

*Duty Nobly Done: The Official History of the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment* By Sandy Antal and Kevin R. Shackleton

Bob Garcia

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landscape look different from areas of Irish settlement? Imitating the lives and buildings of earlier comers works to disguise the scenes of those who came later. Buxton's plank road and steam sawmill were both thoroughly Ontario-like features in the fugitive slave period. Landscapes of refuge are obscure, and hence perceived as safe; I would welcome Smardz Frost's thoughts on these matters.

Fugitive slave studies commonly focus on the escape more than on life afterwards, so the Blackburns' life in Toronto is a particularly valuable aspect of this biography. What better symbol for serving others than an entrepreneurial, socially-conscious cab-driver? Smardz Frost imagines Thornton may even have given a ride to former slave owners or Confederate Army deserters who had fled north. (p. 316) The Toronto chapters mix gratitude with an undercurrent of muted anger at how even a

liberating place can stumble. Maintaining freedom and self-respect involved confrontations less sudden, perhaps, but hardly less trying than the escape from Louisville.

An archeological site dramatically anchors the Blackburn story, and brings us back to the Introduction – the story of the story. Starting with supervising youngsters digging in Toronto's Sackville Street school-yard in 1985, Smardz Frost moved on to country roads, county courthouses and countless other stops in two countries over two decades, giving face to an often faceless topic. Her introduction relates a personal research journey which is a kind of literary liberation that runs parallel with the human story. Freeing incarcerated stories and experiences is the legacy of this fine book.

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## *Duty Nobly Done*

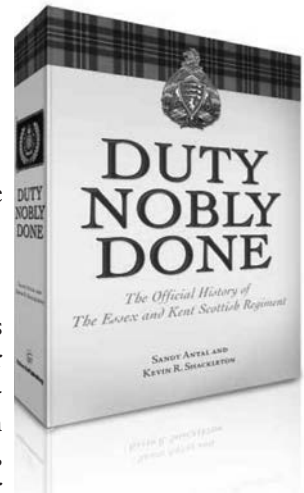
### *The Official History of the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment*

By Sandy Antal and Kevin R. Shackleton. Windsor: Walkerville Publishing, 2006. 828 pp. \$59.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-9731834-8-9.

With the Canadian Forces active in Afghanistan and growing interest in how to commemorate the passing of the last veterans of the First World War, it has been quite a while since our military has had such national prominence. Thus it seems apt that a volume such as *Duty Nobly Done* has been produced. In their thorough narrative Sandy Antal and Kevin Shackleton trace the development of the military units of Essex and Kent counties from the militias of the French regime through to today's Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment based in Windsor and

Chatham.

Antal, who has written on the War of 1812 in the Detroit River region in *A Wampum Denied*, returns to familiar territory as he covers the development of the local militia up to the end of the Upper Canada Rebellion. The early nineteenth-century militias had important roles during the War of 1812 and the Rebellion, especially at the siege of Fort Meigs in Ohio in 1813 and at the Battle of Windsor in



1838. In the latter action the Essex militia defeated the Patriot invasion force before British regulars arrived from their post in Amherstburg, thirty kilometres away. It is a credit to the authors that they included the story of the militias, even though they are not considered direct precursors of the present regiment.

Information on the Essex and Kent militias of this era is not widely available. Alan Douglas describes the county units in both conflicts in his very useful work, *Uppermost Canada*, but the military was not his central theme. In *Duty Nobly Done* Antal has more closely focused on the militia, detailing its composition and contribution. If there is one thing lacking it would be a greater description of the substantial involvement of African-Canadians in the defence of Essex County in 1838.

Kevin Shackleton had a great challenge in writing his portion of this regimental history. While outlining the development of the nineteenth-century forerunners of the Essex and Kent Scottish may have been relatively uncomplicated, summarizing the efforts of the regiment in the two world wars must have been a complex task. It is a compliment to Shackleton's skill as a researcher and writer that he clearly describes the actions of the regiment, its companies and individual members, and effectively sets them within the larger context of the Canadian army's involvement in the two global conflicts. He makes comprehensible the massive scale of First World War battles such as Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele and Amiens, which involved hundreds of thousands of Canadian and allied troops.

Shackleton pays the same careful attention to the actions of the regiment during the Second World War, including Dieppe, Verrières Ridge, and the battles in the Rhineland in early 1945. Most enlightening is the section on the experiences of mem-

bers of the regiment who became prisoners of war. Surprisingly, only eighteen suffered this fate in the First World War, but 255 soldiers fell into German hands as a result of the disastrous 1942 Dieppe raid.

While *Duty Nobly Done* may appeal most to the Regiment's serving members and the members of the extended regimental family, this volume is highly recommended for anyone with an interest in one of southwestern Ontario's most famous units, or in southwestern Ontario history more broadly. The volume is copiously illustrated and carefully documented. The appendices offer a wealth of essential regimental information and there is a good selection of maps and newly-drawn plans that are clear and easy to understand. Shackleton employs maps originally produced for Nicholson and Stacey's official histories of the Canadian army in the two world wars. These beautifully rendered figures are not often seen and making use of them was an astute decision.

Even with its many strengths the book is not without flaws. As with any manuscript of its size *Duty Nobly Done* could have used another reading to catch misspellings and factual errors. For example, historian Paul Couture is misnamed (p. 21), Fort Stephenson is misspelled (p. 54) and the Spanish Civil War commenced in July 1936, not July 1937 (p. 344). Variation in punctuation and format caught my attention, but these issues are minor and do not take away from the overall story presented.

In the early 1990s I visited the old Windsor Armouries and in the finely wood-panelled officers' mess had the opportunity to listen to Colonel Alf Hodges recount his involvement in the Second World War. As his generation passes from the scene the importance of histories such as *Duty Nobly Done* increases, not only for the members of the regimental family but for all Cana-

dians. The work of Antal and Shackleton, ably supported by the Scottish Borderers Foundation in Windsor's Tilston Armoury, will do much to preserve the proud heritage of the Essex and Kent Scottish.

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## *Authors of their Lives*

### *The Personal Correspondence of British Immigrants to North America in the Nineteenth Century*

By David A. Gerber. New York: New York University Press, 2006. x + 421 pp. US\$55.00 hardcover. ISBN 0-8147-3171-6.

"Everywhere we turn the immigrants' letters cause us anxiety about the confident generalizations derived from such familiar conceptual models as assimilation and ethnicity, which prove not quite adequate for explaining the complexity of individual lives." So writes historian David Gerber in the conclusion to his well-researched and thoughtful book *Authors of Their Lives*. He then complicates the argument by reversing it, suggesting that individual lives are too complex to form the basis of generalizations about ethnicity. The book does not entirely elude the abstractions it criticizes, but

Gerber chips so efficiently away at them that he sometimes undermines his own

conceptual framework, though always instructively so.

Gerber includes several published collections of letters, but most of the 72 items he lists are manuscript collections in American, Canadian, Scottish, Irish, and Australian archives. From this voluminous material Gerber develops a detailed study of what he calls "immigrant epistolarity," considering such topics as "traditions of inquiry," "forming selves in letters," "writing with a purpose," "transnational networks on the edge of modernity," "establishing voice, theme and rhythm," and the character-

istic stages that occur "when correspondence wanes." These broader questions are

