Paul Cowan, *How the Scots Created Canada*. 
Pp. 239. ISBN 1896124100. CAD$18.95.

Paul Cowan’s, *How the Scots Created Canada* is the latest in a growing body of work espousing the influence of Scots abroad. While that influence has arguably been nowhere more felt than in Canada, the assertion that it was the Scots who were responsible for its ‘creation’ will be met, no doubt, with derision by academics of both Scottish and Canadian history. Indeed the inclusion of such titles as *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Canadian History* in the bibliography do little to underpin the scholarly merits of this publication, and at first glance one could be forgiven for dismissing this book as little more than an exercise in nostalgic story telling. Yet it would be wrong to judge this book on these terms. Cowan is not an academic, nor is he writing for an academic audience. As a Scots born journalist now plying his trade in Canada, the author is aiming his book at the large number of Scots living in Canada and Canadians with Scottish ancestry, with whom it will no doubt be met with wide approval.

Cowan does in fact present a well written and informative account of the significant impact the Scots had on the development of Canada, both before and after Confederation. Following a brief introduction, the author takes a broadly chronological approach to a range of subject areas, which he intersperses with a series of short segments that look at some of the individual characters and incidents which contribute to this story. In the first chapter, ‘How the Scots Discovered Canada’, Cowan explores some of the Scots’ earliest Canadian encounters, which although at times tenuous, are acknowledged as such by the author, who is correct in his argument that ‘what is beyond a reasonable doubt is that the Scots had connections to Canada long before Columbus and Cabot came on the scene.’ Other chapters examine the role of Scots in the fur trade, exploration, the development of Canada’s vast rail network, the media, as well as the vast list of Scottish
inventions and discoveries which have featured prominently in Canadian life.

The crux of Cowan’s argument relates to the role of Scots during the Confederation process. According to the author, all the fathers of Confederation, with the exception of Quebec’s George-Etienne Cartier and Irishman D’Arcy McGee, were Scots-born or of Scottish descent. Furthermore, with the exception of Newfoundland, which showed little interest in joining Confederation, it was the Scots who dominated most of the colonial legislatures. Not surprisingly, Canada’s first two Prime Ministers, John A Macdonald and Alexander Mackenzie, receive considerable attention. They, according to the author, ‘laid the foundations between 1867 and 1891 that turned a collection of British colonies into a nation in its own right’. While his analysis may be skewed by his somewhat tartan tinted sunglasses, that a number of Scots were in a strong position to influence Confederation is beyond question. What is less clear and is an area which merits further study, is what influence their ‘Scottishness’ had on the process.

‘For better or worse,’ the author states, ‘the Canada we live in today is a product of Scotland’. While this reviewer remains unconvinced that the Scots ‘created’ Canada, Cowan does present ample evidence of their significant impact. That the Scots never made up more than 15 percent of the population, but played such a prominent role in politics, business, finance and education, is testament to this fact.

Andrew Hinson
University of Guelph