Visiting a foreign country is much like looking into a fish tank: you can only observe and make assumptions based on your external perspective. Author Isaac Weld Junior appeared to be a European visitor to Eastern Canada when he wrote the letter titled “Winter Amusements”[[1]](#footnote-1) to an unknown receiver, presumably in his home country, Britain. In his letter, he reflects on the way Canadians in the Quebec region managed during the winter season. In particular, he notes just how happy they appear to be in the unbearable cold. This letter, written between 1795 and 1797 and published in the book *Travels through the states of North America, and the provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the years 1795, 1796, and 1797,* was printed by John Stockholm in London, England in 1799. The proximity of the letter’s publication in comparison to when it was written makes the content of the letter fairly accurate and reliable. This also proves that the letter was written to be shared with the public, with the purpose of informing those living in Great Britain of the winter conditions in Canada and how the local people positively react to the extreme cold and snow. However, Isaac Weld Junior’s impression of Canadians in Winter may have been from a biased outsider’s perspective, thus fueling misconceptions and stereotypes. This analysis focuses on the author’s perspective on winter weather, entertainment, and stereotypes that are articulated in this letter.

Weld expands on the unbearable cold of winter by noting that “the greatest degree of cold which they experience in Canada, [January], when for a few days it is sometimes so intense, that it is impossible for a human being to remain out of doors for any considerable time, without evident danger of being frost bitten.”[[2]](#footnote-2) In the coldest month of the season, the bitter cold would keep residents indoors for nearly the entire month. To Weld, they seem very happy despite being trapped indoors for a lengthy period of time. His perspective of how Canadians dealt with the frigid climates is rather positive. He stated throughout the letter how Canadians seem happiest in the winter, and how it seems to be their favourite season.[[3]](#footnote-3) This assumption may be fueled by the Canadians’ flourishing social lives during the winter. It is only fitting that they must be content with their environment because it is too cold to go outside and do all the daily work required in the warmer months. They cannot tend to the garden, hunt for food, or fish. Instead, they would dedicate their winters to relaxation, recreation, and revitalization.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Canadians frequently hosted parties in their homes, which included cards, music, dancing, and other forms of entertainment.[[5]](#footnote-5) Considering these parties were events within the community, the activities that came with it – such as dance – were seen as pleasurable social events and were very popular. Such activities were seen as expressions of enjoyment because of the circumstances in which they were performed. In his letter, Isaac Weld Junior stated that “it appears then as if the town were inhabited but by one large family.”[[6]](#footnote-6) This explains that the majority (if not all) of the community gathers under one roof, and comes together like a family, showing the closeness and friendliness of the residents of Canada.

The characteristics given to Canadian residents by Weld, however, may have caused for some stereotypes regarding Canadians that are still used today. For instance, the idea that winter is their favourite season, or that they are always rather cheery and happy. Stereotypes are derived from a biased belief, typically aimed toward a certain group of people. Isaac Weld Junior’s outlook on Canadians during winter could be interpreted as stereotypes because of their one-sidedness and lack of factual information. For example, some of the stereotypes mentioned in Weld’s letter are that Canadians seem to be overly happy, that winter is their favourite season, and that they love the cold. “[Canadians prefer] the winter to every other season. . . I never met a Canadian, rich or poor, male or female, but what was of that opinion.”[[7]](#footnote-7) These statements fueled a misconception of Canadians and their general personalities back in Great Britain, which still remain in present time. Did Weld talk to any Canadian citizens and get accurate information before he came to these conclusions, or did he simply make assumptions based off of what he saw and heard from others in a short period of time? There are many unanswered questions and factors that can determine whether the statements made by Weld are factual or not.

In his letter, Isaac Weld Junior has made his opinion very clear about Canadians. He strongly believed that Canadians were happiest in the winter months, and his reasons were explained throughout the document. He argued that in the extreme weather conditions that transpire in winter force the residents to stay inside. This typically resulted in community-wide gatherings in the residents’ homes, including activities such as dance to celebrate and make the best of the workless season. Winters were dedicated to entertainment and unity, thus creating a happy environment for all residents. Although possible stereotype were presented in this document, there was a clear effort to make a positive impression of Canadians. Isaac Weld’s letter gave a clear outlook of the misconceptions that can arise with visiting a foreign country.

1. Isaac Weld Jr., “Letter XXVI: Winter Amusements,” *Travels Through The States Of North America, And The Provinces Of Upper And Lower Canada, During The Years 1795, 1796, and 1797* (London, England: published by John Stockdale, 1799), 225.

   This book was a compilation of letters by the same author, based off of his travels along the northeastern coast of North America. “Winter Amusements” is just one section in the letter XXVI, which is focused on manufacturing, products, and amusement in this portion of Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Isaac Weld Jr., “Letter XXVI: Winter Amusements,” Travels Through The States Of North America, And The Provinces Of Upper And Lower Canada, During The Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London, England: published by John Stockdale, 1799), 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Isaac Weld Jr., “Letter XXVI: Winter Amusements,” Travels Through The States Of North America, And The Provinces Of Upper And Lower Canada, During The Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 (London, England: published by John Stockdale, 1799), 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)