

Dictionary of Glengarry Biography By Royce MacGillivray

Robert L. Fraser

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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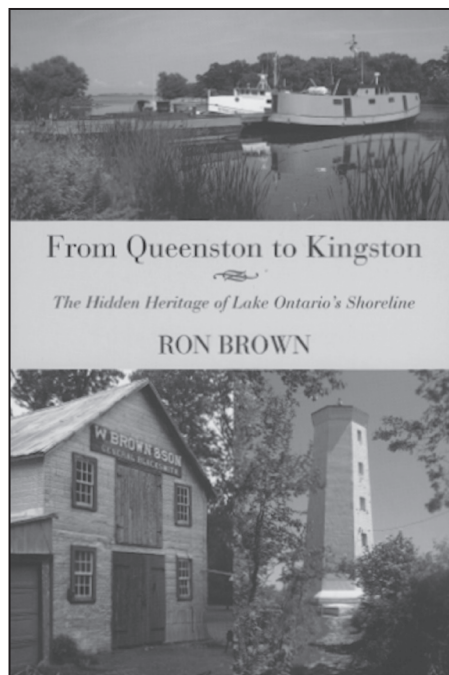
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The result is a book offering many tantalizing details of interest to anyone with an historical-geographical imagination and an attachment to the locality. The evidence for some places is richer than for others, and so the story can be a fuller one. I found Brown's discussion of Toronto's Eastern Beach(es) and of Scarborough especially intriguing; it left me impatient to explore some of the places with which I have little familiarity. By contrast, Brown had disappointingly little to say about the Toronto Harbour, a much reworked landscape that could have offered him a rich field for his particular approach. My sense is that Brown has taken especial care and pleasure to notice the historic legacy remaining in the more rural parts of the region of which he writes. The Bay of Quinte area is an outstanding example of his applied curiosity.

From Queenston to Kingston succeeds best at the most local level. The careful reader will discover that Brown does little to articulate what characterizes the area as a region with a particular historical and cultural character. The reader likewise will find different historical moments in focus at different and nearby sites, exaggerating the isolation of settlements located along the main communication route of the early colonial era.

Brown offers his reader a welcome harvest of illustrations which enhances the text. By contrast, the maps are of value



only for the most general orientation. Anyone wishing to search for the places discussed will need to consult other sources. The book is well produced, although in the chapter on Kingston the copyediting failed to prevent the misspelling of such well-known names as Hales, Counter and Browne.

Peter G. Goheen
Queen's University, Kingston.

Dictionary of Glengarry Biography

By Royce MacGillivray. Alexandria, Ontario: Glengarry Historical Society, 2010. lv + 777 pages. \$95.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-9680711-2-0 <www.glengarryhistoricalsociety.com>

Dipping into Royce MacGillivray's delightful book, I was taken back, quite unexpectedly, to grade school. My love of history first emerged as an enchantment with storytelling. Both of my Fraser grandparents were spellbinding naturals; the formal part took root in

primary school in Hamilton where, in Grade 4, Miss Séguin indulged my passion for tales of Highlanders, explorers, and Jacobites. One of my earliest formed memories is from her class and taken from Ralph Connor's *Glengarry Schooldays* — "The school never forgot the day when big

Bob Fraser ‘answered back’ in class.” Well, neither did I and it was much later in life when I learned that Miss Séguin’s passion for history, Highlanders, explorers, and Ralph Connor came naturally; she was a Glengarrian and a proud one at that. I, too, had become enchanted with her tales and Connor’s of Glengarry and its world of brave Highlanders. It seemed to this young lad a world somewhat akin to family lore about the Highlands of Scotland from whence we came.

“Glengarry was a nation with its own intense sense of cohesion and of separation from the outside world, its own customs, and values, its own awareness of having its own historic past that is separate from the country in which it has been a part, and for a time, even its own language.” So wrote Royce MacGillivray and Ewan Ross in their history of Glengarry County which was established in 1792 mainly by Highland Scottish loyalists from Clan MacDonnell. Group settlement and its cultural persistence distinguished this country from others and left its own mystique.

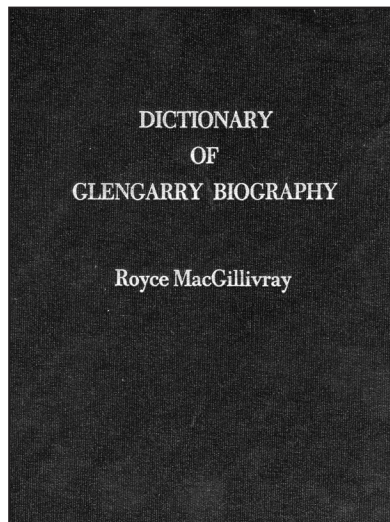
Dictionaries of biography are relatively scarce items on the Canadian historical landscape. There is, of course, the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* now entering its 51st year and a considerable presence online with almost 2,250,000 visitors annually. There is also the *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography* with four published volumes to its credit (1981 to 1999) and the *Dictionary of Manitoba Biography* (published in print in 1999 and online in 2008).

Like so many works on Glengarry,

this new offering springs from the hand of Royce MacGillivray, a retired professor of the University of Waterloo, a historian of the Restoration period in English history, a Glengarrian, and an aficionado of its past. As one who has spent the past 34 years toiling at the rock face of Canadian history that is the *DCB* and who has devoted many of his few leisure hours to the *DHB* over the decades, I find much to admire in MacGillivray’s work for he is the sole author of the 1,600 entries comprising almost 800 pages and 850,000 words that is the *DGB*. This fact in itself is prodigious.

The *DGB* is modelled—although MacGillivray never says as much—on the *DCB*: the size, the two-column format, some of the editorial conventions, the use of individual bibliographies to accompany each entry, the list of subjects, and so forth. As for the entries themselves, they range from the prominent such as Charles William Gordon (Ralph Connor) and Bishop Alexander Macdonell to a “vagrant”

and “eccentric” such as Joe Besau or Beson, “one of the characters who made life more interesting for an older generation of Glengarrians and who ... were remembered with affection and even respect after their deaths.” MacGillivray, to his credit, does not shy away from controversy. He handles John Alexander Macdonell (Jack Greenfield) with considerable dexterity. Jack Greenfield was a party organizer in Ontario for John A. Macdonald and a figure of notoriety and renown. In MacGillivray’s hands, he appears, warts and all, in a skilful and balanced portrayal. It should



be noted that the entry refers to a 'bundle of letters' left by Greenfield to his kinsman, Ian McLean Macdonell. This bundle was still held by him when I wrote my entry on Attorney General John Macdonell for the *DCB* several decades ago. I interviewed the old judge and he told me about them; he had no intention of letting them see the light of the historical day. Despite my pleas and those of others, he, apparently, destroyed them.

In my early days at the *DCB*, one of the great trials was reading a manuscript for the volume and preparing its nominal index. The two *DCB* offices divided the onerous task alphabetically (A to L and M to Z). For a period, the Laval office had the latter and it proved a special trial because of, as one of my former colleagues put it with a smile, 'les Macs.' The Scots have always had their own in the *DCB* and they more than hold their own in the *DGB*. The section on 'les Macs' alone runs from page 236 to page 601! The mystique of Glengarry lives on.

Like the *DCB*, the *DGB* entries include men, women, the mighty, the fallen, and folks from every occupation, ethnicity, race, and religion. What is singularly impressive is the range of research undertaken by the author. Whereas many dictionaries, including national ones, rely on obituaries and secondary sources, MacGillivray has used a wide range of archival and newspaper sources as well as standard reference and secondary works. My sole reservation about the book is that it is available in a limited print edition only; it deserves to be online.

Royce MacGillivray is an unusual sort

of academic, happy to explore the landscape of the past in his own idiosyncratic way that is as intelligent as it is free from cant. Anyone familiar with *The House of Ontario*, *The Mind of Ontario*, and *The Slopes of the Andes* will be aware of the range, the imagination, and the subtlety of his work. The history of Glengarry has never been far from his heart and the *DGB* is the latest addition to his work on his native Glengarry. It represents a staggering commitment of energy, devotion, and talent and is a delightful read. It took this reader back to the magic of Miss Séguin's Grade 4 classroom in Hamilton; I am certain that she would have been well pleased by MacGillivray's achievement. *Gle mbath!*

Robert L. Fraser

Dictionary of Canadian Biography, Toronto

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