

The Memoirs of Alexander Brodie edited and annotated by
John Steckley

Denis McKim

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[See table of contents](#)

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have chronicled the issues associated with corporate influence on Canadian education, largely conducting sociological assessments. Gidney provides much-needed historical perspective on corporatization's gradual intensification, and *Captive Audience* thus represents an important addition to this scholarly debate. In fact, given the book's merits, some readers might have wished to see the discussion extended beyond K-12 public education to address impacts on private schools, online learning, and home schooling.

With detailed endnotes and an extensive index, historians, sociologists, and scholars of education will appreciate the book's broad scope and exhaustive research. Gidney achieves this rigour without resorting to dry, turgid language, so the book remains accessible to parents, teachers, and others who are wary about

the intrusion of corporations into schools.

At times disheartening, but always balanced and enlightening, Gidney's treatment of this sensitive subject provides a comprehensive overview of corporations' progressive invasion of public school systems. Scholars and concerned citizens alike will gain a clear understanding of corporatization's rapid advance, and a deeper appreciation of the ways sanctioning corporate involvement in schools fosters loyalty to brands and legitimizes a consumption-oriented culture. Readers will be in a better position to ask penetrating questions about society's trajectory: *Am I willing to allow children to be a "captive audience" for self-interested, profit-driven corporations?*

Ryan D. Jacobs
PhD Student, Department of History,
University of Waterloo

The Memoirs of Alexander Brodie

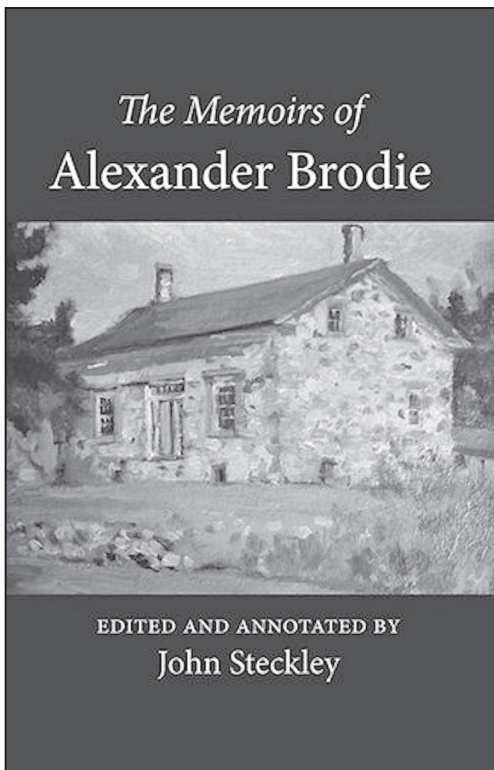
Edited and annotated by John Steckley

Oakville, ON: Rock's Mills Press, 2019. xi + 161 pages. \$24.95 paperback.
ISBN-13 978-1-77244-173-4 (<https://www.rocksmillspress.com/brodie.html>)

These memoirs chronicle the experiences of Alexander Brodie and his family, Scottish immigrants who, in 1835, left behind unfavourable economic circumstances in Aberdeenshire and settled on a farm in York County, Upper Canada named Craigieburn. Born in 1826, Brodie composed the memoirs toward the end of his long life (he died 1916), and bequeathed them to a niece in hopes of preserving for posterity a first-hand account of their family's transatlantic journey, and of assuring status-conscience descendants

that they were not the progeny of "beggars or malefactors" (ix). John Steckley, who has edited and annotated the work, is Brodie's great-great-great nephew.

The Memoirs of Alexander Brodie contain valuable information on an array of topics. Indeed, if one were to invoke a food-related metaphor in an attempt to capture the sheer variety of stimulating material on offer in this book, a smorgasbord would be an apt candidate. Among many other issues, Brodie's engagement with politics and Indigenous-settler relations at-



test to the *Memoirs*' edifying, wide-ranging content.

Brodie's account sheds valuable light on Upper Canada's political culture. Admittedly, it does not provide rigorous analysis of the abstract concepts—including loyalty, liberty, and republicanism—that permeated the writings of the colony's articulate elites. Nor does it grapple with the arcana associated with such thorny legislative matters as the Alien Question and the Clergy Reserves dispute. Instead, the *Memoirs* offer a revealing glimpse of the widespread support that existed among ordinary settlers in Upper Canada's agrarian hinterland for the reformers' cause in the era of the Rebellion of 1837-38.

Brodie contends that this support was

particularly pronounced among this community's sizeable American-born contingent. Yet he takes pains to point out that their sympathy for prominent reformers, including William Lyon Mackenzie, did not necessarily translate into support for the republican insurrection that Toronto's first mayor came to endorse. On the contrary, Brodie states that many members of this community had defended Upper Canada against invaders from their erstwhile homeland during the War of 1812, and become British subjects after the resolution of the Alien Question (which had plunged American immigrants into an anxiety-provoking legal limbo) in the late 1820s. The fact that they did such things, Brodie suggests, indicates that these American-born Upper Canadians accepted Britain's sovereignty over what morphed, in the fullness of time, into the province of Ontario.

Brodie adds that these settlers' support for what he terms the "liberal party" in Rebellion-era Upper Canada did not typically flow from an anti-monarchical sensibility. Rather, he posits that it was an outgrowth of their contempt for what they saw as the nepotistic, counterproductive policies advanced by the Family Compact, and the quiescent colonial governors—particularly Francis Bond Head—who refused to combat that clique's malign impact on the colony. Instead of seeking to topple the British regime, these settlers merely sought "that which every true lover of his country hold[s] dear, government by impartial justice" (101).

The Memoirs of Alexander Brodie also illuminate the suspicions that certain settlers harboured toward Indigenous peoples, including members of the Anishnaabe community whose ancestors had inhabited what became Upper Canada prior

to a major influx of white colonizers into that territory in the late eighteenth century. Evidence can be derived from the terror experienced by the Brodie family and other denizens of York County in the late 1830s regarding what Steckley describes as an anticipated “Indian raid.” Essentially, a distressed neighbour alerted the Brodies to the fact that vengeful “Indians” were poised to descend on the county’s white settlements, “scalping, murdering and burning” along the way. Convinced that if they did not take swift action “char[r]ed bones and ashes” would be all that was left of themselves and their farm, the Brodies hastily gathered a few possessions and sought refuge along with other settlers in a nearby home positioned atop a hill. This dwelling, Brodie notes, was deemed an advantageous location from which to detect and, the settlers hoped, fend off their supposed adversaries (98-99).

However, as Brodie explains, the anticipated assault did not materialize, and the widespread panic that it engendered turned out to be nothing more than a “false alarm,” albeit one that laid bare settlers’ misgivings vis-à-vis Indigenous people. Why, then, had inhabitants of York County been so confident that an “Indian” attack was in the offing?

In helpful annotations, Steckley convincingly ascribes their concerns to three factors. The first was the hysteria and political polarization that afflicted Rebellion-era Upper Canada, and rendered colonists susceptible to fears of social disintegration and internecine violence. The second was the fact that Indigenous warriors *had* been mobilizing in this era. In 1837, Anishnaabe forces allied to the Upper Cana-

dian government marched south on Yonge Street from their community near what is now Orillia in an attempt to quell the rebellious uprising that had begun at Montgomery’s Tavern. (They arrived after the skirmish had concluded.) Although their activities were unrelated to colonists such as the Brodies who were not participating in the rebellion, one can see how fearful settlers might have construed them as evidence of an imminent attack. And the third were the stories of Indigenous-inflicted violence imported to Upper Canada by American immigrants who had experienced clashes involving First Nations combatants linked to the British Crown in New York and Pennsylvania during the Revolutionary War. Steckley explains that memories of these encounters presumably made those who had experienced them especially likely to anticipate similar events happening in Upper Canada, even though the American-based events did not involve Anishnaabe peoples. He also notes that white soldiers involved in the Revolution, whether they were Patriots or Loyalists, were at least as capable of vengeful behaviour as their Indigenous counterparts, notwithstanding bigoted observers’ tendency to use the term “massacre” in reference to First Nations victories while deploying gentler language when discussing the assaults of white-skinned forces.

Overall, *The Memoirs of Alexander Brodie* amounts to a veritable buffet of information on a Scottish immigrant family and the diverse, dynamic colonial society amid which they settled. Dig in!

Denis McKim
Douglas College