

## *Favourite Son? John A. Macdonald and the Voters of Kingston 1841-1891* by Ged Martin

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[See table of contents](#)

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suggest, though, that, for a brief overview of the history of the canals and of their locations, to accompany this volume, readers might like to refer John N. Jackson, *The Four Welland Canals* (1988) and Colin K. Duquemin, *The Driver's Guide to the Historic Welland Canal* (2004).

At the end of my reading, I was left with two compelling impressions. One is that an undertaking on the scale of the Welland Canal was an astonishing accomplishment in pre-confederation Canada, and one that demanded unrelenting political persistence. An enterprise that elsewhere might have ridden a tide of patriot-

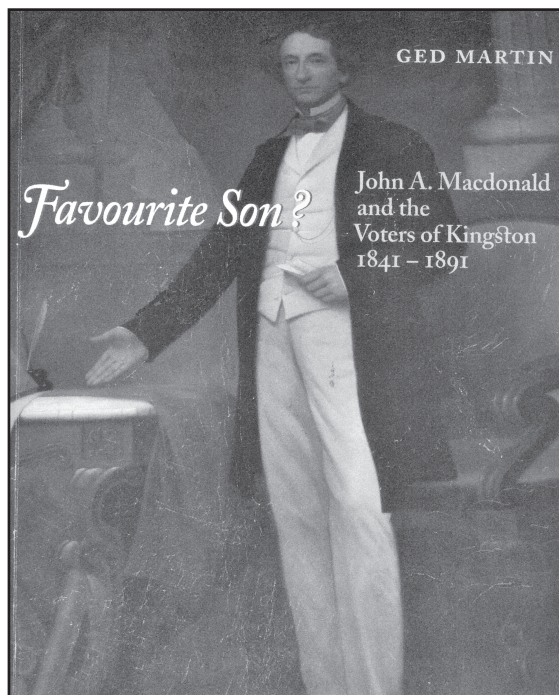
ism and sense of national destiny to easier completion was fated to run a gauntlet of skepticism, pessimism and lassitude. The other is that the construction, operation and support of the early Welland Canals, in defiance of so many natural, economic and human adversities, was an early feat of innovation, resolve and sacrifice that was, albeit on a smaller scale, an event of national drama and importance akin to the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the nineteenth century's closing years.

**Eric Nixon** is a professional writer with a long-term interest in the Welland Canals.

### *Favourite Son? John A. Macdonald and the Voters of Kingston 1841-1891*

By Ged Martin

Kingston: Kingston Historical Society, 2010. 214 pages. \$35.00 paperback. ISBN 978-0-91977-014-0 ([www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca))



**G**ed Martin has done something different and notable. Despite the wealth of material on the life of Sir John A. Macdonald, he provides a new look at the man in *Favourite Son? John A. Macdonald and the Voters of Kingston 1841-1891*, an oversized and somewhat fragile book published by the Kingston Historical Society. Martin takes the standard view of Macdonald—as a man who rose steadily from small town lawyer, to provincial politician, to Father of Confederation, and, finally, to an international statesman—and turns it on its head. When it came to his relationship with the voters of Kingston, Macdonald's story is one of gradual decline and deterioration.

Macdonald represented Kingston for some thirty-eight years between his first election in 1844 and his last, only a few weeks before his death, in 1891. Martin

examines each election campaign, focusing on the candidates and issues and highlighting Macdonald's changing relationship with both. He began his career as a local "Protestant candidate," (31) and then transformed himself into a force on the provincial level. Political and business interests increasingly took him away to Ottawa and Toronto and, as his family connections to the old city evaporated, his ties to Kingston weakened. By the 1860s Macdonald's career was on a different trajectory; his attention was increasingly on national affairs and his ability to provide 'pork' for the city was diminishing. Confederation—Macdonald's greatest achievement—was therefore something of a disappointment for the city. As prime minister, the demands on Macdonald as a national deal maker jumped significantly; at the same time, Confederation created a second level of authority in the new province of Ontario which limited Macdonald's influence in local development projects. "Thus," Martin writes, "both of the core aspects of Confederation were likely to weaken the Kingston-Macdonald relationship: within the re-created province of Upper Canada to be henceforth known as Ontario, the city would probably find itself looking to alternative political benefactors for favours, while at the federal level, the need to subsidize the Maritimes would reduce the overall resources available to localities." (81)

In the following years Macdonald spent even less time in Kingston and his political difficulties made it harder for him to hold his seat. That he held on as long as he did was a testament to his charisma, charm, and the other personal qualities that rarely deserted him. "Sir John A. Macdonald may not have been Canada's most morally upright politician, nor invariably its most sober statesman," Martin concludes, "but he did inspire a remarkably tenacious degree of uncritical loyalty." (105-107) By

the mid-1870s, however, he had moved his family and law practice to Toronto. It was finally too much for his home town and he was defeated in the election of 1878. After a decade in the wilderness he returned to Kingston for the election of 1887, now as the 'old man' and a national treasure.

The second major character in this book is Kingston itself. Martin paints a portrait of a city in decline, as Kingston evolved from an important port, political capital, and military garrison in the 1830s and 1840s, to a smaller regional centre that was increasingly overshadowed by Toronto and Ottawa. Macdonald's greatest triumph, in 1857, was accompanied by great expectations and hopes for the future; in 1891 he was too weak even to campaign and by then Kingston was neither a capital city nor a political centre; it had been bypassed in the railway boom and it had lost the economic benefits of the British garrison. Soon the city would not even have the distinction of having the prime minister as its member of parliament.

Martin includes two chapters examining the city's economic misfortunes and the voters of Kingston—who had the vote, the use of patronage, the extent of bribery and corruption, and so on. He points out that Macdonald's electoral success in Kingston fell as the number of voters rose and, as time progressed, he was less able to dole out favours to his friends or development projects to the city. But Martin does not accuse him of serious corruption and notes that in most elections Macdonald's margin of victory was great enough to rule out most corrupt influences. Indeed, he portrays Macdonald as a man who was willing to help friends and use unscrupulous tactics but, at same time, as a man of some honour and dignity who played fair.

The book is exhaustively researched and a pleasure to read, and it clearly de-

serves the awards it has already received. It ends on a note of some sadness, as Macdonald dies, ending a relationship that spanned half a century, having “achieved far more for the country that he created than for the

city which had for so long sustained his political career.” (190)

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Ryerson University

***Barbed Wire, Black Flies, 55°F Below***  
***The Story of the Monteith, Ontario POW Camp 1940-1946***

By Peter Lanosky

Lone Butte, British Columbia: Peter Lanosky, with Lanworth Creative, 2011. 192 pages. \$30.00 paperback. ISBN 978-1-77084-079-9 ([www.POWcamp23.com](http://www.POWcamp23.com))

Considering that over 30,000 members of the German armed forces began the Second World War in Europe, but finished it in a network of Canadian prison camps stretching from New Brunswick to Alberta, it is curious that so little historical attention has been paid to this subject. The POW camps that dotted the map of northern Ontario are particularly interesting, as the interned Germans at these locations became integrated into the local communities and economies in a manner not replicated elsewhere. Because professional historians have largely ignored the Canadian internment operation, most investigations have been conducted by amateur researchers with personal connections to the regions in which the camps were located. Such is the case with Peter Lanosky’s book *Barbed Wire, Black Flies, 55°F Below*, which documents the story of POW Camp Q/23 that operated from 1940 to 1947 in the northern Ontario community of Monteith.

Lanosky does an impressive job of clearly explaining the origin and evolution of the Canadian POW camps, a reflection of the prodigious amount of archival research that forms the basis of this book. As the author notes, the Canadian internment operation in the Second World War grew out of previous programs initiated by the RCMP and the Department of National Defence that aimed

to intern Nazi sympathizers and “enemy aliens” already residing within Canada. Northern Ontario had previously played host to internment camps in the First World War and to “relief” camps during the Depression, and so by 1940 the region’s geographic isolation and resource-based economy, when combined with the potential labour pool that the POWs represented, was seen as a cheap domestic solution to a complex international security issue. With the infrastructure from a defunct correctional facility still in place, the town of Monteith, about 700 kilometers north of Toronto, seemed especially suitable as a POW camp location.

Lanosky also does a competent job of bringing some historical context to Monteith, a small community near Timmins that was formed in the halcyon days of the Clay Belt discoveries in the early 1900s. The hardship of a Monteith winter, where the temperature would sometimes drop to minus fifty Celsius, is compounded in the reader’s mind by Lanosky’s description of the massive wildfires that swept through the region in the first half of the twentieth century. The claim that the residents of Monteith were a “hardy and resilient lot” (p. 8) is if anything an understatement, but the reader’s curiosity about the interactions between the locals and the POWs is never quite satisfied, especially when considering the outlying labour projects around