

RICHARD MACKINNON

Review of

Branigan, Keith with J.M. Bumsted, D. Barker, P. Foster and C. Merrony. 2005. *From Clan to Clearance: History and Archaeology on the Isle of Barra c. 850- 1850 AD*. Oxford, England: Oxbow Books.

Pp. 252, with illustrations and tables, hardcover, \$60. ISBN 978-1-84217160-8.

A number of years ago, Dr. Keith Branigan delivered a lecture to students in my Vernacular Architecture class at Cape Breton University about the archaeological work he had just commenced on the remains of Black houses on the Isle of Barra. *From Clan to Clearance: History and Archaeology on the Isle of Barra c. 850- 1850 AD* is a fascinating, comprehensive book—the result of his many years of fieldwork examining the remains of buildings and other archaeological artifacts on Barra amidst the lands that once formed the estate of MacNeil of Barra. Branigan says,

it was to try and trace the story of human occupation of the islands that in 1988 a group of archaeologists at the University of Sheffield decided to launch a programme of archaeological research on South Uist, Barra and adjacent islands. (1)

To that end, he and his team of researchers recorded almost 200 sites and monuments and conducted more than 70 excavations on the Isle of Barra and its adjacent isles to try to understand the settlement pattern over 1000 years. A daunting task, it took more than seventeen years and involved 250 people at a cost of more than £300,000.

The description of its extensive, detailed fieldwork is the major strength of the work. It is divided into nine chapters, some more interesting than others. After a historical chapter that brings the reader from the Norsemen to Napoleon, (871 to 1820), the author reveals his real interest: Barra's archaeological remains that provide insights into the buildings and foodways of the early Gaels of this island. Castles, towers, estate houses, churches, chapels, cemeteries, blackhouses, byres, drying sheds, haystack bases, clearance cairns, cultivation plots, land boundaries, pens and enclosures, shielings, huts, peat dryers, kelp ovens and fish traps are all explored in detail. The team even discovered some artifacts that defied categorization and puzzled researchers. These are small stone blocks or boulders arranged in the shape of boats

though some have a pointed prow and flat stern and others are pointed at both ends.... The interior is usually flat, never hollowed and only rarely

slightly mounded. They range in size from 2.5 m to 11m in length. But 75% of them are between 4m and 8m. (36)

Without knowing the purpose and function of these artifacts, Branigan speculates they “represent a sequence of ritual events that took place over decades or centuries. Such rituals might have been concerned, for example, with the erection of memorials for those who died at sea” (37). The author admits that this is speculation for he was not able to find analogues for these peculiar human-made artifacts found along the coastlines.

Other chapters address the history and archaeology of a crofting township, pottery usage in a crofting community, the rise and fall of the kelping industry in the Western Isles, the clearances in Barra and emigration from Barra to British North America, 1770-1850. I was fascinated with some chapters (the ones dealing with buildings and the one on emigration to North America are especially appealing). The detailed fieldwork into the extant archaeological material culture is both a strength, but also a weakness as I suspect that some readers will find some of the fieldwork data description tedious—particularly the chapters that read like archaeological reports providing lists of artifacts found in the particular sites.

Despite this cautionary note for the general reader, the various appendices attached to the main book will fascinate those interested in their Gaelic ancestors and will be of particular interest to genealogists. The last sixty-nine pages of the book are a treasure trove for people of Barra ancestry who are researching their family tree. For example, Branigan provides a list of the various MacNeils who petitioned for land in Cape Breton between 1807 and 1826. While he is uncertain that these petitioners came from Barra, Branigan strongly suspects their roots lie in Barra and he lists them here with the “hope and expectation that further genealogical research might identify their origins” (183). In one instance he lists a Neil “Ban” MacNeil as the first petitioner for land at Cooper's Pond in 1807. Likewise, “Mary MacNeil of Benaccadie

[sic] petitioned for land in 1816 at the age of 70 and the petition states that she was on the land in Benaccadie since 1806” (183-84). Appendix 2 offers a data base of 1050 emigrants from the Isle of Barra to British North America between 1772 and 1851. The information in this database can be seen by looking at one individual who made the trek from Barra to Nova Scotia in the early years of the 19th century. Branigan lists Christie MacNeil who was born in Barra in 1821; her father’s name was Murdoch and she came on the ship Harmony whose port of arrival was Sydney. Her final destination, however, was Gillis Point (226). Branigan does

not provide any indication of relations (sisters, brothers) for Christie, but does so for many other emigrants. The various destinations—from Quebec to Christmas Island—provide a glimpse into the fascinating world of emigration 200 years ago from Barra to what is now Canada.

This is a remarkable book; one that anyone interested in Highland Gaelic culture should read. It clearly shows the contribution extended archaeological fieldwork can make to understanding the complex cultural landscape made by human beings in any part of the world.

SYLVAIN LIZOTTE

Compte rendu de

Samson, Guy. 2007. *Bernard Lamarre. Le génie d’une vie*. Montréal : Presses internationales Polytechnique.

Pp. 162, 24,95\$ / \$25 USD, ISBN 978-2-553-01144-3.

Dans cet ouvrage paru en 2007, l’auteur Guy Samson aborde la vie et la carrière de l’ingénieur et entrepreneur Bernard Lamarre. Né en 1931 à Chicoutimi, ce dernier est un personnage important de l’histoire québécoise de la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle. Après des études à l’École Polytechnique de Montréal de 1948 à 1952 puis à l’Imperial College of Science and Technology de 1952 à 1955, Lamarre entreprend sa carrière au sein du bureau de génie-conseil Lalonde Valois à Montréal. Gravissant rapidement les échelons, il est nommé président-directeur général de l’entreprise en 1962. Cette firme devient le groupe Lavalin durant les années 1960. Lavalin est l’un des plus importants groupes de génie-conseil au cours des années 1960, 1970 et 1980, jusqu’à sa faillite en 1991 et son acquisition par SNC. Au sein de Lalonde Valois puis de Lavalin, Lamarre est impliqué dans plusieurs grands chantiers québécois de la seconde moitié du XX^e siècle, parmi lesquels le pont-tunnel Louis-Hippolyte-Lafontaine, la Baie James et le Stade olympique. Il est en outre connu pour sa participation à plusieurs conseils d’administration,

dont ceux de la Société du Vieux-Port de Montréal et du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal. Nous lui devons également la mise sur pied de la collection Lavalin (aujourd’hui propriété du Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal).

Guy Samson n’est pas un biographe, un historien ou un historien du génie civil. Il a un parcours singulier, ayant œuvré dans plusieurs domaines, dont la fonction publique, le journalisme, l’édition et la photographie. Plus récemment, il s’est fait connaître comme auteur. En effet, Samson a publié plus de 20 ouvrages depuis 1996. Il aborde des sujets (psychologie populaire, technologie) et genres (essai, fiction, guide pratique, biographie) variés sous son nom ou sous des pseudonymes (Sybil Martin, Agatha Miller, Sean MacNeil, Henri Millaire, Philippe E. Dantès).

L’auteur ne prétend pas rédiger un ouvrage définitif sur Bernard Lamarre. Il présente plutôt, de manière brève et sans prétention, la vie et de la carrière de l’ancien président-directeur général de Lavalin, comme l’indique son préambule (page IV). Samson n’est pas le premier à traiter de Lamarre ou