from sin taxes were some of the implications of tavern regulation by the state. For temperance advocates, such regulations were essential to curbing the influence of these “demoralizing establishments.” For the average tavern-goer, however, and as de Lottinville has clearly argued, these small shops were not just centers of entertainment and blood sport; they were often friendly neighborhood and rural hubs where one could get inexpensive food and drink and enjoy some camaraderie and conversation.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the impact of temperance lobbying and legislation on the tavern in nineteenth-century Ontario, with explicit regard to the public portrayal of licensed and unlicensed houses in periodicals and newspapers. Some of the complexities of negotiation between what was considered to be appropriate and inappropriate citizenship were played out over the tavern, as a place for public entertainment and particular types of sport. These kinds of social debates between social reformers, average working citizens, local elites, and temperance advocates were part of a broader social process through which both common and competing views about social life in Canada emerged.

The paper also argues that the structural forces of social class, through the mediated mechanisms of political economy and organized religion were fundamental in creating and presenting a ‘public face’ of consent about the restrictions placed on taverns and grog shops. On the one hand, the tavern was a haven of resistance to prevalent cultural values and created opportunities for alternative social practices, including sport. On the other hand, it was by regulating such public places that the state, if only in part, distilled consent for broader cultural values. Indeed the positioning of social opposites such as the tavern sports and middle-class club sports was part of a legitimization process that contributed to the emergence of post-confederation attitudes towards industrial capitalism and the re-organization of Canadian society.

The main primary sources are local newspapers, contemporary periodicals, and government reports.