

## *Rebels on the Great Lakes: Confederate Naval Operations Launched from Canada 1863-1864* By John Bell

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Volume 104, numéro 2, fall 2012

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065446ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065446ar>

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### Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

### ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer ce compte rendu

Vronsky, P. (2012). Compte rendu de [*Rebels on the Great Lakes: Confederate Naval Operations Launched from Canada 1863-1864* By John Bell]. *Ontario History*, 104(2), 163–165. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065446ar>

health equity, arts and education, immigration, human rights, historic preservation, and the list goes on and on.

I have two very minor complaints. Some of Shadd's remarkable detail would be better placed in chapter notes. The desire to include much of it in the narrative is tempting, of course, especially with such significant new research just begging to be shared. Sometimes, however, the detail overwhelms Shadd's fine narrative. Additionally, Shadd sometimes seems unsure of her conclusions. She has earned her authority, however, in this field. Where she is tentative in her conclusions, she should have the confidence that her documentation does indeed support statements of fact, and that her conclusions are well measured and amply sustained. A seasoned scholar, she no longer needs to qualify her statements. She is the expert and she knows her stuff.

Shadd truly takes us on a *Journey*—a

remarkable journey filled with fascinating characters whose lives are intricately linked to the history of Hamilton and Canada. Her dogged research and relentless pursuit of long forgotten histories is a model for other communities and community historians. The history is there in every community, just waiting to be uncovered and told. Histories like this add to the diverse richness of a national narrative that has long overlooked the contributions of these Afro-Canadians.

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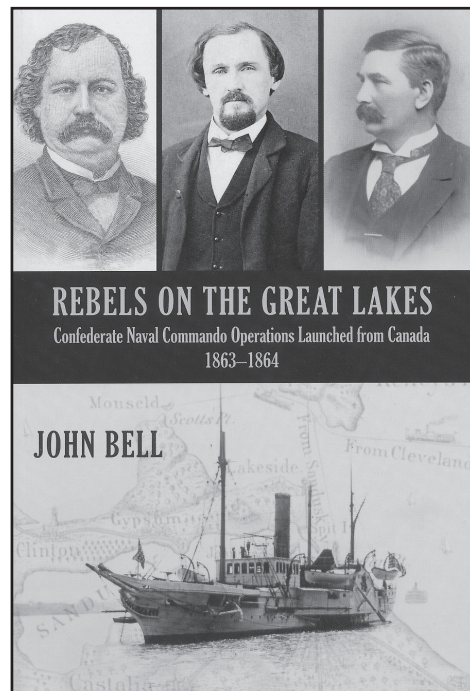
Consulting Historian and Curator, *Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park and Visitor Center*, and the *Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway and All American Road*. Eastern Shore, Maryland.

## *Rebels on the Great Lakes Confederate Naval Operations Launched from Canada 1863-1864*

By John Bell

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2011. 288 pages. \$27.99 soft-cover. ISBN 978-1-55488-986-0 ([www.dundurn.com](http://www.dundurn.com))

John Bell, a former senior archivist at Library and Archives Canada, has produced a welcomed addition to a neglected area of Canadian history with his account of clandestine Confederate Navy commando operations on the Great Lakes in 1863-1864. C.P. Stacey once claimed that the American Civil War was one of Canada's greatest historical events when he wrote in *Canada and the British Army*, "To consider the history of Canada apart from that of the United States of America is not



possible, though Canadian writers have sometimes bent to the task with laudable determination.” Indeed Canada’s historiography for the 1860s is primarily focused on the unfolding Confederation process. The apocalyptic civil war raging next door that killed two percent of the American population in four years appears to have happened far away from Canadian historians in some parallel universe, in another time and dimension, in a footnote or two on the Trent Affair and St. Alban’s Raid.

Until recently, most of the literature on Canada in the Civil War has been published and written in the United States, including Robin Winks’ definitive *Canada and the United States: the Civil War Years*, which was only later re-published by McGill-Queens. Recently ‘amateur’ historians in Canada have begun to fill in the gap, the best of these works being completed by journalists with a scholarly diligence: Adam Mayers, *Dixie & The Dominion: Canada, the Confederacy and the War for the Union*, (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2003); and Claire Hoy, *Canadians in the Civil War* (Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2004).

Bell’s new book confirms that, notwithstanding the abhorrence of slavery in the British Empire by the mid-nineteenth century, and Canada’s historical reputation as a welcoming utopian destination for escaping slaves, many Canadians hated the industrial free-labour federal republic in the north more than they did the agrarian slave-state confederacy in the south. Some Canadians even saw the Tory values of the United Empire Loyalists as akin to those of the rebelling southern plantation gentry. As Bell reviews the complex network of naval commando operations, primarily directed against a Federal prisoner-of-war camp on Johnson’s Island in Lake Erie, it becomes patently clear how much these operations depended upon local support

from Canadians.

Bell’s assertion that prominent land owner, historian, militia cavalry commander, attorney, future police magistrate and Toronto City Council Alderman George T. Denison III served as an agent of the Confederate Secret Service is not new—Denison described his service in detail in one or more of his three autobiographies. What is new is that Toronto photographer William Armstrong, best known for his spectacular series of panoramic images of Toronto in the 1850s, was also a Confederate agent working with Denison. In his fascinating account, Bell describes how Denison and Armstrong devised what is probably in the history of espionage the first known use of microphotography. Photographs of dispatches were reduced so minutely that they could be hidden inside brass buttons on clothing worn by couriers going south from Canada through U.S. territory on their way to the Confederacy.

Bell meticulously describes the Confederate commando operations in Canada as they evolved from first seizing an American ship at gunpoint on the Great Lakes, while gingerly striving to avoid breaching the neutrality of the British Canadian provinces, to eventually clandestinely purchasing in Canada the vessel *Georgian*, for which Denison fronted his name and his cash. The plan was to secretly arm the steamship in Collingwood with a ram, guns and torpedoes, produced locally by Canadian contractors, and steam it into the Great Lakes to attack U.S. shipping and prisoner of war camps. A host of Canadian shipyard owners, manufacturers and suppliers collaborated in the project for a variety of motives ranging from ideological to simply mercenary. In the end Canada West’s attorney general, John A. Macdonald, seized the *Georgian* before the mission could be launched. Denison later unsuccessfully

sued the colonial province for the return of his investment in the seized ship.

Bell illuminates in his book a critical moment in international military law where the distinction between “terrorism” or “piracy” and “naval commando warfare” was put to the test. Confederate Navy commandos operating from Canada, if captured in US territory, faced the death penalty as “spies” or “guerrillas.” Bell recounts in detail the capture on the Suspension Bridge at Niagara Falls of the Confederate naval officer John Yates Beall attempting to return to Canada from an operation to intercept a train carrying POWs in Buffalo. Beall had previously led some of the Lake Erie missions from Canada and Federal authorities were determined to make an example of him. Bell covers in detail Beall’s

subsequent trial and execution in February 1865.

Although Bell near the end of his book begins to overreach with an inconclusive chapter speculating on John Wilkes Booth’s presence in Canada, overall his book is an excellent treatment of Confederate operations on the Great Lakes and a valuable addition to understanding the scope of the impact that the American Civil War had on Canada, the issue of border security and ‘terrorism’ in the mid-nineteenth century and the evolving definition of ‘unlawful combatant.’ Bell’s history has resonance in the post-9/11 world.

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### *The United Church of Canada: A History*

By Don Schweitzer (editor)

Kitchener-Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2012. 330 pages. \$39.95 hardcover.  
ISBN 978-1-55458-331-7. ([www.wlupress.ca](http://www.wlupress.ca))

Featuring chronological and thematic sections, this collection of essays, edited by Don Schweitzer, attempts to tell the story of the United Church of Canada in ways that are faithful to its past, in the hopes that it can inform those who have a vested interest in the church’s future. In the opening section, Schweitzer notes that while the United Church looms large over the field of Canadian studies in areas as diverse as feminism, church history, national policy, cul-

tural issues, education, foreign policy and multiculturalism “there exists no academic history of the United Church of Canada itself.” (xii).

Obviously, looking at over eighty years of a denomination’s history is a daunting task and so this review will begin with comments on the basic layout of the book. The index, while not exhaustive, is satisfactory for quick referencing. However, it is more advisable to examine the table of contents in order to access any partic-

