



The Making of American Resorts: Saratoga Springs, Ballston Spa, and Lake George

Theodore Corbett

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What factors create a successful resort? How did the rise of lavish hotels and spas reflect the changing values of American society as the nineteenth century progressed? Historians have argued that resorts were created to meet the demands of a leisured social elite. Theodore Corbett offers a fresh, compelling argument, demonstrating that resorts created and re-created themselves to keep pace with changing times. Success came with anticipating demands, not just reacting to them.

Using an impressive variety of historical documents, Corbett focuses on the conditions underlying the rise—and the demise—of the resorts at Ballston Spa and Caldwell on Lake George. Both towns' major landlord-developers saw tourism as only one vehicle that could lead to success. As a result of their divided policies, neither town invested in the proper infrastructure to make tourism an immediate success. Both places were soon overshadowed by Saratoga Springs, which became the premier resort of the upper and middle class.

Due to complex interwoven influences, Saratoga Springs was able to supply the amenities needed to attract and retain the patronage of the well-heeled. The town provided visitors with lavish hotels, parks, public squares, pleasure gardens, and convenient service alleys. Saratoga Springs also had a work force that was available for the five-month period per year that the spas were active. Corbett examines the history and participation of various ethnic groups in the resort's service sector: African Americans, Irish, and Native Americans.

Corbett also stresses middle-class America's emulation of the leisure habits of the English aristocracy. Even though these pursuits (hunting, fishing, horse racing) were dominated by men, social rituals were dominated by women, and resorts that accommodated "public domesticity" thrived as the century progressed. *The Making of American Resorts* offers a window into shifting public values and the structure of commercial tourism.

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