



Raw Life: Cameos of 1890s Justice from a Magistrate's Bench Book

J. Patrick Boyer

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Justices of the peace, constables, and game wardens from the late 19th century are brought to vivid life interacting with a variety of accused citizens.

Rare views of human lives in turmoil are revealed in several hundred trials conducted in 1890s Muskoka by Magistrate James Boyer of Bracebridge. The charges and evidence show how raw life really was in Canada's frontier towns, with cases ranging from nostalgic and humorous to pitiable and deeply disturbing.

While dispensing speedy justice, Boyer, who was also town clerk and editor of the *Northern Advocate*, the first newspaper in Ontario's northern districts, kept a careful record in his handwritten "bench book" of all these cases. That bench book, recently found by his great-grandson, lawyer J. Patrick Boyer, provides the raw material for *Raw Life*.

This first-time publication of these cases demonstrates how, in Canadian society, some things haven't changed much over the years – from early road rage to the plight of abused women, from environmental contamination to punitive treatment of the poor.

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