

The Patriot War Along the New York-Canada Border by Shaun J. McLaughlin

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[See table of contents](#)

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B ook Reviews

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by Shaun J. McLaughlin

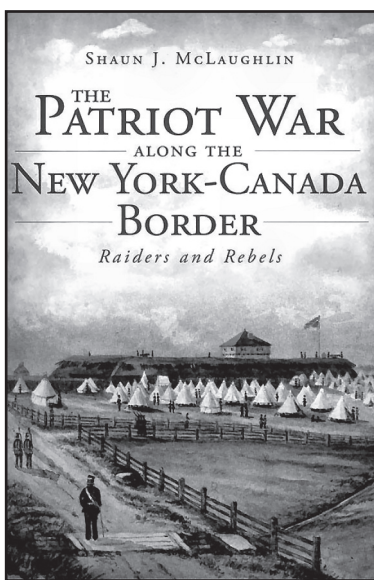
Charleston S.C.: The History Press, 2012. 206 pages. \$19.99 US softcover. ISBN 978-1-60949-465-0 (www.historypress.net)

2012 marks the beginning of celebrations to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the 1837/38 Upper Canadian Rebellions. It is therefore most timely that Shaun McLaughlin's work on a portion of these events has recently been published. As the title suggests, this book deals specifically with episodes related to the Patriot War along the New York-Canadian border. This publication is divided into nineteen chapters that are well organized and easy to read. It is also an affordable book. Following the mission of the History Press by "preserving and enriching community by empowering history enthusiasts to write local stories for local audiences," McLaughlin presents a popular history on a topic with which he has

had a long personal interest. He shares this knowledge with readers and produces his best work on topics that he knows, namely the Patriot War, Canadian-American border clashes, and William Johnston.

However, there are some errors that should be noted. A beautiful, coloured

front cover of an 1867 painting of a military encampment beside Fort Wellington, is described later in the book as being "similar to the events of November 13, 1838." This is misleading. With heightened tensions along the border, the British decided to completely reconstruct Fort Wellington, with work commencing in the summer of 1838. This task was not completed until the spring of 1839, creating the fort as pictured in 1867.



The author uses Tasmania throughout the text instead of Van Diemen's Land. The word Tasmania was not officially sanctioned and used until 1 January 1856. The capital of Van Diemen's Land is referred to as Hobarttown, when its actual spelling is two words—Hobart Town. The political prisoners were sent to Probation Stations, not to work camps. There is no evidence to prove that the Patriot exiles were flogged during their incarceration. Tickets of leave, a form of probation, were not only issued on 16 February 1842 but at various times according to prisoners' conduct. American prisoners were not "abandoned by the U.S. government" as asserted by the author. Active behind the scenes negotiations took place to bring about pardons, and American officials aided freed prisoners in finding their way home aboard U.S. whaling vessels.

Aside from these errors, a question of interpretation is raised by the approach taken by the author. In the Preface, the author suggests that an "undeclared War" occurred between United States and Canada. The events might be more precisely described as war-like, not as war. It would be more accurate to follow the argument proffered at the time by Colonel John Prince. He argued that to be prisoners of war, a state of war had to exist. As states of war do not exist between private organizations and governments, the central government would have to declare a state of war between the United States and Great Britain. This did not happen, either in 1837 or 1838.

More than these small issues, it is not what is in this book, but what is not which should be further addressed. Direct quotes from period references appear on many pages throughout the book, but there is not one footnote to guide readers to the origins of these sources. Numerous photographs, maps and graphics are featured,

but there are few credits provided for these images. Another major shortcoming is the limited bibliography. Primary accounts by Aaron Dresser, Robert Marsh, Samuel Snow and Elijah Woodman are not listed; neither are important earlier secondary works by Oscar Kinchen, Charles Lindsey, E.A. Theller, O.E. Tiffany, Thomas Jefferson Sutherland, James Gibson and George Rude. Nor are more recent titles by Tom Dunning, Stuart Scott, Colin Duquemin, John Carter, Charles Anderson, Cassandra Pybus, Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, and Colin Read and Ronald Stagg included.

Other helpful inclusions could be: the noting of relevant electronic internet sources and websites, a listing of institutions and depositories where primary research documents are housed, more names and descriptions of Patriots who returned to North America added to the Appendix, and a complete list of participants at the Short Hills incursion and the Battle of the Windmill who were transported to Van Diemen's Land. McLaughlin's book lacks academic and scholarly components. The author is generally sound with facts related to events in Upper Canada and New York State, but makes factual mistakes in material presented about the Patriot prisoners in Van Diemen's Land.

Overall, this is a good book for readers acquainting themselves for the first time about certain aspects of the Upper Canadian rebellions of 1837/38. It is also a useful publication in the commemoration of the 175th anniversary of these events. Orders can be placed by contacting the publisher at its website.

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