

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

McLean, Marianne. *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745-1820*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. Pp. xiii, 285. Illustrations. \$34.95 (hard)

J. K. Johnson

Volume 20, numéro 3, february 1992

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019272ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019272ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Johnson, J. K. (1992). Compte rendu de [McLean, Marianne. *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745-1820*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. Pp. xiii, 285. Illustrations. \$34.95 (hard)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 20(3), 130-131.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019272ar>

context of parties and elections, not urban politics. Reference is made to the American debates about urban machines and reformers and to the vibrant English-Canadian literature of the late 1960s and early 1970s concerning the apparent need for local parties, but the link between this material and the Quebec experience is not fully developed.

There is lots of evidence that the authors are quite right in treating the 1989 Quebec City municipal election as a battle between two established local political parties. Each had its own high-profile leader, elaborate advertising campaign, and sophisticated capacity for public-opinion polling. Interesting as the authors' analysis of these matters may be, however, there is always a nagging question: Why, in the absence of strong local political parties elsewhere in North America, have they become so deeply embedded in the political life of Montreal, Quebec City, and, to a lesser extent, some other major cities in the province? The authors attempt a brief explanation in their "Introduction," but it is short and unconvincing. If local political parties were caused by rapid urbanization, immigration, and reformist zeal, then they should be just as strong elsewhere in North America. What makes Quebec special?

As the authors of *Partis politiques municipaux* themselves acknowledge, Montreal's local party system came first. Perhaps developments elsewhere in the province are the result of a kind of "demonstration effect," leaving us then to ponder the origins of municipal political parties in Montreal. In any event, Quesnel and Belley (and Lévêillé) do not provide a satisfactory answer.

But there is much that they do provide. Never has a particular municipal election in Canada been better documented and

analyzed. Any future studies of such elections will be seriously flawed if they ignore this trail-breaking book. It will no doubt be widely used in French-language university courses on urban politics. If it were translated, it would be of great value in English-language Canadian university courses as well.

There is much in the book for non-Québécois to think about. For example, there is a thorough description of how Quebec's progressive municipal-election financing system actually works. Parties and candidates face strict expenditure limits and developers (and all corporate bodies) cannot contribute a cent.

Elsewhere in Canada, has there ever been a municipal election in which two former provincial cabinet ministers from opposing parties (Jean-François Bertrand, *Parti québécois*, and Jean-Paul L'Allier, *Parti libéral du Québec*) contested the mayoralty and in which the winner (L'Allier) appointed a former minister from his opponent's party (Denis de Belleval) as the new city manager? In fact, is there anywhere outside Quebec where it makes sense to use the English equivalent of the authors' "le gouvernement L'Allier?" Did anyone ever hear of "the Eggleton government" in Toronto? Of course not. It was never there.

Experience in Montreal and Quebec City demonstrates that, under certain conditions, municipal political parties can thrive and play a crucial role in city government. In both cities, the dominant pro-development party has eventually given way to a party whose political base is in neighbourhood organizations. Whether the pendulum will again swing back, whether the same parties will still be involved in the battles to come, and whether they will remain independent of national political parties are the significant questions about the future. If the answers to these ques-

tions are affirmative, Paul Peterson should start paying attention.

Andrew Sancton
Department of Political Science
University of Western Ontario

McLean, Marianne. *The People of Glengarry: Highlanders in Transition, 1745-1820*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991. Pp. xiii, 285. Illustrations. \$34.95 (hard).

Urban historians who lead busy lives may wish to know that they don't *have* to read this book. It is 99.9 percent urban history free. On the other hand, historians, of any stripe, who don't read *The People of Glengarry* will have missed quite a lot, for this is an original and valuable piece of work.

Marianne McLean has set out to study the remarkable series of group migrations that brought Scottish Highlanders from western Inverness to Glengarry County in Upper Canada between 1784 and 1815. Adhering to a view she shares with other current scholars of immigration and settlement that it is possible to make sense of the development of settlement in the new world only if the nature of the old world society that provided the settlers is first understood she has adopted a three part approach. The early chapters examine in detail the changing society and economy of western Inverness between 1745 and 1800, a middle section deals with the emigrants themselves, including those who followed a more conventional chain migration pattern after 1815, and the final chapters describe the actual settlement of Glengarry County in which succeeding emigrant groups and kin groups "created a new Highland community."

Any discussion of emigration from the Highlands must confront the contentious question of whether those who left were

voluntary emigrants or unwilling exiles. Dr. McLean manages to come down more or less in the middle of this debate. They were not evicted but left voluntarily, even against the wishes of their landlords, yet they believed that they had been forced to go because as "a proud and self reliant people" they could not accept the changed conditions they were faced with, which included grossly higher rents and the conversion of much land to sheep farming. This conclusion is not so wishy-washy as it may appear, and in reaching it Dr. McLean firmly disagrees with much that has been written by others. She rejects the view that emigration before 1815 was not a form of protest against economic change, that emigration can be attributed to population increase, that emigration was a way of avoiding a commercial economy and preserving a traditional society, or that clearances for sheep were irrelevant before 1815 and were merely "invented" by the emigrants as a rationalization of their decision to leave. The evidence on which this revisionist position is based is on the whole convincing, especially since it derives from a specific case study of actual people in their actual setting and not on the kind of generalized studies of population and emigration which have usually been done.

Dr. McLean has done about as much as anyone could to get at the conditions and motives of ordinary Highlanders. They were "noted for their intense conservatism" but made a "radical" decision. But she also rightly puts a good deal of stress on the crucial role of the "Highland gentlemen" who were the leaders, organizers and go-betweens for the emigrants, both in Scotland and in Upper Canada. Her view of these men is not romantic; they were decidedly self-interested, seeing a chance to rebuild their eroding fortunes, prestige and authority in a new land, something they were in fact quite successful in doing, at least for

a couple of generations. Dr. McLean never explicitly says so, but the reader nonetheless gets the distinct impression that the successive group migrations (except for that of 1815) would probably not have happened at all without their initiative, and her explanation for the absence of group migration after 1815 includes the fact that there simply weren't any gentlemen left "as individuals and as a class" in the Highlands. A cynic might suggest that some not so self reliant sheep had been led away by their shepherds.

This book fits well with the recent work of other historians of immigration in finding that immigration was family and kin based and was drawn from people of at least modest resources, though Glengarry seems to have been somewhat unusual in the way in which the immigrants continued to remain fixated on a single destination and the extent to which the chain of migrants was made up of groups, rather than individual families. Such differences, from Irish migrants for instance, are not stressed in the book and while Dr. McLean notes that Glengarrians have always seen themselves as coming from a special place, she argues in her conclusion that Glengarry may in fact have been typical of Upper Canada as a whole since Highland characteristics "loyalty, defence of local interest and conservatism" were widely shared in the province. Widely shared to a degree perhaps, but one suspects that Upper Canadians in other areas and of other backgrounds (such as Americans and Lowland Scots) would have felt that Glengarrians had an excess of such virtues.

On one major subject which might have been assumed to be of some significance—religion—the book is curiously reticent. There are occasional references to priests and to the Roman Catholic church, but their role is treated, if at all,

as a minor one, though surely the emigrant groups were not defined by family and region alone, but also by a shared faith. Nor is there any suggestion of religious division within the Highland community; they are simply all assumed to have been Roman Catholic. How then are we to explain the fact that when the first reliable denominational census for Glengarry was taken in 1851, Catholics and Protestants were almost exactly equal in numbers in the county? Evidently there is a second "People of Glengarry" who remain to be given equally expert attention.

J. K. Johnson
Department of History
Carleton University

Moodie, Susanna. *Voyages: Short Narratives of Susanna Moodie*, ed. John Thurston. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1991. Pp. xxix, 256.

Campbell, Sandra, and Lorraine McMullen, eds., *New Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women, 1900-1920*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1991. Pp. 333.

The imaginative lives of two generations of women short story writers in Canada is the subject of two new literary anthologies from the Canadian Short Story Library of the University of Ottawa Press. Regarded together, *Voyages: Short Narratives of Susanna Moodie* and *New Women: Short Stories by Canadian Women 1900-1920*, will help literary scholars chart the development of the short story genre in Canada and the contribution of women writers to it. Their historical value extends further, however, for the stories also suggest how some English Canadian women used literature to give meaning to the personal and social upheavals affecting their lives in nineteenth and early twentieth century urban Canada.