

Another World: William Ord Mackenzie's Sojourn in the Canadas, 1839-1843 by Sandra Alston and C.M. Blackstock, eds.

Jarett Henderson

Volume 109, Number 1, Spring 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1039207ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039207ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Henderson, J. (2017). Review of [*Another World: William Ord Mackenzie's Sojourn in the Canadas, 1839-1843* by Sandra Alston and C.M. Blackstock, eds.] *Ontario History*, 109(1), 147–149. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039207ar>

sonal violence.

Reimer's decision to remove the dropping rates of interpersonal violence in Toronto from larger contexts of demographic, economic, cultural and political change by constructing it as a product of Evangelical Protestant rhetoric gives *Revisiting Toronto the Good* a sharp focus. It will contribute to our understanding of how some late-nineteenth-century Canadians leaned on their exposure to religious teaching to shape

their worldview. This focus, however, risks causing readers to lose sight of the richly complex knot of factors—economic, social, cultural, political and demographic—that might have caused nineteenth-century Torontonians to turn their backs on the rough popular violence of their predecessors.

Dan Horner
Ryerson University

*Another World:
William Ord Mackenzie's Sojourn in
the Canadas, 1839-1843*

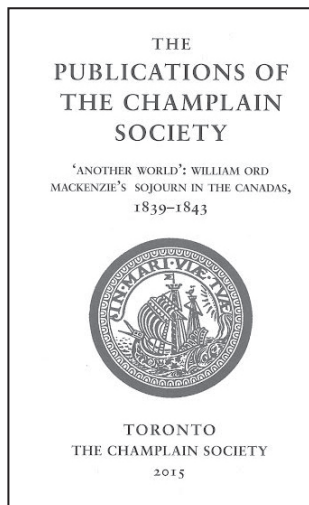
Sandra Alston and C.M. Blackstock, eds.

Toronto: The Champlain Society, 2015. 645 pages. ISBN 978-1-4875-2025-0 (bound). (champlainsociety.utpjournals.press)

Between February 1839 and October 1843 William Ord Mackenzie, an Indian-born British army surgeon in his mid-twenties recorded—in five volumes—his impressions of the peoples, places, and politics of northern North America. As Sandra Alston and C.M. Blackstone explain in their introduction to the 2015 edition published by the Champlain Society, Mackenzie's journals appear to have been based on notes and diary entries he made at the time and then revised in the days and weeks that followed. While Mackenzie's journals span the duration of his tenure in the Canadian colonies, there are occasional months-long gaps between entries and volumes. When Mackenzie began his fourth volume from Riviere du Loup on 1 September 1841, for example, the tediousness of his

routine appears to have got the better of him: "My last Volume was concluded early May last. Since that date I have not had much inclination to begin a new one... as I conceive a Journal is meant for the amusement of both writer and reader" (314).

In their introduction Alston and Blackstone hone in on the broader medical and military histories of the colonial period. Given Mackenzie's background, such a focus on his medical training at the University of Edinburgh and his award-winning scholarship as well as the presence of the British military in the Canadian colonies appear to make sense. Unfortunately, this history provides little context for the content of Mackenzie's journals which are as scant on matters of militarism in the Canadas



as they are the medical practices and procedures he presumably performed. Had the introduction paid heed to the shifting politics of rebellion-era British North America and the highly stratified social and intellectual worlds in which Mackenzie lived and worked one would have been better prepared for the 600 pages of observations about “men and things” that followed.

While Mackenzie does make mention of medical and military life in the colonies, he spends much more time and space commenting upon the places, peoples, and politics—local, colonial, and to a lesser extent, imperial—that comprised his four-and-a-half year sojourn in the Canadas. A series of sketches, drawn by Mackenzie, ranging from plans of religious revivals to maps of Kingston to depictions of winter travel by snowshoe or sled all add dimension and scale to his often critical prose. These images begin—as did Mackenzie—with his transatlantic voyage to North America, highlighting the coordinates as well as the conditions of his travel, noting his brief stops in New York, Montreal, Kingston, and eventually Toronto, where he received the “agreeable information that my travels are for the present at an end” (90). For the duration of his tenure Mackenzie sought to infiltrate the military and elite colonial networks of the colony by attending countless balls, inspections, and dinners. And like many other imperial interlocutors he also visited notable tourist destinations—both man-made and natural—such as the Brock Monument and Niagara Falls in Upper Canada and the Falls of Montmorenci and the “elegant” monument to Wolfe and Montcalm, in Lower Canada (428).

As was common among other writers from the period, Mackenzie took the time to record various life events—both his own and of those of the societies he observed. While such things as the birthdays of fam-

ily and friends were recorded, he offers little intimate reflection; the death of his mother serves as a rare exception as Mackenzie writes that “the shock has been to me dreadful” (472). More frequent were his sharp critiques of the habits, manners, and bodies of those with whom he interacted and observed, what he described as his “usual custom of describing place & persons constituting Society—where I happen to be” (412). Mackenzie never passed up the opportunity to remark upon the state of a woman’s appearance, and made it expressly clear what he thought of the societies in which he lived and worked in. Riviere du loup, he charged, was made up of “nobodies” who were “lazy like [those in the] West Indies” (314-15).

Given that Mackenzie arrived in British North America in the aftermath of the 1837-38 rebellion, it is not surprising that Mackenzie often remarked upon the state of local, colonial, and imperial politics in his journals. He disliked the reformers, considered the “French Canadians as disloyal ever” (507), and loathed Lord Durham. He paid particular attention to the Boundary Question between the British North American colonies and the United States of America, identifying those involved as “Maine-iacs” (280). He overtly praised the staunchly conservative Colborne, who had not only crushed the rebels, but also had long ties to the colonial military establishment that employed Mackenzie. Yet Mackenzie only offered passing references to larger imperial matters: he noted Melbourne’s influence during the Bedchamber crisis (109), the marriage of Queen Victoria (264) and the assassination attempts against her (493-94), and the political affairs of Syria and China (376).

By 1843 Mackenzie was ready to leave British North America. Before he departed he made a quick detour—“I had never been at Indian Lorette (572)—a rare ac-

knowledge on his part of the Indigenous peoples of northern North America. As he left Quebec he noted a peculiar sadness that filled his heart, passing over the event in silence for “feeling too sacred for expression Even in a journal” overpowered

him (577). Mackenzie ends where he began—plotting the coordinates and tribulations of his transatlantic adventures.

Jarett Henderson
Mount Royal University

***Canada’s Rural Majority, 1870-1940:
Household, Environment, Economies***

by Ruth Sandwell

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016. 272 pages. \$29.95 Paper/
ebook. ISBN 9780802086167/9781487510596. (utpublishing.com)

The period marking the late nineteenth century, leading up to 1940, brought much in the way of change to Canada. Ruth Sandwell’s *Canada’s Rural Majority: Household, Environments and Economies, 1870-1940*, makes a welcome contribution to our understanding of Canadian rural history. The book examines a particular moment in the history of rurality, and indeed, Canadian history, by looking at the period in which most industrializing nations were experiencing a decline in their rural populations as they rapidly transitioned from rural and agricultural, to urban and industrial. As a collection of snapshots of rural agricultural life in disparate parts of Canada at a time of great change, the study is invaluable. Sandwell takes that wonderful, keen sense of detail honed in her earlier micro-historical exploration of the people, policies and practices on Saltspring Island, BC, in the late nineteenth century, and uses it to explore how rural Canadians lived and worked during this seventy-year period. Through this exploration, she argues that we must see a process of change, but not necessarily a complete transformation. The movement to modernity meant wholesale change for some, and creative adjustments for others.

Canadian rural historiography has tra-

ditionally been an exercise in regional analysis, and prior to the 1970s, Canadian historians paid little attention to our rural past. A survey of Canadian rurality in its entirety therefore seems an unwieldy undertaking. A question arising early, is how to speak generally about rurality in a nation so geographically and ethnically diverse, without constantly having to evoke the experiences outside the box, or without addressing absences in the telling. Sandwell moves the definition of rurality beyond that of population density, and develops a definition of rurality based on the “dominance of life lived out-of-doors, the enormous amount of hard labour, and the pervasive presence of the household as the defining social and economic structure” (11). She does a masterful job here, by drawing our attention to an examination of geographically similar regions, and the ways in which rurality, as defined by the physical environment, shaped people’s lives and work. To

