



38 Hours to Montreal: William Weller and the Governor General's Race of 1840

Dan Buchanan

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38 Hours to Montreal, with its many photos and its amazing ambiance of bleak Canadian winters, reminds us of what great history books used to be like.

Speed, technology, and transition are the central themes of this fun, lively history book. Dan Buchanan brings 1840s Canada to life in *38 Hours to Montreal*, a fast-paced story of industrialization and state formation.

38 Hours to Montreal presents two main characters: Governor General Charles Poulett Thomson and Vermont-born Canadian entrepreneur William Weller. These two men represent the different strands of Canadian history and identity. On the one hand, Thomson is a proud bureaucrat for the British Empire and is looking at a future peerage back home in England. He is essentially a conservative in temperament, but his Whig politics make him enthusiastic about industrial capitalism and progress. Weller, on the other hand, is a dynamic captain of industry who foreshadows Canada's growing closeness with the United States, its rapidly expanding and republican neighbor to the south.

This book tells in exquisite detail and plain language how Weller, "the Stagecoach King," promised to get Thomson and his aide-de-camp Captain Thomas Le Marchant to Montreal in just thirty-eight hours. The trip is 376 miles long, and it was taken over snow- and mud-choked roads.

This is an adventure story under the guise of a history book. *38 Hours to Montreal* is not weighed down with academic jargon or clogged to the gills with pet philosophical theories or historiography. Rather, Buchanan's writing is sparse and consumable, and better yet, his larger-than-life characters are hard to stop reading about.

For Americans or for those not overly familiar with Canadian history, *38 Hours to Montreal* provides ample detail about the rough transition years for the Canadian state. After all, Thomson's journey to Quebec came in response to the 1837–38 Lower Canada Rebellion of the *Patriotes*, a group of French Canadian nationalists who wanted a more democratic, less Anglo state in Quebec. London responded by sending Governor General Thomson to implement the controversial Act of Union in 1840, which replaced the old Lower Canada and Upper Canada parliaments with the more centralized Province of Canada.

Unlike in the United States or France, where nationals could call themselves "citizens" in 1840, Canadians were subjects of the British crown, an altogether different type of loyalty and legal expression. This too plays into the story of *38 Hours to Montreal*, which shows that so much of Canada's modernization was driven by its Anglo settlers and politicians. This of course came at the cost of Quebec nationalism and French Canadian culture, and this story is also a part of Buchanan's book.

38 Hours to Montreal, with its many photos and its amazing ambiance of bleak Canadian winters, reminds us of what great history books used to be like. This is top-of-the-line storytelling with engaging characters, fascinating anecdotes, and a worthwhile purpose. Buchanan deserves high praise for bringing one of the most important moments in Canadian history to such vivid life.

BENJAMIN WELTON (June 8, 2018)

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