

Violent Loyalties: Manliness, Migration and the Irish in the Canadas, 1798-1841 by Jane G.V. McGaughey

Chris Raible

Volume 114, numéro 1, spring 2022

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088119ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1088119ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Raible, C. (2022). Compte rendu de [*Violent Loyalties: Manliness, Migration and the Irish in the Canadas, 1798-1841* by Jane G.V. McGaughey]. *Ontario History*, 114(1), 134–136. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1088119ar>

most unique about the book is its detailed look at structures already known by most Torontonians. These are known as “cottages,” which can still be spotted across the entire city, often in former working hubs and now wedged between multimillion dollar homes as well as a selection of other styles of homes described in detail at the beginning of the book. Special attention is given throughout the book to the design and architectural aspects of the structures, a nod to Loucks’ lengthy career as an architect.

Loucks and Valpy’s experience within

the heritage conservation and urban planning world has clearly inspired this important book. They campaign for an appreciation of the modest hopes that helped give rise to Toronto and argue these homes are windows into a much larger story: “Connecting housing and hope,” (74) a topic deserving of far greater scrutiny, study and appreciation.

Morgan Cameron Ross
MA Candidate, History, York University
Old Toronto Series Curator

Violent Loyalties

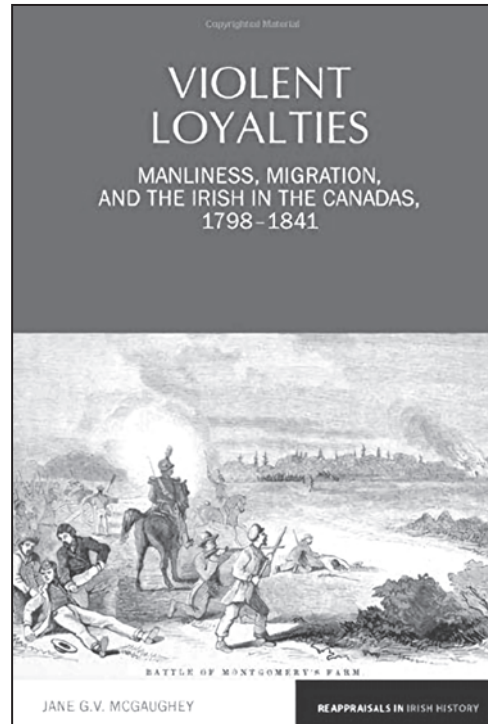
Manliness, Migration and the Irish in the Canadas, 1798-1841

By Jane G.V. McCaughey

Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020.
256 pages. £80. ISBN 978-1-78962-186-0
(www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk)

In 1845, while living in exile in the United States, William Lyon Mackenzie published the first installment of a projected collection: *The Sons of the Emerald Isle, or Lives of One Thousand Remarkable Irishmen*, brief biographies, each “a noted character of Irish parentage or descent.” His stated purpose in publishing was to counteract American “nativism” with its harsh rejection of Irish (indeed all non-native) immigrants. These were Irish lives that mattered.

Professor Jane G.V. McCaughey has a very different purpose with this study of Irish men in Upper and Lower Canada in the era of the 1837 Rebellions. It focuses not on a thousand individuals, but on six examples of Irishmen involved with major male violence:



- Benjamin Lett, a lone terrorist best known for his 1840 destruction of Queenston’s Brock monument.
- James Fitzgibbon, of Laura Secord fame—but featured here as a disciplined Irish loyalist serving as an Irish

riot-breaker, a harsh critic of the violence of Irish Orangemen (but with no sympathy for Mackenzie), a frustrated and maligned militia officer during and after the Toronto rebellion. The focus here is his disciplined “manliness” (McGaughey’s favourite word) all through his public and personal life.

- Ogle Gowan, who channeled his Irish manliness politically by importing and establishing Canada’s Orange Order, notorious in its early years for its violent political engagement.

- Peter Ayles, leader of the so-called Shriner war, an often-violent conflict between Irish and French lumberjacks in the Ottawa valley in the 1830s.

- Edmund Bailey O’Callaghan, an Irish journalist and avid Papineau supporter, whose democratic dreams were shattered in the ill-fated rebellion in Lower Canada and he was forced to flee (and ultimately find a very different life) in the United States.

- Irish-British troops engaged in the defence of Canada in the last (but one) of the era’s violent encounters, the so-called “Battle of the Windmill” (on the shore of the St. Lawrence near Brockville). Defeated there were invading volunteer Americans and Canadians hoping to re-ignite the fires of rebellion. (The grim tale offered here is essentially a re-publishing of McGaughey’s, “Dis-memberment at Windmill Point,” *Ontario History*, 110:1, Spring 2018.)

With each of these chapters, McGaughey, a professor of Irish Diaspora Studies in the School of Irish Studies at Concordia University, offers an intensive yet extensive exploration. The aim with this work, as she declares in the introduction, “is to offer a nuanced account of

how codes of manliness and constructions of masculinity intersected with popular ideas about Irish violence and various incarnations of loyalty in Upper and Lower Canada.... This is a new perspective for histories of the Irish diaspora... it is the first to consider male Irish migrants settling in the Canada from a gendered perspective.”

On my first reading of that summary of her work, I confess, I did not comprehend what was meant. Having read exhaustively, and written explicitly, about Upper Canada—and to a lesser extent Lower Canada—it is a historical period and territory I thought I knew reasonably well. But I have never before been invited to view important episodes of the period through “the prism of gender.”

Presented here are tales of violence: histories of men whose manliness was constantly tested; stories of Irishmen whose loyalties were constantly questioned; episodes of violence that contradict the myth of Canada as “peaceable kingdom”; studies of settlers never fully settled, of transplants never deeply rooted, of immigrants never truly landed. After reading and re-reading the cramped and crowded pages of this volume entitled *Violent Loyalties—Manliness, Migration and the Irish in the Canada, 1798-1841*, I confess that I am profoundly impressed, but not quite convinced. Old male me, I continue to prefer history presented as clear narrative. I realize, of course, McGaughey offers her reflections and revelations not to the likes of me but to a far more disciplined core of scholars.

Mackenzie wrote his 1846 work on laudable Irishmen to impress and to educate a popular readership. Alas, after publishing but two of a planned ten parts, he abandoned his project—not because (as some critics meanly suggested) he could not find a thousand laudable Irishmen, but because he could attract so few paying read-

ers. This 256-page-work, priced about \$150 Canadian, may, I fear, meet a similar fate.

On a final note, this book's cover reprints an image by an anonymous artist, first published twenty-five years after the 1837 Rebellion, and reprinted in dozens of works since. Depicted are a few male figures, civilians tending wounded comrades, but, more prominently, a few uniformed soldiers, aiming guns or firing a cannon. These are military men, not farmers. They are defending, not attacking. They peer

across a wide clear landscape at a distant, forward-moving massive enemy force. The scene has no hills or ravines, no crops or animals, no cultivated fields or railed fences, no barns or houses, no macadamized Yonge Street. Though entitled "Battle of Montgomery's Farm," there is no tavern; there are almost no trees. Is this Upper Canada in 1837?

Chris Raible
Creemore, Ontario