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This Great National Object Building the Nineteenth Century Welland Canals by Roberta M. Styran and Robert R. Taylor

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to a 5,400 acre tract on the Thames River (near modern London, Ontario) in the early 1840s. Tiro interprets the move as the effort of one segment of the Oneida population, arguably more "traditional" in its cultural views and practices than the so-called "First Christian" party, to escape the pressures of settler encroachment in New York and begin life anew in Upper Canada (ironically under British colonial sponsorship) as opposed to Wisconsin or Kansas. Noting that the Oneida of the Thames community quickly developed a "dynamic agricultural sector," Tiro contrasts their experience with those who remained in New York and found ways to make a living on the margins of the dominant culture while expressing "quiet resistance" (p.186) to American mainstream ideology regarding the proper place of indigenous peoples.

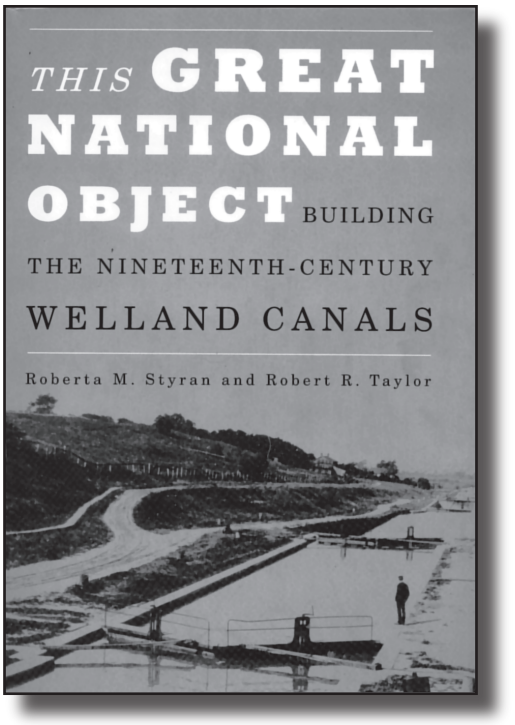
All told, this book is a substantial achievement that will find an important place on the shelves of all scholars of eastern North America's first peoples. Some historians may quarrel with the author's insistence on pursuing an argument of cultural continuity over time, noting the diasporic character of the Oneida population and the perceived failure of the New York-based Oneida Nation to extend an open hand to their kinfolk in Wisconsin and Ontario during the political struggles of recent years regarding land claims and casino profits. Many more scholars, I suspect, will regard this study as the work of first resort in understanding post-Revolutionary Oneida history.

Jon Parmenter,
Cornell University

This Great National Object Building the Nineteenth Century Welland Canals

By Roberta M. Styran and Robert R. Taylor

McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012. 403 pages. $44.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-773-53893- 1 (www.mqup.ca)



This impressive work is for the reader not seeking a single, sequential narrative. Instead, the nineteenth-century history of the first, second and third Welland Canals (the story of the extant fourth, the Welland Ship Canal, must wait for a future volume) is told and re-told from a series of different perspectives. The authors have isolated the stories of particular engineering challenges and the roles, successes and failures of the various groups of people (including promoters, engineers and labourers) involved in the successive projects. The story of each serves as the fo-

cus of its own chapter. Every chapter spans the roughly seventy-year period from the conception of the first canal, to the completion of the third.

Inevitably, some chapters will find broader interest than others, which are likely to be of most interest to the historian or informed enthusiast. For example, in the chapter, "Surveyors, Engineers and Contractors," the authors demonstrate the thoroughness of their knowledge and research, but because of the sheer number of people deserving mention and the impracticability of describing each in biographical detail, the chapter becomes at times a series of names attached to vignettes. The characters are numerous and the vignettes, by necessity, too brief to allow the reader to develop a depth of empathy with these characters, making at times for detached reading. Some, such as William Lyon Mackenzie, Oliver Phelps and the indispensable William Hamilton Merritt, are given elaborate attention, but the book is challenged to provide the average reader a thorough understanding of every figure's role. Mackenzie is a recurring character and, as a powerful personality and writer, commands the reader's attention whenever he appears. Still, one is left curious about the root of Mackenzie's antipathy toward the waterway. An entire chapter devoted to the canal's adversaries (though the chapter "Community Relations" deals with this to some extent), perhaps with Mackenzie as the central character, might have been an illuminating addition to this book.

A common thread ably binding these many stories together is the authors' evident and infectious enthusiasm for their subject. Frequently I found myself re-reading passages because their earnestness made it apparent that I had not grasped the full meaning of something they considered significant or surprising. Their generous use of accounts quoted from contemporary letters, journals and newspapers makes the period speak to the reader. I appreciated too that the stories are told frankly. The determination and energy of those involved in the enterprise are not promoted at the expense of also acknowledging their many mistakes, miscalculations and misdeeds.

The illustrations are ample, well chosen and well captioned although I would have appreciated more maps. In a landscape that has undergone so much change as the Welland Canal corridor, it can often be difficult to establish exactly where a structure or an historical incident was located. As well, the authors spend great effort trying to explain the great difficulty posed to the canal-builders by the need to find a source of water adequate for navigable depth. This was a challenge of daunting complexity and Professors Styran and Taylor take pains to underline its importance. As they reveal, it was not as simple as cutting a direct pass to Lake Erie which, of course, occupies a higher elevation than Lake Ontario. Therefore alternate sources such as the Chippewa Creek and the Grand River had to be considered. This was a potentially insurmountable challenge to the engineers of the day, yet despite the authors' efforts it is still difficult for the reader to understand its nature and ultimate resolution. The addition of one or two topographical cross-sections might have made this simpler. Nevertheless, an important point is well made; the successful linkage of Lakes Erie and Ontario for navigation was an enormous task for the expertise then available. This was no simple trench across the Niagara Peninsula, and mounting the escarpment was only the most obvious challenge.

The index is comprehensive and helped me easily to navigate when looking, for example, for a topic that might be covered in various chapters of the volume. I would

suggest, though, that, for a brief overview of the history of the canals and of their locations, to accompany this volume, readers might like to refer John N. Jackson, *The Four Welland Canals* (1988) and Colin K. Duquemin, *The Driver's Guide to the Historic Welland Canal* (2004).

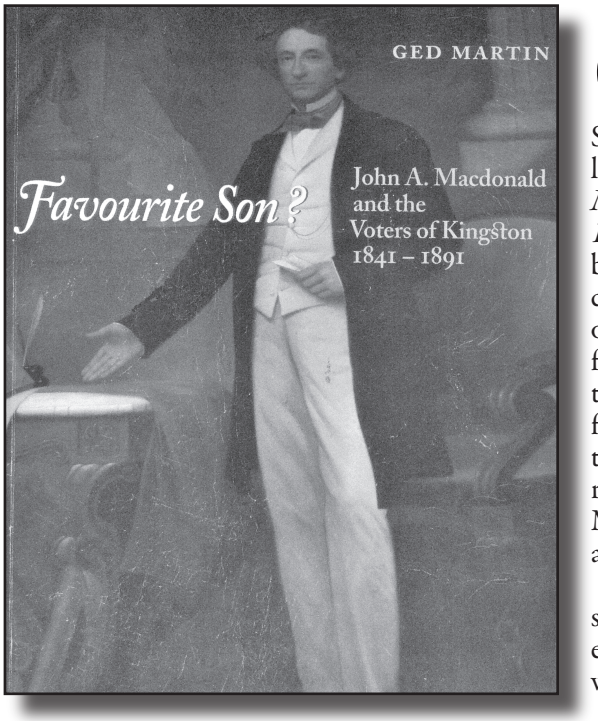
At the end of my reading, I was left with two compelling impressions. One is that an undertaking on the scale of the Welland Canal was an astonishing accomplishment in pre-confederation Canada, and one that demanded unrelenting political persistence. An enterprise that elsewhere might have ridden a tide of patriotism and sense of national destiny to easier completion was fated to run a gauntlet of skepticism, pessimism and lassitude. The other is that the construction, operation and support of the early Welland Canals, in defiance of so many natural, economic and human adversities, was an early feat of innovation, resolve and sacrifice that was, albeit on a smaller scale, an event of national drama and importance akin to the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the nineteenth century's closing years.

Eric Nixon is a professional writer with a long-term interest in the Welland Canals.

Favourite Son? John A. Macdonald and the Voters of Kingston 1841-1891

By Ged Martin

Kingston: Kingston Historical Society, 2010. 214 pages. $35.00 paperback. ISBN 978-0-91977-014-0 (www.kingstonhistoricalsociety.ca)



Ged Martin has done something different and notable. Despite the wealth of material on the life of Sir John A. Macdonald, he provides a new look at the man in *Favourite Son? John A. Macdonald and the Voters of Kingston 1841-1891*, an oversized and somewhat fragile book published by the Kingston Historical Society. Martin takes the standard view of Macdonald—as a man who rose steadily from small town lawyer, to provincial politician, to Father of Confederation, and, finally, to an international statesman—and turns it on its head. When it came to his relationship with the voters of Kingston, Macdonald's story is one of gradual decline and deterioration.

Macdonald represented Kingston for some thirty-eight years between his first election in 1844 and his last, only a few weeks before his death, in 1891. Martin