

*“Union is Strength”: W. L. Mackenzie, the Children of Peace,
and the Emergence of Joint Stock Democracy in Upper Canada*
By Albert Schrauwers

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Volume 102, Number 1, Spring 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065604ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065604ar>

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Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Raible, C. (2010). Review of [*“Union is Strength”: W. L. Mackenzie, the Children of Peace, and the Emergence of Joint Stock Democracy in Upper Canada* By Albert Schrauwers]. *Ontario History*, 102(1), 129–131.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065604ar>

lery, plus the two American commanders, and the American defense fragmented. From initial surprise, to incipient disaster, to sudden victory, the British organized a rapid retreat before dawn could reveal how low their strength really was. The Americans withdrew to Fort George amid fear of a counter-offensive by the Royal Navy, and were on the defensive for the rest of 1813. Elliott estimates that over 200 British troops were imprisoned, wounded or killed, a casualty rate of 25 per cent versus the American rate of about 10 per cent.

Elliott gives a stirring account of these events but some contextual comments are in order. Despite the strong production—organization, maps, and historic images—and his care in documenting both sides of the story in greater detail than ever before, some reorganization would help the narrative. Readers need a timeline. Failure to conclude the narrative with the American evacuation in 1813 is odd. The appendices could also be reordered, placing the relevant War of 1812 material first.

Three of the appendices conceal what I would regard as the most significant aspect of the book: challenging assumed truths. First, Elliott debunks the claimed role of Canadian scouts like Billy Green, for which there appears to be no documentation. Next, he shows how modern

forensic methods have been able to demonstrate the brutal character of the battle, possibly including battlefield executions. And thirdly, Elliott challenges the rather perverse reinterpretation, by Victorian-era citizens, of the meaning of the Stoney Creek Battlefield Park for (apparently) their own purposes. He claims that the park displays (including a monument built to rival Brock's at Queenston Heights) do not properly reflect the military and political circumstances: a representative example of the great power of military competition that characterized eastern North America until the War of 1812. Elliott finds the park to have been, instead, an expression of late nineteenth century imperialism, focused on Canadian settlers who were bystanders in the clash, and celebrating peace with the United States. This is all provocative thinking, and it is a mystery why Elliott has relegated the role of critical versus social memory to a remote part of such an engaging manuscript.

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“Union is Strength”:

W. L. Mackenzie, the Children of Peace, and the Emergence of Joint Stock Democracy in Upper Canada

By Albert Schrauwers

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. 320 pages. \$70.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-8020-9927-3 (www.utppublishing.com)

In this tightly-packed, ambitious volume, Albert Schrauwers depicts a fresh version of the history of Upper Canada of the 1820s and 1830s. It

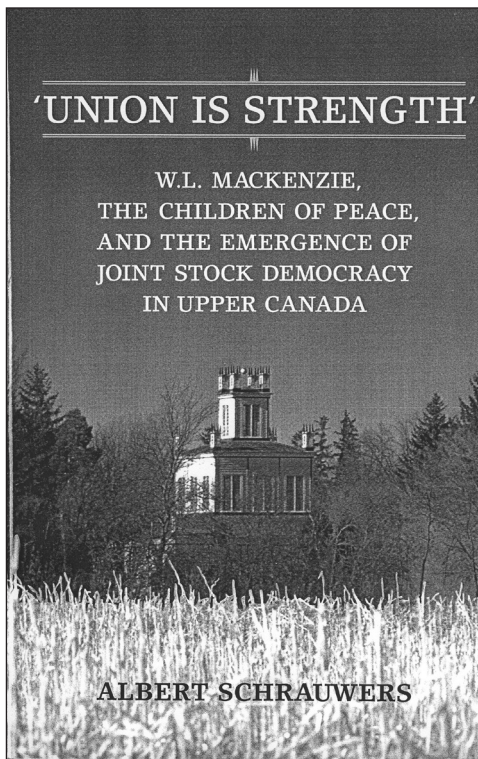
is a tale of corporate, charitable, commercial, and political development. If it has a hero, it is not William Lyon Mackenzie (despite the book's title), but David Will-

son, founder of the Children of Peace.

Union is Strength combines Schrauwers' two main interests. One is the Children of Peace, the religious community best known today for the Sharon Temple, a stunning piece of architecture, now a museum near Newmarket, Ontario. Hardly a withdrawn communal sect, the Children of Peace under Willson's guidance were fully engaged in the political and economic world around them. They combined moral force, commercial acumen and electoral

power to become influential participants in the reform movement of the era. Schrauwers' second interest is the "structural transition of Upper Canada's economy to capitalism" fostered especially by joint stock companies. (p. 7) These organizations, he argues, produced a "joint stock democracy," powerfully influenced by British and American socialist or co-operative movements inspired by the Scottish industrialist and idealist, Robert Owen.

Schrauwers offers closely-knit, albeit at times repetitive, arguments. The variety and scope of his intermingled ideas are suggested by chapter titles, such as: "Charity, Owenism and the Toronto House of Industry," "The Economics of Respectability: the Farmers' Storehouse (Banking) Company," or "The Promise of Responsible Government." In his portrayal of the drama of those times, an establishment



elite—John Strachan, Henry John Boulton, William Allan and others—controlled the province through powerful chartered corporations, most notably the Bank of Upper Canada. In opposition, an interconnected group of reformers directed various commercial jointstock companies, among them Farmers' Storehouse Company (a grain cooperative), and the Bank of the People. Other unincorporated joint stock enterprises—Toronto House of Industry (charitable), Mechanics' Institute (educational), Canadian Alliance Society (political), and Shepard's Hall (a public-spirited company)—were also linked to the reform movement. The overlapping boards of management—including James Lesslie, Joseph Hughes, Joseph Shepard and others—collectively countered the actions of the notorious Family Compact. Theirs was almost a "Reform Compact" (my term, not Schrauwers'), a few leaders who united disparate organizations into a powerful force for change.

These joint stock corporations were founded on moral principles, and an ethical theme runs through much of Schrauwers' discussion, what he calls the economics of respectability. Willson's early support of the Farmers' Storehouse Company was aimed less at members earning income than it was at their avoiding debt, with its accompanying social stigma and criminali-

zation. Even the votes of freeholder debtor inmates of the Toronto jail were dictated by their creditors. In the mid 1830s the Bank of the People served clients other banks refused. In the hard times of 1836-37 reformers created the House of Industry to aid pauper immigrants, successfully resisting attempts by Lieutenant Governor Bond Head, fresh from serving as an English Poor Law commissioner, to apply rigid regulations in Upper Canada.

Almost as an aside, Schrauwers contrasts the 27 members of the Children of Peace who were led in Rebellion down Yonge Street by Samuel Lount with the 54 men who stayed behind. As a group, the rebels were younger and more recently married. Schrauwers writes "it would be wrong to conclude that [men] joined the rebellion because they, as the poorest members, had nothing to lose. ... They had the most to lose: their respectability. ... It was precisely because they had the most to lose that they responded to Mackenzie's call." (p. 201) Yet Schrauwers admits that he is unable to explain why Lount rebelled while Joseph Hughes, a similarly prominent Children of Peace elder, did not.

Schrauwers utilizes Mackenzie's political career as the narrative strand for *Union is Strength*. Unfortunately, this procedure results in a number of overstatements, and I cite a few examples. The purpose of Mackenzie's 1832 journey to London was not to appeal his expulsion from the House of Assembly but, rather, to seek redress for a whole catalogue of grievances brought by many thousands of petitioners. Excessive court costs incurred by debtors was hardly the sole issue that pushed Mackenzie into politics; it was but one of many perceived evils that inspired the 1824 launching of the *Colonial Advocate*. Similarly, Mackenzie's published denunciation of the Bank of

Upper Canada and its attorney John Henry Boulton was only one of several themes in Mackenzie's writings that prompted a gang of young Tories to destroy the *Advocate* printing office in 1826. Mackenzie collected £625 in damages from the rioters, but it is a stretch to suggest, even ironically, that the bank thus funded his election to Parliament two years later.

Schrauwers has combined his experience as an economic anthropologist, his admiration of David Willson and the Children of Peace, his fascination with Robert Owen and cooperative socialism, and his diligent research into the political and economic development of Upper Canada to produce a history that is novel, insightful, argumentative, and yet, alas, not fully convincing. The intertwined threads of his themes do not weave a full tapestry. Nonetheless, his work is a welcome addition to a growing body of works by professional historians—Jeffrey McNairn, Carol Wilton, and others—demanding a re-assessment of this era. The debate continues.

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