

to trot briskly up when
My diligent father and
were often late and
Nevertheless, Dick was
ed down for the night,
ugar or an apple and a
at pat for being a good
g before father finally
wn supper.

house was evidently a
for we lived in it only
ny opulent parent sold
ably at a profit and
e at 403 North Division
home was a red brick
nice, veranda and all,
riage house which we
hed. It had everything
d most, central heating,
ved in it we made out
ves here and there and
r years.

did have of which we
was carpeting, beautiful
n carpeting; this lovely
the house. We didn't
wall carpets then, and
long before the day of
t was sheer drudgery to
rooms and the long
clean, but clean they
ry or no.

too, of the black mar-
n each parlor, and we
ace curtains. Now we
ed!

ing about a house, I
the man who had it
indicative of my father's
believe I am justified.
, save one, never saw
d like them to know

s demolished several
7 Clinton Street was
, so I feel each shingle,
ount and earn its keep.

Jacob Porter Norton A Yankee on the Niagara Frontier in 1814

Edited with an introduction by Daniel R. Porter

Buffalo "is a nest of villains, rogues, rescals, pickpockets, knaves & extortioners—"

This very candid and undoubtedly exaggerated impression of a frontier town during the War of 1812 was expressed by a youthful American officer, Jacob Porter Norton. He recorded his reaction to Buffalo after a visit he made there on November 8, 1814, while on duty with the 4th United States Infantry Regiment serving on the Niagara Frontier. The day before he had seen an American soldier executed for desertion, and for some time he had been a witness to dissension and disagreement among his fellow officers as winter began to close in on the hard-pressed and poorly-supplied troops. These were days of desperation for many; optimism and charity were personal qualities rarely exhibited that winter on the frontier.

Norton was no inexperienced recruit. As soon as war had been declared, he left a Boston, Massachusetts, printing shop where he had been serving as an apprentice to seek a commission in the armed forces. At a time when the sons of prominent New Englanders were echoing the anti-war sentiments of their parents, Jacob Norton was ardently espousing his nation's cause. Earlier, his younger brother Edward had secured a commission in the Navy through a letter of recommendation from former President John Adams, whose wife, Abigail, was a sister

¹ Manuscript Collections, State Historical So-

of Jacob and Edward's mother, Elizabeth Cranch Smith Norton. Jacob sought a similar recommendation.

John Adams, although a Federalist, took no part in opposing war with Great Britain. On July 15, 1812, at his Quincy mansion, Mr. Adams penned an eloquent recommendation for Jacob to William Eustis, Secretary of War: "Old New England blood you know," he wrote, "is very apt to feel for the safety & honor of the plantation, when Indians, Frenchmen or Englishmen invade their rights.

"Mr. Jacob Porter Norton . . . is ardently desirous of serving his Country in this just & necessary war . . ."¹

The President's entreaty produced the desired results. On September 28, 1812, President James Madison appointed Jacob an ensign, lowest commissioned rank in the army, and assigned him to the 4th Infantry Regiment.

Jacob served at Fort Wiscasset, Maine, from December 1812 to June 1813, whereupon his company was assigned to Major General Wade Hampton's army in the Chateaugay and Plattsburg regions. Here he served in combat, in camp and on recruiting service until August 27, 1814, when, at the insistence of Secretary of War John Armstrong, Major General George Izard with 4,000 troops was ordered to the Niagara front to reinforce Major General Jacob Brown. From Lake George south to the Troy and Albany area, thence to Sacketts Harbor, they

society of Wisconsin, Madison.

marched, selecting the roundabout route in order to be assured of ample provisions from richer farm regions. After marching 350 miles for 21 days, the army arrived at Sacketts Harbor, September 16.

With the frankness of a Bostonian, Norton called Sacketts Harbor "an unpleasant, dirty little place," but he admitted that its strategic situation could make it "a place of considerable consequence." On September 17, Commodore Isaac Chauncey's fleet sailed into the harbor. The soldiers boarded the vessels which carried them to the mouth of the Genesee River. At this point, the letters written to his father at Weymouth, Massachusetts, and the diary he maintained present an intimate account of the experiences and prejudices of one young officer in an important theater of war.²

Lewiston N. York
Oct. 6th 1814

Hond Father,

We arrived at this place yesterday, and before we could encamp, we were greeted with a heavy shower.—The roads from Batavia to this place are very bad, until we get down upon the ridge road which appears to be a natural turnpike to facilitate the settlement of this very fertile country.—The village of Lewistown (which lies directly opposite Queenstown) upon the American side of Niagara river, presents a deplorable scene of desolation. Every house was burnt last year by the British, and the place is left without an inhabitant.—I made an excursion to-day as far as Lewistown heights,—(opposite Queenstown heights, at the latter place the British have a battery)—a number of British Officers came down as far as the edge of the opposite bank, and we took a look at each other. The view is narrow at this place, and we could hail each other very distinctly. The bank of the river from Lewistown up as far as the falls are an almost perpendicular

² A portion of the Norton-Cranch-Adams manuscript collection donated to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in 1957 by Mrs. Fred A. Chamberlain and Miss Mabel Adams, Madison, Wisconsin; Mr. Ben C.

ledge nearly 200 feet high, and the current is very rapid.

October 11th Camp 1 mile below Fort Erie, Up. Canada.—We are now occupying the ground, lately the encampment of the enemy. We moved from Lewistown on the 7th and arrived at Black-rock yesterday, about 25 ms. above Lewistown. We crossed the river last evening. Buffaloe is about 2 ms. above Black-rock, and exactly opposite Fort Erie. The latter is built upon a point of land, which makes out a little way into the head of the Niagara river. The gallant defence which Genl Brown has made against the enemy at this place, renders it very famous. The loss of the British while besieging this fort was very great, and our own loss tho' not as great, averaged 20 per day, a great number of dead bodies of the enemy still lay unburied in the woods, and others only partly buried.—I am told that a Corpl was shaving a Sergt in the fort, when a ball came and took off the Sergeant's head and the Corporal's hand: pretty sharp times when a man must be killed for losing his beard.

I had an imperfect view of Niagara falls as we passed them. I was very sorry that I could not have an opportunity of going and taking a thorough view of them.

The route which we took from Champlain to this place is a distance of 630 miles. Please to write to me immediately on receipt of this and direct it to Buffaloe . . .

Your Dutiful & affectionate Son
J. P. Norton
[Diary]

October 8th Struck our tents, and continued our march up the Niagara river. I had a distant view of the falls. Chippeway lies upon the British side of the falls, and the plains are the ground where Genl Brown gained a splendid

Adams, Kansas City, Missouri; and Mrs. A. A. Chamberlain, Huron, South Dakota. The spelling and punctuation are those of Ensign Norton, later Lieutenant.

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the Tandawanta river b
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victory over the enemy July 5th 1814.—
October 9th Sent our tent etc. by water
up to Black-Rock, and resumed our
march up the river. The Bridge upon
the Tandawanta river being destroyed,
the Army crossed the river with one
scow and a raft—Oct 11th Arrived at
Black-Rock, about 25 miles above
Lewistown, and crossed the river to the
Canada shore in the evening. All the
houses from Lewistown to this place
have been wantonly burnt by the Brit-
ish, with the exception of 3 or 4. Fort
Erie is about 1 mile and a half above
our encampment. . . . October 13th The
Army broke up its encampment and
moved down the river. The bridges are
all destroyed, and we are obliged to
cross the Creeks upon boat bridges etc.
—14th Our advance exchanged a few
shot with the enemy just at night,
when the latter retreated. Encamped
on Chippewa plains.—15th Advanced
about 1 mile and a half and formed
our lines out of reach of the enemy's
batteries, which are formed upon the
banks of a creek called Chippewa river
a short way above the falls.— Our
Artillery moved down and cannonading
commenced, which lasted about 3
hours, when we all fell back upon our
old ground at Chippewa plains. Octo-
ber 16th At about 12 O'Clock we re-
sumed the position of yesterday. No
Quarrelling to-day. Returned to our
encampment a little before sun-set—

17th At 2 O'Clock the army com-
menced a retrograde movement, and
encamped at French Creek — The
troops continue in remarkable health.
— 19th This morning we heard small
arms apparently about 3 miles distant.
It proved to be [Brig.] Genl [D.] Bis-
sell's Brigade engaged with a much
superior force of the enemy, which he
routed and drove. Our loss was con-
siderable; that of the enemy not known.
The 4th [Regiment] moved down to-
day as far as Chippewa Creek and en-
camped. 21st Broke up our encamp-
ment and commenced a return march.

22nd About 11 O'Clock, we halted 2
miles below Fort Erie and encamped.
The weather for a few days past has
been wet and very uncomfortable. The
troops begin to grow unhealthy.—24th
Moved our tents about 200 paces in
advance.— 26th Crossed the river to
Buffaloe and encamped. Nov. 1. The
rain has been incessant for the last 5
days. However we make ourselves toler-
ably comfortable with the assistance of
chimnies which we erect in front of our
tents. Nov. 2d. Struck our tents, and
proceeded about 1 mile up the river
towards Buffaloe leaving our com-
fortable chimnies behind, and a quan-
tity of timber which had been cut for
our huts; agreeably to an established
rule of our feeble commanders that
preparation for comfort is a sure pre-
sage of a movement. Nov. 6. Fort Erie
was blown up and evacuated to-day.
Colo Purdy is ordered to Batavia to
await the sentence of a Court Martial.
About the 24th of October Genl
Brown's Division commenced its march
from Buffaloe to Sacketts Harbour—
Nov. 7th. Cutting timber for huts.— A
man was executed today for desertion
— 8th—Went to Buffaloe, the impres-
sion which I received from my visit is,
that it is a nest of villains, rogues,
rascals, pickpockets, knaves, & extor-
tioners—

Black Rock, Nov. 12. 1814

Hond Father

I received your letter of Oct. 25.
yesterday, which is the first that I have
heard since I left Champlain, & of
course was a great relief to my anxiety
. . . . You acknowledge the receipt of
only 4 of my letters, therefore as many
as three, must have miscarried. By this
time, you have probably received a
letter from Black rock, which contained
a brief account of our excursion down
the river to Chippewa, just above the
falls. Since writing that letter we have
moved nearly a mile above Black Rock
towards Buffaloe,— Buffaloe is almost
2 miles above where we are now, upon

the Lake shore.— Between this and Buffalo, the river heads, or rather the Lake empties into or forms the Niagara river. The weather has been very uncomfortable ever since we crossed the Niagara from U [pper] Canada, rain, hail & constant wind from the whole length of Lake Erie. Our men are more healthy nevertheless, than could be expected. Fort Erie was blown up and evacuated on the 6th inst. The policy of the thing I am not able to say any thing about. The explosion was tremendous, and worth seeing. On the 7th a man was shot for desertion, an awful sight. We are busy in getting timber to construct huts for the winter. I think it is not improbable that the enemy will bring up some heavy pieces of ordnance and annoy us from fort Erie with shot and shells, which may easily be done.

You observed that it would be gratifying to you if in some of my letters I had mentioned the name of the commanding officer and other principal Officers etc. Maj Genl George Izard is senior Officer upon the frontier, Maj Genl Jacob Brown is next in Rank, & is the Officer, who with the Division under his command, have fought so gallantly in and about fort Erie. The principal Regular Officers with Genl Brown, were Brigadier Genls [Winfield] Scott, [James] Miller, & [Ellazar] Ripley; of the Militia, were Genls [Edmund P.] Gaines and [Peter B.] Porter.— Genl Izard's particular command is a Division consisting of two Brigades commanded by [Brig.] Genls [T.A.] Smith and [D.] Bissell. Cap Hawkins commands the company to which I am attached, he is the same who commanded a detachment with which I marched from Concord last Summer. He is a very worthy young man and an excellent Officer. Lt Peckham is the next Officer, Brother to Cap. P. whom you saw at Concord. Lt Norton is the next, with whom you are acquainted. Ensign Robbins is the Junior, and was formerly a Sergeant under Cap. Binney.

When the army returned from Chippewa, Genl Brown's Division marched to Sacketts Harbour about Oct. 26 where he now commands.

I find it difficult to get Massachusetts papers, and hear but very little news. I hear enough however of the fuss in Boston about their fortification, Militia, Volunteers etc., and I believe their greatest operations are performed upon paper. Not so with New York. She says less, and does much. If I could, I should wish to respect the State, which gave me birth more than any other, but it is impossible — I am not in a situation to be inflamed by party disputes, and broils, and therefore do not speak this as a man would utter it in a passion, but it is an opinion which I have coolly formed, and which will stick by me until a great reform happens in Massachusetts. If ever insurrection breaks out in New-England the root may be traced to Massachusetts, and I feel mortified when I say, that I believe, mutiny and treason are conducted in many instances under the mark of Religion. But thank heaven the many headed monster has not yet dared to show himself. A head has occasionally pop'd out, but no sooner out, than cut off. The great town of Boston and its great mutinous characters makes me think of a pumpkin with a face engraved upon it, struck up pale in the night, with a candle inside, which frightens a person at a distance and assumes a horrible aspect, but if you approach it, the carrier is frightened in turn, and is glad to get away with a whole skin. So with these same insurgents.

It appears to me quite doubtful whether the army remains here this winter: whether we do, or do not, we may expect the next campaign to commence early. I should not be surprised if we were ordered onto the sea board of New York or Mass. There is but a very trifle for us to protect on the frontier, and the enemy will not dare penetrate far into the country. Our warfare

has changed from the offensive to the defensive, and for this reason I think it good policy to have huts where they could be of use.

Your affectionate son

J. P. Norton

Rev. J. Norton
Mass.

[Diary]

Nov. 17th Laid the found huts— Nov. 21. A duel was fought day between Cap. Paxton and Dr. Dade 10th Infy. killed upon the spot, & that Cap. Paxton will not his wound.— 23 The marched today for Detroit snow fell about 2 inches per 6th. The men's huts occupied— Dec. 8. Beg compy. Officers hut.— I received the decision of the Cap. Conkling 4th Infy. *Mutiny* preferred by Col. OURABLY ACQUITTED—Lieut joined from Batavia. De Severe Cold & Blustering 16th This day I am two old, & in good health, the A remarkably severe snow high wind. Occupied o Rolls ordered to be called too and reveillee under is commissioned Officer— 1815. A soldier was hung — 5th Cap. Fuller's cor for Williamsville. 13th viewed the troops who Buffalo on the occasion. Regt marched from our near Buffalo, and took q Hospital Barracks, at elev in Williamsville, 11 miles Jan 24th Genl Izard is a command devolves upon [Cromwell Pearce?]- 25 of the army Register w: 26th Major Humphreys mand of the Regt, havin — The command devolv Fuller.— Feby 12. Capt

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 ssachusetts. If ever insurrec-
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 ve traced to Massachusetts,
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 eaded monster has not yet
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 op'd out, but no sooner out,
 The great town of Boston
 t mutinous characters makes
 a pumpkin with a face
 on it, struck up pale in the
 a candle inside, which
 person at a distance and
 horrible aspect, but if you
 the carrier is frightened in
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Rev. J. Norton
 Mass.

[Diary]

Nov. 17th Laid the foundation for our
 huts— Nov. 21. A duel was fought to-
 day between Cap. Paxton 12th Infy
 and Dr. Dade 10th Infy. the latter was
 killed upon the spot, & it is thought
 that Cap. Paxton will not recover from
 his wound.— 23 The 17th Regt.
 marched today for Detroit. 25th The
 snow fell about 2 inches deep. Decem-
 ber 6th. The men's huts completed &
 occupied— Dec. 8. Began upon the
 compy. Officers hut.— Dec. 9— We
 received the decision of the Court upon
 Cap. Conkling 4th Infy charged with
Mutiny preferred by Col. Purdy. HON-
 OURABLY ACQUITTED—Lieut. Armstrong
 joined from Batavia. Dec. 11. & 12.
 Severe Cold & Blustering snow-storm—
 16th This day I am twenty-one years
 old, & in good health, thank God. 20th
 A remarkably severe snow-storm, and
 high wind. Occupied our hut. 28—
 Rolls ordered to be called between tat-
 too and reveillee under inspection of a
 commissioned Officer— January 3d
 1815. A soldier was hung for desertion
 — 5th Cap. Fuller's compy. marched
 for Williamsville. 13th The Genl re-
 viewed the troops who marched to
 Buffaloe on the occasion. 14th The 4th
 Regt marched from our encampment
 near Buffalo, and took quarters in the
 Hospital Barracks, at eleven mile Creek
 in Williamsville, 11 miles from Buffalo.
 Jany 24th Genl Izard is absent and the
 command devolves upon Col Peirce
 [Cromwell Pearce?]- 25th The arrival
 of the army Register was announced.
 26th Major Humphreys left the com-
 mand of the Regt, having a furlough.
 — The command devolves upon Maj
 Fuller.— Feby 12. Capt. L. Peckham

married. 14th Lts Kirby and Wilson
 joined from furlough.—19 Received a
 handbill, stating that a treaty of peace
 between the U. S. and G. B. had been
 signed by the prince Regent of Great
 Britain— 20. Maj Humphreys joined
 from furlough. Feby 30 [?] 1815. Capt
 and Lt Peckham resigned their com-
 missions—March 1st 1815.— Capt &
 Lt Peckham left us in the morning, and
 took the road to Batavia. March 9. Lt.
 Col. Ranney joined and took command
 of the Regt— 10th May Humphrey
 left us for Washington— May 2d Col
 Purdy joined, to take command of the
 Regt., having been released from arrest,
 by order of General Brown— It was
 expected, and said in General orders
 that those men who enlisted for the
 war, would be discharged and paid on
 the 1st of May; a considerable degree
 of uneasiness exists among the soldiery
 on account of their disappointment,
 but nothing serious is apprehended.—
 May 14th Col Purdy left this place for
 Avon, to preside at a Court of Enquiry,
 to examine into certain charges prefer-
 red against Lt. Col. Ball of the Dra-
 goons. May 17th.— Lt Green, pay-
 master arrived, but without funds. . .

May 29 Lt Green recvd funds to pay
 the during War men.— May 31.— The
 during War men of Cap Hawkin's
 company were paid and discharged.—
 Col Purdy returned and resumed com-
 mand of the 4th Regt. June 1815. The
 Register of retained Officers has ar-
 rived,—2 Captains, 1 first Lt, and four
 2d Lts of the 4th are retained—I ap-
 prove of the selection, expecting that
 of three of the 2d Lts, which I think
 was done by the influence of friends,
 rather than by their own military
 qualifications— The three which I re-
 fer to, have done less duty than any
 Officers of the Regt— Two or three
 Captains of the 4th who have been
 dropped, I think have stronger claims,
 than a great number of Caps who have
 been retained in some other Regts. The
 selection in most cases has been such as

it should be.— But the breaking up of the old peace establishment is an outrageous piece of misconduct; it has thrown out old experienced officers whose intention and expectation it was to spend their days in the service, to make room for Officers of the additional army, who had no reason to expect to be retained, to the exclusion of the old establishment.— I have no reason to complain that I am not retained, other than in common with the old establishment— I have no personal pretensions to the notice of Government; I have done nothing more than my duty, and I do have the satisfaction of knowing that I have performed it faithfully and conscientiously— As to pecuniary compensation to disbanded officers I have to find much fault with the thirteenth congress;— the extra pay which I am to have will amount to \$75 which will about purchase me good Citizens dress, my allowance for transportation will carry me nearly half way home, the monthly pay which is due me, will about pay my debts in this place, which are necessarily heavy, on account of the exorbitant prices which are put upon eatables, drinkables, and European goods. It appears to be the object of the inhabitants about the vicinity of this, to sponge Officers of all their money, that they may not get home, and so oblige them to squat down in these odious bogs with them. I think that Lt Col Ranney 4th Infy has strong claims to being retained— He served through a great part of the revolutionary war, has been in service almost ever since; he is the most attentive vigilant and active officer that ever I knew although he is now between 60 & 70 years old,— In point of discipline, he has made the 4th Infy. the praise of the whole army— I think he would have been retained, had it not been for the unhappy differences between Col Purdy and himself.— The army burying ground at this place when we first came, was in a miserable situa-

tion,— Many of the graves were not more than half filled, and they had been dug promiscuously without regard to order, so that it was difficult in some places to distinguish the graves. Lt Col Ranny had them mounded up and clodded with green sard, the stumps dug up, a fence built round it, a gate with an arch over the way, upon the arch was inscribed— “Sacred to the memory of those men who died of wounds received in the memorable fields of Chippewa, Bridgewater and Erie,— They rest in honour and deserve the gratitude of their country”.

June 14 — The 4th Regt marched from Wmsville to Conjockta Creek, and took quarters in the Rifle cantonment—16th embarked from Conjockta in boats, and landed at Sclosser, from then marched about 1 mile and a half, and encamped at the Niagara Falls.— Went down to the foot of the falls— 17. Visited the falls again in the morning. The sun shone bright and shew the rainbows to great advantage— It is extremely difficult and dangerous descending and ascending the presciple, about 80 feet of which is perpendicular — I shall not attempt to describe the tremendous sublimity of this scene, but it is indelibly impressed upon my mind. The view of the falls upon the Canada side is much better than upon this. Recommenced our march about ten o'clock and reached Fort Niagara a little before night— 20th left Fort Niagara & went by water to Sackets Harbour—

Ensign Norton returned home by boat that summer by way of Montreal. His Canadian impressions, tempered by the fact that Canada had been the enemy during the war, were less complimentary than those he had written of Buffalo. “The better class (of people),” he wrote in his diary, “have a vehicle which they call a calash, for riding, which is drawn by one horse, and is about as convenient and elegant as a Massachusetts dung cart. The French inhabitants, which are numerous, are generally a poor, abject, miser-

able set of beings, and are as contemptible, as the Hottentots . . .”

Thus ended the military expedition of Jacob Porter Norton, who in civilian life, married soon thereafter Holbrook, raised ten children and died in 1845. While his mili-

Books You May

How the Irish Built the Erie.
Chalmers II, New York, Book
ates, Inc., 1964. Pp. 190, 17

This piece of historical fiction takes the theme expressed in its title—the creation of a legend-like man, named McShane, and forthright, and knife-swinging man named Pippa. Between two manage to overcome the machinations of anti-Canal politicians particularly Martin VanBuren, opposition of New York City preference of the Irish laboring and drinking instead of short-sighted and lazy New York the mammoth engineering the canal, and the inferred the official engineers to solve a fast-moving story, filled, jacket states, with imagination to the last to the hero tradition enabled the author to reconstruct the way the problems of Erie might have been solved

That it might have been done is, of course, no proof that this way. One of the values of writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, is the questions it raises in the mind. This reviewer acknowledges a debt to Mr. Chalmers in that he would like to discuss certain aspects treated in the book. Interest in the Erie Canal has probably never been since its completion than there. There have been several popular treatments in recent years on the topic, including Chalmers' previous book, *The*

of the graves were not filled, and they had discursively without regard that it was difficult in some guish the graves. Lt Col. nem mounded up and green sard, the stumps re built round it, a gate over the way, upon the ribed—"Sacred to the ose men who died of ed in the memorable opewa, Bridgewater and rest in honour and detude of their country".

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on returned home by boat oy way of Montreal. His ersions, tempered by the ada had been the enemy r, were less complimentary : had written of Buffalo. ass (of people)," he wrote have a vehicle which they for riding, which is drawn and is about as convenient a Massachusetts dung cart. habitants, which are num- erally a poor, abject, miser-

able set of beings, and are as deserving of pity, as the Hottentots . . ."

Thus ended the military experiences of Jacob Porter Norton, who returned to civilian life, married soon thereafter Harriet Holbrook, raised ten children, and died in 1845. While his military career

was unblemished but hardly notable, the descriptions Jacob Norton wrote lend an intimate, personal insight into the daily life of a Yankee who chose to serve his country at a time when his friends, even his family, by word and deed, opposed the policies of their government.

Books You May Want to See

How the Irish Built the Erie. By Harvey Chalmers II, New York, Bookman Associates, Inc., 1964. Pp. 190, 17 ill. \$3.50

This piece of historical fiction develops the theme expressed in its title through the creation of a legend-like figure of a man, named McShane, and a beautiful, forthright, and knife-swinging young woman named Pippa. Between them, these two manage to overcome the political machinations of anti-Canal politicians, particularly Martin VanBuren, the staunch opposition of New York City men, the preference of the Irish laborers for fighting and drinking instead of working, the short-sighted and lazy New York farmers, the mammoth engineering problems of the canal, and the inferred inability of the official engineers to solve them. It is a fast-moving story, filled, as the dust jacket states, with imagination, and true to the last to the hero tradition. This has enabled the author to reconstruct a tale of the way the problems of building the Erie might have been solved.

That it might have been done this way is, of course, no proof that it was done this way. One of the values of historical writing, whether fiction or non-fiction, is the questions it raises in the reader's mind. This reviewer acknowledges his debt to Mr. Chalmers in this regard and would like to discuss certain questions treated in the book. Interest in the Erie Canal has probably never been higher since its completion than it is today. There have been several publications in recent years on the topic, including Mr. Chalmers' previous book, *The Birth of*

the Erie Canal; the canal buffs have formed their very active and useful Erie Canal Society; the Canal Museum (Weighlock Building) has been opened in Syracuse; there is still concern about the restoration at Fort Hunter; and so forth. What we write about the canal in the midst of this renaissance of interest should be as accurate historically as it can be. And so, for the historian, the statement "it might have been this way," becomes the question "was it?"

It is well known that the engineers for the Erie Canal were men with little knowledge about engineering generally and about canal building in particular. We know little about who was responsible for the various technical and mechanical solutions to the problems they faced. (The reviewer is certain only about Canvass White's patent on hydraulic cement.) The author, Mr. Chalmers, solves this problem by the creation of his hero McShane, an Irishman whom White supposedly met in his travels about England examining canals there. For the fictional writer this is a common and satisfactory device. For the historian, however, it gets him nowhere at all in the search for who-did-what, in other words, it does not add to historical knowledge.

Now perhaps this is carping criticism. Mr. Chalmers is not really concerned with the question of who did it, but rather, how might it have been done. And his imaginative reconstruction of how it might have been done is generally good and in many cases quite believable. It is also very true that engineering was in its infancy; there were no formal schools at