

Through Water, Ice & Fire: Schooner Nancy of the War of 1812 By Barry Gough

Keith R. Widder

Volume 99, numéro 1, spring 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065802ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065802ar>

[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

Widder, K. R. (2007). Compte rendu de [*Through Water, Ice & Fire: Schooner Nancy of the War of 1812* By Barry Gough]. *Ontario History*, 99(1), 115–117. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065802ar>

what is contained in *Telling Our Stories* is not available on the website, and the book has its own distinct charms. In its nine chapters it focuses on particular themes: origin stories, the Mi-te-wi-win (“shamanism”), early contact narratives, Cree versus European weaponry, Christianity, and a moving account of a devastating epidemic. The stories in themselves are absorbing and engaging, well-told and rich in meaning. Most of the chapters have useful introductions by the University of Winnipeg researchers who worked on the Omushkego project, writing of their collaboration with Mr. Bird and providing historical and cultural context. Mr. Bird himself contextualizes the stories too, largely by describing key aspects of the traditional Omushkego lifestyle. He also explains the motivations and concerns behind his project of recording as much Omushkego culture as possible, focussing particularly on his fear that the Omushkego language is disappearing and, with it, the wealth of stories it carries. Louis Bird’s concern to save an ancient, vital tradition frames the book and much of his narrative, but for the reader this is only one component of the experience. To a non-Omushkego, the reading experience also includes a sense of being admitted into the thought world and lived experience of the Omushkegowak. In any one story here, countless elements of belief, understand-

ing, values and daily practice are transmitted incidentally in the course of describing the actions and thoughts of the protagonists. I know of few books that so effectively transmit a cultural world as does this one in its combination of traditional tales, oral histories, and commentary and explication by an internal expert, Louis Bird.

Telling Our Stories will be a tremendous teaching tool for students of virtually any age, from primary school to university. In salvaging what knowledge he can, as the forces of colonization and modernization pry the generations apart and impose the English language, Louis Bird is attempting primarily to preserve his culture for the Omushkego generations to come, hoping they will return to it. At the same time, he has offered the rest of the world access to the thought, knowledge, struggles and historical understanding of his Omushkegowak people.

Robin Jarvis Brownlie
University of Manitoba

Bibliography:

Bird, Louis. *Omushkego Legends*. Omushkego Oral History Project, Centre for Rupert’s Land Studies, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2006. See <<http://www.ourvoices.ca>>

Through Water, Ice & Fire: Schooner Nancy of the War of 1812

By Barry Gough. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2006. 213 pp. \$24.99 softcover. ISBN 1-55002-569-4.

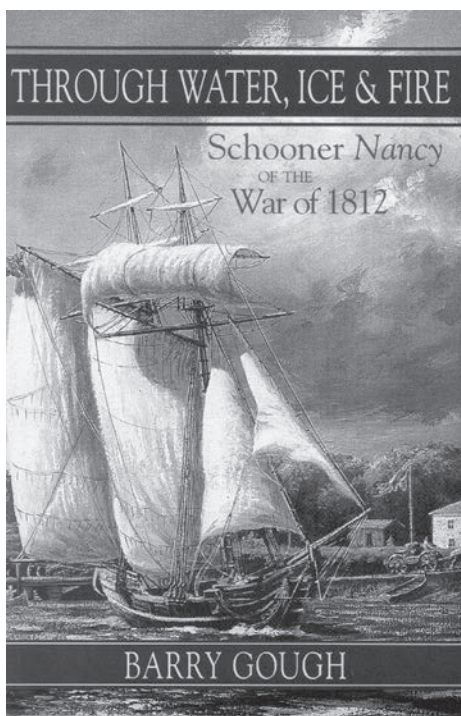
Through Water, Ice & Fire is a biography of the *Nancy*, a sailing vessel that played an important role on the Great Lakes during the War of 1812. Barry Gough has fle-

shed out in great detail the *Nancy*’s story that he began to tell several years earlier in *Fighting Sail on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay*. By placing the activities of one ship at the centre of his narrative, Gough draws our attention away from more familiar players in the War of 1812 such as Tecumseh, Isaac Brock, Oliver Hazard Perry and

William Henry Harrison. Gough's presentation enables us to see the interconnections among the British military, the fur trade, maritime commerce, and the changing fortunes of the War. He demonstrates the importance of shipbuilding, and especially the Americans' successful effort to build a fleet powerful enough to win control of Lake Erie. Gough makes it clear that it mattered a great deal who controlled the water routes through the Great Lakes and that

naval activity on Lake Erie and Lake Huron needs to be part of the interpretation of events that took place during the War. After all, Great Britain and the United States were engaged in a bitter conflict that both nations saw as a battle for hegemony in the region surrounding the Great Lakes.

Gough gives us a view from the water of the western Great Lakes at war. We see the *Nancy's* courageous captain, Alexander Mackintosh, carrying troops and armaments to support the unsuccessful British campaigns against Fort Meigs (near Toledo today) in April and July 1813, and nearby at Fort Stephenson in July of that year. The *Nancy* served as a lifeline, transporting goods and people between Amherstburg and Michilimackinac, and between there and St. Joseph's Island and Sault Ste. Marie. Gough takes us on the *Nancy's* voyage southward through Lake Huron in October 1813, and we watch the gallant crew keep the vessel afloat during violent storms and out of the hands of their Amer-



ican enemies. Mackintosh had sailed from Michilimackinac unaware of Perry's victory over the British fleet on Lake Erie, and miraculously made it back to Mackinac Island unscathed. The *Nancy* needed repairs, however, and Mackintosh refused the order of Captain Richard Bullock, commandant of Fort Mackinac, to sail to Matchedash Bay (at the foot of Georgian Bay) to procure badly-needed provisions.

Gough is at his best as he recreates the fiery end of the *Nancy*. Lieutenant Miller Worsley of the Royal Navy, who had taken command on 2 August 1814, put up a fierce defense of his ship in the teeth of a blistering American bombardment on 14 August while the *Nancy* took refuge on the Nottawasaga River. When Worsley's efforts proved futile in the face of a superior force, he burned the *Nancy* to keep the Americans from capturing it and using it against the British. Fortunately, Gough does not end the story there. He recounts the efforts of William Wilson, C.H.J. Snider and Dr. F.J. Conboy in keeping alive the memory of the *Nancy*. They finally located the charred remains, and parts of the ship ultimately found their way into the Museum of the Upper Lakes on Nancy Island (in the Nottawasaga River, near Wasaga Beach) in 1968.

Many illustrations bring *Through Water, Ice & Fire* to life. Portraits, manuscript maps, paintings and sketches help the reader to visualize the world as it appeared

to the crew of the *Nancy* and other people who took part in the struggle for naval supremacy on Lake Huron. The timeline that appears at the beginning of the book will help readers keep track of a complicated sequence of events. Missing, however, is a good map that identifies points visited by the *Nancy* on Lakes Huron and Erie, and important places on the land surrounding them. We are told that General William Hull led an American force across the St. Clair River, first to invade Canada on 12 July 1812, and then to retreat several weeks later. (pp. 47, 55) Actually, Hull crossed the Detroit River; more careful proofreading would have caught this error.

Through Water, Ice & Fire will be useful to readers who are interested in the Great Lakes fur trade, the rivalry between Great Britain and the United States for the determining and controlling the international border, and the naval and military history of these two nations.

Keith R. Widder
Michigan State University, East Lansing

Bibliography:

Gough, Barry. *Fighting Sail on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay: The War of 1812 and its aftermath*. Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2002.

Under the North Star: Black Communities in Upper Canada

By Donald G. Simpson. Edited by Paul E. Lovejoy. A Publication of the Harriet Tubman Resource Centre on the African Diaspora, York University, Toronto. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, Inc., 2005. x + 500 pp. US\$34.95 softcover. ISBN 1-592213-56-1.

During the antebellum period, fugitives from American slavery were advised to follow the North Star and navigate their way to Canada. Since then, the North Star has become synonymous with Black freedom. It is fitting, therefore, for Donald Simpson to call on this historical image for his text. By his own account, Simpson wrote *Under the North Star* to offer a province-wide survey of Black settlements and communities during the early days of Ontario (Upper Canada) history prior to Confederation. Through six chapters of vastly different lengths he not only uncovers the history of Ontario's

Blacks during this period but also uses this history as a catalyst for examining the evolving nature of Canada-U.S. relations, relations that could be particularly strained when the protection of men, women and children of colour was on the line.

Following the foreword by Paul Lovejoy (Director of the Tubman Centre), Simpson opens with brief accounts of Black immigration to and slavery in Canada. He focuses on the Revolutionary era, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and the years following the fugitive slave laws of 1793 and 1850. Legislation initiated by Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe in Upper Canada in 1793 helped ensure that slavery, while not comprehensively abolished, would ultimately disappear. Many Blacks were indeed escaping slavery, but notable figures like the Shadds were free people who left the United States because of the continued encroachment on