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Book Review - *Borderland Blacks: Two Cities in the Niagara Region during the Final Decades of Slavery*

Susanna Ashton

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Borderland Blacks: Two Cities in the Niagara Region during the Final Decades of Slavery. By dann j. Broyld. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022. Acknowledgments, introduction, epilogue, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xi, 296. \$45.00.)

Broyld's study of Rochester, N.Y. and St. Catharines, Canada West—the paired cities of the Niagara region—is an intricate walk through urban sensibilities on a border that was particularly and peculiarly structured by the slaver society of the United States. Indeed, this study does not concern itself with Black people in this region as much as it examines what this region meant to Black people.

To be sure, there was no romantic notion of liberty in Rochester, and any dreams of Black Utopias in St. Catharines were quickly burst as well. Broyld sketches out various and distressing examples of slave catchers and bounty hunters aided by local White citizens of the area on both sides of the border. Moreover, Broyld also attends to the class and economic circumstances that coupled with race to keep Black people employed in menial jobs with few opportunities, while sketches of remarkable Black citizens who managed to open successful businesses or thrive in the region were the exceptions, not the rule. However, even those exceptions may have been able to exist because of the comparative freedoms offered by the culture of the area.

The “fluid frontier” (p. 3) of this region was often the last stop on the Underground Railroad and, unsurprisingly, the water metaphor did not just end a railroad route as much as it carried it in different directions, usually with a specific current, but occasionally with the unpredictable eddies and swirls of historical circumstance. As Broyld demonstrates, the interactions and movements between these regions were mutual, and this counterintuitive point is played out with copious examples of the myriad reasons Black individuals, often fugitives from slavery and people who had dedicated their lives to freedom, returned from Canada and found themselves again moving through or staying in Rochester.

This book illuminates what Broyld sees as a “comprehensive borderland framework” (p. 2) and he analyzes with dozens of examples how Black people near that border claimed shifting national identities. Indeed, many of the individuals he features in the antebellum period—whether born free, enslaved, or formerly enslaved—occasionally identified themselves as more transnational and Black rather than British, Canadian, or American. This study attends to the stories of Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Austin Steward, and other well-known activists who resided there for periods of time, but with some deftness, fleshes out the lives of regular Black citizens and transients who helped make Rochester the haven for hope it became.

Structured with a look first at Rochester, followed by the study of St. Catharines, Broyld set up a series of suspenseful questions. Some fugitives escaped to Rochester and were ferried across, while others were hustled over the bridge. Two dozen fugitives were herded across the border in one evening as a group. But what happened to them all?

Some sense of what might have occurred is fleshed out in his descriptions of the opportunities in St. Catharines and Canada West, but sometimes the mysteries are unresolved.

While writing is occasionally a bit dry in order to simply deliver the quantity of powerful and compelling information and research the author has done, this study is a tremendous and invaluable contribution to the field. Broyld tracks telling details, noting, for example, the ways in which the city directories of Rochester segregated residents by race in 1847 but no longer did so in 1852 (p. 76). The stories he shares about some of the individual experiences of this fluid border are harrowing, such as when Broyld tells of how a family, including a six-week-old infant, was kidnapped in St. Catharines, returned to N.Y. state, pursued by rescuers, and then liberated again to be returned to Canada (p. 104).

Anyone seeking information about the Underground Railroad and its supposed terminus at the border would be remiss to skip this volume. It serves up essential coverage of the cultures of these communities with depth and nuance. And it offers too, surprising insights into the structure of nineteenth-century urbanism and class analysis and even the ways in which canal culture (both the Erie Canal and the Welland Canal), which fed the burgeoning economies of the area, were in many ways informed by the racial politics of the region.

Susanna Ashton
Clemson University

Confederate Outlaw: Champ Ferguson and the Civil War in Appalachia. By Brian D. McKnight. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2022. Acknowledgments, introduction, notes, bibliography, index. Pp. xi, 252. \$24.95, paper.)

Brian McKnight has written a useful study of guerrilla warfare in the upper South during the American Civil War. This well-written biography follows Confederate partisan Champ Ferguson from 1861 to his death in 1865 in his effort to protect his family and himself. Living in the highland area along the Tennessee-Kentucky border, Ferguson was in the minority among his Unionist neighbors. Taking a proactive stance, Ferguson decided to confront those he perceived as potential threats.

The author is very convincing in his portrait of a complex society and economy. McKnight points out that the region could accurately be designated as Appalachian. While Ferguson's violent tendencies might be explained as an example of the hillbilly stereotype, McKnight fortunately refuses to adopt this simplistic strategy and Ferguson is instead treated as an individual in a difficult situation. McKnight also rejects the easy explanation that his subject is a psychopath and claims that in an unstable society where virtually everyone had access to a gun, Ferguson preemptively killed all potential threats to him and his family.