REVIEW


The topic of Scottish migration to Canada is a well-worn one, but for just cause. The series of books currently being produced by Lucille Campey demonstrates that there are novel seams of enquiry still being productively mined. *After the Hector: The Scottish Pioneers of Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, 1773-1852* and *The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada, 1784-1855: Glengarry and Beyond* are companion volumes in that they ask similar questions of Nova Scotia and Upper Canada in similar time periods. How did the emigration process work? What were the social and economic developments that encouraged people to leave Scotland? What were the factors that made Canada attractive? What were the regional patterns? What was the role of government and philanthropy in emigration? Why did Scots have such an impact? What happened to Scottish customs? Although these are recurring themes, the investigations make separate and unique stories, demonstrating the variation in the emigration experience. The two titles sustain the current thinking that emigration was predominantly at the instigation of the migrants
themselves. Campey develops this by investigating the importance of Canadian pull factors as well as the conditions which made life in Scotland unpleasant. She considers whether the nature of the voyage was as horrific as it is popularly held to have been, and investigates the experience of Lowlanders and urbanites as well as Highlanders and rural dwellers. After the Hector emphasises the vital importance of the timber trade between Nova Scotia and Scotland for both enabling migration and fuelling Scottish success in the New World, whereas The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada examines the strategic importance of settlement patterns encouraged by the government. Thus Campey engages with age-old debates about the agency and motivations of migrants, and the changing nature of Scots-Canadian identity, but with new slants.

Campey focuses both on the factors which pushed Scots from home and those which drew them to Canada. She concurs with current scholarship that maintains the pulls were the opportunity to own land, and to improve living conditions, preferably in the context of an existing community. Her discussion of push factors in The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada is revealing because it takes the Lowlands and urban areas as its subject as well as the Highlands. This both feeds and challenges prevailing theories on the level of agency of emigrants. The evidence from the emigration of Lanarkshire weavers supports her conviction that migrations were predominantly self determined, opposed by upper classes. Unlike many authors, from Alexander MacKenzie in 1883 to relatively recent books by John Prebble and James Hunter, she does not see the Scots as coerced into emigrating. She accepts they were pressurised by falling living and working conditions, but the evidence of the self organisation of the Emigration Societies, and the pressure they put on government for assistance dispels any lingering images of tormented exile. In this she follows J.M. Bumsted’s The People’s Clearance. He, however, declares that official resistance was the case only until the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. Campey’s consideration of the Lowland weavers questions how relevant Bumsted’s 1815 cut-off point is for non-Highlanders. She shows that potential emigrants continued to struggle to find government support for their exoduses. The assistance for the 1820-1 migration of textile workers was an exception: a result of the strategic importance of
their destination at the time, and to ease increasing social unrest in the Glasgow area.

Campey maintains that not only were the Scots rarely the victims when it came to the decision making process, but they were also rarely victimised by the experience of the voyage. She produces compelling evidence in *After the Hector* that it was far from usual for travellers to be duped by money-grubbing captains and agents into disease-ridden tubs which threateningly decayed during the transatlantic voyage. Her close study of Lloyds’ Shipping Register reveals that the majority of the ships were rated as A1. She also demonstrates the importance of letters of recommendation from former passengers in choosing a captain. Although the voyage could occasionally go disastrously wrong, most were spent in discomfort little different from the conditions found in most homes of the time.

Once across the Atlantic, Campey claims the Scots were exceptionally successful because of their early arrival and the importance placed on community. Their early arrival allowed them to secure the best locations, whether that was forest and river lots in Nova Scotia, or agricultural land in Upper Canada. She maintains it mattered little that the Highlanders had no experience with forestry, or that the weavers had no farming skills, as the important factor was claiming superior natural resources, and community assistance. This success led to extensive follow-on migration to these areas by the friends and family of early settlers. Campey supports the idea that community was especially prized, even to economic detriment, citing the example of later migrants to Nova Scotia who had refused better land in Upper Canada because they prioritised proximity to kith and kin. She then examines how the Scots tended to group themselves by ethnicity and religion, resulting in coherent communities held tight by language or creed, thus preserving their distinctiveness.

In common with most migration studies, the books fail to address questions about native people and gender. The emphasis placed on the settlement of the New World is surely incomplete without a consideration of the Scots’ impact on First Nations. This is especially necessary if the Scots were frequently the earliest settlers. There is token mention of Natives, but no discussion of their interactions. The impression is given that Canada was an empty wilderness ripe for cultivation. Investigating these
issues might counteract the tendency toward the hagiography of the early migrant which creeps into the last chapter of *The Scottish Pioneers of Upper Canada*. There is also an occasional dabbling in ethnic stereotyping which leads to some apparent contradictions. The other potentially significant theme is gender. Was the experience of the migrants the same whether they were male or female? I suspect not.

Despite the inevitable further questions which any study opens up, Campey’s volumes are an invaluable resource for the historian or the genealogist. They are accessible, with many illustrations and useful maps. Examples of primary sources are included within the text which both illustrate the type of material available and supply biographical illustration. The appendices provide comprehensive coverage of relevant passenger lists and ship details, invaluable for pursuing further research, or indulging a historian’s nosiness about just how many yards of tartan or barrels of pork Hugh McLeod brought from Cromarty to Pictou in 1821!

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