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Thomas Mackay: The Laird of Rideau Hall and the Founding of Ottawa by Alastair Sweeny

Sarah Dougherty

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profile and motivations of this mostly urban, highly educated, and much more feminine group of race shifters diverge from the rural masculine phenomenon analyzed in this book. Instead of usurping Indigenous identity as a political strategy to oppose Indigenous land claims, they appear to perceive race shifting as a personal strategy to obtain professional and economic gains and increase their symbolic capital. Yet, these remarks are in no way prejudicial to the quality of this book, and it simply shows that it will contribute greatly to informing academics, as well as politics (let's hope), and the public on a phenomenon that is rapidly evolving and continues to be a relevant issue today.

Mathieu Arsenault
Université de Montréal

Anonymous, "Investigation into false claims to Indigenous identity at Queen's University", 7 June 2021; T. Gerbet, "Livres détruits: la 'gardienne du savoir' n'est pas Autochtone", *Radio-Canada*, 8 September 2021; C. Oldcorn, « Fake indigenous professor resigns from the University of Saskatchewan », *Western Standard*, 2 June 2022.

Thomas Mackay: The Laird of Rideau Hall and the Founding of Ottawa

By Alastair Sweeny

Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 2022. 328 pages. $59.95 cloth, $39.95 softcover, $29.99 e-pub. Cloth ISBN 9780776636795. Softcover ISBN 9780776636788. E-pub ISBN 9780776636818 (press.uottawa.ca)

Thomas Mackay: The Laird of Rideau Hall and the Founding of Ottawa is the first published biography of Thomas Mackay, the Scotland-born mason and businessman who helped build the Rideau Canal and built Rideau Hall, the current residence of the Governor General of Canada. The goal of this monograph is to "correct a glaring deficiency in Canadian history:" the lack of a book describing Thomas Mackay's role in the founding of what would become the capital city of Canada. (2)

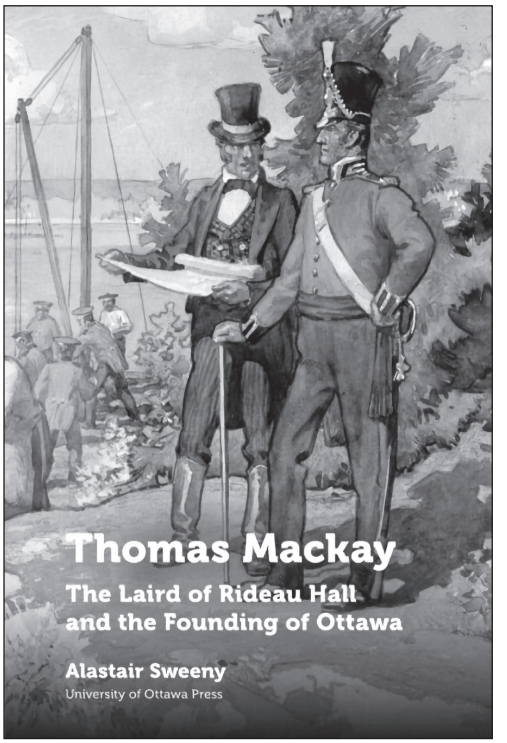
Sweeny has previously published a monograph on the history of BlackBerry and a biography of George-Étienne Cartier. This book combines the business history of the former and the nineteenth-century biography of the latter. The book's implicit thesis is that Thomas Mackay was essential to the founding of what is now Ottawa. Without "the Laird of Rideau Hall," Ottawa would have looked different and may not have been chosen as the site of Canada's capital city. Sweeny notes in the book's introduction that Mackay left few papers and only two years of limited correspondence. In the absence of a collection of Mackay papers, Sweeny relied on records from other sources such as the Mackay & Redpath business account records at the McCord Museum to piece together the story of Mackay's life.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One, Lachine and the Rideau Canal, introduces the two main characters, early Ottawa and Thomas Mackay, and details the construction of the Lachine and Rideau Canals. Mackay partnered with John Redpath, another Scottish builder and businessman, on both projects. Part

Two, New Edinburgh and Rideau Hall, depicts Mackay's role in politics as a member of the Legislative Council of Canada as well as his founding of the village of New Edinburgh (now part of Ottawa) and his building of Rideau Hall as a personal residence for his family. Part Three discusses Mackay's involvement in the Bytown & Prescott Railway, which failed as an investment, but was motivated by the goal of making Ottawa Canada's capital. Part Four examines Thomas Mackay's estate, administered by Mackay's industrious son-in-law, Thomas Keefer, a notable engineer and businessman who sold Rideau Hall to the federal government for use as the Governor General's residence, and who developed Rockcliffe Park, now a neighbourhood of Ottawa.

This is a richly illustrated book with more than one hundred images including maps, paintings, artifacts, floorplans, and photographs. Sweeny writes in an engaging narrative style, ably switching between broader contextualization and the specifics of Mackay's life. Sweeny has fruitfully investigated the financing of the Rideau Canal, illustrating how the construction of the canal was paid for with Spanish silver the British gained during the Peninsular War. This connection between the founding of Ottawa and the Napoleonic Wars adds depth to our understanding of the local history. To avoid disruptions to the narrative flow and to assist in possible future research, Sweeny has compiled information on the Spanish silver, as well as debates over the expenses of the Rideau Canal and an examination of the failure of the Bytown & Prescott Railway, as three appendices to the book available for download on the University of Ottawa Press website.

Sweeny has clearly consulted a range of primary sources including archival papers at Library and Archives Canada, the National Archives of the United Kingdom, the McGill University Library and Redpath Library, and the City of Ottawa Archives, among others. These sources are cited at a collection or institution level in the book's biography. However, while the book does have footnotes in which some sources from the bibliography are cited, overall, many statements which would benefit from a source do not have a footnote. The limited number of footnotes might be an indication that the book's intended audience is a more general readership, rather than an academic one. Details are plentiful and context is well-explained, but academic readers may be frustrated by the lack of citations in parts of the text. Similarly, the book at times prioritizes narrative at the expense of analysis. The land we now call Ottawa is situated on the unceded territo-



ries of the Algonquin nation. In this story of Mackay and Ottawa, Algonquin people appear mostly as background characters, who are primarily used to add texture to the narrative with descriptions such as the "chants of the Algonquin people" (16) and "the drumming of the Algonquins" (202). There is a brief mention of the Algonquins' concerns about the encroachment of settlers on their hunting grounds in the 1820s, but the book would have benefitted from further consideration of Mackay's role in the colonial dispossession of land in the founding of Ottawa.

Sweeny has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the early history of Ottawa and provided a portrait of one of the key men involved in founding the city. His research on the use of Spanish silver from the Napoleonic Wars to pay for the building of the Rideau Canal adds an important transnational dimension to local history. Readers looking for an informative and engaging narrative of Mackay and the early history of Ottawa will find it in this book. Readers seeking analysis of Mackay's colonial legacy and source material for further research may find the book less useful.

Sarah Dougherty
Historical Researcher, Know History

Piratical Doings on the River St. Clair 1838

By John Carter

Heritage St. Clair 2020, 227 pages. $45.00 Soft Cover ISBN 978-1-7772622-0-4 (https://sombramuseumshop.square.site/)

"I ran immediately up to the fellow determined to bayonet him but found the fire of Colonel Harvell had done its fatal work . . . for a moment a sudden thrill of horror passed over me as I watched the fellow gasping for breath in the last agonies of death."

So wrote Jedediah Hunt Jr., an American sympathizer of the Canadian rebels who participated in one of the many Patriot attacks on the Western District in the Upper Canada Rebellion in 1838 describing the death of a Canadian militiamen defending Canadian soil during one of these marauding raids. It is these "piratical doings" that are the subject of John Carter's latest publication on the Upper Canadian rebellions and their aftermath, with a focus on the hitherto sparse accounts of the raids in the River St. Clair region. The inspiration for this book was a presentation by the author at the Sombra museum. Local historian Al Anderson responded enthusiastically to the talk and, with the support of Heritage St. Clair, formed a partnership with Dr. Carter to flesh out the story and publish the results.

The finished product, *Piratical Doings on the River St. Clair Some Reflections on the 1838 Upper Canadian Rebellion* is much more than a recounting of the Sombra raid of June 1838. Through an impressive review of contemporary newspapers in North America and abroad, personal diaries, official correspondence, both American and British, muster rolls, militia orders and private letters, the author set the stage for the assembling of American sympathizers for the failed 1837 Rebellion into a so called "Patriot Army" in Michigan that kept the Detroit River region in a state of heightened tension as the risk of