

June Skinner Sawyers. *Bearing the People Away*. (Sydney, NS: 2013, Cape Breton University Press. Pg 317. ISBN:978-1-927492-59-8)

Joyce Rankin

Volume 36, numéro 1-2, 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1037626ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037626ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)

1708-0401 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Rankin, J. (2014). Compte rendu de [June Skinner Sawyers. *Bearing the People Away*. (Sydney, NS: 2013, Cape Breton University Press. Pg 317. ISBN:978-1-927492-59-8)]. *Ethnologies*, 36(1-2), 525-528. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1037626ar>

this chapter, with its frequent use of visuals and clear explanation of the concepts of style, is well-suited for incorporation into university folklore courses. The fourth chapter, with its discussion of how community history is locally created and recreated for the sake of shaping an image of play, would also fit well into a course discussion of tourism, as its engagement with identity and authenticity are important for understanding cultural production as a whole. Gabbert utilizes historical sources well in this chapter, bringing the reader to a better understanding of how winter carnivals reinforced both community and moral worldview.

The final chapter, rather than focusing on a combination of custom and material culture, synthesizes local material culture with verbal art through discussing how local legends about serpentine lake monsters are projected through Winter Carnival activities. By discussing legend's incorporation into areas such as advertising, snow sculptures, and mass media, Gabbert successfully comes full circle in showing how the three major aspects of folklore- verbal, customary and material culture- can be manifested through carnivalesque behaviour.

Gabbert's thought that "Community is not limited to a single idea or proposition, or even to the realm of ideas and propositions," is clearly manifested within her book. By providing a well-rounded account of how Winter Carnival creates community while provoking multiple reactions, the author clearly shows how public participation is diverse, multivocal, and far from utopian. Scholars interested in community ritual and festival will benefit from the book's multifaceted approach, while students at various levels will be able to draw ideas from the text, possibly by reflecting upon their own community's practices. Gabbert's personal reflections upon her own involvement in the Winter Carnival only further such engagement.

Nicholas Hartmann  
Memorial University of Newfoundland/University of Arizona

---

June Skinner Sawyers. *Bearing the People Away*. (Sydney, NS: 2013, Cape Breton University Press. Pg 317. ISBN:978-1-927492-59-8)

*Bearing the People Away* is a fascinating read, with a wealth of

information. It serves as a significant resource for the focussed study of the Highland Clearances and, at the same time, an introduction to the general story of the Clearances. Historians and casual readers will find plenty to interest them.

The Highland Clearances took place over a period of time, between the 1750s to the 1880s, with the worst episodes taking place between 1790 and 1855. Highland crofters were evicted from their lands to make way for a new kind of agricultural model; they were often forcibly removed from their ancestral lands by absentee land-owners, subjected to various kinds of abuse, and either relocated to substandard or unfamiliar lands, or forced to emigrate. The specific events of this removal are enumerated and discussed in the book, along with the historical, political, and cultural forces that drove them, the people involved, and the results.

Rather than a narrative history of the Highland Clearances, the information contained in the book is presented as a resource and arranged accordingly. The bulk of the book is an historical dictionary, but there is also a chronology of major events in the history of the Highlands and Islands, an extensive list of references (28 pages of them), a period map of the Highlands that allows the reader to cross reference with the contemporary writings, and an index. Of particular interest to historians (and perhaps also to casual readers), is an appendix that includes samples of material from primary sources, such as court records, a notice of eviction, letters, newspaper and magazine reports, pamphlets, and contemporary song lyrics.

The short two-page introduction addresses the attempts of some modern historians to downplay the events, and points out that more label it an example of what we would call "ethnic cleansing." The text generally is instructive for anyone who wishes to understand some of the deep-rooted antipathies (on both sides) that are driving political events in Britain today, for just as interpersonal issues that have never been resolved continue to fester long after physical wounds have healed, ethnic and religious groups that share a country and a troubled history suffer from the effects of the unexamined events of their pasts. (Witness the rise of the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) in Scotland and the recent resounding defeat of the Labour Party in the Scottish cities and towns from which it sprang, and its traditional stronghold.) There are entries on the Lowland Clearances and the attitudes of Lowlanders toward the Highlanders (hint: "an inferior race").

Throughout the volume, the tone is even-handed and almost

understated, making the information contained even more chilling when presented in prose of such restraint.

Some entries are short and factual, while others are much longer. For example, the entry on Jacobite songs segues into a discussion of how Walter Scott and Robert Burns managed to idealize and romanticize the Highlands, and stir the interest of English society in a people who they had virtually tried to exterminate a few years before.

The entries demonstrate the intersection of history, culture, and art. Entries on Canadian novelists Margaret Laurence, Hugh MacLennan, and Alistair MacLeod discuss how the events of the Clearances have reverberated down the generations and coloured the thinking and the work of some of the best of Canadian literature, writing from the perspective of the immigrant who is caught between two worlds, haunted by a great sense of loss and exclusion. That theme shows up in many parts of cultural life in Scotland, and spills over to Canada and the USA. Sawyers covers most of them with entries related to poetry (Mary [Mhairi Mhor nan Oran] MacPherson and Sorley MacLean); music (Runrig, Capercaillie, and Catherine Anne MacPhee); film (John McGrath); and design (Alexander McQueen).

Sawyers's entry on clan is extensive and serves to clarify for readers unfamiliar with the social and cultural background of the Highlands (and the Gaels who lived there) why the Clearances were not the simple economic transaction they were portrayed as. The lands that had been held by deeply-embedded leader of the clans in a complex and highly evolved system of interdependence, *duthchas*, were now held by people who saw themselves primarily as land-owners. For them, the mutual obligations of clan-folk and chief were nullified. For the tenant farmers and the cottars, the system of obligations remained and they continued to uphold their part of the traditional bargain, expecting the land-owners to do the same.

Many entries focus on the individual players in the story, both major and minor figures, and those entries include additional information about the person, such as his or her background, accomplishments, family relationships, and various military and administrative posts. This allows the reader to connect some of the names to other events in Scottish and Canadian history.

Through entries on writers and thinkers, like Thomas Malthus, Karl Marx, and Samuel Johnson, whose ideas influenced public opinion and

political will, and reporters and writers who were informing the public, we get a sense not only of the events, but of the causes (political, cultural, economic) and the results (political, cultural, and economic) in Scotland and across the Highland Diaspora.

I had intended to read this book in an orderly fashion, from cover to cover, but found myself jumping from one entry to another, following the italicized cross-references. Part of the charm of the book is in its digressions, which stray into music, politics, film, ethnomusicology, visual arts, cultural history, a bit of engineering, etc. All of them are fascinating. This reader would have liked more of the italicized titles that alert one to linked pages for cross-referencing. But that's a small complaint, as the navigation is simple and straightforward. Most of the major clearance sites have their own entry, and there's an extensive list of "other Clearance sites" that would be a valuable resource for a reader interested in tracing either personal histories, or specific villages.

Any visitor to the Highlands is struck by the "dry stane dykes" that are scattered throughout the landscape. These stone fences delineate fields and crofts; built meticulously by hand with stones from the field and without mortar, many have lasted hundreds of years. *Bearing the People Away* is like those dykes, assembled with skill by a craftsman with a deep understanding of her materials. The large foundation stones of documented events, the stonework of primary resources, and the small pebbles of details form a solid structure that will last the test of time.

Joyce Rankin  
Sydney, Nova Scotia

---

Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye (eds.). *Unsettling Assumptions: Tradition, Gender, Drag*. (Boulder, CO: 2014, University Press of Colorado and Utah State University Press. Pg. 260. ISBN: 978-0-87421-897-8)

*Unsettling Assumptions: Tradition, Gender, Drag*, edited by Pauline Greenhill and Diane Tye, is an insightful and uniformly well-written collection of case studies demonstrating how examining the intersections