Sam Steele: A Biography by Rod Macleod (review)

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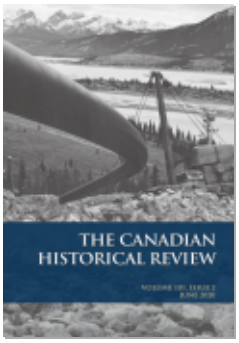

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judge having done so. Discretion is highly prized among Canadian judges, and this memoir does not break with tradition even though the author does pull back the veil on some deeply personal experiences. McLachlin reveals her experience with assisted death in the case of her cancer-stricken first husband (she declined to help him) and her own thoughts of suicide when undergoing a period of depression as an adolescent. It is laudable of McLachlin to open up about these matters when mental health, adolescent suicide, and the legal parameters of assisted death are issues of such public concern at the moment.

The MeToo movement may have inspired McLachlin to be more open about her gendered experience of the law than one might have expected. The usual stance adopted by early women lawyers and judges was to downplay the role of gender, as both McLachlin's predecessors on the court did. Generational turnover clearly has something to do with changing views on this score. Both Bertha Wilson (appointed in 1982) and Claire L'Heureux-Dubé (appointed in 1987) were born in the 1920s, but McLachlin was born in 1943. She began articling in 1968 when many social barriers, gender-based and otherwise, were tumbling and women began entering law schools in large numbers. McLachlin could feel confident that women would make their mark on the profession in her lifetime, something her predecessors could not have predicted.

In spite of these nods to openness, the fact remains that Beverley McLachlin is responsible for taking steps that will impede the work of historians for decades to come. In 2017, she concluded on behalf of the court an agreement with Library and Archives Canada that will forbid access to the papers of Supreme Court judges regarding their interactions on a particular case for fifty years after the decision has been rendered. This action, little noted at the time but subsequently deplored by many, including two retired Supreme Court judges, is not discussed in the memoir. When even Cabinet documents are released after twenty or thirty years, the necessity for such a long embargo period is not evident.

The memoir will be most useful to historians as evidence of changing attitudes on a variety of topics and to those wishing to chart the rise of women in the legal profession. Its vagueness about dates (one does not discover the author's actual birthdate until almost the end of the book), almost total absence of footnotes, and reliance on memory rather than contemporary documents in the form of diaries or letters, enhances readability but makes it less reliable as a historical source.

PHILIP GIRARD *Osgoode Hall Law School, York University*

Sam Steele: A Biography. Rod Macleod. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2018. Pp. xvi + 407, $39.99 paper

Sam Steele (1848–1919) was a policeman and military officer whose career was intertwined with a number of significant historical events: the North-West Rebellion/Resistance, the founding of the North-West Mounted Police, the Gold Rush, the South African War, and the First World War. When, at great cost, the University of Alberta's Bruce Peel Special Collections Library acquired what is

now the Sir Samuel Steele Collection in 2008, the staff were determined to revive a Canadian hero who had faded from memory. Rod Macleod does just that.

Sam Steele is in many ways a traditional biography of a "great man" or, in the author's words, of "one of the most celebrated Canadians of his generation" (26). It is very accessible, being well written, chronologically structured, and not excessive in length. Each chapter title includes the year or years to be discussed; a helpful map is provided on the opposite page to orient the reader; and the text is interspersed with a generous number of photographs. It is also well rooted in the secondary literature, some of which Macleod (an emeritus professor at the University of Alberta) has authored. These sources are well synthesized and provide a clear account of the historical context, with minimal direct quotations and a judicious use of the primary material. As well, Macleod kindly kept his historiographical quibbles to the endnotes where they provide insight into his interpretive lens.

The book seems intended for the general reader more than the historian, a fact confirmed by the author's decision not to position his work against existing biographies. From the acknowledgements, the reader is left to infer that the biography is warranted as a result of the now-expanded primary source base. Additionally, the back cover suggests that the book will examine Steele's heretofore "closely protected" private life and that the reader will get to hear Steele's "voice," previously available only in his published memoirs (1915). But, while several books about Steele have been published since the late 1970s, Macleod does not explicitly state the reason for this latest offering nor is any explanation given as to how it differs from the others.

Reading Steele's memoirs, Macleod finds that he failed to mention that he had rivals that he disliked, that he had a family that he loved, and that he was a proud Canadian (xiii–xiv). Macleod does far more than amend the record on these three points. His focus is more on the public man and his career ambitions than it is on the private man, although the source base allows for a more intimate look at Steele's private life. And while he is critical of some of Steele's specific decisions, on the whole, this is not a critical biography. Instead, it works to bolster Steele's reputation as "the man who tamed the Gold Rush." Moreover, the suggestion that Steele should not be understood as a "stereotypical bombastic imperialist" because he considered himself to be Canadian seems unsatisfying in light of Carl Berger's examination of the relationship between imperialism and Canadian nationalism in *The Sense of Power* (University of Toronto Press, 1970).

Focusing on its subject's life and career, *Sam Steele* paints a thoughtful portrait of an interesting and important man that, like any good book, raises interesting and important questions. For example, what was Steele's relationship with Indigenous peoples? At times, Steele successfully negotiated with Indigenous leaders to arrive at a desired outcome, but, at other times, he displayed remarkable folly, such as allowing men under his command to attempt to arrest a man in the middle of the Kainai's annual Sun Dance, a sacred event (63–4, 124). While Macleod admits that Steele did not handle the situation well, he defends Steele's questionable choices in other cases, such as when Steele arrested some

twenty-six members of an Indigenous criminal's family, an act of "dubious legality" given that some were children (153–6). Additionally, some of Steele's more freely expressed feelings about these situations do not appear in the text but are placed in the endnotes (342n26), while, in other cases, no evidence is cited for the conclusions drawn (146, 222).

Macleod began working on his biography of Steele over a decade ago. By his own admission, he wondered if he would ever finish: the collection was massive, and Steele's handwriting was awful. But, with the help of his wife, Elaine Macleod, who deciphered and transcribed Steele's difficult script, he persevered. The end result tells the story of an ambitious man who was just doing his job, having success, and being denied further successes by incompetent superiors and political machinations. And while an examination of Steele's legacy as a complicated agent and defender of British colonialism, both in Canada and South Africa, remains to be done – those who take up this task can only hope that the Macleods will donate their transcriptions! – this biography is likely to remain the definitive work on Steele's life.

DANIEL R. MEISTER *Queen's University*

They Shot, He Scored: The Life and Music of Eldon Rathburn. James K. Wright, with Allyson Rogers. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019. Pp. xix + 362, $39.95 cloth

Musicologist and composer James Wright and researcher and co-author Allyson Rogers present a biography of the acclaimed elder statesman of Canadian film music Eldon Rathburn. Addressing lacunae in Canadian film studies – namely, the study of film music composers in our national context and film music within the institutional space of the Canadian National Film Board (NFB)– the authors rightly acknowledge Rathburn as a central figure in Canadian film music. Usually studied as a consequence of his collaborations with iconic filmmakers Norman McLaren and Colin Low, neither he nor his film work has been the object of a focused study. Included by Wright and Rogers is an extended consideration of Rathburn's work outside the world of film, especially his concert music and his compositions for vernacular instruments such as the Jew's harp and the banjo, all of which underscores the multidimensional nature of this musical polymath.

Spanning the disciplines of history, film studies, and musicology, *They Shot, He Scored* is, at its core, a straightforward biography. Rathburn's storied career is the stuff of many Canadian entertainment legends: born in a small rural town, the young musician turned heads and came of age in a non-urban centre, made it big in a capital city, and was tempted early and often by opportunities south of the border. In Rathburn's case, he was not only ultimately faithful to his Canadian roots, but he committed himself to a career in the public service, working for the government's film-making organization. Methodologically, Wright and Rogers draw upon a wealth of primary sources from a variety of repositories – including provincial archives (New Brunswick Provincial Archives), institutional spaces