Little, J.L. *Loyalties in Conflict – A Canadian Borderland in War and Rebellion 1812-1840*,

University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2008

Extract from the Preface by J.L. Little, professor in the Department of History at Simon Fraser University

While Ontario and three of the Atlantic Provinces are separated from the United States by bodies of water, the same is not true of Quebec.

Yet that province's historians have only begun to grapple with the issue of *Américanité*, and the long-settled borderland alongside the forty-fifth parallel has been largely ignored. It lay beyond the colonization zone during the French regime, and, as English-speaking Protestants, the early settlers did not contribute to what Jocelyn Létourneau refers to as the province's 'great collective narrative of *la survivance*.

Furthermore, the subsequent demographic victory of the French Canadians in the region fails to conform to the defensive nature of that narrative, and it is certainly not predisposed to celebrate the accommodations characteristic of cultural contact zones.

The history of the region known as the Eastern Townships would clearly be better known had there been less accommodation and more conflict, for even the two major crises of the early nineteenth century - the War of 1812 and the Rebellions of 1837-8 - saw no major battles in the region. If Canada deserves the title the 'peaceable kingdom,' however, and if the two largest 'threats' to our survival as a country have long been the external influence of the United States and the internal aspirations of the Québécois, the story of how the people of the Eastern Townships responded to those two crises should be of more than local interest.

During the French regime the land east of the Richelieu and west of the Chaudière served as the hunting territory for Abenaki warriors, whose raids into New England slowed the northward expansion of the British colonial frontier.

The first settlers to arrive in this northern Appalachian region were New York Loyalists during the American War of Independence, but they were quickly outnumbered by land-seekers from New England. Less than two decades later, the War of 1812 would represent this population's first test of allegiance to British authority. While one might have expected most of these Yankee settlers to have been sympathetic to the American cause, Vermonters themselves initially showed little enthusiasm for the war. Loyalties were localized and the people on both sides of the border resisted playing more than a defensive role. But local loyalties also meant that, just as the British invasion of Vermont in 1814 stimulated sharp resistance in that state, so American raids north of the forty-fifth parallel caused a defensive reaction in the Eastern Townships.

As Peter Sahlins (echoing Benedict Anderson) has noted, 'imagining oneself a member of a community or a nation meant perceiving a significant difference between oneself and the other across the bounddary'. That difference would become more real as the war-caused break in New England preaching circuits, followed by the arrival of British missionaries, gradually resulted in the development of a more conservative religious culture north of the border, a process that I examined in *Borderland Religion.*

This volume complements that study insofar as it focuses on the evolution of the region's political culture, culminating with the Rebellions of 1837-8, when the dual threats posed by French-Canadian and American nationalism accelerated the shift towards a pro-British political allegiance.

The Eastern Townships may have been, until recent years, an exception to the rule of a French-speaking Quebec and English-speaking rest-of-Canada, but the region represents a microcosm of a country largely shaped by the interaction of American and British influences, as well as French-language and English-language ones.

The forces that led to the development of a distinctive English-Canadian identity in this cultural borderland were not so different from those at work in other parts of early nineteenth-century British North America.

This study, then, is not simply another example of the 'limited identities' approach to Canada's history that has been criticized by its more nationalist historians. It does argue that local loyalties remained a powerful force in the pre-industrial Eastern Townships, but it also examine the development of a civic culture, a regional outlook, and a growing identity as British subjects and Canadians.

This is not an intellectual history, however, but a socio-political one, for the emphasis is less on how a regional elite articulated that identity than on how the population as a whole manifested it through their responses to the crises posed by war and rebellion.