

studiously impartial account of the tragic events of 1837-38 in Lower Canada. It is an important new contribution to the literature of these events.

Grace Hyam
Manuscript Division
Public Archives of Canada

The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada: A Collection of Documents. COLIN READ and RONALD J. STAGG, eds. Ottawa: The Champlain Society with Carleton University Press, 1985. c, 471 p. ISBN 0-88629-026-0 \$18.95 pa.

The Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada, edited by Colin Read and R.J. Stagg, is the most recent addition to the Champlain Society's Ontario Series. It presents a collection of 442 documents dealing with the political situation in the province leading up to, and including, the Mackenzie and Duncombe uprisings; activities in areas not threatened by the rebellion; and the immediate aftermath when order was restored. Following the general format of the series the editors, both specialists in the rebellion period, provide a lengthy introduction to the documents which illustrate their themes. The introduction draws on approximately one century of historiography to outline what has now become a familiar story: Reform grievances, especially the abuse of power by the executive and the issue of church-state links, are outlined; Tory attitudes and the activities of the British Constitutional Society in organizing loyal supporters before the election of 1836 are noted; and Sir Francis Bond Head's provocations, plus British imperial policies, culminating in Lord John Russell's Ten Resolutions, are cited. Political tensions were exacerbated by the deepening economic crisis of 1836-37, which was marked by a short money supply, rising interest rates, and crop failures, and the consequent rise in the price of food-stuffs, which squeezed many Upper Canadian farmers. Their discontent was exploited in areas north of Toronto and in the London District by radicals such as William Lyon Mackenzie and Charles Duncombe. Mackenzie prepared a draft constitution promising social and economic democracy for Upper Canada which was reprinted by Reform newspapers; political unions sprouted in some parts of the province to organize the radicals. But as the authors conclude, the rebellion was finally a product of Mackenzie's frustrations; there was no general movement for revolution.

The discussion of the Toronto uprising, condensed from Stagg's doctoral dissertation, takes as its focus William Lyon Mackenzie. Although he was acting on the spur of the moment, he was able to win over prominent individuals such as John Rolph, Samuel Lount, and Peter Matthews and attract large audiences sympathetic to his interpretation of recent developments. Some supporters moved prematurely and three hundred to five hundred rebels gathered at Montgomery's Tavern in early December anticipating an easy march to "liberate" the capital. Toronto had no organized defences and Bond Head offered little leadership; he was originally willing to negotiate with Mackenzie through Rolph and Robert Baldwin. (Stagg does clarify the infamous Rolph incident. Rolph, who had been involved in preliminary discussions about the uprising and was suggested as the first president of the new republic, probably informed Mackenzie about the situation in Toronto while acting as Head's emissary under a flag of truce. The doctor would later deny that he was a traitor in the face of accusations by his opponents and corroboration from Mackenzie himself.) The rebels, who were poorly organized, became discouraged when they met resistance as the loyal forces quickly gathered to crush the uprising.

Read's discussion of the rebellion in western Upper Canada stresses the importance of the prominent local radical, Charles Duncombe. This movement was fuelled by rumours of Mackenzie's success and the fear of Tory reprisals but it attracted few supporters and they were quickly dispersed by large numbers of loyalists led by Allan MacNab.

One of the strengths of the introduction is the examination of developments around the province. Earlier histories have largely ignored what was going on in eastern Upper Canada although it was apparent that there was not much significant activity apart from Tory persecution of old political enemies. In fact the typical response seemed to be that of John Langton, writing from the backwoods around Peterborough: "In this province the insurrection was suppressed and tranquillity restored before we heard of its interruption."

The aftermath of the rebellion saw continued harassment of prominent Reformers; the expulsion of Marshall Spring Bidwell from the province; persistent border tensions and rumours of invasion from the United States; and the execution of Lount and Matthews to ease pressure from loyalists to punish the rebels.

The documents which follow the introduction are intended to provide "a solid basis for the formation of sound judgments about the ... consequences of Upper Canada's twin revolts." Professors Read and Stagg provide an extensive and varied selection of primary sources — they have done a thorough job of searching archives (notably the Public Archives of Canada, Public Record Office, and Archives of Ontario) and university libraries from Trent to Oxford for government records, newspapers, diaries, and personal papers. The footnotes are excellent — they provide short biographies of all individuals mentioned in the documents and note important historical information about the period. A selected bibliography is included, although it might be pointed out that theses on Upper Canada are produced at universities other than Toronto and Western.

Two more significant problems remain: the first relates to the responses to the rebellion, while the second concerns the intended audience for this book. The authors suggest that many factors contribute to an understanding of the causes of the rebellion and yet their emphasis remains on traditional political concerns. No real answer is provided to explain why some Upper Canadians rebelled — in contrast, the work of Fernand Ouellet on the insurrections in the lower province discusses the manipulation of habitants discontented by the collapse of the wheat economy, the scarcity of land due to overpopulation, high taxes, and increasing debt, by the liberal professionals who exploited French-Canadian national feeling. We have no such analysis in this book although there are hints: while the rebels apparently represented a cross-section of Upper Canadian society, they were older, married, and over half of them were of North American background; they came from prosperous areas of the province; they tended to follow no religion or belonged to dissenting sects. Why were these factors important? No evidence is provided as few documents are included to illustrate the important social and economic context of the rebellion. One still has to look elsewhere for the answers. The importance of local leaders is stressed but we don't know why Duncombe, Lount, or Matthews were driven to rebellion. Instead, the editors conclude that "the role of Mackenzie and the susceptibility of those of his audience who joined him must be credited with the major role in creating rebels out of average citizens desirous of reform." (p. lvii)

The response to the loyalists is not discussed adequately — apparently "the loyalists and rebels were very similar" (p. lvi) in social background. Therefore why did some

farmers rebel when many others actively supported the government? What are the attitudes that allow us to understand the nature of loyalty in Upper Canada? In short, this book does not advance our understanding of the rebellion; students of the period will continue to rely on sources such as G.M. Craig's *Upper Canada: The Formative Years* for their information.

This problem is linked to a second one: for whom is this book intended? While the selection of sources is good, specialists in the field will want to examine the original documents themselves rather than rely on a collection such as this. And it would be difficult to recommend this book to students — does a minor incident like the rebellion in Upper Canada merit wading through 437 pages of documents?

Moreover, books such as this are becoming increasingly anachronistic because of new technology. In the past, it was difficult for researchers to study documents unless they went to the repositories where the originals were located. Archives and libraries can now make primary sources available through microfilm or microfiche, and the possibilities associated with computerization are boundless. University presses which have limited sources of funding might do better to direct their resources towards the publication of scholarly monographs rather than collections of documents such as this.

In conclusion, the introduction does provide a concise political overview of the rebellion and the documents can be useful, but those interested in unravelling the peculiarities of this period would be better directed to Colin Read's own excellent study of the Duncombe rebellion, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada*, or Ronald Stagg's thesis, which is available on microfilm. These extended studies provide more answers and more clearly represent the work of serious scholars whose primary task after all is presenting analyses of historical problems rather than simply collecting the research notes which they utilized for their own work.

David Mills
Department of History
University of Alberta

1885: Métis Rebellion or Government Conspiracy? DON MCLEAN. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1985. 137 p. ISBN 0-919143-17-2 \$12.95.

The anniversary of the North West Rebellion or, more correctly, the Métis Armed Resistance, resulted in a number of publications on Louis Riel, the Métis, and the military engagements of 1885. After the pro-government, anti-Riel, anti-Métis stance of Thomas Flanagan in *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered* (Saskatoon, 1983), one hoped for an effective response to disprove or at least provide a "nuance" to Flanagan's rather harsh and narrow perspective. Unfortunately, Don McLean's interpretation of the causes of the Rebellion, though very different from Flanagan's, is both unconvincing and amateurish. The approach sets up villains (church and government) *versus* victims (the Métis). Curiously enough, only the North West Mounted Police, in particular the commanding officer of the detachment at Fort Carlton, Major L.N.F. Crozier, "who had a sense of honor and did everything possible to prevent armed conflict," (p. 113) come out unscathed. The study lacks a solid research base; it relies on selective sources and "upon reference and a priori constructions to build the case against the Government." (p. 121) More seriously, perhaps, the book undermines the role and credibility of the Métis and of their political