

The Patriot War along the Michigan-Canada Border: Raiders and Rebels by Shaun J. McLaughlin

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er's, need to subdue nature both temporal and other worldly, and his failure to do so. Conceptually, Hele's previous collection, *Lines Drawn...*, offered a stronger platform for academic discussion. Integrating the concept of an Empire of Nature within the larger realm of contemporary aboriginal studies has the potential to reduce its human subjects to caricatures. What's more, a workshop predicated in part on Mackenzie's observance, "Throughout the world, Europeans have tended to see land and nature in terms of ownership while indigenous people see them in terms of use and relationship" [p.9] risks a mawkish simplicity. Statements like this belie an ignorance of the complex-

ity of traditional land use and ownership, reducing and homogenizing sophisticated systems into one generic way of life, more suitable for folklore than arbitration. And they are potentially dangerous because governments love them. They love them because they take the very visceral struggle of First Nations to protect their land base and treaty rights and reduce it to tales told around a campfire. This is probably the reason why the stronger chapters in the collection barely touch on this theme and stand out as singularly thought-provoking.

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The Patriot War along the Michigan-Canada Border: Raiders and Rebels

By Shaun J. McLaughlin

Charleston, South Carolina: History Press, 2013. \$19.19 (U.S.) softcover. 189 pages.
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The "Patriot War," as a whole series of 1838 invasions of Canada from American border states came to be called (at least in the United States), was a disaster from start to finish. Here, in a companion to his earlier volume on raids along the New York border (reviewed by John Carter in *Ontario History*, CIV, 2, Autumn 2012), Shaun J. McLaughlin continues the sad tale of eagerness, ignorance and incompetence that followed the debacles of the 1837 Upper Canada Rebellion. As the title suggests, many sympathetic Americans saw these raiders—some Canadian exiles, mostly American volunteers—as "Patriots," crossing the border to help re-ignite the fires of Canadian rebellion and thus to expel the British lion from the North American continent. However, to the colony's British governors—and apparently most of its

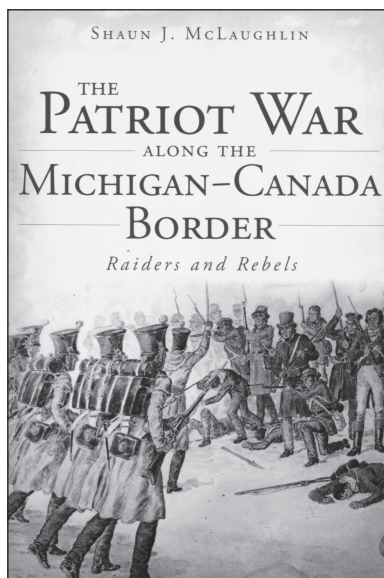
residents—the raiders were not patriots but pirates, not liberators but invaders, not rescuers but rebel terrorists.

McLaughlin has read much and travelled far—digging in archives, collecting facts, culling quotations, copying images and taking photos. Here he has assembled all his finds into a single narrative. After a brief setting of the scene and a summarizing of the Mackenzie and Duncombe uprisings of 1837, the author describes the first failed invasion: Mackenzie's occupying of Navy Island (although from New York, this raid was not part of McLaughlin's first book). He then moves west to tell the tales of the various ill-fated and inept incursions across the Detroit River, followed by the battle at Pelee Island. The next chapters deal with arrests, trials, and escapes. The author also repeats and augments his earlier volume's

descriptions of the origins and activities of Hunter lodges. An account of the December 1838 Windsor invasion, the last of thirteen (by his count) failures, is followed by more stories of arrests and trials, resulting in executions, and transportations. There also is an added chapter on prisoner experiences in Van Diemen's Land. An appendix lists all known men who were hanged and men who were transported. In the course of the narrative, the book provides brief

biographical vignettes (often accompanied by images) of many of the numerous individual players in this whole sad drama. But being provided with so many notes about the players, the reader may well have difficulty following the plot.

This work—and its companion—attempt to present a coherent narrative of noble war. Instead it offers a tangled series of facts. Laudable as is its intent, it gives specifics but inadequate contexts. It manages to provide too much detail and too little explanation. As a brief introduction, this book has its value, but despite its research, it is a once-over-too-lightly. It gives no citations for its many quotations, sources for its doubtful stories, or justifications for its questionable opinions. It does offer an extensive, albeit notably incomplete, bibliography. For example, the two most substantial and reliable works on North American prisoners in Van Diemen's land—Stuart Scott, *To the Outskirts of Habitable Creation*, and Cassandra Pybus & Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, *American Citizens, British Slaves*—are not listed. Nor, apparently,



is McLaughlin aware of John Carter's many articles (save one) about the 1838 invasions or the Van Diemen's Land prisoners—though McLaughlin does acknowledge Carter's "help in identifying key sources and for reviewing the manuscript for accuracy."

Too many trivial errors remain. But worse, can an author who, in his opening chapter's description of the Upper Canadian government merges the Executive Council and the Legislative Council into a single entity, be accepted as a competent interpreter of the Rebellion as whole? His obvious bias in favour of the "Patriots" is also troubling, as are his sweeping statements about the depth of Canadian support for the Rebellions and the fervour of American desire to free Canada from British rule. These many failed raids and their cumulative disastrous results surely suggest that most Americans, even in the border states, were barely interested, much less actively sympathetic. And, difficult as conditions often were, pitifully few Canadians, even in the centres of deepest discontent, were suffering enough to risk their lives in revolution.

If, as some would argue, the events along the Canadian-American border in the year 1838 should be seen as significant second chapter of the 1837 Rebellion, rather than simply a subsequent scattering of foolhardy filibusters and broken dreams, the proof is yet to be published.

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