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This book represents a compilation of eighteen papers first presented at a 1998 migration conference at the Centre of Canadian Studies, University of Edinburgh. Together they amply demonstrate the centrality of migration to the Canadian experience. Although described as multidisciplinary, most are historical in approach, the exceptions appearing towards the end of the collection.

Barbara Messamore in her introduction draws attention to the complexity of ‘Canadian’ identity, emphasising that all but Canada’s First Peoples are immigrants or their descendants. She charts the history of successive waves of immigrants, their motivations and reception, and policy shifts over time. In the opening essay, Marjory Harper surveys the historiography of British-Canadian (especially Scottish-Canadian) migration, highlighting trends and paradoxes within the debates and the transition from imperialistic and victim histories to more qualitative, multidimensional and comparative approaches over the last half century. She evaluates the mechanisms through which trans-Atlantic migration has occurred and speculates on future research directions.

Subsequent essays are loosely grouped thematically and chronologically. Two short pieces clarify specific aspects of Upper Canadian history. Peter Marshall scrutinises the term ‘late Loyalist’ (early immigrants from the United States) accounting for its
adoption while explaining its contradictions. Ronald Stagg questions the alleged emigration of several thousand disaffected Upper Canadians to the United States after the failed rebellion of 1837. Using population statistics, he argues that numbers were actually far fewer.

Three essays address the ‘invisibility’ of English immigrants to Canada in the nineteenth century. Bruce Elliot analyses the origins, destinations and motivations of pre-Confederation English emigrants to Upper Canada, where most English immigrants to British North America settled, comparing these patterns with those of the better documented Irish. Wendy Cameron also tackles pre-Confederation English migration, specifically the Petworth emigration scheme of the 1830s. This constitutes one case study of parish-aided emigration while Terry McDonald provides another. McDonald argues that although published letters from Wiltshire and Somerset emigrants to Upper Canada in the early 1830s were valuable in encouraging further emigration, publishers manipulated the details for propaganda purposes.

The next four essays use letters as their primary sources. In a micro study of two families, Kathleen Burke shows how early sojourners to Canada established trans-generational links between England and Upper Canada. Duff Crerar traces the experiences of one highland cottar immigrant family beyond the pre-Confederation confines of earlier contributions, into the twentieth century. Crerar notes the absence of female voices in his sources while Joan Bryans, for the first time in the collection, introduces a feminist perspective. Bryans examines the strategies of two sisters for coping with separation from loved ones as a result of their (internal) migration from Nova Scotia to British Columbia. Similarly, Donald Harris focuses on how women
from a genteel Shropshire family who migrated to British Columbia around 1900, coped with differing attitudes to social class.

Two papers consider the migration of ideas. John Davis discusses information available to prospective emigrants from eastern England to Western Canada between 1880 and 1914, gleaned from regional press sources and other promotional material. Using the 1897 articles of William Lyon Mackenzie King, journalist and social reformer, and medical reports of the 1910s, Richard Dennis reflects upon attitudes to ‘foreigners’ in Toronto, especially their geographical concentration, situation in the housing market and levels of property ownership.

While all papers consider motivations for migration, three address them specifically. Tracey Connolly attributes the high rate of Irish emigration in the 1950s largely to economic factors. She examines the shifting popularity of possible destinations and compares Irish immigrants with other immigrants to Canada, and with Irish emigrating elsewhere. Sebastián Escalante’s chapter at first appears misplaced in a collection on migration from Britain and North America, but is important for its general interest. The author argues strongly that Mexico is increasingly part of the North American economy and refugees, especially those subject to gender-based persecution, should not be equated with economic migrants. Gary Hunt and Richard Mueller use census data from 1990-91 to assess the role of income in determining migration patterns within North America and explore the Canadian ‘brain drain’ to the United States.
Finally, two essays examine artistic representations of migration experiences. Christopher Armstrong focuses on the literary and historical dimensions of a selection of post-Second World War novels of Atlantic Canada, especially the work of Paul Bowdring, to explore themes of mobility, identity, ‘home’ and ‘away’. The volume ends poignantly with Karen Clavelle’s compilation of migration songs of love and longing. The emotions revealed in the melodies and lyrics of the writers, categorised as exiles, emigrants or expatriates, are examined for the insights they bring to the migration experience.

What can be said about such a large and diverse collection? Like others of its kind, its contributions are more likely to be read individually than as part of the whole. To some extent, it shares the same strengths and weaknesses of other publications arising from conferences: while they bring into the public domain important new work in the field, they often struggle to achieve an appropriate balance, dependent as they are on papers offered for the occasion and not committed for publication elsewhere. There are inevitable gaps, most notably, the interwar period, the years between the 1960s and the 1990s, the significant role of non-government organisations in migration, and papers based on oral testimony. In relation to the last, Messamore argues that letters form the most valuable source for individual or family migration experiences: while this is true up to the early twentieth century, for immigrants since World War One, oral accounts certainly provide another. Overall, however, the collection is an important addition to the published literature, in particular because of the open and critical appraisal by the authors of their sources. Elliot’s chapter, although laborious, exemplifies this.
Several essays implicitly or explicitly engage with the concept of Canadian identity. Its complexity, according to Messamore, can be explained by the multiple ties formed by the history of migration between Canada and elsewhere, and between parts of Canada itself. Migration, however, is not simply about the past but is the reality of the present.

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