

Lake Erie Stories: Struggle and Survival on a Freshwater Ocean By Chad Fraser

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that, through the years, storytellers reshaped the facts to suit the ears of the dominant population; the Aboriginal agency steadily diminished. In a second Baldoon essay, Rick Fehr uses the failure of the settlement's "utopian vision" to drain the wetlands as a basis for rethinking environmental sustainability in the Lake St Clair region in the twenty-first century. Fehr believes these borderlands would function best by blending Aboriginal notions of sustainability with traditional European land-use knowledge.

The last four chapters take up intangible borderlands. Catherine Murton Stoehr speaks of borderlands of spirituality, wherein southern Ontario First Nations were able to blend comfortably the millenarian teachings of Anishinabeg religious leaders with the penitential and redemptive preachings of Methodism. Michelle Hamilton explains how Pauline Johnson, her sister Evelyn, and the Brant-Sero family functioned on the academic borderlands as anthropologists, chronicling the history of their communities. They chose to preserve the artifacts and stories of their past through the institutions and methodologies of white society. Norman Shields argues that federal legislation restricting native status, dating from the Confederation era, continued to affect Ontario natives' lives until at least 1985. These laws not only led to an ideological split between the Six Nations and the Anishinabeg, but also caused rifts among the latter communi-

ties themselves over issues of matrilineality and marriage to non-status and non-Canadian native people. Ute Liske's examination of the works of Cree-Métis writer Louise Erdrich (born 1954) forms the final chapter of *Lines Drawn upon the Water* and allows the reader to review contemporary examples of the aboriginal experience with the international border. Like the Sault communities discussed by Hele, and Chute and Knight, Erdrich's words reveal a sense of identity and cultural solidarity that transcends the artifice of boundaries.

Hele hoped that these essays would encourage American and Canadian scholars to consider the international border "not as a barrier but as a crucible where conflicting currents of identity, history and culture shape local and national communities." (p. xiii) The two introductory chapters and the subsequent essays on the Sault Ste Marie area lend themselves most strongly to this mandate. The works on the metaphysical and epistemological concepts of borders are awkward additions and would work better in a separate volume. But even if *Lines Drawn upon the Water* does not offer seamless reading from beginning to end, the majority of the chapters are well crafted and of scholarly merit. Readers will also benefit from the sizable bibliography appended to the collection.

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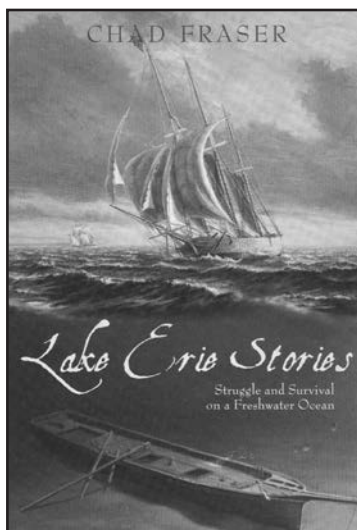
Lake Erie Stories: Struggle and Survival on a Freshwater Ocean

By Chad Fraser.

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008. 227 pages. \$24.99 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55002-782-2 (www.dundurn.com)

Chad Fraser has been immersed in his subject since the early 1980s, when, as he says, "my late father introduced me to Lake Erie in the only way fathers of the time

knew how—by nudging me into its warm waters one summer afternoon at the government dock in Kingsville, Ontario." (p. 203) It is clear from the book that the lake has quite



a hold on him.

Lake Erie Stories recounts history and stories from the fourth largest (by surface area) of the five Great Lakes. Though substantial in extent, Lake Erie is also the shallowest. For the mariners who have plied its surface, it is these two characteristics that make *Struggle and Survival* such an apt subtitle for

the book. Erie's position among the Great Lakes, with the major shipping ports of Buffalo at the eastern end and Detroit, Toledo and Cleveland at the western, has meant that its waters have been heavily travelled since the earliest days of commercial navigation. Shallow depths, shifting sandbars, heavy traffic, and quick and unpredictable changes in weather have made Lake Erie a perilous place for sailors. Its geographical position has also made it politically contested, particularly during the War of 1812 and the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837. Struggle and survival have been themes for the countries that border Lake Erie as well as for the mariners that have sailed it.

The book is organized chronologically into seven chapters, dealing with the period of French exploration, the War of 1812, the Rebellion of 1837, a raid during the American Civil War, shipwrecks, lighthouses and, finally, rum-running and smuggling during the prohibition era. Fraser concludes *Lake Erie Stories* with useful sections listing associated historical sites and organizations, and online resources. A thorough bibliography documents American and Canadian newspapers that would be of interest to researchers.

Among the remarkable stories Fraser recounts, the experience of one in particular individual stands out. Abigail Becker—The Heroine of Long Point—was from Fraser's account a woman of considerable mental and physical resources. She must have been made of stern stuff just to get through the daily trials of life raising thirteen children, five of them step-children, in a small isolated cabin out on Long Point, built of salvaged logs and driftwood. The skills and decisiveness that she developed in the course of looking after her extensive family stood her in good stead in an area infamous as a graveyard for vessels that ventured too close. Late one season (Fraser does not give the year), with the lighthouse boarded up for the winter and the keeper gone, a vessel was wrecked near Abigail's cabin. Six sailors made it ashore and started towards the cabin, but two collapsed along the way. When the other four men, wet and exhausted, reached safety and told her of their comrades, Abigail sent out her older children with food and clothing for them, and they too eventually made it to the cabin. During the succeeding weeks she nursed all six sailors back to health. In November 1854, she was called upon again when the Toronto-bound schooner *Conductor* struck a sandbar two hundred metres off shore in a blizzard. Their only lifeboat was swept away, leaving the crew with no choice but to lash themselves in the rigging and await rescue. There next morning Abigail discovered eight of them, clinging in the wreck. After lighting a fire on the beach and boiling water for tea, she and the children encouraged the men to jump into the roiling, freezing water and make their way to shore and the warmth she had prepared. Only the cook, a non-swimmer, remained in the rigging. Returning the second morning, she and some of the crew built a raft from the wreck and rescued the cook. We should all have such help in time of need.

Other stories cover a wide range of sub-

jects. Some are heroic: for instance, American Oliver Perry's victory over the British fleet during the War of 1812 in the bloody naval engagement at Put-In Bay. Rather less glorious episodes relate to the thousands of gallons of liquor that flowed from Canada south to the US during Prohibition. Still others are almost farcical, such as the comedy of errors that was William Lyon Mackenzie's rebellion, which ended in the Battle of Pelee Island in 1837.

Fraser's writing style is clear and orderly, and his narratives move along briskly. He has undoubtedly been diligent in his research, and has successfully condensed a great deal of reading into a lively recounting. This is true even for stories often told, such as LaSalle's

misadventures and the loss of the *Griffon* in the seventeenth century. Behind each story there is obviously much more information, but Fraser has selected well from the wealth of material available to him. In the end, *Lake Erie Stories* offers neither significant new insights into Lake Erie history, nor radical re-interpretations. Instead, in a style eminently suited to his purpose, Fraser moves the reader through a history of this tempestuous and contested body of water in an entertaining way that must surely leave readers wanting to visit for themselves the sites of the events he so ably describes.

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Thomas D'Arcy McGee, Volume I: Passion, Reason, and Politics, 1825-1857

By David A. Wilson

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. 448 pages. \$39.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-7735-3357-8 (www.mqup.mcgill.ca)

This book is the first installment of David Wilson's two-volume biography of Thomas D'Arcy McGee. Wilson teaches at the University of Toronto and is an accomplished historian of modern Ireland and the Irish diaspora. He has devoted much of his academic career to demolishing historical myths and, as such, is ideally suited to writing a biography of a figure whose importance in Canadian history has grown to mythical proportions. McGee is today remembered as one of Canada's Fathers of Confederation; this book reminds us that McGee was once an Irish revolutionary republican.

Wilson opens by offering extensive information about McGee's family background and formative years in Ireland, and then moves on to discuss McGee's emigration to the United States in 1842, at the age of seventeen, and

his journalistic career in Boston. By the time he returned to Ireland in 1845, McGee had become an important figure in the Irish-American com-

munity. Wilson then discusses McGee's role in the Young Ireland movement, his response to the potato famine, and the events that led up to the failed rebellion against British rule in 1848. McGee escaped to the United States following that episode, where he edited Irish Catholic newspapers in New York, Boston, and Buffalo. Volume One concludes in 1857, when McGee relocated to Montreal. The sec-

