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The Canadian Rebellions of 1837 and 1838 as a Borderland War: A Retrospective

by Tom Dunning

I moved to Tasmania [Van Diemen's Land, (VDL)] in 1985 to take up an academic position at the University of Tasmania, teaching North American history. I soon became aware of the existence of a group of North Americans, referred to as the "Canadian Exiles," who had been transported to VDL in 1839-40 for invading Canada. I published my first article about these men in 1991[1] and gradually, through Stuart Scott, became aware of a dedicated group of scholars who had been chronicling their history. Some of these individuals are represented in this issue of *Ontario History*. I was fortunate to meet some of them at a small conference at Brock University in 1997, organized by Stuart Scott. Work on the Exiles has accelerated with the publication of book-length studies by Scott[2] and by my colleagues at the University of Tasmania, Hamish Maxwell-Stewart and Cassandra Pybus.[3]

Whilst important works, they are not definitive in the sense of closing off further discussion and debate about the significance of these men, their actions and their experiences. This issue will illustrate the ongoing significance of the Exiles. It is with great pleasure and appreciation that I make this contribution to this edition of *Ontario History*.

I want to return to material and issues I first raised in two articles: one from 1995[4] and another in 1999.[5] I want to revisit the idea that the invasions of Canada can be usefully conceptualized as a borderland war. Hopefully this will eliminate any tensions over the nationalist component of the Canadian Exiles or American Patriot Hunters. I also want to focus on the Battle of the Windmill at Prescott, as the significant event of this borderland war, and rely on the writings

[1] Tom Dunning, "Convict Resistance: the American Political Prisoners in Van Deimen's Land," Tasmanian Historical Research Association (THRA) *Papers and Proceedings*, 38 (June, 1991), 88-97.

[2] Stuart Scott, *To the Outskirts of Habitable Creation: Americans and Canadians Transported to Tasmania in the 1840s* (New York: iUniverse Press, 2004).

[3] Cassandra Pybus & Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, *American Citizens, British Slaves: Yankee Political Prisoners in an Australian Penal Colony, 1839-1850* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).

[4] T. P. Dunning, "The Canadian Rebellions of 1837-38; An Episode in Northern Borderland History," *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, (AJAS) 14 (December, 1995) 31-49.

[5] Thomas P. Dunning, "The Adventures of Patriot Hunters: Danger, Memory, Place and Virtue at the Windmill", *Canadian Review of American Studies* 29 (1991) 109-121.

Abstract

Historians of Southwestern United States history and culture have created the concept of a borderland to explain the historical circumstances of the area where Anglo-America ran into Hispanic America. Its application to the Upper Canada-Great Lakes area during 1837-1838 will allow a re-interpretation of the Canadian Rebellions of 1837 and the subsequent invasions of 1838 as part of a borderland war. Hopefully this approach will eliminate any tensions over the nationalist component of the Canadian Exiles or American Patriot Hunters. I also want to focus on the Battle of Prescott or the Windmill as the significant event of this borderland war, relying on the writings of two of the Exile narrativists, William Gates and Stephen Wright. Finally I hope to contribute some reflections on the significance of these Exiles/Patriots after almost twenty years of an acquaintance of sort with them.

Résumé: *Les historiens spécialisés dans l'étude de la culture et de l'histoire du sud-ouest des États-Unis, ont développé le concept de 'région frontalière' pour rendre compte des circonstances historiques du face à face des Espagnols et des Anglo-Américains dans cette région. Reprenant ce concept, et l'appliquant à la région des Grands Lacs et du Haut-Canada pendant les années 1837-1838, nous réexaminons dans cet article les rébellions de 1837 et les invasions qui ont suivi en 1838. Nous les réinterprétons comme des épisodes d'une guerre de régions frontalières, une approche qui pourrait notamment permettre, nous l'espérons, d'éliminer les tensions créées par l'élément nationaliste chez les Exilés canadiens ou les Patriotes américains. Notre étude, qui s'appuie sur les récits qu'en on fait deux exilés, William Gates et Stephen Wright, traite plus particulièrement de la bataille de Prescott, celle dite du Moulin à Vent, un événement déterminant de cette guerre. Après avoir travaillé depuis près de vingt ans sur les Exilés / Patriotes, je cherche ainsi à ouvrir de nouvelles perspectives sur cet épisode de l'histoire canadienne.*

of two of the Exile narrativists, William Gates and Stephen Wright. Finally I hope to contribute some reflections on the significance of these men after almost twenty years of an acquaintance of sorts with them. Hopefully this will form a useful introduction to this collection of articles.

Historians of Southwestern United States history and culture have created the concept of a borderland to explain the historical circumstances of the area where Anglo-America ran into Hispanic America. These historians have shown little interest in national mythologies or westward movement. Rather than seeing lines of political sovereignty, they describe continuous terrains through which they trace commercial ties, migration patterns, class and racial structures and cross-cultural relationships. These areas are the scenes of intense negotiations, of cultural conflict, and of the reshaping of multiple social roles and identities.[6]

South-western historians have principally used this concept, but it is certainly employable in other socio-geographic regions. Its application to the Upper Canada-Great Lakes area during 1837-1838 will allow a re-interpretation of the Canadian Rebellions of 1837 and

[6] See Gerald E. Poyo and Gilberto M. Hinojosa, "Spanish Texas and Borderlands Historiography in Transition: Implications for United States History," *Journal of American History*, 75, (September 1988), 393-416.

the subsequent invasions of 1838 as part of a borderland conflict.[7]

Upper Canada was a borderland from its inception in 1791, when the British divided the territory of Quebec along the Ottawa River to form Lower Canada and Upper Canada.[8] It was the resettlement of Loyalist refugees after the American Revolution that led to this division. These refugees included thousands of discharged soldiers, American Tory civilians, Indian allies of the British, free blacks, escaped slaves, religious dissenters and various ethnic groups. After initial settlement in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, many of these people agitated for a new province. In response, the British undertook a vigorous program to develop and secure a first, wholly inland colony in British North America. It was clearly an area for Loyalist colonisation, completely separate from the old seigniorial lands of Quebec.[9]

The first lieutenant governor, John Simcoe, was a military leader with American Revolutionary war experience. He set up his capital near the American border at Newark. Here, Simcoe, in a fortress, established a nineteenth-century version of British garrison government, which placed a military executive in charge of a local elite, which itself depended on monarchical patronage, in this instance through direct crown financing of such items as Loyalist war claims.[10] Simcoe, however, was not content with this convenient arrangement. He wished to substitute commercial values for the old imperial-military ones in

[7] John Francis Bannon in *The Spanish Borderlands Frontier* (University of New Mexico Press: Albuquerque, 1974), first suggested comparison with the Anglo-American frontier. See Poyo and Hinojosa, "Spanish Texas," 396. For other suggestions concerning the use of the borderlands concept in areas other than the American Southwest, see David Thelen, "Of Audiences, Borderlands and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History," *Journal of American History* 79, (September 1992), 436-44 and Renato Rosaldo, *Cultures and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 207-17.

[8] D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History, Volume I: Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 322-32. Meinig in this important book has tried to transcend national history in his study of North America as a group of historically important regions. A student of Meinig's, William Wyckoff, has written a useful book on the social geography of such an area, *The Developer's Frontier: The Making of the Western New York Landscape*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[9] Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years, 1784-1841* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1964), 106-44.

[10] Stephen Saunders Webb, *The Governors-General: The English Army and the Definition of the Empire, 1569-1681* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979) created the concept of a 'garrison government' as a description of what he argues was the dominant mode of British imperial rule from the mid-seventeenth century. For criticism of Webb, see Richard R. Johnson, "The Imperial Webb: The Thesis of Garrison Government in Early America Considered," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (1986), 408-30. Stephen Saunders Webb's response is found in "The Data and Theory of Restoration Empire," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (1986), 431-59. Howard Temperley, "Frontierism, Capital and the American Loyalists in Canada," *Journal of American Studies* 13 (1977), 5-27 emphasizes the effect of direct Crown financing of Loyalists claims on Canadian society. See also Craig, *Upper Canada*, 106-44.

the emerging Upper Canada. There was much good land available and Simcoe believed that he could use it to lure thousands of Americans who might prefer to live on British soil. He publicized a 1789 law that made land available in generous amounts to anyone willing to swear an oath of allegiance to the Crown. Many Americans took advantage of this offer because the British provided easier terms than the land companies in western New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Many who responded to the offer were relatives and friends of Loyalist refugees. They wanted to move into areas where they would have support of these original European settlers. Additionally the offer of land attracted many other migrants, who stayed only a short time.

Not all American citizens living in northern New York were attracted by land. Many worked or travelled in Upper Canada, becoming involved in commercial ventures throughout the area. They were part of the great number of individuals who continually crossed and re-crossed the political frontier as part of a borderland population. Regardless of citizenship, many residents in this region took a keen interest in its public affairs and in its future.[11]

Upper Canada was thus the home to many who found the connection to Great Britain beneficial, yet many influences from the United States existed. Even many Loyalists desired a more participatory form of government and a more egalitarian society. Continuing American migration and commercial ties reinforced this view, making Upper Canada part of a borderland.

This was, then, an area that two large external centres of power, Great Britain and the United States, influenced greatly. The underlying issue in the Rebellions of 1837-38 was the relative degree to which either British monarchical or American republican ideas or values should dictate the institutional, social and political life in Upper Canada. The United States and Great Britain provided the residents with constant points of reference, both positive and negative, in their search for a better borderland society.[12]

[11] J.G.A Pocock, "British History: A Pleas for a New Subject," Journal *of Modern History* 47 (1975) 606, 618, 620, has argued that these people "cared little which side of the 49th parallel they were on." They were part of a process of "interrelations' between advanced and sophisticated provinces (and states)."

[12] There were a wide variety of possible responses to British and American influences ranging from those who dreamed of a British Canada, through those who wanted to imitate the United States, to those who rejected both outside powers. Jane Errington, *The Lion, The Eagle and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 39, 55, 181, argues that an Anglo-American Upper Canada was part of a larger North American community, drawing on both American and English culture. For a contrasting view that emphasises an Anglo-Canadian culture that is separate from and critical of Americanism, see S.F. Wise & Robert Craig Brown, *Canada Views the United States: Nineteenth Century Political Attitudes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982). David Mills, *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's Universities Press, 1987) provides perspective on this debate. For an account of the enduring influence of British loyalism, see Dennis Duffy, *Gardens, Covenants, Exiles: Loyalism in the Literature of Upper Canada/Ontario*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

In these borderlands, individuals fashioned new complex selves. These peripheral peoples created regional cultures that in turn influenced the creation of national and transnational cultures. The residents of the Great Lakes borderland helped formulate such cultures and identities for an emergent Canada, an imperial Britain, an expansionist United States, and an international republicanism. This paper will focus on how one episode on the edge of the British Empire in an Anglo-American borderland influenced the creation of new identities for some residents and hence contributed to the formation of local and global cultures.[13]

The heroes of my story are nineteenth century white male North Americans. These men were members of a group of Americans and Canadians, who invaded Upper Canada in 1838 after the failed Canadian Rebellions of 1837 and whom the British transported to Van Diemen's Land in 1839. Six of these men wrote narratives about their common experiences. These accounts are retrospective and justificatory adventure stories in which these men became republican heroes, who risked death and exile to help those people they considered to be their unfortunate neighbours.[14]

Their goal was then to liberate their borderland neighbours. The narrators viewed British Upper Canada as a long-suffering colony.[15] In the words of Stephen Wright, the Canadians suffered oppression under "the crushing despotism of Victoria Cobourg."[16] The corrupt

[13] For interpretations of the early formation of North American identities, see Jack P. Greene, "Search For Identity: An Interpretation of the Meaning of Selected Patterns of Social Response in Eighteenth Century America," *Journal of Social History* 3 (1970), 189-220, Michael Zuckerman, "The Fabrication of Social Identity in Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977), 183-214 and Zuckerman, "Identity in British America: Unease in Eden," in Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (eds.), *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500-1800*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 115-58.

[14] There are six narratives: Linus W. Miller, *Notes of an Exile to Van Diemen's Land*, (New York: W. McKinstry and Co., 1846), reprinted, (New York: Johnson Reprints, 1962), William Gates, *Recollections of Life in Van Diemen's Land*, 2 vols., (Lockport, 1850,) reprinted, (Sydney: D.S. Ford, 1961); Stephen Wright, *Narrative and Recollections of Van Diemen's Land During a Three Years' Captivity of Stephen S. Wright*, edited by Caleb Lyon, (New York: New World Press, 1844); Robert Marsh, *Seven Years of My Life, or a Narrative of a Patriot Exile*, (Buffalo: Faxon & Stevens, 1847), Daniel D. Heustis, *A Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of Captain Daniel D Heustis*, (Boston: S.W. Wilder, 1848); Samuel Snow, *The Exile's Return or Narrative of Samuel Snow*, (Cleveland: B. Fellows, 1846). Additionally there are two collections of letters written by two Canadians: Benjamin Wait, *The Wait Letters*, (Ontario: Porcepic Press, 1976)—this is a new edition of Benjamin Wait, *Letters from Van Diemen's Land written during Four Years Imprisonment for Political Offences Committed in Upper Canada*, (Buffalo: W.W. Wilgus, 1843)—and Fred Landon, *An Exile From Canada*, (Toronto: Longmans, 1960), which includes many long extracts from the letters of Elijah Woodman. There is also the unpublished diary of Aaron Dresser, held in the Public Archives and Library of Canada, Ottawa.

[15] D.B. Read in *The Canadian Rebellion of 1837*, (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1986), 346 cynically notes that "It has always been a marvel to Canadians how it happens that there are so many citizens of the United States who in some ways conceive that Canada is a bleeding country when in fact ... Canadians have always been able to harmonize their political differences without foreign interference."

[16] Wright, *Narrative and Recollections,* 3-4.

British had deprived residents of Upper Canada of liberty. Regional patriots must free people who could not function as free moral agents. Because Upper Canadians could not fully help themselves, their borderland neighbours must come to their aid. Gates wrote

> We believed our Canadian neighbours to be struggling for that freedom which we were enjoying and which with a little aid they would be successful in securing. Was it therefore wrong that we should stifle our feelings and refuse to act out of sympathy?[17]

Snow expressed similar thoughts.

> I entered the Patriot service with the best of motives, only wanting that our Canadian neighbours might in the end, enjoy the same civil, religious and political freedom with which the citizens of the United States are blest.[18]

Gates wrote on the way to the Battle of Prescott in late 1838:

> We were indeed a happy band. We had full confidence in our cause, as a just and noble one. We believed we were about to do our neighbours a deed of charity, such as the golden rule inculcates, when it teaches us to do to our fellows as we would they should do to us.[19]

These actions helped define these men's borderland identities.

The principal organization that planned these invasions of Upper Canada was a borderland organization called the Patriot Hunters. During 1838, many Americans and Canadians formed Hunters' Lodges along the Canadian border. These lodges resembled flamboyant, militarized versions of Freemasonry. There were four degrees through which the Hunters passed, each corresponding to a military rank. The first degree was the Snowshoe, which qualified a man to be a common soldier. The second, the Beaver, led to commission as an officer. The third and fourth degrees, the Great Hunter and the Patriot Hunter, were necessary for Colonel, Commodore and General. These fraternal lodges were public spaces of democratic sociability. Within these spaces, they constituted what Roger Chartier has called a Masonic society. [20]

The Patriot Hunters' Lodges involved not only a Masonic sociability, but also a military sociability. Their values were similar to those of the officer corps of the United States Army, one of the groups that opposed their activities along the Canadian border. Army officers and Hunter officers held many of the same convictions. Male camaraderie and friendship were foundation beliefs, but family values, which emphasized the need for a close and supportive female, seemed to be more important among both groups of men. They tended to invest familial, patriotic and civic values with the same type of sacred intensity that others did

[17] Gates, *Recollections*, 12.

[18] Snow, *Exile's Return*, 4.

[19] *Ibid*. Much of the material from the middle of page 6 through the bottom of page 10 first appeared in Dunning, "The Canadian Rebellions," 322-57.

[20] Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 162.

with Christian tenets. The family was the basis of their male sociability and community.[21] All of these elements formed the basis of a borderland identity.

The leaders of the Patriot Hunters, acting as military leaders on what they believed to be sound strategy, felt that the seizure of the town of Prescott on the Canadian side of the Saint Lawrence River (where there was a small stronghold, Fort Wellington) was a key to the control of Upper Canada, as it exposed the eastern part of the province to further Hunter invasions.[22]

Action began on Sunday, 11 November, when 400 men boarded the regularly scheduled steam packet, the *United States,* at Sackett's Harbour, New York. This force increased at each stop on the American side of the river. The *United States* took in tow two schooners, the *Charlotte of Oswego* and the *Charlotte of Toronto.* Most of the men transferred to these vessels where they had stored their arms.

When near Prescott, the Hunters detached both schooners from the *United States.* The *Oswego* quickly ran aground. Efforts by the *United States* and a commandeered ferry, the *Paul Pry*, failed to free her. Meanwhile the *Toronto* managed to berth at the Prescott pier on early Monday morning, the 12th of November. It then broke free from its moorings, floated a mile and half downstream where it finally ran aground at Windmill Point. Here the invaders managed to occupy a number of stone buildings, including a six-story windmill tower. [23]

Meanwhile, the *Experiment,* a British armed steamer, attacked the *United States* and the *Paul Pry* as they resumed their attempt to free the *Oswego*. A small-scale naval battle ensued which lasted most of Monday. Despite these efforts of the *Experiment*, the Patriots managed to free the *Oswego*, and all three ships landed in Ogdensburg, New York, across the river from Prescott. Later that day, the Hunters succeeded in landing reinforcements and armaments on Windmill Point. By the end of the day, two companies of U.S. Federal troops arrived in Ogdensburg, impounding all the Patriot vessels.

The men at the Windmill, during the naval manoeuvrings, fortified their positions. The armed British vessels, the *Queen Victoria* and the *Cobourg*, came on Monday night with seventy marines. By early Tuesday morning, hundreds of Canadian militia arrived. The British quickly, but unsuccessfully, attacked the Patriot positions. Despite heavy causalities on both sides, the Patriot fortifications behind stonewalls were impregnable to British artillery. The British broke off the engagement, calling for the delivery of heavy eighteen-pound guns. On Wednesday, the 14th, little fighting occurred, al-

[21] Samuel I Watson, "Flexible Gender Roles During the Market Revolution: Family, Friendship, Marriage and Masculinity Among U.S. Army Officers, 1815-1846," *Journal of Social History* (Fall), 1995, 81-105.

[22] Oscar Kinchen *The Rise and Fall of the Patriot Hunters,* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956), 70.

[23] *Ibid*., 72.

though the Patriots made several unsuccessful attempts at reinforcement. On Thursday the battle recommenced with a British artillery bombardment of the Windmill and a Patriot sortie against British positions. Both failed. On Thursday night, a rescue party succeeded in landing at the Windmill. The remaining men refused this opportunity to escape. On Friday, the British procured two eighteen-pound guns, which they positioned only four hundred yards from the Windmill. The guns, firing at this range, succeeded in forcing a Patriot surrender.[24]

Borderland commitment did have its limits with the Patriot Hunters' borderland residents. Throughout the five days of the battle, promised reinforcements did not arrive. Canadian supporters, who had pledged to aid the invading Hunters, assembled on Monday morning to observe events. However upon seeing, the arrival of British marines and Canadian militia as well as armed ships, they dispersed. After the initial reinforcements Monday evening from Ogdensburg, no more men or material came from the American side of the River. The only support was that of cheering crowds that lined the riverbank across from the Windmill.

William Gates, our first Patriot Hunter narrator chooses initially to position the Battle of the Windmill in a transnational context. Gates begins his story with heroic memories of an international American Revolution, which he uses to dispel uncertainty over his participation in the battle. He focuses on those men from another country who helped the American colonists during their War for Independence against the British monarchy. He invokes the names of von Stubben, De Kalb, Kosciusko and La Fayette.[25] These foreign heroes, who aided the causes of others, legitimatize his actions and those of his leader at the Windmill, a 31-year-old Pole named Nils von Schoultz, a man whom the younger Gates admires very much.[26]

Gates soon refocuses the battle into a borderland conflict through his use of memories and images of families. He recalls his parental home in which he lived and his unusually endearing parents and siblings whose companionship bound him to that home. It is only through a sense of duty to others, not a selfish desire for personal reward or wartime booty that he parts with his family. The family is a sanctuary from which men, such as Gates, go forth into the public to establish their identities through virtuous social practices and performances.[27] These

[24] Mary Beacock Fryer, *Battlefields of Canada* (Toronto: Dundern Press, 1986), 191-205, George F. C. Stanley, "Invasion, 1838," *Ontario History* 54, (December, 1962), 237-52, William Draper, "Sketch of the incursion of the patriot hunters in the province of Upper Canada, 1839" *Upper Canada Sundries*, Civil Secretary's Correspondence, : R G 5 A 1 Volume 215, Microfilm Reel C6904.

[25] Gates, *Recollections* I, 19-21 & 9-10.

[26] *Ibid*., 19-26

[27] Howard M. Wach, "Civil Society, Moral Identity and the Liberal Public Sphere," *Social History* 21, (October), 1995, 295; Jurgen Habermas. *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 45.

men move from the private and personal to the public and civic. This is a process facilitated by the Masonic and military sociability of the Hunters' lodges.[28]

He does not leave his family for distant causes, but rather for a nearby one. He acts with some of his borderland neighbours on behalf of other neighbours. His motivation is the golden rule, which teaches him to do those who live nearby a deed of charity. This means helping his neighbours, who are struggling to enjoy the same freedom and liberty that his family is enjoying. He argues that it is not wrong to act on such feelings of sympathy.[29] The story becomes, in his telling, one of family and neighbourhood. Thus Gates' family privately teaches him the public values of civic virtue and responsibility. He remembers his family with sacramental intensity. Only civic and patriot duty can rival and surpass this intensity.

The Gates family is not the only familial source of meaning for his public experiences. The Prescott battlefield provides Gates with an example of another borderland family and woman. This family lives in one of the outbuildings of the Windmill. On the first day of the battle, von Schoultz advises family members to leave. Before they can do so, the British troops surround the Windmill, preventing the family from leaving. The family, however, willingly helps the Patriot Hunters. Gates again connects family with civic duty and loyalty.

The eldest daughter attracted Gates' attention. In his words, she is "a young lady of rather prepossessing appearance." During the battle she receives, according to Gates, "a wound that deprive(s) her of speech. A bullet pass(es) through the mouth, from one cheek to the other, knocking out several teeth, and severing her tongue at its roots."[30] After the Patriot surrender and imprisonment, the British take this woman to prison. She and her family refuse to identify Gates and his companions as being insurrectionists. The fact that the daughter looses her physical voice (at least in his recollection) helps him to gain his literary voice. The silence provided by the inability of the girl to speak and the refusal of the family to testify gives Gates the narrative space to construct and tell his story.

This daughter and her family are heroes, who exemplify for Gates the connection between family and patriotic duty that informs his story of the Battle of the Windmill and his subsequent imprisonment and exile. Through memory, families (both Gates' own family and the Windmill family) become the private source of individual public, patriotic duty and loyalty towards other, less free people. His public experience gives a voice to the discovery of his borderland republicanism.

[28] Karen Hansen, *A Very Social Time: Crafting Community in Antebellum New England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

[29] Gates, *Recollections* I, 12-13.

[30] *Rbid.*, 23 See also Roger Rosentreter, *To Free Upper Canada: Michigan and the Patriot War 1837-38*, Ph.D. Thesis. Michigan State University, 1983, 223

Stephen Wright, like Gates, begins his narrative with the memories of a transnational heroic tradition of aiding foreign fights for freedom. This memory again dispels his uncertainty. He emphasizes the ways in which countries and individuals can help other people attain freedom. He uses the recent examples of Byron helping Greece and the United States helping Poland. Canada, in his opinion, could only be free with similar aid from borderland heroes. He sees himself as part of a patriotic tradition that dates back to Bunker Hill. [31]

Instead of using memories of the family that he leaves to fight at the Windmill to structure and give a plot for his story, Wright recaptures memories of a borderland masculinity, with manly acts of courage and cowardly unmanly acts of deceit. The best Hunter leaders, Nils von Schoultz, Martin Woodruff, and Dorrephus Abbey, bear themselves "with a manly undeviating fortitude." Before the last assault at the Windmill, the last word is "Die like men." They are to Wright "decent Christian men." Woodruff, one of the leaders, meets his death "with an eagle eye and a lion's heart—invincible courage, coldly and quietly, no timid fear, no soul searchings." George Butterfield, a battlefield companion, is "mild and gentle in manner, but in battle brave as a tiger." Wright is clearly creating his adventure story based on male physical courage, which he describes using a virile language that incorporates animal images.[32] In contrast, he uses a derogatory feminine image to describe those men who fail the test of courage. He uses hysterical sexual terms to represent the majority of the Canadian militia who are "like so many harpies, who t(ear) from the captured Patriot bodies their clothes."[33] The British leaders possess all the characteristics of what Wright feels is an unattractive male, "imperious, insolent-looking, possessing coarse and vulgar manners, using brutal language and beastly slang, drunken, and having no teeth!"[34]

Wright acknowledges the limits of borderland solidarity, as he believes that many Patriot Hunters themselves are cowardly. With the exception of the three executed leaders, most Patriot leaders are, for Wright, either cowardly or self-interested. In any case they "in heat fled from support of liberty in its hour of danger." "Even the crowds on the shores of Liberty in Ogdensburg" do "not possess the moral courage to aid us in our hour of trial." He quotes von Schoultz telling the Ogdensburg people who come on Thursday night to rescue the surviving men at the Windmill, "to be men enough to send a boat to remove the wounded." He receives no help only "rotten and further promises" that leaves wounded men

[31] Wright, *Narrative and Recollections*, 3-4

[32] *Ibid*., 6, 8, 10, 11, 7, 13.

[33] *Ibid*., 10, & Neil Hertz, "Medusa's Head: Male Hysteria under Political Pressure," *Representations* 4 (Fall, 1983), 27-53.

[34] Wright, *Narrative and Recollections,* 10.

[35] *Ibid*.

lying on a frozen beach.[35] The account of decaying bodies on a beach is a corporeal image of disintegration that may reflect the collapse of Wright's plans through the perceived abandonment of borderland republican activists by those who lack virtue and courage.

Wright chooses an incident similar to that of the battlefield family that Gates uses in his narrative. It occurs at the execution of Colonel Dorrephus Abbey, one of the leaders of the expedition. Abbey leaves his wife with three orphaned children. They received letters from Abbey, written shortly before his execution,[36] containing expressions of all of the family values associated with the Hunters. Wright describes Abbey's loyal wife standing firmly by as the British execute her husband. In contrast Governor George Arthur, observing only a short distance away, seems completely "unmanned" as evidenced by his feeble step. Wright remembers the effect of British actions on patriot women. "The Battle made weeping mothers and agonized sisters, and heart broken wives." Wright's heroes are the Patriot leaders and subsequently their loyal wives. Like Gates, he talks about family loyalty and female sacrifice as necessary to borderland solidarity.[37]

Being an American citizen was not these men's only identity as many previous historians have assumed. John Murrin has argued "American national identity was, in short, unexpected, impromptu, and artificial. Therefore, it was an extremely fragile creation of the Revolution,"[38] and it remained that way well into the nineteenth century. Regionalism, or sectionalism as American historians have preferred to call it, could be an important alternative. Neither regionalism nor nationalism produced mutually exclusive loyalties. Individuals could express more than one loyalty. Furthermore regionalism and nationalism were not monolithic structures. Many different voices existed under the rubric of regionalism. As Michel de Certeau has said, "A region is thus a space created by interaction. It follows that in the same place there are as many regions as there are interactions, or intersections of programs."[39] According to this definition the Patriots were certainly borderland 'regionalists'.

Regions are *inter alia* landscapes, both natural and social. Landscapes are not material objects of empirical investigation. They are "terrains of meaning" with cultural symbols and images, which, like a text, can be read. This text, however, is a document that is being constantly erased and amended. The Patriots' borderland landscape was a natural one for liberty, but it was defiled by the exist-

[36] *Ibid*., 14, & D. Abbey, "Letters to his Children," National Archives of Canada, *Upper Canada Sundries*, "Civil Secretary's Correspondence,": R G 5 A 1 Volume 211. Microfilm Reel, C6905

[37] Wright, *Narrative and Recollections*, 10 & 14.

[38] John Murrin, "A Roof Without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," in Richard Beeman et al. (eds.), *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 344-48.

[39] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 126.

ence of monarchy. This led to a fearful atmosphere and climate of suspicion and treachery, where the lurking spy rather than the free and open citizen was the symbol.[40]

Republican borderlanders resisted the marking of political boundaries. They felt an interest in the prosperity and freedom of the peoples whose lives intersected those lines and whose community and personal relationships transcended those borders. In doing this they were part of the economics and politics of a region. The residents of the borderland surrounding Lake Ontario and Lake Erie in the 1830s were active agents who engaged in collective political action in an attempt to determine the nature of their government, the distribution of the land on which they lived, and their relationships to outside power structures. They wanted to create a regional republican community and to be identified as residents of this borderland as well as citizens of the United States. To do this they created new modes of association, such as the Patriot Hunters. Some of these men wrote stories of personal danger, of imperial adventure, and of household support for a public masculinity. In all these tales, they sought virtue rather than glory. They devoted themselves to duty.

While acknowledging the clear American exceptionalism in these writings, I have read these stories against the nationalist grain. I want to emphasise the local and global sources of their thought and actions. My conclusions are accounted for less by accumulation of new evidence, than by new assumptions and conception about culture localisation. I see borderlands as "constructed and disputed historicities, sites of displacement, interference and interaction."[41] The Great Lakes borderland in 1837-38 is certainly one of these sites.

Historians should not be intimidated by exaggerated respect for national boundaries or national integrity. Historians should weigh the claims of national identity against contrary varieties of subjectivity and identification. Historians should react against the notion of confining a tidy flow of cultural output into neat symmetrical nation-state units. Nationalism, while an increasingly powerful force in the early nineteenth century, was not a hegemonic force. Many other ideologies contested it. Regionalism, nationalism, and transnationalism existed together in the Great Lakes borderland. Historians must set aside their nationalist predispositions to see that national loyalties existed alongside and within regional and international values.

[40] Denis Cosgrove & Stephen Daniels (eds.), *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Miller, *Notes*, 9 & 11.

[41] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 16, 17, 29, 35, 37. Much of the material from the second column of page 10 through the second column of page 15 first appeared in Dunning, "The Canadian Rebellions," 43-44.

In twenty years of work on these men, I have tried to take their experiences seriously, not dismissing them as members of an irrelevant, fringe element. I have attempted to understand them as individuals and as a group. Most importantly I have tried to see what their lives can tell us about the wider mid-nineteenth century Anglophone world in North America and in Australia. They were complex, rather than simple men, who fashioned identities in a world of still fragile nationalism, of changing concepts of family and masculinity and of increasing international circulation of ideas and experiences. I hope that these revived, reflective writings in this article have been a small step in understanding not only the Patriot Hunters' identities but also the wider world in which they engaged so readily.