Inventing a Foundation Myth: Upper Canada in the War of 1812

Jeffrey Wasson
Clark University, jeffrey.r.wasson@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.clarku.edu/studentworks

Part of the Political History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://commons.clarku.edu/studentworks/6

This Masters Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Scholarly Collections & Academic Work at Clark Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Student Works by an authorized administrator of Clark Digital Commons. For more information, please contact mkrikonis@clarku.edu, jodolan@clarku.edu.
Inventing a Foundation Myth: Upper Canada in the War of 1812

Jeffrey Wasson

4-14-2014

AN HONORS THESIS

Submitted to the History Department of Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree with Honors in History.

And accepted on the recommendation of

Drew McCoy
Abstract

Using the Canadian Government’s War of 1812 bicentennial commemoration campaign as a springboard this thesis will explore the events and effects of the War of 1812 on Canada by focusing on three of this campaign’s main assertions. These three areas are the Canadian population’s role in the defense of Upper Canada during the conflict, the role of Native Americans in the conflict and its long term effects on them as a group, and finally the War’s effects on the development of Canadian nationalism and nationhood. On these three topic areas this thesis seeks to accomplish three things. First, it will present the bicentennial’s message to the Canadian people. Second, it will then compare this message to the findings of notable secondary sources. Third and finally, it will present my own interpretation and reading of the primary sources.
Acknowledgements

I would like to first and foremost thank my thesis advisor Professor McCoy for his perfect mix of encouragement and criticism along the way. His sage advice has been invaluable in translating my vision for this project into a reality. I literally cannot thank him enough for all he has done for me in the last year and a half. The staffs at the Library Archives of Canada in Ottawa and the Archives of Ontario in Toronto were very helpful and patient in guiding me through my first trips to those archives. They helped make the experience an enjoyable one that I look forward to repeating again. I owe thanks to Professor Klooster for taking the time to be my second reader and Professor Kushner for her efforts in creating our honors forum, which helped solve numerous small details and kept me focused. Furthermore, I would like to thank all the professors who supervised our honors forum and the rest of the Clark University History Department for their aid in numerous forms. Thanks are also owed to the other members of our history honors forum for their support and feedback, I have learned a lot from your projects and research methods.

I would like to thank my parents Bob and Sandra Wasson for their support in everything I attempt and giving me the opportunity to attend Clark University and complete this thesis. I owe my sisters and friends a thank you for putting up with me researching at inopportune times. Finally, I would like to thank Molly Igo for her generous draft readings, unprovoked interest, and valuable encouragement to get this done. I am very lucky to be surrounded by such great people.


Preface

“Two hundred years ago the United States invaded our territory,” starts the advertisement, while scenes of American troops and ships advancing flash on the screen. “But we defended our land. We stood side by side…and won the fight for Canada.” These bold proclamations are accompanied by Hollywood style scenes of General Isaac Brock planning over maps, Native warriors led by Tecumseh emerging from the wilderness, French-Canadians rallying to arms around Charles De Salaberry, and Laura Secord making her famous trek to warn the British of an American attack. The final and most dramatic words, “and won the fight for Canada,” usher in a series of montages depicting these famous leaders and British Redcoats clashing with blue-clad American soldiers. The advertisement ends by saying this message was brought to you by the Government of Canada and directs you to a website where more can be learned on the upcoming bicentennial celebration of the War of 1812.

Such is a description of the commercial (playing coincidentally during a Canada-USA women’s soccer match) that captured my attention and spurred my current interest in this topic. Intrigued by this message from my Government (and decidedly dejected after watching Canada lose in crushing fashion to the USA), I checked out the website my Government had directed me to. Its depiction of the War of 1812 very much matched the commercial: Canada was invaded by the United States, we stood our ground to defend our country, and we were ultimately victorious, preserving our modern Canadian nation. This all left me with a surge of pride in my Canadian nationality.

My experiences with this website, in the summer of 2012, would prove to be the launching pad for this current project. As a dual Canadian and American citizen, I have always been interested in the War of 1812, the only instance in which my two nations went to War.
However, my Government’s message provoked a special interest, because it appeared to settle the long-debated question in my mind of who had actually won the War of 1812. Having been educated in both countries’ school systems, I remember instances in which my Canadian classmates would let me know that Canada had whipped the United States in the War of 1812. On the other hand, across the border, my American classmates would let me know that the United States has never lost a war and most assuredly had beaten the Canadians in the War of 1812.

However, after visiting the Canadian Government’s website and reading its depiction of the War, I felt this question had finally been put to rest. My Government would not mislead me; clearly, Canada had won the War. Heavily influenced by my government’s message, I originally set out to explore how Canada’s experiences and victory in this War led to the development of Canadian nationalism and a Canadian nation. Unfortunately, after digging into the historical record on the topic I was shocked to see the divide between my Government’s message and what the most recent scholarly literature was telling me. Indeed I soon realized that my Government’s narrative contained glaring historical inaccuracies. As a history major in university, I was shocked by this deception and began focusing my efforts on identifying precisely where and how I had been misled. Through this transformation, I arrived at the current shape and substance of my thesis.

Background on the Bicentennial

In June of 2012 the Canadian Government launched its $28 million dollar bicentennial commemoration of the War of 1812. The campaign is supposed to last for the duration of the War, beginning in June of 2012 and ending in December of 2014. In total the campaign has over one thousand days of planned activities. The commemoration includes the production of “a
special silver dollar coin, a new national monument, funding for historical re-enactments, upgrades for historic sites, museum exhibits and even a mobile phone app.”¹ Along with an aggressive advertising campaign on television, much of the government’s message is available on its website.² The website includes messages from government officials (including Prime Minister Stephen Harper) about the importance of the bicentennial, summaries of the events, figures, aftermath of the War, and even external links to an animated comic series about the War and lesson plans for students.

The $28 million dollar campaign comes at a time of austerity by the Conservative Party Government in Ottawa. In the same fiscal year of this $28 million dollar campaign, $9.6 million dollars was slashed from the budget of the Library and Archives of Canada and an entire grant program for community archives was eliminated. To put this spending in perspective, the $28 million it will cost to fund this campaign would have been enough to operate the recently disbanded Polar Environment Atmospheric Research Laboratory for eighteen years.³ Comparatively, the federal government of the United States has spent no money on its bicentennial, rejecting any spending proposals on commemorating this War. At the state level, New York has allocated $450,000 for commemorations, but rejected any further proposals. By contrast Canada spent $6.5 million dollars on television commercials alone.⁴

² For Government website WWW.Warof1812.GC.CA
A comprehensive survey done for the Canadian National Defence Department in August of 2012 reveals that the majority of Canadians had very little knowledge on the War of 1812, most being unaware that 2012 marked its bicentennial. This means that for most Canadians the Government’s campaign has been, if not their first, certainly their most lasting impression of the War of 1812. For instance, upon meeting my cousin’s new husband, Dave, for the first time this past summer, he saw me researching for this project and began telling me about his recent trip to the Fort George memorial located outside Toronto. Dave told me about how impressed he was by the Fort and how intrigued he was to learn for the first time about this proud part of Canada’s military history in the War of 1812. Stories like Dave’s may suggest how far-reaching and effective the Government’s commemoration campaign has been thus far.

Finally, when referring to this campaign I am drawing on information from the official website, statements from government officials, and actions and events from the commemoration itself. This only includes actions and statements made and sponsored by the Federal Government, meaning that Provincial and communal commemorations are not included.

# Table of Contents

Preface ...................................................................................................................................... iv  
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1  
Chapter One: the Militia Myth .............................................................................................. 7  
Chapter Two: Native American Involvement ....................................................................... 44  
Chapter Three: Effects on Canadian Nationalism and Nationhood .................................. 68  
Epilogue: Foundation Myths ................................................................................................. 101  
Bibliography ......................................................................................................................... 106
Introduction

In April of 1814, in the midst of a third American invasion, Upper Canada found itself lacking one of the cornerstones of Western civilization, a printing press. The previous year, the Kentucky Militia had destroyed the Provinces’ only printing press during the looting of the capital at York. Desperately needing to replace this, Upper Canadians would turn to Lower Canada, the more advanced and established Province. However, with little history of cooperation, officials there were unable or unwilling to lend any support. The solution to this problem, ironically, was on the American side of the border, at the strategically vital town of Ogdensburg, New York. Despite being located at a crucial juncture of the St. Lawrence River where the British defenses were at its weakest, Ogdensburg had become an unofficial neutral zone in the War. Federalist David Parish had given the cash-strapped American Federal Government $7.5 million dollars to ensure that no American invasion would ever occur to disrupt his business ventures in the area.

It comes as no surprise then that a resident of Ogdensburg would sell Upper Canada a printing press for the low price of eighty-four pounds seven shillings and six pence. This story becomes even stranger when you consider why Upper Canada was so in need of a printing press. Although given a deal by an American citizen, British officials in Upper Canada would have a

---

6 Prior to 1841, Upper Canada was a semi-autonomous British colony comprising most of present day Southern Ontario. Lower Canada was also a semi-autonomous British Colony comprising most of present day Quebec. Although they both were a part of British North America answering to the Crown in Great Britain, due to the structure of their governments and ethnic differences there was little cooperation between the two.


much harder time getting supplies out of its own inhabitants. One of the first uses of this printing press was to inform the people of a ban on the use of grain for the distillation of whiskey, as the British Army was in desperate need of all excess grain to feed their troops. Three years into the War, with the fate of British Canada at stake, the main purpose of this printing press acquired from the “enemy” would be to try and convince the people of Upper Canada to contribute to their own defense.

This episode captures the bizarre and often confusing nature of the War of 1812. Although officially fought by two separate nations, loyalty was never that clear, as many Federalists in the United States sought to undermine the American War effort, while civilians in Upper Canada openly defied the British troops who were defending them. Furthermore, the actual fighting of the War would provide little battlefield glory for people to revel upon, as skirmishes between undisciplined militia were easily dwarfed by the grand campaigns of Napoleon going on at the same time in Europe. Even the primary reason for the conflict, British infringement of American maritime rights, would be settled days before war was declared. For these reasons the War of 1812 is hard to define or encapsulate quickly and many of the lessons that come from the War are not ones that today’s public on both sides of the border want to hear. This has led to a marginalized legacy for the War of 1812, often being overlooked or forgotten by the public at large and even historians.

However, the bicentennial of this War has prompted an unusually high amount of interest in this conflict often dubbed the “Forgotten War”. Most of this has been on the Canadian side of the border, as the Canadian Government’s War of 1812 bicentennial commemoration campaign has generated unprecedented interest in this topic. Using this bicentennial campaign as a springboard, this thesis will explore the events and effects of the War of 1812 on Canada by
focusing on three of this campaign’s main assertions. These three areas are the Canadian population’s role in the defense of Upper Canada during the conflict, the role of Native Americans in the conflict and its long term effects on them as a group, and finally the War’s effects on the development of Canadian nationalism and nationhood.

Dealing with popular commemorations of historical events can be tricky, but Nicole Eustace puts it very nicely: our goal as historians she writes, “is neither to counter nor countenance those emotions but rather to analyze them.”\(^9\) With this in mind, this thesis seeks to accomplish three things. First, it will present the bicentennial’s message to the Canadian people on the three areas of focus. Second, it will then compare this message to the findings of notable secondary sources on these topics. Third and finally, it will present my own interpretation and reading of the primary sources. This project is not meant to be political or a partisan production; rather, it is simply an analysis of the historical accuracy of the bicentennial’s message to Canadians. The aim is neither to “counter nor countenance” the findings of the bicentennial, but rather only to analyze them and in effect create a reference point for Canadians on these topics.

Since Canada was not an independent country at this time and its inhabitants were considered British subjects, the term Canadian may be a bit confusing. For the sake of clarity, I am applying the term “Canadian” to any permanent residents of British North America during this time. For example, someone like John Strachan would be considered a Canadian, as he settled in Kingston, Upper Canada in 1799, started a family and remained there until his death in 1867. However, someone like Sir Isaac Brock, British General and Lt. Governor of Upper Canada, would not be considered a Canadian, as he had no intention of remaining permanently in North America.

Furthermore, although the War of 1812 affected other parts of British North America that would eventually become part of an independent Canada, this thesis will only focus on the War’s effects on the Colony of Upper Canada. Using this approach is not meant to reflect an Ontario-centric bias, implying that the other Colonies of this time are less important today, but rather is an appropriate way of focusing on where this War was most prominent. In order to apply these findings to Canada as a whole, this project will treat Upper Canada as a nucleus for the eventual emergence of modern Canada. In short, Upper Canadians’ experiences during this War shaped a legacy that was incorporated into a united Canada some years later. Ideally this work will inspire further analysis of this War’s effects on the other Colonies of British North America during this time.
Map detailing the numerous frontiers of warfare in Upper Canada during the War of 1812. The Americans attempted invasions in each year of the conflict, putting Upper Canada under siege from all angles.

Map detailing the numerous Districts in Upper Canada as they stood one year after the end of the War. The Niagara and Western Districts would be the target of numerous American invasions seeing the bulk of the fighting in Upper Canada.

Chapter One: The Militia Myth

Canadians have a proud military history to look back upon, having made significant contributions to some of the most pivotal armed conflicts of the last two hundred years. A visit to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa would reveal the tremendous price Canadians paid at the Dieppe Raid and D-Day invasions during World War II. One would see definitive proof of the improbable Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge and also the darker side at the Second Battle of Ypres where Canadians fell victim to the first large-scale poison gas attack of World War I. There would also be an exhibit testifying to the courage of Canadian volunteers during the dreadful Boer War. Although Canada has these proud military endeavors to look back upon, the War of 1812 remains an outlier, as people seem unsure what to make of this conflict. Its legacy, like the legacy of all great historical events, is even today, contested and uncertain. This uncertainty comes from an ongoing debate over how to properly frame the role and involvement of the Canadian population during this War.

However, despite this disagreement, the Canadian Government’s War of 1812 bicentennial campaign has no doubts about Canadian involvement. They believe that the Canadian Militia was a key part in the military defense of Canada and that Canadians patriotically participated in the resistance to the invading Americans. They put forth that this makes the War of 1812 an equally proud part of Canadian military history, on par with the valiant efforts described above. This message starts at the top, with Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s statement, “I invite all Canadians to share in our history and commemorate our proud and brave ancestors who fought and won against enormous odds… It was the beginning of a long
and proud military history in Canada.”¹ As this message is expanded upon on the bicentennial’s official website, the Canadian Militia are presented as being a crucial part in the force that defended Canada. This portrayal makes the War of 1812 look even more gallant, as these Canadian efforts are framed in the context of having helped secure the country Canadians now inhabit.

The bicentennial’s official website further proclaims, “However, the relative unpreparedness of the American military for war and the strong resistance of both the population of Canada and First Nations meant that each campaign met with failure.”² By stressing the “strong resistance” of the population of Canada, the Government is putting forth that not only those who fought, but the Canadian population as a whole was a crucial piece of the successful defense of Canada. Combined with the other parts of the website, this paints a picture that Canadians as a group ably performed their military duties and that civilians were enthusiastic supporters of the resistance. A great example of this comes in their description of the Battle of Queenston Heights:

While Brock, the “Hero of Upper Canada,” was killed, the battle did a great deal to bolster morale in Upper Canada. Further it showed the British that Upper Canadians, many of whom were recent immigrants from the United States, would fight tenaciously to defend their adopted land, even against their former countrymen and neighbours.³

This portrayal leaves no doubts that the War of 1812 deserves recognition alongside Canada’s other great military endeavors, perhaps even more as it directly secured the fate of Canada. However, the bicentennial’s glorious picture is not the only take on this subject, as the

³ Ibid.
scholarship of the last fifty years would emphatically disagree with these assertions. After World War II Canadian scholar, J. Mackay Hitsman, argued that the Canadian population was insignificant in the War. In his 1965 work, *The Incredible War of 1812*, he would point out that it was British leadership, resources, and professional soldiers that enabled Canada to successfully defend itself from the American invasions. Contrary to being a crucial piece in the defense of Canada, Hitsman barely mentions the Canadian Militia, instead focusing on the British high command’s skillful deployment of resources in a defensive strategy. With this Hitsman would challenge the prevailing notion of Canadian involvement in the War of 1812 and can be credited for advancing this great debate over how to properly frame Canadian involvement in this War.

Although most scholars would agree that the British did most of the work, some still believe that the Canadians contributed to the defense of Canada in other ways. Pierre Berton’s *The Invasion of Canada* (1980) and *Flames Across the Border* (1981) would credit the British regular forces and Native American alliance as the reason for the defeat of the American invasion, but he also constantly highlights the efforts of the Canadian militia, trying to illustrate that their limited successes were important. In a similar fashion George Stanley’s *War of 1812: Land Operations* (1983) agreed that the British regulars were primarily responsible for the defense of Canada, but that militia units provided invaluable support in supply operations and garrison duty and thus had a significant role in the War effort. These two historians put forth a middle ground in this debate that Canadians deserve credit along with the British for contributing to the War effort, albeit in less obvious and unconventional ways.

---

However, George Sheppard’s *Profit, Plunder, and Paroles* (1994) rejected this middle ground and denied that there is a proud military history for Canadians to seize upon in remembering the War of 1812. A social history of the War, Sheppard’s book presents statistics now available for computer analysis, to show that the population of Upper Canada was absolutely disinterested in participating in the War. He shows the prevalence of consistently high desertion rates, the seeking of paroles in order to avoid militia service and dispatches by British Generals to attest to the ambivalent and unreliable nature of the population. Christopher Arajs’ *All the King’s Men: The Militia of Western Upper Canada and the War of 1812* (2005) builds on this by filling a void in Sheppard’s work, by explaining the motivation for the few that did join the militia. His analysis only furthers Sheppard’s claims by putting forth that none were inspired to fight by a sense of Canadian nationalism.

Allan Taylor’s *The Civil War of 1812* (2010) further affirms Sheppard’s findings, by presenting, through extensive research, that the population of Upper Canada and the militia played a minimal role in the conflict. Clearly, between the scholarship and the bicentennial’s message in 2012, the debate of how to frame Canadian involvement in this War is still ongoing. In this chapter I will join the discussion by offering my own assessment, based on analysis of the relevant primary sources, of the military role of the Canadian Militia and Canadian population in the War of 1812. Analysis of the evolution of the Canadian Militia from the eve of the War until its conclusion in 1814 will capture a relevant measure of the Canadian people’s involvement.

---

8 Christopher Arajs, “All the King’s Men: The Militia of Western Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” MA. Thesis, Queen’s University, 2005.
Alongside this, a comparison of how the Canadian civilian population behaved during the same period will reveal if there are any connections between the involvements of the two groups.

Using the definition of a Canadian put forth in the introduction, this following chapter focuses only on the contributions of Canadians to the War effort. Previous works have not covered Canadian involvement as their primary focus, but rather largely as a side-note. By only looking at only how Canadians were involved and reacted to the War, I hope to advance a sharper focus for later addressing the larger question of its possible relationship to an emerging Canadian national identity. Also, this work will differentiate itself from the few other works that have focused solely on Canadian involvement in the War of 1812 by assessing the role of Canadians relative to their military contributions. This will not attempt a comprehensive social history of the War, but rather an assessment of the Canadian population’s contributions to their own defense.

**Road to War**

This story begins after the Chesapeake Crisis of 1807, when War between the United States and Great Britain began to look increasingly likely. Although a welcomed challenge for many Americans, in Upper Canada the always-rational British were pessimistic about their prospects. In 1808, the current Lt. Governor of the Colony, Sir Francis Gore, did not believe the country could withstand anything more than a brief incursion by the Americans. He felt that of the country’s inhabitants, “there are few People here that would act with Energy were it not for the purpose of defending the lands which they actually possess.”

---

Canada reveals that this pessimism was not unwarranted, as Upper Canada leading up to the War of 1812 could be defined by three characteristics: a divided population, a corrupt government, and a generally self-absorbed rural society.

The divided population was a result of social tensions between “United Empire Loyalists” and “Late Loyalists.” The U.E. Loyalists were the original 14,000 settlers to Upper Canada, most being refugees from the American Revolution who had stayed loyal to the Crown during that conflict. As a reward for their services they would be given the title of United Empire Loyalists, granting them privileged status, choice land claims and aid from the British Crown once settled in Canada. This group would form the backbone of Upper Canadian Society.  

The Late Loyalists were the next 61,000 immigrants to Upper Canada, most coming after 1791. The majority were poor American farmers lured to Upper Canada with the promise of democracy, freedom of religion, low taxes, and most importantly 200 acres of free land. All that was required of these immigrants in return was an oath of loyalty to the British Crown.

Tension between these two groups was the result of U.E. Loyalists’ belief that simply taking an oath of allegiance to the British Crown did not make someone a trustworthy subject. This suspicion was not unfounded, as some Late Loyalists, such as Michael Smith, were blunt in their reasons for coming to Upper Canada: “in order to obtain land upon easy terms and for no other reason.” The U.E. Loyalists thus perceived themselves as being the true loyal subjects of Britain, while the Late Loyalists were perceived as being disloyal citizens with Americans sympathies. Wary of these Late Loyalists, the U.E. Loyalists with their privileged status would do everything in their power to monopolize government. With their connections they would

---

11 Taylor, pg. 23-25.
easily achieve this, leading to a situation where a minority of the population would control a vast majority of the power in Upper Canada.

However, despite their altruistic claims of loyalty, their conduct within government was far from ethical and rarely in the best interest of the Crown. The conduct of the pre-War government of Upper Canada is best captured in Attorney General William Firth’s letter to the Earl of Liverpool, Prime Minister of Great Britain at the time, in January of 1812. Going well over the head of his superior, Lt. Governor Francis Gore, Firth revealed the rampant corruption permeating the government:

That unwarrantable grants of land have been made by Mr. Gore to some- and that claimable grants of land have been unjustly withheld by him from others…I might have considerably enlarged the list with the recital of a thousand petty acts of tyranny of Mr. Gore.\textsuperscript{13}

This corruption and petty backstabbing attests to the fact that in Upper Canada before the War, government and politics were seriously underdeveloped, being intensely personal and immature. Those in government did not see a responsibility to the people, mostly because they viewed the people as representing the disloyal Late Loyalists. Many of these U.E. Loyalists saw themselves entitled and used the government as their own source of funds and personal advancement. Thus the U.E. Loyalists would use Government only as a tool to advance the interests of their own group. This in part represents the fact that at this time no sense of duty to country or nation existed in Upper Canada. In the words of Robert Nichol, a prominent U.E. Loyalist in the Niagara District who would become a Colonel in the militia and a member of the legislature after the War, it was “absurd to expect an individual to give his time to the public

\textsuperscript{13} William Firth to Earl of Liverpool, Jan. 18\textsuperscript{th} 1812, William Dummer Powell Papers MG 23, H-I-4, Box 3, 1390-1397, (LAC).
Such was the sense of duty to one’s country in Upper Canada on the eve of the War of 1812.

While the U.E. Loyalists used Government for their own purposes, most Late Loyalists lived in small farming communities with little ties to other parts of Upper Canada. Ninety-five percent of the country lived as agricultural farmers and cared little about politics, allowing the U.E. Loyalists to keep a corrupt stranglehold on government. Amongst this group there existed even less of an attachment than the U.E. Loyalists to the idea of an Upper Canadian community. In a country with no central economy or even a common currency, most lived a self-absorbed frontier life style. A British Doctor John Douglas would describe their outlook on life in straightforward terms: “those events which are related to their own state of life, seem alone worthy of their notice.”

This was the population of 75,000 that Canada would bring to War of 1812, a divided people with a corrupt government and a majority of the population indifferent to the outside world. Having only existed as a Colony for approximately three decades, Upper Canada had quickly developed some serious problems. Sir Francis Gore’s pessimism in 1807 would not be far off the mark in predicting the Canadian people’s participation in their own defense.

The Evolution of the Militia: the Eve of War

In June of 1811, General Brock took the special position of both the military and civilian leader of Upper Canada. From this motley assortment of a population, General Brock would determine that a Militia force of 11,000, almost all of the military age men available, would be needed in order to save the Country from an American invasion. As he explained, “unless the

---

inhabitants give an active and efficient aid, it will be utterly impossible for the very limited number of the military who are likely to be employed to preserve the province."\(^{16}\) For General Brock, creating this effective Militia, necessary for the defense of Upper Canada, was truly a daunting task. Compounding the generally primitive nature of Upper Canada, the Militia on the eve of the War of 1812 was far removed from a respectable fighting force. Brock would essentially be starting from absolutely nothing in his endeavors. The previously mentioned Robert Nichol issued a rather frank assessment of the Militia in Upper Canada before the War:

> It is a well known fact that almost ever since the first establishment of a Militia in this country, it has been little better than a legalized mob; the officers without respectability, without intelligence and without authority, and the men without any idea of subordination.\(^ {17}\)

The Militia Law of 1808 would be the only positive Brock would have to work with, but even this was flawed. This Law - only passed in the wake of the Chesapeake Crisis of 1807 after realizing that “the laws now in force are in some respects defective” - still lacked the necessary teeth to coerce the population into service. General Brock stated that this Law gave him “but few means of enforcing” the creation of an effective Canadian Militia.\(^ {18}\) One could hardly blame him for this belief, as the most important piece of the Militia Law of 1808 was that it called for an annual mustering of the Militia on the King’s Birthday June 4\(^ {th}\). This event was seen more as a social gathering, and as one historian puts it, “featured more drinking than drilling.”\(^ {19}\) With the law against him, Brock could not create a militia through coercive government power. If he

---


\(^{17}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 15.

\(^{18}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 25. Both quotes.

\(^{19}\) Taylor, pg. 150.
wanted to construct the Canadian Militia he so desperately needed he would need to rely on the Canadian people’s willingness and spirit to participate.

Unfortunately all pre-War signs from this population were not positive, as General Brock encountered a lack of enthusiasm or proper sense of duty from Upper Canada’s inhabitants. In his short tenure as military and civilian leader, Brock had seen numerous instances revealing the unreliable character of Upper Canadians. Most prominent among these was in December of 1811, when Brock uncovered that the Militia had been selling the “several thousand stands” of weapons the Government had been giving them. He would find that this was a common practice in the Militia as “in all probability great deficiencies will be found.”\textsuperscript{20} Despite this dreadful scenario, Brock remained stoically optimistic that the population of Upper Canada could produce a suitable fighting force. With all of these odds in his face, Brock would publically state that he felt “confident a large majority will prove faithful.”\textsuperscript{21} His unofficial motto became, “Most of the people have lost all confidence. I however speak loud and look big!”\textsuperscript{22}

Brock decided to incorporate the Canadian Militia by forming them into “flank companies” which would serve alongside the British regulars as an auxiliary force.\textsuperscript{23} An exchange of letters between Brock and Colonel Nichol reveals how this system would work. The army would commission men of prominence in their district to become officers in the Militia (usually U.E. Loyalists), assign them a quota of men to recruit for service, give economic incentives for men to join, and then give the unit a posting to fill once it had been assembled. Although confident in public, Brock began to become more pessimistic in private. In his commission and orders given to Colonel Nichol, Brock would include a warning not to arm the

\textsuperscript{20} Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 20.
\textsuperscript{21} Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 21.
\textsuperscript{22} Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 153.
\textsuperscript{23} Taylor, pg. 152.
men, as “experience has shown the absolute necessity of adopting every possible precaution to preserve in a proper state the arms issued to the militia.”

Despite all the odds, Brock would be rewarded for his public optimism as the original efforts to recruit for the flank companies proved a tremendous success. Brock was pleased to report to superiors in May of 1812, two months before the outbreak of the War, that “the flank companies in the districts in which they have been established were instantly completed with volunteers, and, indeed, an almost unanimous disposition to serve is daily manifested.” From this Brock was able to raise 1,800 volunteers into the flank companies, who could be trained before the War and ready to fight alongside the regulars once the inevitable War with the United States came. From this initial success, Governor General Sir George Prevost, Brock’s superior and the Civilian ruler of all of British North America, based in Lower Canada, reported to the Government in London that along with the 1,800 men in the flank companies, “the total number of militia in Upper Canada is calculated at 11,000 men, of which it might not be prudent to arm more than 4,000.” With only 1,200 British Regulars in the Province, against the possibility of the entire American Army, this optimism must have been very reassuring.

**The Exception or the Rule?**

This cheerful rush of volunteers would prove to be an anomaly, and an analysis of the mood of the country at the time shows why this strange rush to volunteer occurred. This rush to enlist should not be confused with an eagerness to fight the Americans. In fact in the months leading up to the War most people in Upper Canada did not believe the War would occur. After dealing with the local Legislature, Brock would comment on this: “A strong sentiment now

---

24 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 51
26 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 63.
prevails that war is not likely to occur with the United States…I mean of such who, tho' honest, are by their ignorance easily betrayed into error."\(^{28}\) Not believing War would ever actually occur, the majority of men that rushed to join these initial flank companies were not motivated to defend their homeland, but rather to reap the economic and social benefits of militia service without the hardship of actual fighting. To Upper Canadians, the opportunity offered by the flank companies to advance oneself, in a Country where few other alternatives existed, seemed almost too good to be true. When War was finally declared by the United States on June 18 1812, Upper Canada’s residents were shocked. Militia Colonel Baynes wrote to General Brock describing the attitude of the Country:

> We have learnt the unexpected declaration of war, threatened that no one believed it would ever seriously take place, and even now it is the prevailing opinion that from the opposition testified by the Eastern States offensive measures are not likely to be speedily adopted against this country.\(^{29}\)

This reflects the opinion that although shocked by the declaration of War, most in Upper Canada still did not believe any serious fighting would take place in their homeland. This was a result of the fact that most had no quarrel with the Americans. Many of the issues that would cause the War, impressments and Native American raids, had nothing to do with Upper Canadians. In fact, few made any distinction between the United States and Canada at all. Most in Canada and America did not look at the border as having any significant meaning.\(^{30}\) It was typical for those who lived in the border area to have spent time and had family or property in both the USA and Canada. Many in the Johnstown District, on the border, would visit New York to see family on a regular basis both before and during the War. One man, Buell Bishop, would

\(^{28}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 43.
\(^{29}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 111.
\(^{30}\) Taylor, pg. 4.
go to see his mother-in-law in New York at the outset of the War and not be able to return for two years.\textsuperscript{31} To the majority who lived in rural areas and who would form the backbone of the Canadian Militia, the idea that the United States would invade simply did not register. They did not think of America as a foreign country and could not see the reasons for an American invasion. Some of the rural population still believed that sickness was a result of witchcraft; most likely the events of global politics were lost on them.\textsuperscript{32}

With these 1,800 ill-informed and ignorant men enlisted, the challenge for General Brock now became calling them out to duty. In order to accomplish this Brock played on this callowness of the population, by effectively tricking them into service. Brock became aware of the Declaration of War on June 24\textsuperscript{th} 1812. Instead of releasing this message to the people, Brock kept this news to himself. Without telling them of the outbreak of hostilities, Brock would call in the 1,800 men of the flank companies to join the British regulars at Fort George. Since they were ignorant that War had been declared and told they would receive their muskets at Fort George, General Brock was able to muster most of the Militia. This little piece of deception would prove to be the most effective means of mustering the Canadian Militia in the War of 1812.\textsuperscript{33}

Upon their arrival they were told of the outbreak of the War, prompting much grumbling, but most were too scared to desert while in such close proximity to the British regulars. However, just because the men were present and knew that War had been declared, did not mean they were ready to fight. Preoccupied by the upcoming harvest, most still did not believe any

\textsuperscript{31} Joel Stone’s Notes from the Alien Act Commission Johnstown District concerning Buell Bishop, January 22, 1818, RG 22-144 Alien Act Commissions, inquisitions and related records, Microfilm (AO).
\textsuperscript{32} Sheppard, “Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg. 34.
\textsuperscript{33} Sheppard, “Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg. 91.
fighting would occur. Militia Captain J.B. Glegg would capture this mood in his July 9th letter to future Attorney General William Dummer Powell in York:

> Everything continues on both side of the river, in status quo, and judging from appearance I do not believe any material change is likely to take place. I rather think the American militia are at present actively employed getting in the hay harvest and I am decidedly of opinion that it would be good policy to grant a similar indulgence to our own...that a general restless disposition is too prevalent amongst us at this moment...be ascribed solely to a wish to return for harvest purposes.³⁴

Three days later on July 12, 1812, American General William Hull would cross into Upper Canada with 2,500 men. While the Militia, duped into service, remained focused upon the upcoming harvest, the fight for Canada had commenced. The greatest question mark for the British was, how would the population behave? Would they rise to the occasion? Or would they shrink from duty? At this time the British believed their fate in Canada depended upon this response.

**Evolution of the Militia: the Year of 1812**

At the outset of the War, Brock remained confident that the country could produce 4,000 Canadian Militia to repel the American invasion.³⁵ However, at the time of Hull’s first invasion of Canada, after some desertions, Brock’s rouse would give him only 800 men in the Canadian Militia to deploy for immediate service. Being such a small percentage of the population, what motivated these men to serve? Was it as the bicentennial claims, a sense of duty to protect their new adopted land? Very little research has been done exploring what type of men comprised the Canadian Militia, but fortunately the little that has been done contains an examination of the exact Militia units that would have served in these original 800. In Christopher Arajs’

---

³⁵ Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 94.
examination of the Militia from the Western and Niagara Districts his main finding is that there is no one single or uniform reason why men chose to volunteer into the Canadian Militia. Rather men served for a diverse range of reasons including the social and economic incentives to advance oneself, previous military service, family or personal connection to other volunteers, or following a popular officer. However, absent from this is any indication that men volunteered to fight for nationalistic or loyalist reasons and no one ethnicity or background served disproportionally.\textsuperscript{36}

Although this area lacks sufficient research for the rest of the country, from recruitment efforts both for and against the Militia, one can deduce that province-wide economic and social incentives factored heavily in men’s decisions to join the Canadian Militia and support the British War effort. General Hull’s proclamation to the people of Upper Canada, upon his arrival in the country on July 12\textsuperscript{th} 1812, tried to persuade the inhabitants of Canada to stay neutral by stressing the economic and social incentives of how the Americans cause would help Canadians personally. The refrain from Hull’s proclamation is likewise: “I tender you the invaluable blessings of Civil, Political, & Religious Liberty, and their necessary results, individual, and general, prosperity…”\textsuperscript{37} According to Brock this message would be effective at dissuading the population of Upper Canada from joining the Canadian Militia and supporting the British War effort.\textsuperscript{38} In order to counter this appeal from the Americans, Brock responded with his own proclamation to the people of Upper Canada a few weeks later. Reciprocal to Hull, Brock would center his argument on the economic incentives of British rule. In it he would stress how the British connection would make their lives better:

\textsuperscript{36} Arajs, pg. 68, 90-97.
\textsuperscript{37} Berton, pg. 126.
\textsuperscript{38} Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 133.
This unequalled prosperity could not have been attained by the utmost liberality of the Government or the persevering industry of the people had not the maritime power of the Mother Country secured to its colonists a safe access to every market where the produce of their labor was in demand.\(^{39}\)

Absent from either of these proclamations is any rhetoric appealing to the Upper Canadian’s sense of loyalty or national duty. Instead their messages are practical and meant to present how their cause will help Canadians personally. The fact that both messages are effective shows how important personal incentives were to Upper Canadians. Further evidence of economic incentives trumping nationalistic or loyalist sentiments comes from the Militia’s constant demand for pay. Bonds of nationalism or a sense of duty to country would not be enough to keep the Canadian Militia in service when their pay was not forthcoming. General Brock and other British Generals would recite numerous instances in which the Militia were so “clamorous” in their demand for pay that it was given despite it being harmful to the War effort as a whole.\(^{40}\) This attitude was present from the lowest ranks to the highest ranks, as Colonel Talbot would remark to General Sheaffe that if officers were denied pay, “after devoting their time for the good of the Province,” their attitude and service would quickly change to the detriment of the War effort.\(^{41}\)

**Reality Check**

However, these economic and social motivations for service would rarely be enough to muster a capable force of Canadian Militia. Contrary to the optimistic reports of 11,000 Militia being possible, the realities of the situation began to set in for General Brock. Instead of being able to recruit more men as he had hoped, he would have enough trouble trying to keep the

\(^{39}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 136-139.
\(^{40}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 146.
\(^{41}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 300.
original 1,800 volunteers in service. In July of 1812, while General Hull presented a serious threat to the survival of Canada, Brock reported that most of the Militia were so eager to return home for their harvest that he was forced to commission the release of a large portion of them. Many of those who were not granted permission would leave anyway, accepting the $20 fine.\(^4\)

On top of their desire to tend their harvest, a council at York concerning the Western Frontier in 1812 would report that whenever the enemy was near, desertion would rise as well.\(^3\)

A statistical breakdown of service in the year of 1812 paints an even grimmer picture of the Canadian Militia. In the year 1812 roughly 400 Militia men would follow General Brock to his infamous victory at Detroit in August of 1812. This 400 would comprise just seven percent of the possible 5,850 men available for militia service in the four districts surrounding Detroit. On the Niagara frontier 500 men would remain on duty accompanied by the regular force. This means that from the districts surrounding the Niagara frontier eighty five percent of the available militia were not in service.\(^4\) In the end only 900 men could be mustered into service in the year 1812 accounting for just 1.2% of the total population. Furthermore, despite numerous American invasions only three battle deaths would be reported in the Canadian Militia, comprising just 0.3% of those in service. For some context, in another nineteenth century North American war for survival against a Yankee invasion, the Confederate States of American would suffer a battle casualty rate between thirty-seven and thirty-nine percent.\(^5\)

However, it is important to note that despite the desertion and indifference of the majority of the Canadian Militia, the few who did come out and serve were involved in crucial battles and

\(^4\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 123.
\(^3\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 179
fighting. In the second American invasion of Canada, at the Battle of Queenston Heights, American General Stephen Von Rensselaer would try to lead 3,500 men across the border to invade Canada near Niagara Falls. At this battle, upon which the fate of the country depended, the men of the Canadian Militia from the York and Niagara Districts would serve with distinction. The 1st York Militia would be by Brock’s side when he fell from the bullet of an American sniper. The unit would rally in a fools charge against the Americans to avenge his death. However, their charge to take back the high ground would end in failure, sustaining eleven casualties. Eventually the Battle of Queenston Heights would decidedly turn in the Canadians favor after a charge of Six Nations Warriors sent the advancing American’s running back to their side of the border.

The argument being made is not that the Canadian Militia were poor fighters, but rather that they never summoned enough of a force to make any difference. Those who did fight, did so with equal bravery and courage to any participants in the War. There are highlighted moments where the Militia deserves praise, but it is inaccurate and problematic to make this involvement appear as the norm. Just because the Militia fought with distinction in some battles does not mean the Canadian Militia as a whole had a positive impact on the War. For instance, on the eve of this historic battle in Canadian history, General Brock would comment that his force of militia was less than half of what he needed or anticipated. He found himself lacking from the Canadian Militia the necessary “willing, well-disposed characters” to properly defend Queenston Heights. Had Brock had the reliable support of the Canadian Militia and population in the year 1812, perhaps once his line had been penetrated due to a lack of manpower he may not have been forced to rush into combat himself and ultimately lose his life.

---

46 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 123.
47 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 64-65.
Furthermore, after this distinguished fighting at Queenston Heights the Canadian Militia would not build on this morale to rally into an effective fighting unit. In fact, on the contrary, they digressed. For General Sheaffe, the new leader of the British forces and Canadian Militia after Brock’s death, the mood in Upper Canada was far from what one would expect after two surprise victories over numerically superior American forces. The common jingoistic refrain today is that Canadian morale was boosted after Brock’s death and the people began to rally in favor of the War effort. However, the historical record clearly indicates otherwise, as desertion grew to its highest levels of the War after Brock’s death. General Sheaffe, in trying to assess the strength of this new force he commanded, called for inspections of the Militia flank companies by Colonel Bishop. At the inspection of the 1st Lincoln Regiment on November 18th, such an embarrassing number of men showed up that the officers were forced from Fort George to recover their men wherever they might be. Other militia units would report similar numbers of deserters.

Just like Brock, originally Sheaffe was optimistic about the Canadian Militia, but very quickly the realities would set in with incidences such as these. After numerous efforts to try and curb desertion Sheaffe was forced to tell his superiors: “It mortifies me extremely to have to report to Your Excellency that both sickness and desertion increased among the militia after the date of my last dispatch.” The situation must have been very bad for a new inexperienced commander to report to his superiors that he could not control his men from simply leaving service. In December of 1812, five months into the War, the Canadian Militia would be

---

48 In a span of three months the British would earn decisive victories over numerically superior forces, first in capturing Fort Detroit in Michigan Territory then at Queenston Heights in the Niagara District.
50 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 222.
51 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 322.
disbanded and all the men sent home by General Sheaffe. The plan was to start over in the new-year. 1812 had begun with optimistic expectation of 11,000 men in service and ended with no Militia force at all. One historian would sum up very well this clear failure:

The experiences of the previous few months had shown that the provincial militia system was next to useless. It could not be relied on to provide the number of militiamen that were needed, and it proved incapable of holding onto the few men who did offer their services.\(^{52}\)

Clearly in 1812 the Canadian Militia did not put forth a consistently strong effort militarily, as it was certainly not a performance on par with the rest of Canada’s proud military heritage alluded to earlier. However, armed conflict is not everything in war, and the Canadian population could have just as much effect by enthusiastically aiding the British War effort with supplies and knowledge of the terrain. Unfortunately, as the War progressed and the situation became more urgent, British leaders’ opinion of the Canadian population began to sour. Brock had always known the nature of the Country, but would soon admit that the population “is worse than I expected to find it.” He knew their commitment was dubious at best, but now he began to see an attitude of defeatism gripping the Country: “Everything shows as if a certainty existed of a change taking place soon.”\(^{53}\) He even began to believe that the “greater part” of the population “are either indifferent to what is passing or so completely American as to rejoice in the prospect of a change of government.”\(^{54}\) Far gone from his optimism a year earlier, Brock now began to believe the Canadian population worthless. This prompted him to begin efforts at recruiting other allies to fill their void.

\(^{52}\) Sheppard, “Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg. 125.
\(^{53}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 149.
\(^{54}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 123.
Brock’s earlier allusions to a spirit of defeatism gripping the Country were correct. Many saw the victory of the Americans as a foregone conclusion and did not want to anger their future rulers. Proceedings of a Council held at York Respecting the Western Frontier would report “that in the Western and London Districts several persons had negotiated with the enemy’s commander, hailing his arrival and pledging support...”\(^{55}\) Even the Legislature of Upper Canada was accused of falling victim to this spirit as they would deny a number of Brock’s requests for reasons that many British officers thought stemmed from a desire for good relations with the Americans once they had been victorious. This situation would lead General Brock to conclude that his greatest enemy in this War was in fact the Canadian population itself:

> My situation is most critical, not from anything the enemy can do, but from the disposition of the people—the population, believe me, is essentially bad—a full belief possesses them all that this Province must inevitably succumb—this prepossession is fatal to every exertion. Legislators, Magistrates, Militia Officers, all, have imbibed the idea, and are so sluggish and indifferent in all their respective offices.\(^{56}\)

As we can see, the mood of the Canadian people was one that had little hope or investment in the British cause. This spirit would spill over into the lackluster performance of the Canadian Militia. Still, perhaps the ultimate irony for the Canadian Militia and population is that even if they had had the will and men to fight they would not have had the resources to do so in 1812. Due to the isolation and primitive nature of Canada, the British barely had enough supplies to clothe, feed and arm their regular units, let alone the militia. After arming the original 800 Canadian Militia, Brock would comment that “nearly the whole of the arms at my disposal have been issued.” The problem was not just arms but clothing and proper attire. Of the few men that did muster most lacked the basic necessities of soldiering: “The militia assembled in a wretched

\(^{55}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 162.  
\(^{56}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 152.
state in regard to clothing: many were without shoes, an article which can scarcely be provided in the country.”

Throughout the year 1812 the Generals would repeat over and over again to their superiors the phrase: “Our military chest is so nearly exhausted and there are so many demands on it.”

Even Colonels and Captains in charge of Militia units would express their great troubles in attaining public funds in order to supply their small units. With this in mind, it seems literally impossible that the Canadian Militia could have had any significant impact on the defense of Canada.

This lack of supplies, on top of the lack of spirit from the Canadian population, would lead to a disastrous performance by the Canadian Militia in 1812. These three factors would render any of the few efforts done by Canadians to help the British War effort ineffectual.

General Brock had once declared: “No exertions, however, shall be wanting in my civil capacity to place that body (the Militia) upon a respectable footing.”

It became his primary objective and he failed at it. This was a man who through personal will had strategically forced the surrender of Detroit without losing a man, who despite being outnumbered again repulsed a second American invasion at Queenston Heights. Even someone of this character, making a respectable military force out of the population of Canada would prove impossible in the year 1812.

**Evolution of the Militia: 1813-1814**

After a series of weaker men, Gordon Drummond would emerge in 1813 as Lt Governor and head of the British forces in Canada. Born in Canada, Drummond was not deluded about the

---

58 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 276.
59 Joel Stone to Gordon Drummond, Jan. 27, 1814, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 70 (LAC).
60 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 25.
population. He maintained a realistic position not to expect much from Canadians and to take what needed to be taken from them. A combination of Drummond’s forceful personal will and the new “Incorporated Militia” system would try and turn the tide of Canadian population for the rest of the War. As previously mentioned, having only summoned 900 men to duty in the year 1812, the flank companies were abandoned. The new Incorporated Militia system had many innovative and intelligent changes made in order to gain more recruits. Men who volunteered their service for the remainder of the War were given immunity for debts under $50, exemption from tax rates and statute labor, the same pay as regular soldiers, and the possibility of land grants after the War. On top of these huge economic incentives, the unit was supposed to serve on its own, and the officers in charge of recruiting were not given any pay until they had met their quotas.

All in all the system on paper had a much better design than the flank companies of 1812. However, despite these smart decisions, the Incorporated Militia system would have equal trouble raising and keeping recruits. Even when some Militia Captains offered more money than the Government, they still had no luck in finding recruits. Captain Thomas Coleman would offer a $30 dollars US bounty to serve for the duration of the War, but would still be forced to ask Captain William Hamilton Merritt for more men: “I am recruiting the strength of my troop, but with little success at present. If you can procure me a few good recruit without interfering with your own interest, I should feel obliged.” However, there would be no men for Captain Merritt to give up, as his small force of thirty-eight men was already under strength and

---

62 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 174.
pressed for recruits itself.\(^{63}\) This poor showing, despite better planning, would speak to the fact that the small pool of recruits willing to serve had already dried up in the year 1812.

Ambivalence to the War was so high that it did not matter the ingenuity in the planning, there simply were not enough men who were willing to serve.\(^{64}\)

On top of this struggle to recruit, desertion of the men who would actually come into service was still a problem. General Vincent, on the eve of his battle for Fort Erie in 1813, would comment that desertion “beyond all conception continues to mark their indifference to the important cause in which we are now engaged.”\(^{65}\) The Incorporated Militia system would only raise 300 new men in 1813, less than the flank companies in 1812, prompting General Drummond to brand the year’s efforts at raising a Militia a failure, “not having answered the expectations then formed of it.” Drummond, not afraid to upset or go against the will of the people, would order a draft of 1/14\(^{th}\) of the population in order to produce 600 men for the year 1814. He would even go so far as to say that if he had a larger regular force, it “would induce me most willingly to dispense with the military for the domestic services of the militia…”\(^{66}\)

Drummond’s belief that the Militia was more trouble than it was worth was again aided by the conduct of the population at large in the years 1813 and 1814. The disloyal nature of the Country in the year 1812 would be no hidden secret from the authorities in Great Britain.\(^{67}\) Tasked with combating this in his tenure, Drummond would find little positives to report to his superiors on this subject, as he would find it impossible “to suppress or keep in awe that spirit of

\(^{63}\) Nominal Pay lists of April 1813 for the Provincial Dragoons of the 2\(^{nd}\) Lincoln Militia, F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds, Microfilm 1-6 (AO).

\(^{64}\) Sheppard, “Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg. 135.

\(^{65}\) Sheppard, “Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg. 142.

\(^{66}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 260-261. Both quotes.

\(^{67}\) Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 59.
sedition and disaffection, which, I regret to say, prevails in some parts of the country”\textsuperscript{68} In fact his opinion of Canadians had stooped so low that he would risk bringing in new immigrants from the British Isles, despite the fact that the country barely had enough food and specie to provide for its current population. He felt that the introduction of Scottish immigrants outweighed the practical risks involved: “the population being thus increased by such loyal inhabitants, the ranks of militia would be filled with a brave and hardy race of men, whose desertion to the enemy would not be apprehended”\textsuperscript{69}

By trying to get out of the population everything possible to aid the War effort, Drummond would find himself constantly at odds with the will of the people. Perhaps this battle is best captured in Lt Governor Drummond’s constant proclamation to the people that they give their excess wheat to the army and not waste it on the distillation of spirits.\textsuperscript{70} Proclamations such as these would have little effect, but Drummond was willing to use more forceful measures to get what he needed. In February of 1814 Drummond would instigate the passage of bills calling for Martial Law and the suspension of habeas corpus in the country. He believed such efforts were necessary to get the needed supplies out of the population and to stop the rampant disloyalty and treason in the country.\textsuperscript{71} He would also commission Chief Justice John Beverly Robinson to prosecute trials for treason in the country in order to make an example to the population. In what would become known as the “Bloody Assize,” nineteen civilians would be prosecuted for treason, fifteen found guilty, and eight executed by public hanging, on the 20\textsuperscript{th} of July 1814.

\textsuperscript{68} Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 260-261.
\textsuperscript{69} Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 191.
\textsuperscript{70} Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 108.
\textsuperscript{71} Taylor, pg. 309-310.
message had been sent: the treasonous nature of the people the last few years would no longer be
tolerated.\textsuperscript{72}

Along with the usual problems of a lack of recruits willing to fight in the Canadian
Militia and desertion, new problems and detriments to the British War effort arose in 1813. Most
prominent and destructive among them was the explosion of paroles sought and given to
Canadians. Paroles refers to the well-recognized military agreement of the time that men
captured by the enemy in War could be released if they promised to give their written word not
to serve in the oppositions armed forces again. The person being paroled would be given a
certificate of proof to present to their government if needed. In almost every instance an army
would accept having been paroled as a legitimate reason to be exempt from military service.

The emergence of paroles first appeared at the capture of York in April of 1813, in
which the York Militia and the population, considered the stronghold of U.E. Loyalists,
surrendered almost immediately after the British regulars had retreated. At York 1,400 paroles
would be given out although the population of the city was only estimated to be 600 at that time.
This means that people came from outside the city in search of paroles.\textsuperscript{73} This same phenomenon
would be duplicated at the captures of Fort Erie and Fort George in the summer of 1813. At Fort
George only 503 Canadian Militia men would be present, but 1200 paroles would be given out.
At Fort Erie people were reported as having traveled over a hundred miles to attain a parole and
traveling one hundred miles in primitive Upper Canada was no small task. This flocking to attain
paroles is indicative of Canadians’ desire to avoid militia service. Unlike 1812, 1813 would see a
string of American victories in Canada, at York, Fort Erie and Fort George. In each of these

\textsuperscript{72} Archives Ontario. “Perceptions of the War of 1812: Identity, Diversity, Memory.” Exhibit in
the Helen McClung Exhibit Area at the Archives of Ontario, 2013.
\textsuperscript{73} Sheppard, “Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg. 140.
instances Americans would occupy Canadian soil for the first time. Perhaps the only reason this didn’t occur in 1812 was because there were no American victories that year in Upper Canada. By the end of the year 1813, 3000 paroles had been given out, excluding almost one half of the military age population from Militia service.74

Even men who had faithfully discharged their services in the year 1812 began to submit themselves to being paroled. Captain Abraham Nelles would submit to being paroled in December of 1813 despite there being only British victories at this time. This shows how those who originally had enthusiasm for service were now beginning to lose interest as the War dragged on.75 Certainly most who obtained these paroles had no idea how the process worked; they only saw it as an opportunity to evade Militia service. The fact that Governor General Sir George Prevost would issue a rare proclamation to the people at the beginning of 1814 about paroles indicates how severe this problem had become to the British War effort. In it he issued stern instructions that paroles given incorrectly would not be recognized and that their policy against any future offenders would be “to send all such useless and disaffected characters out of the country to the enemy…”76

The problem of paroles was both a military and civilian problem, further demonstrating the connection between the mood of the people and the performance of the Militia. The previously mentioned declarations of martial law, suspensions of habeas corpus and the “Bloody Assize” were very much a response to this prevalence of paroles. However, the damage had already been done, as almost half of the country now believed they were immune to militia service. This exacerbated the problems of the Canadian Militia in finding men for service and

75 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 39.
76 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 89.
then keeping them in duty. The response by the realist Gordon Drummond was to diminish the Militia’s role in the actual fighting. Although their impact on the fighting was almost negligible in 1812, it would further erode in 1813 and 1814 as this force weakened and more British regulars found their way to Canada.

An engagement at Black Rock in January of 1814 was typical of the Militia’s involvement in the fighting in the last half of the War. The engagement would deploy 970 regular British soldiers, 400 Indian Warriors, and 50 Militia. The Militia would comprise 3 of the 31 killed in action and 6 of the 72 wounded in action.77 Likewise, a proposed force for an attack on Sackets Harbor in the fall of 1814 would reveal proportionally similar numbers, with the militia making up 400 of the 3000 troops to be potentially deployed.78 More often than not the Canadian Militia began being used in non-combat duties. In the fall of 1813 both the York Militia and the Glengarry Light Infantry, considered two of Canada’s finest Militia units, would spend their time building roads for the regular force to travel upon.79 On top of building roads, they were also frequently used for transporting supplies to the regular British force. However, to the astonishment of General Drummond, this would sometimes prove too difficult a task as he frequently mentions how the “backwardness” of the Militia would preclude them from accomplishing even small tasks.80

Nonetheless, despite all this, there were still extraordinary instances in which the Canadian Militia would be called upon to fight. At perhaps the largest and most intense engagement of the War, the Battle of Lundy’s Lane in July of 1814, General Drummond and

77 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 72-74.
78 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 314.
79 Militia General Order July 6th 1813, William Dummer Powell Papers MG 23, H-I-4, Box 1, no. 1283, (LAC); Reverend Alexander Macdonnell to William Dummer Powell, December 18th, 1813, William Dummer Powell Papers MG 23, H-I-4, Box 1, no. 210, (LAC).
80 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 74.
American General Winfield Scott would be locked in fierce battle calling for the use of every possible man. William Hamilton Merritt’s unit of Provincial Dragoons from the Niagara District would fight through the night in pitch darkness by the side of the wounded General Drummond. Eventually Merritt and much of his unit would be captured and taken to Massachusetts as prisoners after running into the American line in the confusion of the night. Again, just as at Queenston Heights, when actually present to fight the Canadian Militia served with just as much courage and bravery as any other unit in the War of 1812.

**Joel Stone**

However, Merritt’s Provincial Dragoons would consist of only thirty-eight men and being a unit on horseback was highly atypical of the participation of the Canadian Militia. Perhaps a more accurate depiction of the Canadian Militia comes in the story of Joel Stone’s 2nd Leeds Militia, from the Johnstown District, near present day Gananoque, on the American border. The demographics of Stones’ unit matched the demographics of Canada as a whole, being mostly comprised of recent American immigrants, with a handful of U.E. Loyalists and immigrants from the British Isles. Stone, a U.E. Loyalists himself who had fought with the British in the American Revolution, was commissioned to raise a unit of Militia for his Leeds County. Although Stone exhibited enthusiasm for the position, he had a tough time transmitting this spirit to the rest of his community. The position would lead Stone to the brink of a mental breakdown, as it appeared at numerous instances that the unit Stone commanded really only existed in his imagination.

In June of 1813, General Drummond would call out Stone’s 2nd Leeds Militia to service for the first and only time during the War. In what needed to be their finest moment, Stone’s unit

---

81 Return of the 2nd Leeds Militia, 27 December 1814, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 2, no. 948, (LAC).
would muster only 70 men, which soon diminished as “the greater part of the men who had embodied soon deserted.”

To put this poor performance into perspective, in peacetime of June 1818, only a few years later, his unit would be able to muster 553 men. Clearly the prospect of actual fighting had dissuaded the majority of men in Leeds County from embodying. Stone, the ardent and often deluded Loyalist, would seek Court Martials for ten men who did not embody on this occasion. Trusting this prosecution to his second in command, Colonel Wiltse, he would be sorely disappointed. Despite their having clearly broken the rules, Wiltse would drop all the charges against the ten men. When confronted about this by Stone, Wiltse became insubordinate and attacked Stone personally.

Wiltse’s improper conduct would not stop there. Stone would commission a local merchant to make clothes for his militia unit; however, the man would soon defect with the money to the American side of the border. Again once brought to trial, Wiltse would drop all the charges against the man. Realizing the incompetence of his surrounding officers, Stone began to seek outside help to bring his unit to a proper sense of duty. His only expenditures reported for the first half of the year 1814 was for hiring men to go out and find deserters. These expenditures to find men who had deserted came at a time when Stone reported that there was a “great want of funds in the public department.”

For his use of funds during the War and partly

82 Joel Stone to Gordon Drummond, Jan. 27, 1814, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 70 (LAC).
83 Return of the Militia of Upper Canada, November 24th, 1818, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 2, no. 1537 (LAC).
84 Joel Stone to Gordon Drummond, Jan. 27, 1814, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 905-906, (LAC).
85 Expenditures for the 2nd Leeds Militia, July 1814, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 928, (LAC).
86 Joel Stone to Gordon Drummond, Jan. 27, 1814, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 73 (LAC).
due to his unpopularity, the Government would investigate Stone after the War. In his trial, in which he was cleared of all charges, he described his Militia’s primary duties:

Many officers were from time to time employed sitting on court martial’s trying delinquents and many noncommissioned officers and privates were on duty guarding, escorting and bringing in the said delinquents.  

Stone’s rag-tag Militia unit would serve primarily as a home guard, mustering to full service once and never seeing any real action. However, perhaps the most shocking part of this story is that this service would become an extraordinary tool for advancement after the War. Militia service became a litmus test for rising up the social ladder in Upper Canada, as men such as Samuel Kettsey would seek out Stone after the War for recommendations to future employers detailing his faithful service in the Militia. Stone himself would receive a lucrative commission from the Government “for amending and repairing the public highways in this province.” Despite not having done anything substantial to contribute to the War effort, both Kettsey and Stone would be treated like heroes after the War and receive the perks of social advancement in a society where few such opportunities existed.

A Selective Memory

The explanation of this absurd phenomenon is what has become known as the “militia myth.” Despite the Canadian peoples’ clearly disloyal, negligent and damaging effects on the British War effort, the story would be remembered quite differently. Before the War had even ended, political-minded Tories in the capital of York would use selective memory to try and spin

---

87 Joel Stone testimony to the Adjutant General, July 1818, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 1193 (LAC).
88 Samuel Kettsey to Joel Stone, 27th April 1815, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 898 (LAC).
89 Sir Francis Gore to Joel Stone, December 1815, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 975 (LAC).
the efforts of the Canadian population in the defense of Canada. This was done to create an impression to British officials that the U.E. Loyalists had actually done something and thus were deserving of rewards and compensation for their services to the British Crown. In December of 1812, the powerful Reverend John Strachan delivered an influential sermon at York in which he credited the inhabitants of Upper Canada for having solely and courageously defeated the American invaders, “without the assistance of men or arms, except a handful of regular troops...”90 It was rhetoric such as this, from influential individuals such as Strachan, that re-cast the involvement of the Canadian Militia from their true dismal performance to being the saviors of Upper Canada. Despite having done nothing, Samuel Ketssey and Joel Stone would reap the benefits of this political spin in the post-War period. The effect was that the real story presented above became lost, in memory, as this fake militia myth emerged to serve the narrow purposes of a few ambitious men.

This spin would only accelerate after the War had concluded. The militia myth was first picked up and broadcast by members outside of John Strachan’s immediate political circle in a series of letters in the Montreal Herald called “VERITAS” between April and June 1815. At the time British officials were receiving praise and being credited with having defeated the American invasion. John Richardson, a personal enemy of these British officials, challenged this praise by promoting John Strachan’s militia myth instead. He sought to make Canadians believe that it was the yeoman farmer of Canada, not British leaders, who rose up and defeated the American invaders.91 For a number of reasons this rhetoric was successful. This created an environment very much like the United States after the Revolution, where people would

90 An address pronounced after the Sermon, York, December 22nd, 1812, seen in Hitsman, pg. xvii.
91 Arajs, pg. 101.
hyperbolize their contributions to the War effort in order to conform to this popular story being promoted. Despite being far from the truth, once adopted by the people, this myth would catch fire in Canadian social memory.\textsuperscript{92}

Part of the reason for this tremendous success is that it appears a plausible explanation for the outcome of the War. The conquest of Canada had appeared such a foregone conclusion, that when it did not occur it was shocking. Looking for answers, people were willing to believe the rhetoric that it had been the strong effort of Canadians that had tipped the scales. Preoccupied by Napoleon in Europe and half a world away, most in Britain had to take the Canadians word for it. Effective at convincing the British, for Canadians, embracing this myth creates a usable past that some cannot help but seize upon.\textsuperscript{93} This would give this story longevity, being perpetuated through a form of ancestor worship for generations after. Organizations such as the Loyal Canadian Society, established by the sons of U.E. Loyalists, would perpetuate this fallacy by honoring their father’s “contributions” to the War of 1812 in a manner that wholly embraced the militia myth. This effort can be seen in their mission statement: “to form a society to keep in perpetuation those associations that were nearest and dearest to our forefathers and cherished by us and to install in the minds of the children the same principles.”\textsuperscript{94}

A firm part of Canadian social memory, this myth would also come to dominate historical scholarship as well. After the War, the few but proud veterans of militia service would tell stories of their actions in battle, while the majority of the population who did not serve

\textsuperscript{92} Charles Royster, \textit{A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783}, Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1996; see for details on America’s “militia myth”

\textsuperscript{93} Sheppard, “Enemies at home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg.2.

\textsuperscript{94} Robert F Nelles Constitution of the Loyal Canadian Society, 1847, F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds, Microfilm 1-6, (AO).
remained silent.\textsuperscript{95} For generations after the War, historians would rely on these veteran accounts to tell the story of the Canadian population in the War of 1812. The effect was an inflation of the Canadian’s role in the conflict, which made heroic stories appear as the norm. In 1842, John Richardson would write his \textit{War of 1812}, relying heavily on his own highly atypical personal experiences.\textsuperscript{96} Taught in the newly formed public school system, Richardson’s depiction of his unique case would perpetuate the militia myth for a generation of school children. In the end, combined with ancestor worship, almost all-Canadian scholarship on the subject in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early part of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century embraced the militia myth.

Despite the effectiveness of this myth, it is wildly different from the historically accurate truth, which the record of this chapter attests to. When all the facts are presented, there is really no great debate at all. Only through this re-casting of events using selective memory and political spin is there any debate to be had. Unfortunately, this myth would have a greater effect on the long-term consequences of this War than the actual events themselves. The militia myth would deceive future generations of Canadians and contribute to many of the toxic and harmful side-effects of the post-War period that will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis. However, before this a more immediate question needs to be addressed. If the Canadian people did not save Upper Canada, who did? No account of the War of 1812 is complete without an analysis of the role and participation of Native Americans in this conflict.

\textsuperscript{95} Arajs, pg.4.
\textsuperscript{96} John Richardson, \textit{Richardson’s War of 1812 with Notes and a Life of the Author}. Toronto: Historical Publishing, 1902.
Produced in 1896 by John David Kelly, a member of the generation after the War, this painting is meant to capture Brock’s famous last words at the Battle of Queenston Heights. Originally, J.B. Glegg, present at the Battle, reported Brock’s last words as being “my fall must not be noticed or impede my brave companions from advancing to victory.” A few days after the Battle, on October 27th, 1812, the Montreal Mercury would report that “he cried out to some person near him to push on the York Volunteers.” As seen in this painting, the perpetrators of the militia myth would spin this rhetoric to be remembered by generations of Canadians as: “push on ye brave York Volunteers.” Ironically, there is little evidence to support any of these versions of history, as Brock was struck directly in the heart and most likely died immediately.

This painting of General Brock’s death at the Battle of Queenston Heights is one of many romantic depictions of Canadian history done by C.W. Jefferys in the first half of the twentieth century. Much of his work would make it into children’s history textbooks, exhibiting to another generation of Canadian school children a glorious past in the War of 1812. These paintings show how the militia myth has lasted well into the twentieth century.

---

Chapter Two: Native American Involvement

Before the War, Americans of all backgrounds had beamed with confidence in their military prowess against the British. In retirement, Thomas Jefferson would predict that “the acquisition of Canada, this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching.”¹ This confidence was not unfounded, as the 2.5 million Americans at this time heavily outnumbered the less than 100,000 subjects in all of British Canada.² Militarily, the picture was not any prettier, as there were only 1,200 British troops available in Upper Canada to defend a border that stretched the entirety of the Great Lakes. This grim scenario led high command to a strategy that was essentially to sacrifice Upper Canada in order to defend the old citadel of Quebec City. Given this situation, American “War Hawks” such as Henry Clay would find it easy to convince the nation “that the militia of Kentucky are alone competent to place Montreal and Upper Canada at your feet.”³

So, why did Upper Canada not fall? How were the British able to overcome such tremendous odds to resist not one, but three American invasions? Certainly, the Canadian population was not responsible for overcoming these odds, and although Brock and the few British regulars acted bravely, out-soldiering their American counter-parts, their efforts alone could never have been enough. The reason taking Upper Canada was not a “mere matter of marching” was due to the tremendous effort and aid of Britain’s Indian allies. Ranging from the Mohawk tribe of the Grand River in Upper Canada, to the Sioux under Little Crow in North

³ Allen, pg. 118.
Dakota, these Native American warriors decisively tipped the scales in the favor of the British and prevented the conquest of Upper Canada.

This tremendous contribution to the defense of Canada between 1812 and 1815 is duly acknowledged and recognized by the Government’s bicentennial campaign. The message is clear: that the efforts of Indians in this conflict were crucial, as “without the alliance with First Nations during the war, the defence of Canada would probably not have been successful. First Nations played instrumental roles in many important victories…”4 As with the Canadian Militia, the website’s depiction of major battles mentions the contributions of Indian warriors at every possible instance, even naming specific tribes when applicable. In fact, in the Government sponsored film series, *Canada 1812: Forged in Fire*, of the six people featured, two of them are people of Native American background. The website even acknowledges that most were not directly fighting to defend Upper Canada, but that most, like Tecumseh, were motivated by their own personal goals.

This depiction of the Indian’s participation and motivations is perfectly in line with the recent scholarship on this same subject. After the Civil Rights movement of the 1960’s helped remove racial prejudice, works such as A.L. Burt’s *The United States, Great Britain, and British North America from the Revolution to the Establishment of Peace after the War of 1812*. 5 Building off of this, Pierre Berton’s *War of 1812: Flames Across the Border* (1981), began to credit the British-Native

---


American alliance as the primary reason for the successful defense of Canada.\textsuperscript{6} This trend would culminate in Alan Taylor’s \textit{Civil War of 1812} (2010), which identifies Britain’s Indian allies as the key to repulsing the first American invasion in 1812, when Upper Canada was at its most vulnerable.\textsuperscript{7}

Scholarship would also agree with the bicentennial’s acknowledgement that most Indians who participated in the War were not directly motivated to defend Upper Canada. Robert Allen’s \textit{His Majesty’s Indian Allies} (1993) puts forth that the British Indian Department’s agents and resources were responsible for channeling Native American warriors into the conflict.\textsuperscript{8} Counter to this, John Sugden’s \textit{Tecumseh: a Life} (1998) believes that the Native Americans, under Tecumseh’s Confederacy, had already begun their War against the Americans at the Battle of Tippecanoe in 1811.\textsuperscript{9} He puts forth that this earlier War would eventually merge into the British’s War effort in 1812. However, where recent scholarship and the bicentennial begin to diverge is in their depiction of the lasting effects of this War on Native Americans as a group. Full of rhetoric on this War’s long-term effects on Canadians, the bicentennial becomes strangely quiet when it comes to its Indian allies. The only mention of the fate of the Indians after the War comes in a brief paragraph on the website:

> While First Nations rights, as they stood in 1811 were guaranteed, the dream of many First Nations to carve out a territory in north-western North America that would be free from further American encroachment was not to be realized. Nevertheless, by choosing to resist the American invasion and side with what became Canada, First Nations helped

---

create the foundation for modern Canada, including its respect for the rights of Aboriginal Peoples.¹⁰

This oddly convoluted description paints a rosy picture of the War’s lasting effects, while at the same time implying that all those who participated in the defense resided in Canada after the War. Most historians would agree with the first part that this War led to the demise of any realistic hopes of an Indian nation or confederation on the North American continent. However, the bicentennial’s additional claim – that by allowing for the survival of modern Canada, Native Americans secured better rights for themselves after the War – has received less attention in the historical literature. The most recent works do not seem to support this conclusion, as Robert Allen states that the British dissolved their half-century alliance with the Indians after the War in order to effect good relations with the United States. John Sugden exhibits how the War of 1812 was the beginning of the end for the Shawnee Indians on their ancestral lands. Finally, Alan Taylor concludes that Canadian Indian policy would begin to match that of American Indian policy for the sake of alleviating tension between the two nations.¹¹

Exploring the effects of this War on the Indians who participated in this conflict and the villages associated with them will be the primary focus of this chapter. Along with briefly expanding upon the reasoning for why the Native Americans had such a tremendous impact on the outcome of this War and what motivated them to do so, this chapter will assess the effects of the War on the Indian veterans of the War and their larger connections. Since service by the Indians was not confined by international boundaries, this analysis will try to portray the conditions of Indians on both sides of the border. In order to assess the bicentennial’s message,

¹¹ Allen, pg. 193; Sugden, pg. 348; Taylor, pg. 438.
there will be a particular focus on the effects of British-Indian policy after the War on these veterans. I will try to identify the lasting effects of this alliance between Indians and their British subjects in Upper Canada for both groups. This analysis and assessment will not focus on the Indians as a homogenous group, but instead upon specific communities, evaluating how each tribe was affected by the aftermath of the War.

**Defying the Odds and Tipping the Scales**

The fact that the War of 1812 hinged upon Indian warriors, who lacked contemporary military technology and used primitive fighting tactics, may seem a bit odd, but then again most events of the War of 1812 defy common logic. What the Indians lacked in technology, they more than made up for psychologically. While British subjects in Upper Canada held an intense fear of American ideals, Americans held an equally intense fear of Native American warriors. Their distinguished fighting prowess and well-known practice of mutilating corpses instilled an intense fear in their American enemy. They were quick to turn and run at the possibility of un-Christian like mutilation by Indian braves. This fear worked two ways, both propelling them into conflict with the Indians, while at the same time causing them often to turn and run once the conflict began. Along with their own disorganization, this fear would be the American’s greatest enemy in the opening campaigns of the War of 1812.

British Generals were quick to realize that “the dread the Yankees have of the Indians is incredible.” They began to incorporate this into their battle plans at key moments, which in effect gave them an edge over their opponent and saved Upper Canada in the year 1812. At the

---

12 Taylor, pg. 137.
13 Charles Askins to Captain Alexander Hamilton, August 30th, 1812, F 775 Miscellaneous Collections, (AO), as seen in “Perceptions of the War of 1812: Identity, Diversity, Memory.” Exhibit in the Helen McClung Exhibit Area at the Archives of Ontario, 2013.
capture of Detroit and the Battle of Queenston Heights, two pivotal battles in 1812, the outcome hinged upon the psychological effect of Native warriors. At the capture of Detroit, General Brock would position his Indian allies so they were in plain sight to General Hull. Once the psychological damage was done, Brock would play upon this fear by delivering a message to those inside the Fort that “you must be aware, that the numerous body of Indians who have attached themselves to my troops, will be beyond control the moment the contest commences.”

By threatening an Indian massacre, this fear helped produce Hull’s otherwise inexplicable surrender of Detroit in 1812.

In the same year, at the Battle of Queenston Heights, with General Brock lying dead and the York Militia decidedly subdued, it seemed as though the battle was lost. However, Mohawk Indians would arise at the right moment to save the day. As “the first in advance,” they would strike fear into the invading Americans with “their terrific war whoops,” causing most to turn and run, some even jumping off the heights of the cliff in order to avoid the Indians. Just the sound of their voices was enough to break the undisciplined American troops, allowing time for British reinforcements to arrive and prevent the Americans from gaining a vital foothold on Canadian soil.

In the instances in which the Americans did not turn and run, the Indians proved themselves to be expert soldiers, with a will to fight superior to that of the Canadian Militia. In 1812, while the Canadian Militia deserted en masse after Hull’s Proclamation, Tecumseh kept his Indian warriors “faithful” to the cause, impressing upon the British Generals that unlike the

---

16 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 4, pg. 119.
Militia, he and his warriors could be trusted as a dependable ally. Brock would eventually comment on Tecumseh that “a more sagacious or a more gallant warrior does not I believe exist.” Others such as John Norton, Robert Dickinson, and Main Poc would fight with a distinction in the year 1812, “deserving of monuments to their memories.” While most Upper Canadians remained focused on their wheat harvests, as many as ten thousand Native Warriors came out to prevent the conquest of Canada. These ten thousand, well-trained and veteran fighters would more than make up for the ten thousand Canadian Militia that Brock had believed he needed, but never came to fruition.

Their Own Cause

Of this 10,000, almost eighty-five percent, 8,410, were commonly referred to as “Western Indians,” meaning they resided around the Great Lakes, predominantly in United States territory. So, why would Indians, who resided outside of Upper Canada, come to defend a colony, most of whose inhabitants didn’t come out to fight? The answer to this requires an analysis of the Indians not as a whole, but rather of individual villages and tribes. Spanning such a large geographical distance, the Indians who came to fight and defend Upper Canada were motivated by a diversity of reasons. Perhaps the most well-known and publicized are those who came to fight under Tecumseh’s Confederacy. Tecumseh would recruit Indians from all over the Ohio Valley to his cause of stopping American encroachment upon their lands through a united Indian nation. Coupled with religious overtones from his brother Tenskwatawa, or the Prophet, Tecumseh would preach unity in order to achieve this goal: “We must be united; we must smoke

17 Allen, pg. 134.  
18 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3.  
19 Colonel Clark’s Chronology of the War of 1812, Undated, F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds, Microfilm I-6 (AO).  
20 Allen, Appendix B.
the same pipe; we must fight each other’s battles; and more than all, we must love the Great Spirit: he is for us; he will destroy our enemies.”²¹

With elegant oratory “utterly impossible” to capture in words, Tecumseh would be successful at inciting numerous tribes and villages to fight for his mission. He would blame the miserable conditions of the Indians on American land hunger, saying, “the white men despise and cheat the Indians; they abuse and insult them; they do not think the red men sufficiently good to life.” However, he would direct their anger only at the Americans, describing the British as a friend: “Our Great Father…he will send his brave warriors against them; he will send us rifles, and whatever else we want – he is our friend, and we are his children.”²² At its peak, Tecumseh’s Confederacy would summon almost three thousand warriors to fight for him.²³ Urged on by British promises, Tecumseh would combine his efforts with the British in defense of Upper Canada once the War began. He and his followers were motivated by hopes that the British would aid them in establishing an independent Indian nation across the border after the War.

While some fought for the dream of an Indian nation, others both in the United States and Canada chose to participate for much simpler reasons. The Fox leader Black Hawk, residing in Illinois Territory, far from Upper Canada, was brought into the War by the efforts of British Indian agents and traders. Ignorant of War having occurred, Black Hawk would be lured in with goods by the British trader La Gutrie, and told, “that Col. Dixon was at Green Bay with twelve boats, loaded with goods, guns and ammunition.” He was then urged “to raise a party immediately and go to him.” Following the promise of goods and guns, once with Colonel

²² Ibid. pg. 45-47.
²³ Sugden, Chapter 8.
Dixon, he would be told that ‘your English Father has found out that the Americans want to take your country from you … we want all your warriors to join us.’ Ignorent of the larger context of the War, Black Hawk would follow Col. Dixon’s orders and go to fight alongside the British in Michigan Territory in the year 1812, even being given a medal for his services. During his time in Michigan Territory, Black Hawk would be told that if he helped defeat the Americans at Detroit, his lands in the Mississippi country would be secured for his people.\footnote{Black Hawk, \textit{Life of Black Hawk or Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak Dictated by Himself}. Edited by J. Gerald Kennedy. New York: Penguin Books, 2008, Autobiography, pg. 26-27.} Playing on Indian anger at the Americans and worries about the future of their lands, the rhetoric and promises of British Indian agents would channel Indians from all over the Great Lakes to the War effort.

The estimated 1,590 Indians from all over British Canada who joined the War effort took much more convincing than the Western Indians. Most of the Iroquois Indians residing in Upper Canada had given tremendous support to the British during the American Revolution, an effort for which they felt they were not properly compensated in the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Already upset with the British, a census of their Grand River Reservation by Indian Agent John Norton before the War reveals that there were almost twice as many women as men, with most women identifying as widows.\footnote{A Census of the Grand River Reservation, December 1805, F 440 John Norton Fonds, Microfilm, (AO).} This shows that they paid a huge price in human life for their assistance to the British in the American Revolution, a cost for which they received very little in return. Angry and depleted of men, they would refuse any British efforts to secure their support before the war, leading General Brock to call them “a fickle race.”\footnote{Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3.} However, after victories by the British at Fort Michillimackinaw and Detroit, the Iroquois Indians would be convinced that the British were serious in their efforts and actually had a chance to defeat the Americans. Realizing
an opportunity to further their own land claims, approximately three hundred Iroquois Indians, of
the Grand River Reserve, would follow Indian Agent John Norton to the Battle of Queenston
Heights.

Although each tribe had different motivations to join the War effort they had one thing in
common: they did not fight directly to defend Upper Canada for its British subjects. Much like
during the American Revolution, Indians fought for their own personal interests, which varied
depending on their unique local conditions. These personal interests included the dream of an
Indian nation, the promise of goods and rifles, or simply a chance to exact revenge on the
Americans. However, the British would prove themselves very good at manipulating these
personal interests to their own advantage. Whether offering promises, goods, or ammunition, the
British were primarily responsible for channeling into the conflict the estimated 10,000 Indians
that fought against the Americans in the War of 1812. One historian would put this phenomenon
very nicely:

The Indians were manipulated, but not duped, and a counter-argument of equal validity
could be presented to demonstrate and evaluate their manipulation of the British. Yet the
significant difference was that the British manipulation was successful.27

Regardless of their motivation to do so, Indian warriors would become the centerpiece of
Brock’s strategy for the defense of Upper Canada in the year 1812. While the Canadian Militia
failed miserably to live up to expectations, Britain’s Indian allies came to take their place.
Although originally urged to use “extreme moderation in the use of the Indians,” Brock would
ignore these racial prejudices, making securing the goodwill of the Indians his main objective.28
By thinking about only practical military concerns, Brock produced a strategy that was not only

27 Allen, pg. 184, 193.
28 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 100, 272.
open-minded and forward-thinking for the time, but also a viable means for the successful defense of Upper Canada. This success is something that Brock could not have achieved alone and surely could not have achieved had he placed the same reliance on the Canadian Militia. The irony is that these Indians warriors gave a decisive effort to defend a Province that its inhabitants seemed to care little about. If modern Canada owes its current existence to this War, then it is heavily indebted to the First Nations people of North America, not to its settlers of European descent.

**The Difference a Year Can Make**

During the War, almost all British subjects in Upper Canada were aware of this tremendous effort given by the Indians. Throughout the ranks of Government and military command, they would shower their new Indians allies with praise. Colonel Clark of the Second Lincoln Militia, an ardent Tory Loyalist, not known for demagoguery, would comment that “our brave Indian allies…it must be said of them they aided in the success of the British troops on all occasions.” Politician and future Reform Party leader, William W. Baldwin, recognized the gratitude owed to the Indians after the year 1812: “I fear also that the Govt at Home may neglect the interests of the Indian Nations…it is to them we are indebted for the safety of all the western posts of the Province to this day – for without them even Genl Brock could have affected nothing.” For most Upper Canadians of power and importance, the Indians had saved their lives or even worse in their minds from the threat of living under radical American republicanism. After the first year of the War, Upper Canadians were well aware of the debt they

---

29 Colonel Clark’s Chronology of the War of 1812, Undated, F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds, Microfilm 1-6 (AO).
owed the Indians, prompting them to begin making promises to the Natives in order to keep their support for the remainder of the War.

Eventually, these promises and gratitude by powerful men in Upper Canada would make their way, through correspondence, to the eyes of some of the most powerful men on the planet in Great Britain. Brock, now a hero with political clout for his victory at Detroit, would inform Governor General Sir George Prevost of the promises he made in order to assure Native support: “I have already been asked to pledge my word that England would enter into no negotiation in which their (the Indians) interests were not consulted.”31 Impressed by this language, Governor General Sir George Prevost then informed the Earl of Bathurst, the former Foreign Secretary and current President of the Board of Trade, that Brock “has repeatedly represented to me in the strongest terms the greatest assistance he has derived from the services of the different Indian tribes settled in and near the Michigan territory.” He therefore mentioned “a sense of obligation,” that those in Upper Canada now owed to the Indians in the post-War period, impressing upon him “the necessity of conciliating their future friendship” in order to create a barrier between Upper Canada and future American aggression.32

In this language, the notion of an independent Indian buffer state was beginning to take form. Although not a new concept, it was beginning to command the attention of some very powerful people in the year 1812. For the first time this notion seemed a realistic possibility. The Indians would be motivated to continue the fight against the Americans in 1813 by the growth of these promises and rhetoric. Unfortunately, the years 1813 and 1814 would not be as kind to the Indians, as their importance and thus their leverage in negotiations would begin to unravel. After the death of Tecumseh at the Battle of the Thames in October of 1813, the participation of

32 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 3, pg. 36.
Indians who dreamed of an Indian Confederacy would drop off significantly. Missing this leadership, worn down, and vulnerable to American attacks on their families, Indian participation would dip drastically in the latter half of the War. Far removed from the rhetoric of 1812, Lt Governor Drummond would comment in 1814 that “experience has taught me that Indians are not a disposable force and far from a manageable one when brought into action. Their cooperation is never to be relied on.”

Saying Thank You

Heroes in 1812, unreliable in 1814: the trend was apparent. By 1853 Upper Canadian perception of the Indians had changed drastically. Far gone were the days of praise, gratitude, and indebtedness. At a dinner of the Loyal Canadian Society in 1853, commemorating the Battle of Queenston Heights, no credit would be given to the Indians for their participation. As previously mentioned, it had been the Americans’ intense fear of Indian violence that prompted their retreat from the cliffs during the Battle of Queenston Heights. However, in his keynote speech, William Hamilton Merritt credited this entirely to his own Second Lincoln Militia, who according to him, came up behind the enemy and “the Americans of course ran away and some fell down the Banks and broke their arms and others their legs, and one man hung…” Gone from this depiction and the rest of Merritt’s speech is any credit to the efforts of the Indians; instead Merritt actually took credit for something they had done. It appeared that William W. Baldwin’s fear in 1813, that the Indians efforts would be neglected, had come true by 1853.

So what had changed? How had Upper Canadians gone from showering the Indians with praise during the War, to neglecting their efforts entirely in the next generation? The answer to

---

33 Cruikshank, DHCNF Vol. 9, pg. 189.
34 William Hamilton Merritt speech to Loyal Canadian Society, October 13th 1853, F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds, Microfilm 1-6 (AO).
this is a Shakespearian like betrayal of their former ally by Upper Canadians both in actions and in memory. The “militia myth” put forth by John Strachan for political purposes had robbed the Indians of the credit they deserved, instead giving it to the lackluster Canadian Militia. As a result British subjects in Upper Canada would forget the debt that they owed the Indians for their current situation and survival. By marginalizing the role of the Indians and inflating their own, Upper Canadians were able to justify the fate they had left their once faithful ally to. For many Indians, their involvement in the defense of Upper Canada had spelled the beginning of the end for their people. Perhaps, the great irony of this War is in how people were rewarded for their services after the conflicts conclusion. On the one hand, the Native Americans gave tremendous support to the War effort, but received very little in return; while on the other hand, a select few Upper Canadians gave very little to the War effort, but received very much in return.

The first dagger in the back of the Indians would come in the Treaty of Ghent in 1815. Although the delegates’ original platform was to accept nothing without Native American rights and land guarantees, there would be no Native American delegates present to make sure this would occur. After negotiations began to stall over this issue, the British Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, knowing full well of the contributions the Indians had given, impressed upon the delegates that this War had become an “inconvenience,” instructing them “that we should avoid anything, as far as may be in our power, which may increase our difficulties in concluding it.” Since American hatred of the Indians was so intense, this instruction knowingly told the delegates to abandon the issue of Indian rights and land guarantees, in order to end what had become for the British an expensive and inconvenient war. The result was a peace treaty that ignored any of the promises the British had made to Indians during the War. By calling for a

---

35 Berton, pg. 792-793.
36 Berton, pg. 799.
return to the “status quo ante bellum,” meaning a return to the boundaries of all parties involved as they stood before the War, the treaty marked a stunning defeat for one party only, the Indians. Although the Indians had fought for the defense of British territory in battle, the British would not fight for their rights at the negotiating table.

Although the Treaty of Ghent called for a return to pre-War boundaries, the Americans would violate the Treaty by consolidating all of the land claims over the Indians that they had furthered during the War. The Americans would move to isolate the Indians in the “Old Northwest” from the British, by cutting off the fur trade between the two and building American forts where British posts had once stood. The Indians would look to the British for assistance, but none was to be given. The Government in Britain and Upper Canada was not willing to prosecute the Americans for breaking the Treaty. They remained focused on saving their own skins and were not willing to risk anything for people who only a few years before had risked so much for them. They would give only token support as British Indian agents would offer petty gifts. The Government’s greatest gesture was to provide relief for Indian warriors who could prove service during the War; however, this only applied to those residing in Upper Canada, making up only 15% of those who fought in the War. At this time the Indians didn’t need gifts, they needed action. The British would give no real support for the Indians to overcome these American threats to their way of life. With this decision, they had in effect abandoned 85% of their former allies, residing in the United States, to this marginalized fate. Little Crow of the Sioux would capture this post-War relationship perfectly:

After we have fought for you, endured many hardships, lost some of our people and awakened the vengeance of our powerful neighbors, you make peace for yourselves,
leaving us to obtain such terms as we can. You no longer need our service; you offer us these goods to pay us for having deserted us. But no, we will not take them; we hold them and yourselves in equal contempt.\textsuperscript{40}

The postwar experiences of Black Hawk would attest to this awakening of vengeance. Having little contact with Americans before the War, he would begin to see an escalation in violence between his people and the Americans as a result of the War. For Indian attacks on American settlements during the War, such as the Fort Dearborn Massacre, American frontiersmen would take revenge on Indian civilians, while most of the men were away fighting in Upper Canada. Upon returning home from fighting for the British at Detroit, Black Hawk was informed that the Americans had captured his adopted son, shot him in the face numerous times, then stabbed and scalped him. The response by Black Hawk for this was to raise a war party of thirty braves and attack American settlers for revenge.\textsuperscript{41} In Black Hawk’s culture anything less would have been disrespectful to the dead, especially his adopted son.\textsuperscript{42} As seen here, these revenge killings by the Americans would in turn fuel more revenge killings by the Indians, leading to an escalated cycle of violence on the frontier, which had its roots in the War of 1812. Incited to War against the Americans by the British, Indians such as Black Hawk would find themselves in a cycle of violence they did not understand: “and for my part, I never had anything to do with this war. The Americans never killed any of our people before the war, nor interfered with our hunting grounds; and I resolved to do nothing against them!”\textsuperscript{43}

Along with this cycle of violence, without British protection and a belief that the Indians had finally been pacified, a wave of American settlers would begin to flood onto Indian lands in

\textsuperscript{40} Indian Council at Drummond Island, 29-30 June 1816, the speech of Little Crow as quoted in Allen, pg. 176
\textsuperscript{41} Black Hawk Autobiography, pg. 30-32.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid. pg. 49.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid. pg. 35.
the Ohio Valley.\textsuperscript{44} For Black Hawk, the War of 1812 and his involvement would mark a turning point in the conditions of his people. Black Hawk would refer to his situation before the War as blessed, as his people had uncontested control of their lands. However, after the War, due to British abandonment and white migration, it had changed “from what it was in those days! Then were we as happy as the buffalo on the plains – but now, we are as miserable as the hungry, howling wolf in the prairie!”\textsuperscript{45} This white migration would eventually cut off the land and resources needed for the Indians to maintain their cherished way of life. This devastating situation would eventually lead Black Hawk to rebel against the Americans, in the Black Hawk War of 1832. During this conflict, or rather massacre of his people, Black Hawk would get no support from the British, leaving him to his inevitable fate: “I felt the humiliation of my situation; a little while before, I had been the leader of my braves, now I was prisoner of war! But had surrendered myself!”\textsuperscript{46} While the politicians in London and Washington D.C. who had negotiated the peace had for the most part moved on from the War of 1812, the Indians who participated in the conflict were still feeling its harsh side-effects, even as late as 1832.

While their former “Western Indian” allies were reduced to impoverished conditions in the United States, the Indians of Upper Canada would not fare much better. In 1789 the British had distributed to the Indians around Fort Michillimackinaw: 100 guns, 3000 shot and ball, 5000 flints, and 1000 ounces of gunpowder.\textsuperscript{47} However, after the War things changed drastically, as peace with the United States meant British subjects in Upper Canada no longer needed the military support of the local Indians. Showering the Indians with gifts before and during the War,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Black Hawk Autobiography, pg. 46.
\item Ibid., pg. 87-88
\item Return of Indian Presents Proposed for the Post of Michillimackinac 1789, March 1788, F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds, Microfilm 7 “Indian Affairs” (AO).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
after the peace they were unwilling to faithfully honor the simplest requests of the Indians. Revealing of this new relationship, in 1816, famed Indian agent and adopted son of the Mohawk tribe on the Grand River, John Norton, would put in a request for guns and ammunition for his people. However, the request would be stalled significantly and it was not even clear if the order was processed at all. Norton, pressing for answers, would be told by the Commissariat Department that there is no reason to hurry the delivery, “since we are not now at War with the Americans.” Looking for alternatives, Norton would be told by his friend with connections to the Department that had he processed the order, it “would now been half way across the Atlantic Ocean.”

This little episode is telling of how much the Indians had dropped in significance soon after the War, as they no longer commanded the attention or respect of the leaders of Upper Canada.

Unfortunately, not being able to acquire guns from the Government in 1816 would pale in comparison to the struggles of the Indians in Upper Canada for the rest of the nineteenth century. Brainwashed by the militia myth and not present to see the Indians’ courageous efforts in Michigan Territory or in the Ohio Valley, the majority of Upper Canadians would remember a version of the War which prompted them to feel no sense of obligation to the Indians. This allowed them to quickly rewrite history and justify the miserable conditions of their former allies. This fit in nicely with their wish to appease the Americans, which they accomplished by making British-Indian policy in Upper Canada match that of the United States. Between 1815 and 1824 the Upper Canada Government would force 7.4 million acres of land cessions from its Native American population. By the 1820’s most of the 8,000 Indian inhabitants of Upper

---

Canada would be forced to live on reserves, which were very similar to their American counterpart.  

An analysis of the text of British-Indian and American-Indian treaties during this time period reveals that in language, they were almost identical. The only reasons these treaties in Upper Canada did not result in the frontier violence seen in the United States was because of geography and culture. Culturally, Americans and Canadians on the frontier would both exhibit racial prejudice against the Indians, but in the United States this was expressed in violence. Also, the simple fact of geography prevented violence, as in Canada, Indians could migrate north to avoid the stream of western migration, while in the United States, Indians could only travel west, following the stream of migration and inevitable conflict.

For their services in the War, the British would thank the Indians by abandoning them to their fate and appeasing their former enemy, adopting a similar discriminatory policy. As a result, by 1840, regardless of what side of the border they were on, Upper Canada’s saviors in 1812 were now reduced to miserable conditions. This description in 1845 of the Indians in Upper Canada could easily have been applied north or south of the border:

(Indians) no longer lead a wild and roving life in the midst of a numerous and rapidly increasing white population. Their hunting grounds are broken up by settlements; the game is exhausted, their resources as hunters and trappers are cut off; want and disease spread rapidly among them, and gradually reduce their numbers. To escape these consequences no choice is left but to remove beyond the pale of civilization or to settle and cultivate land for a livelihood.

Perhaps the strangest part about this story is that despite being ungraciously deserted by the British, the Indians of North America would exhibit a lasting connection towards the British.

---

50 Taylor, pg. 437  
52 Allen, pg. 108.  
53 Allen, pg. 181.
As a result of this alliance, consistently Indians in Canada would volunteer to aid the Government in military endeavors. In the next armed conflict in Upper Canadian history, the Rebellion of 1837, a “large number” of the Native population would come to march under Canadian military officers in subduing the Rebellion.\(^{54}\) In every Canadian War, Native Americans would serve at disproportionally high rates in the Canadian armed forces. This attachment to Britain did not apply only to those in Upper Canada, but also to the Indians residing in the United States. After the Treaty of Ghent, La Gutrie, the same person who brought Black Hawk into the War, would inform him that the British now wished for him to make peace with the Americans. Confused by a request that Black Hawk could not understand, he believed La Gutrie had no right to make him do this, as “I have done no more than I had a right to do, as a British subject.”\(^{55}\) Despite his terrible post-War conditions, Black Hawk would exhibit no hard feeling towards the British, continually calling them his “Great Father.” His war party would even be seen raising British flags in their preparation for battle with the Americans in 1832.\(^{56}\)

Evidence of this attachment can be seen as late as 1876. Following the Sioux’s victory at the Battle of the Little Big Horn, Teton Sioux warriors and their families would flee north to Canada seeking refuge. Upon their first contact with the North West Mounted Police, they would display the medals of King George III, given to them for their services to the British in the War of 1812. This gesture was meant to symbolize their belief that for their services in the War they possessed a right to enter Canada for refuge. Perhaps a good case study for this entire relationship, the Canadians would initially receive them warmly, but soon after expel them from

\(^{54}\) Colonel Clark’s Recollections of the Rebellion of 1837, Undated, F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds, Microfilm 1-6 (AO).
\(^{55}\) Black Hawk Autobiography, pg. 44.
\(^{56}\) Ibid. 69-70, 73.
the country, back to their fate with the Americans in North Dakota.\textsuperscript{57} This connection the Indians felt to the British was not because Britain was a faithful ally, but rather because they had no other options to seek help from. Stuck between a rock and a hard place, the Native population of North America would consistently choose to seek assistance from the lesser of two evils, in British Canada.

This connection the Indians felt to the British has led to an opinion in Canada today that their treatment of the Indians has been morally superior to their American neighbors. Although currently both Indians in the United States and Canada exhibit disproportionally high rates of poverty, unemployment, and alcoholism compared to the rest of the population, many in Canada do not make the connection that they bear responsibility for this.\textsuperscript{58} This responsibility comes from the fact that the War of 1812 was a watershed moment in determining this current fate. It presented the British a choice of whether or not to honor their promises to their faithful ally or abandon them to their former enemy. Often lost in this history is the fact that Britain and its Canadian subjects chose the latter option, deserting a people who had given them so much in order to preserve their own nation. By making this decision, Canadians have played a part in creating the current fate of Indians in the United States and Canada. Although some may consider Canada’s role to be morally superior to the Americans, at least the Americans never pretended to be the Indian’s friend.

\textsuperscript{57} Allen, pg. 195-196
\textsuperscript{58} Tremaine, pg. 8.
Another one of C.W. Jeffreys’ paintings of the War of 1812, this image would also be shown to generations of school children in their history textbooks. By casting Tecumseh and General Brock as friends and allies, this romanticized depiction ignores the promises the British broke to Tecumseh’s people after the War.

This depicts the decisive Battle of Bad Axe, in which American forces would rout Black Hawk’s war party, effectively ending the Black Hawk War of 1832. After being abandoned by his British allies to his American enemies, the plight of his people is captured in this engraving.

---

Chapter Three: Effects on Canadian Nationalism and Nationhood

It may differ depending upon whom you ask, but on balance Canadians lack a clear and popular foundation myth. Canadians have no one shining and glorious event they can look to as their founding moment. Unlike the United States, which emerged through a triumphant armed revolution, Canadian nationhood took generations and once achieved in 1867, did not even give Canada complete sovereignty. The whole story is rather bland, which the historian Robin Winks puts very nicely when he notes that “the United States became independent through revolution...Canada became independent through evolution.”¹ Perhaps what accounts for this absence in Canadian social memory is the fact that the one possible foundation myth Canada could have is not a glorious one. It is often forgotten that the American Revolution created the long-term basis for not one but two nations, the winners in America and the losers in Canada. Canada is very much the counterrevolution, being a safe haven for the most ardent of supporters who rejected American values and fought for loyalty to those of the British. Since no one wants to be a loser, it is hard to create a glorious past from losing a war. With this in mind it is no wonder Canadians have struggled to reach a consensus on a foundation myth.

This absence has created a modern Canada with identity issues. The lack of a distinctly Canadian ideology has led some politicians to try and “play psychiatrist” in order to discover a national identity.² Attempts by politicians to console Canadians usually come in the form of anti-Americanism, in which they try to find an identity through deprecating the United States. Since

Canada emerged as a counter to Revolutionary America, to some extent this response is only natural because in the words of the historical sociologist Martin Lipset, “without at least a touch of anti-Americanism, Canada would have no reason to exist.”\(^3\) One needs to look no further for proof of Lipset’s point than the sites Canada has chosen to commemorate. Almost one third of all historic sites in Canada commemorate an event that is anti-American in its message.\(^4\) It may help to think of the Canadian nation as a figurative younger brother, both attached to and resentful of the success of its older national brother across the border.

Into this dynamic and national consciousness steps the Canadian Government’s War of 1812 bicentennial commemoration campaign. Coincidentally or not, this campaign fits the country’s prescribed remedy perfectly. The bicentennial campaign tries to make a connection between the War of 1812 and Canadian nationhood by using this event to mark the beginning of sesquicentennial celebrations of the Canadian Confederation of 1867. The official commemoration website claims, indeed, that “the war gave Canadians a sense of shared experiences and relationships, paving the way for confederation 50 years later.”\(^5\) Prime Minister Stephen Harper himself “plays psychiatrist” in his official statement:

> The War of 1812 was a seminal event in the making of our great country…the events surrounding the 1812-1815 armed conflict laid the foundation for Confederation and established the cornerstones of many of our political institutions. In short, the Canada we know today would not exist had the invasions of 1812-15 not been repelled.\(^6\)

On top of this message, the recently updated War of 1812 exhibit at The Canadian War Museum in Ottawa presents the War as an explicit fight for Canadian autonomy. The exhibit

---

\(^3\) Lipset, pg. 53.
\(^4\) Winks, pg. 36.
boldly proclaims that if the Americans had succeeded in just one of their invasions, modern Canada would not exist. Further stressing the War’s importance in creating modern Canada, select ceremonies for Canadian citizenship are being performed at historic War of 1812 landmarks. As a part of the bicentennial, at these select ceremonies bookmarks are being given to participants with verses of Adam Muirs', *The Maple Leaf Forever*, a ballad that commemorates Canadian heroism in the War of 1812. Furthermore, understanding the events of the War of 1812 has been added to the Canadian citizenship exam study guide. It may seem odd, but for some immigrants their first experience of Canada will be about a War that heretofore has been known for being forgotten.

Clearly, these efforts to tie Canadian military prowess in the War of 1812 to a Canadian nationality reflect a larger attempt to remedy Canadians problems with identity and self-perception. It establishes a foundation myth for Canadians to seize upon that does not see them as the loser, but rather as the heroic and victorious defender. In sum the Government’s message makes the events of the War of 1812 appear as a usable past for Canadians and nothing less than a foundation myth that they can be proud of. So the questions become, how historically accurate is this depiction? Is this potential foundation myth plausible? Do Canadians have a glorious history to seize upon here?

In this chapter I will attempt to answer these questions by assessing the presumed connections between the effects of the War of 1812 and the emergence of a Canadian nation. As with the militia myth discussed in an earlier chapter, the perspectives of historians regarding this potential foundation myth have fluctuated over time. Influenced mostly by their belief in the accuracy of the militia myth and in part due to a form of ancestor worship, most historians from

---

the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pointed to the War of 1812 as a key event in the formation of a Canadian nation. Most would echo the opinion of Jean Murdoch Harper in his *The Annals of War: in Commemoration of the “Century of Peace”* (1914), that the War of 1812 was Canada’s “baptism by fire.” Others went so far as John Castel Hopkins in saying that the War of 1812 is to Canada what the American Revolution is to the United States.

The debunking of the militia myth after World War Two would lead to a watering down of this synopsis, but not a complete abandoning of it. George F Stanley in *The War of 1812: Land Operations* (1983) would acknowledge the limited role of the Canadian population in aiding the war effort, but still arrive at the conclusion that the War helped unite the population by creating a common experience that they could all rally around. Pierre Berton in *War of 1812: Flames Across the Border* (1981) would stay on this track by also agreeing that the Native American-British alliance was responsible for defending Canada and that the War led to nationhood and nationalism by creating the “Canadian way” for the population that lived through it.

However, the trend of scholarship would decidedly switch with David Mills’ original work *The Idea of Loyalty in Upper Canada, 1784-1850* (1988). The main focus of his work is the battle in Upper Canadian history surrounding the definition of loyalty. Although he does not explicitly say so, his portrait of the aftermath of the War as divisive and unproductive suggests

---

little direct connection between the War of 1812 and a Canadian nation. Focusing on the War of 1812, George Sheppard’s Profit Plunder and Paroles: A Social History of the War of 1812 in Upper Canada (1994), confirms Mills’ findings.\textsuperscript{13} Sheppard demonstrates through statistics that the War was a divisive experience for Canadians both economically and regionally.

The most recent significant contribution to this subject comes from Alan Taylor’s Civil War of 1812 (2010).\textsuperscript{14} Early in his work he clearly states that there is no certainty that the War was a fight for Canadian autonomy. Due to the reluctance of Southern slaveholders, the US Congress never openly declared its intentions to annex Canada if its invasion was successful. His analysis also puts forth that before the War the border between the USA and Canada was so permeable that it meant little to most people living in the border region. However, the War would cause this border to harden leading to an “iron frontier” existing between the USA and Canada. Ignoring Sheppard, Taylor also puts forth that the War developed stirrings of nationalism in Canada through a united hatred of the American invaders.

All in all, the synopsis of historians on this subject at present is not as clear as their opinion on the Canadian people’s involvement in the War. Collectively scholars have not reached a consensus about the War’s effects on both Canadian nationalism and nationhood. Even so, the most recent historical scholarship’s mixed opinions are squarely at odds with the unequivocal message of the bicentennial campaign, connecting the War to the formation of Canadian nationalism and a Canadian nation. This chapter will seek to build on recent scholarly trends and offer a convincing assessment of the War’s effects on nationalism and nationhood.


It will assess the War’s effects on nationhood by searching for plausible similarities or patterns in the post-War period that led to or can be seen in either modern Canada or Canada around the time of Confederation in 1867. Did the post-War period produce any rhetoric or sense of identity of a united Canada? Is there evidence of a sense of unity among Upper Canadians, or even more, co-operation and links between Upper and Lower Canada? This chapter will first look at the immediate effects of the War and its intended consequences on nationhood and nationalism. It will then look at the lasting effects of this War and its unintended consequences. It will end with an assessment of what these events mean to the War of 1812’s effects on Canadian nationhood and nationalism.

**Immediate Results of the War: Localism**

The most apparent immediate result of the War of 1812 in Upper Canada was that it brought with it a wave of destruction, which the infant colony was not ready to handle. The Board of Claims established for war losses reveals that the total damage cost in numbers amounted to $390,152. To put this into perspective, the annual revenue of Upper Canada in the years before the war was $8,000.\(^{15}\) On top of this, during the War the price of essential goods increased to four times the normal amount and sometimes more. This hit the pocketbooks of inhabitants very hard, while also leading to hoarding of goods, which in effect caused some people to go without food or basic requirements of civilized living for long periods of time.\(^{16}\) Furthermore, great damage was done to people’s property in the direct path of the fighting. Newark, the third most populous city in the Colony, would never recover from being reduced to rubble during the War. The effects of this destruction and people’s wartime experiences were so

---


intense that referring to an event as either before or after the War became a standard measurement of time in Upper Canada.

Some historians blame this destruction on the Americans by noting that “they carried off all they could seize, even the household furniture, burnt a great number of private houses, and cut down most of the fruit trees.”\(^{17}\) One would think that this destruction would rouse a united anti-American hate and identity for the whole of Upper Canada; however, for some, like Joel Stone’s private crop field, this damage was the result of the British troops who were defending them.\(^{18}\) Who was actually responsible for this destruction is important because it determines of whom these people directed their anger at in the post-War period. Sheppard demonstrates that of the claims filed for damages after the War, only 50.4% of single perpetrator claims were the result of enemy American troops or their Indian allies. British troops or Indian allies caused the rest of the damage, with 49.6% of single perpetrator claims. The fact that the British make up such a large number of those who allegedly perpetrated the damage during the War means that almost half of the people would be directing their anger at the British, not the American invaders. It is reasonable to ask, how could the destruction unite the nation around an anti-American sentiment if Americans only caused half of the damage?

Furthermore, the damage and destruction done to Upper Canada was not distributed evenly, as those in the West were affected much more than those in the East. Of the total damage done to the country, 82.7% of the damage would be in the four Western-most districts - Western, Niagara, London, and Gore - while damage in the four most Eastern districts - Eastern, Johnston, Newcastle, and Midland - would total just 12.8%. For proof of this difference in wartime

\(^{17}\) Taylor, pg. 443

\(^{18}\) Schedule No. 3 Losses and Depredations sustained by the subscriber for the year 1812-1814, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 1, no. 935, (LAC).
experience, one needs to look no further than the previous chapter to see how Joel Stone in the Eastern District and William Hamilton Merritt in the Niagara District had such completely different wartime experiences. On top of this West - versus - East divide in wartime experiences, each district saw different proportions of who was responsible for damage. For instance in the London District the majority of damage was caused by the enemy, in the Gore District the majority was caused by Indians, and in the Home District there was an even split between enemy, Indian, and British. We might again ask, how could the War be a uniting event for the population if each district experienced the War in such different ways?

In 1815, when the War had just ended, the answers to these questions were not clear. These statistics alone are not enough to make a definitive conclusion, because destruction can always be cleaned up. If the damage was repaired rapidly, people’s property restored, and the economy stimulated, people would quickly forget about these damages and move on. If they were not, it might still take a generation until the effects of this destruction would become clear. The choice on which path Upper Canada would follow was therefore up to its next generation of leaders.

**Immediate Results of the War: The Next Generation of Leaders**

Unlike during the War, the people of Upper Canada were left to solve this problem of repairing their devastated country on their own. After defeating Napoleon in Europe, Great Britain’s depleted treasury prompted them to enter a period of great austerity. They were exceptionally hesitant to offer any expenditure to a colony on the other side of the world, especially when it had recently demonstrated only lukewarm loyalty at best. The majority of the effort to rebuild Upper Canada would have to come internally. For scores of men who are now

---

legends in the history of Canada, the War of 1812 would act as a springboard to propel them from obscurity to positions of great influence. In effect, like most wars do, the War of 1812 would be responsible for producing the next generation of leaders in Upper Canada.

Men such as John Strachan and John Beverly Robinson would evolve from being virtually unknown before the War to a collection of the most powerful men in British North America. All would use service and loyalty in the War of 1812 as the means to propel their advance up the ladder. During the siege of York in 1813, Strachan would gain a reputation and the admiration of the people for his tireless efforts in protecting private property and providing for the needy. Although never firing a shot or serving in any military role, this would transform Strachan from being a little-known Anglican priest and grammar school headmaster to celebrity status, as the fiery bishop who defended the capital. His close friend and colleague would later comment that this moment “raised him to notice and flattery which soon opened his mind to ambition of power, wealth, and distinction.”

John Beverly Robinson would also see a rapid rise to power, becoming acting Attorney General of Upper Canada in 1812 at the age of twenty-one. For his previous service in the York Militia and executing what is known as the “Bloody Assize” he would be given the role permanently. Robinson would remain a powerful figure from the age of twenty-one until his death in 1863. Without the War of 1812, neither of these men would have been able to catapult their careers so rapidly. These men would translate this newfound influence to determine a new platform for their Tory Party. Having stood since the formation of Upper Canada, the Tory Party was comprised of conservative minded U.E Loyalists and recent British immigrants. Their ideology viewed all post-1783 settlers with suspicion, and all dissent as disloyal republicanism.

---

reflecting an exclusive definition of loyalty pertaining only to a ruling elite. For these men and particularly these emerging leaders, the War of 1812 had the effect of confirming, heightening, and crystallizing their ideology. For them the internal threat to Canada during the War confirmed their belief that they needed a strong authoritarian government in which dissent would not be tolerated.\textsuperscript{21} They now found it essential to the survival of the nation to implement their new purified ideology in government. Thus the first step these new leaders took was to radicalize the Tory Party by preying on the nation’s memories of vulnerability during the War and instilling a fear in fellow Tories of all outside groups.

These men would be placed in a perfect position to implement their views by the return of the previously mentioned Sir Francis Gore to the position of Lt. Governor after the War. Already known for his corruption, Gore preferred to leave the determining of policy to a select group of locals. This allowed him and his wife to focus on their primary interest of throwing elaborate parties, something that they would perfect during his tenure.\textsuperscript{22} Gone during the War, unlike Brock and Drummond, Gore was willing to believe the Tory Party’s rhetoric about their service saving the nation and the need to implement their ideology. With the Lt. Governor’s heavy executive control being the key to power in Upper Canada, these blossoming leaders of the Tory Party were able to seize the moment by gaining the dominance of Gore’s ear and shaping his policies. Eventually Gore would effectively become a surrogate for the demands of this radicalized Tory Party.

The heroes of the day, Strachan and Robinson, would manipulate the events of the War of 1812 to their advantage in order to ensure their supreme power both in the Tory Party and in

\textsuperscript{21} Mills, pg. 22.
Upper Canada. Unofficially they would come to form a body known as the “Family Compact”, comprised of Strachan, Robinson, and other War heroes such as Æneas Shaw and Col. James FitzGibbon. Once given immense power by shaping the policies of Lt. Governor Gore, they would remain at the top of the political spectrum for almost two decades after the War. Their power and dominance of government was unrivaled and unlike anything seen in the British Colonies.\textsuperscript{23} Strachan would emerge as the ringleader of the group; as his friend and fellow Family Compact member, William Dummer Powell, would comment, Strachan’s leadership “completes the climax of power and influence in the person of a parish priest comparatively equal to that of the cardinal who carried the Spanish monarchy at his guide.”\textsuperscript{24}

**Immediate Results of the War: Keep on Fighting the War**

So what would these men do with this glorious opportunity of power and centralized control? Would they begin to bring the country together, heal the wounds of the recent War, and progress forward towards catching up with the United States? Unfortunately, this generation would produce no Nelson Mandela, and despite being led by an Anglican priest would employ no Christian principle of turning the other cheek. Although the War was officially over, in the minds of men such as John Beverly Robinson, they were still fighting it. Robinson still saw all former Americans in his midst as enemies, commenting that he “would suffer death before he would consent to a measure that would confer the rights of a subject on men who, but a few years ago. Had invaded our country – ransacked our villages – burnt our houses – and murdered our wives and children.”\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{24} Personal Record of William Dummer Powell, Undated, MG 23, H-I-4, Box 5, No. 1500, (LAC).

\textsuperscript{25} Mills, pg. 45.
These new leaders were intent on revenge upon the population of American background who they believed, incorrectly, were alone responsible for the disaffection and disloyalty during the War that almost led to the downfall of their British imperial province. The experience of the War of 1812 had crystallized the belief that all Americans were not to be trusted and that all dissent should be equated with disloyalty. Deluded about their perception of American immigrants during the War, they sought to weed them out of the country and block them from access to the government. Indeed, the postwar Tory Party was willing to take action against those of American background that they had not even contemplated before the War. They were in a sense very much still fighting the War against the Americans; however, this time there were no guns or cannon, but rather rhetoric and proclamations.

Guided by an irrational fear of Americans, these Tory leaders would usher in a McCarthy-like scare in Upper Canada of anything American, particularly directing this rhetoric at the British officials in power. In a moment of absolute power they chose to ignore vital improvements needed to rebuild the battered infant country, in favor of a discriminatory policy against those of American background and all those who opposed Tory leadership. With this they blew the lid off the social divides between Americans and Brits, and ideological divides between reformers and conservatives, which had been delicately held in check before the War. Although they thought they were advancing the country by making it more loyal, their policies in the decades after the War would turn out to have the absolute opposite effect. Without the War of 1812, these leaders would never have been catapulted to this position and would never have taken their anti-American prejudices to this extreme.

Their first action in this anti-American crusade was to remove from the country all Americans who in their eyes had acted disloyally. This first effort would begin even before the
War itself had ended, with the Alien Act of 1814. The language of the Act was targeted only at people of American background, who during the War left Upper Canada for the United States, for any period of time without the permission of the government. Anyone found guilty of this would lose their citizenship and be deemed an Alien, which meant legally the government could seize all of their property in Upper Canada and effectively expel them from the country. Notes from the Commissions in each district set up to prosecute this Act reveals that the typical story was of someone who had left to the USA for any period of time during the War without permission and then returned to their land in Upper Canada. The Commission, comprised of men whom the Tory Party approved of such as Joel Stone, would then employ witnesses to prove any claims. After a very high conviction rate they would confiscate the accused property and land for the Government. This would occur while most, like Sala Blanchard, were still living on the land leaving them homeless.\(^\text{26}\)

Some interesting cases reveal just how serious and unfair this law was, most notably in the saga of John Wagstaff in the Niagara District. Wagstaff would claim he left the country against his will since he was taken prisoner by the Americans. The Commission would tirelessly investigate this claim, eventually sending it to the aforementioned Attorney General John Beverly Robinson. Stating that he could neither prove he was not telling the truth nor if he was lying, Robinson would give no benefit of the doubt and convict Wagstaff under the Alien Act. In his mind any seed of doubt about Americans meant they were guilty.\(^\text{27}\) The Smiths of York epitomize just how discriminatory this law was. John Smith, the father of the family, would die in the year 1813, leaving all of the land to his son Henry Smith. Overwhelmed by the prospects

\(^{26}\) Joel Stones’ Notes from the Alien Act Commission for Leeds County Concerning Sala Blanchard, July 3 1817, RG 22-144 Alien Act Commission Fonds, Microfilm (AO).
\(^{27}\) John Beverly Robinson to the Alien Act Commission for Ancaster County concerning John Wagstaff, April 1818, RG 22-144 Alien Act Commission Fonds, Microfilm, (AO).
of providing for his whole family, Henry would flee to the United States during the War. His mother, Nancy Smith, would rise to the occasion working the land and providing for her family during the War and well into 1817 when the Alien Act came and intervened. Due to the fact that the land was in Henry’s name and he had fled to the USA during the War, the Government would take the property leaving Nancy Smith and her family homeless refugees.\textsuperscript{28} Once again, no benefit or goodwill would be shown to people tried under the Alien Act.

The people who were convicted under this Act were far from traitors. The vast majority of the people did not have any intentions of consorting with the enemy, but only wished to avoid the War or to take care of personal matters. This Act and the Commissions set up to enforce it were part of an effort to weed out people of American descent. No similar law would exist to prosecute those of British descent who left Upper Canada during the War. The ultimate irony is that if the Act did apply to the whole country, the current Lt Governor Francis Gore would have been guilty under the Act, as he had left Upper Canada during the War for the British Isles. Guided by an irrational fear of Americans, the Tory Party were on their way to making the majority of the population, those of American descent, second-class citizens.

After removing as many Americans as they could under the Alien Act, these Tory leaders then moved to make sure no more Americans would enter the country. In October of 1815, Lt Governor Gore would issue a proclamation to all the districts asking them to take count of Americans in their midst that they felt were “ALIENS.”\textsuperscript{29} At the same time, he took action to ensure that no further immigration from the United States would occur by blocking the issuance

\textsuperscript{28} Notes from the Alien Act Commission York District concerning Henry Smith, April 1818, RG 22-144 Alien Act Commission Fonds, Microfilm, (AO).

\textsuperscript{29} Affidavit of Phebe Freeland, Grimsby November 9 1821, as seen in the “Perceptions of the War of 1812: Identity, Diversity, Memory,” Exhibit in the Helen McClung Exhibit Area at the Archives of Ontario, 2013
of the Oath of Allegiance needed for citizenship only to those of American background.\(^{30}\) However, the executive orders persecuting Americans did not stop there, as Lt Governor Gore would enforce two imperial statutes from the last century in order to attack the property of Americans. He instituted a policy requiring foreigners to live in the Country seven years before they could hold land. In Upper Canada the only way to gain land required an oath of allegiance, which he had just instructed the Government not to give out anymore.\(^{31}\)

This decision to stop all American immigration and attack their property was an abrupt turn of policy, as before the War those in the Provincial legislature had declared American immigration essential to the continued growth of the Country both structurally and economically.\(^{32}\) However, the experiences of this new Tory leadership during the War had changed everything. They were now willing to go forth with all anti-American policies that had been held in check before the War. This produced a policy that cut off Upper Canada’s main source of continued revenue and stagnated all crucial growth in the population of the province right at a time when it needed both of these the most. This policy would be the equivalent of the United States banning all loyalists and immigrants from the British Isles after the American Revolution. It was clearly against the interests of the nation, but had become a goal of this new Tory leadership.

This anti-American policy reached its zenith in the Alien Question. Having already weeded out all whom they could and stopped all American immigration, the Tories would seek to exploit a King’s Bench Decision in Great Britain that acknowledged all those living in the

\(^{30}\) Circular Lt Governor’s Office, October 14\(^{th}\), 1815, F 521 Solomon Jones Fonds, Microfilm, (AO), as seen in the “Perceptions of the War of 1812: Identity, Diversity, Memory,” Exhibit in the Helen McClung Exhibit Area at the Archives of Ontario, 2013

\(^{31}\) Lucas, LDR, pg. 172

\(^{32}\) Sheppard, “Enemies at Home: Upper Canada and the War of 1812,” pg. 73.
USA after 1783 as no longer British subjects, but American citizens as foreign as any other nation. Applying this ruling to Upper Canada the Tories began to argue that anyone who came to Upper Canada from the United States after 1783 was not a British Subject and thus could not hold public office or even hold property. Taking their irrational fear of Americans to new heights, John Beverly Robinson would propose the Naturalization Act, which would strip the majority American population of voting rights and the ability to hold public office.\(^{33}\)

This would ignite a furious debate in the Legislative Assembly between the Reformers and Tories. A product of the War of 1812, the Alien Question would prove to be incredibly divisive in Upper Canada, polarizing the Country and the two political parties. Evidence of the divisiveness of the Alien Question can be seen in the discussion of the Legislative Assembly in March of 1828, when the debate caused both sides to lose all semblance of etiquette. The session would require the doors to be closed twice, a Parliamentary tactic rarely used in order to allow the men to calm down.\(^{34}\) Eventually the higher authorities in London decided to keep the status quo and reject the Naturalization Act, in effect saving American citizenship and property. The damage had already been done, however, as the event was so divisive it prompted an explosion of newspapers in Upper Canada to debate the topic.\(^{35}\) The Alien Question would prove to be the most extreme measure taken by the Tory Party during their rule. They would never again go so far in their discrimination against Americans.

As a whole this episode speaks volumes to the nature of Tory rule after the War. Instead of focusing on the pressing issues needed in order to grow and unite the Country, Tory rule

---

\(^{33}\) Taylor, pg. 451-452.
\(^{34}\) Journal of the House of Assembly Upper Canada, Archives of Ontario Library, as seen in the “Perceptions of the War of 1812: Identity, Diversity, Memory,” Exhibit in the Helen McClung Exhibit Area at the Archives of Ontario, 2013.
pursued a policy that had the country discussing moot points better left to sociologists about loyalty and identity. While this debate dominated the political system, which was essential to rebuilding the nation since British help was not coming, nothing productive was done. This policy pursued by the Tories as a result of the War retarded the growth of the nation and was more divisive than any American invasion.

**Immediate Results of the War: Strachanism**

One of the obvious side effects of angering and attacking the rights of the majority of the population was that it made the rival Reform Party the preferred one of the people. In the Reform Party those of American background found a champion, which they rewarded them for by often voting them into majorities in the Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately in Upper Canada this meant very little as the Legislative Council and Executive Council, dominated by Family Compact appointments, could overrule any of their decisions. The Family Compact could turn down any actions taken by the Reform Party in the democratically elected Legislative Assembly, while the Reform Party had no check on the Family Compact’s power in the Legislative and Executive Councils.\(^3^6\) This meant that the Tory Party did not need to appeal to the masses as in the United States, but rather only to reward select groups of important people. In order to win over the powerful British officials they would spin all Reform Party efforts as disloyal republicanism, put forth by men motivated only by personal ambition, in a country where there was supposedly nothing wrong. They equated the actions of the Reformers with those of the disaffected during the War of 1812, as threats to the comforting British connection. They were successful in creating a McCarthy-like fear of all things American among people of influence in

---

\(^{3^6}\) Lucas, LDR, pg. 150.
the post-War period, which allowed them to keep their stranglehold on power despite heavy unpopularity.

Articles from the Tory-backed *Kingston Gazette* on February 21, 1832 capture this spin by the Tory Party perfectly. They call the proposals of the head of the Reform Party, William Lyon Mackenzie, as an effort to “gratify…his insatiable appetites for power.” They also frame his Party as being composed of “foreigners” who follow the “faction” of radical American Orthodox preachers whose ideas were even too radical for the United States. They put forth that nothing is wrong in this “blessed country” and that they lived under a government that allows for a nation “in a degree superior to that of any country on the face of the globe.” They propose that Canadians can thwart this menace “by firmly uniting and opposing every attempt at innovation upon our present government and laws.” They expose memories of the War by trying to remind people where they would be now had not the British poured in their support during the War. They frame the efforts of the Reform Party as trying to upset the British connection and in effect prevent them from saving this nation in any future wars.\footnote{
*Kingston Gazette*, Oct 21 1832, William Dummer Powell Papers MG 23, H-I-4, Box 3, no. 210, (LAC).}

This mastery of political spin would give the Tories a comforting feeling of immunity in power allowing them to pursue policies in their own interest at the expense of the nation. The saga of the Clergy Reserves demonstrates this scenario perfectly. At its founding, Upper Canada

\footnote{Lt. Governor after Lt Governor - Francis Gore, Peregrine Maitland, John Colborne, and Francis Bond Head - would all be intimidated by this rhetoric and defer all power to the Family Compact. The Tories created a feeling that if they did not submit to their demands, the Country would fall to these republican-inspired traitors bent on overthrowing the government, and they would in effect live in infamy among future generations of loyal Brits as responsible for this catastrophe.}

This mastery of political spin would give the Tories a comforting feeling of immunity in power allowing them to pursue policies in their own interest at the expense of the nation. The saga of the Clergy Reserves demonstrates this scenario perfectly. At its founding, Upper Canada
would allocate 1/7\textsuperscript{th} of all land in the Province to the Anglican Church, known as the Clergy Reserves. This land, often hand-picked at the founding of Upper Canada, was some of the best in the country. The Anglican Church, headed by John Strachan, would profit immensely from this system, evidenced by the impressive St. James Church in York and Strachan’s numerous philanthropic foundations. Due to the destruction and heavy debt incurred during the War, many people began to clamor for the sale of the Clergy Reserves in order to provide relief for War losses. Political agitator Robert Gourlay would report that the top two most frequent complaints among the people in 1819 were “lands of non-occupants” and “crown, clergy, and other reserves”.\footnote{Robert Gourlay, \textit{Statistical Account of Upper Canada, Compiled with a View to a Grand System of Emigration}. 2 Vols. London, 1822, pg. 623.} The issue of Clergy Reserves would be the greatest in the Country once the Alien Question subsided, being “an abiding and unabated cause of discontent.”\footnote{Lucas, LDR, pg. 176.}

Despite this popular discontent and possible solution to fixing the damages of the War, Strachan would refuse to share this landed wealth with other religious sects, let alone sell the land for the public good. The Church of England would control all of the wealth from the Clergy Reserves, despite the fact that the Anglican faith comprised only one-fourth of the population.\footnote{Lucas, LDR, pg. 175.} However, they comprised the right one-fourth of the population, as most in the Tory Party were proud Anglicans. The Legislative Assembly would propose two bills in order to sell the Clergy Reserves for the public good, but both Bills would be rejected by the Family Compact dominated Legislative Council. With his cronies in absolute power, Strachan would be able to protect this vital source of personal income at the expense of the country. Confident that their rule could not be challenged, the Tory Party began to impose measures that only benefitted their minority of the population, while the rest suffered. They had no hesitancy about doing this, as the War of 1812
and their deluded belief in the militia myth had impressed upon them an opinion that only their group was truly loyal and thus deserving of Government aid.

Having lost in their bid to deny Americans access to the government in the Alien Question and perhaps suffering from a bit of over-confidence, the Tories began to institute obvious measures from top to bottom in order to block Americans and the Reformers from “their” government. In the “Loyal” Election of 1836, Lt. Governor Sir Francis Bond Head would be convinced, through Tory political spin and American fear rhetoric that a Reform Party victory in the election would lead to an overthrow of the Government. Aided by recent British immigrants buying into the fear rhetoric as well, Head would rig the election to ensure that the Reformers were not represented in the government. The result was an overwhelming majority of Tory Party members in the Legislative Assembly, giving them dominance of all parts of the Government.41 Once again they would use this dominance for their own interest, as “No economical reforms were introduced. The Assembly…produced no change in the administration of affairs, except that of reinstating the 'Family Compact' in power.”42

Similar measures to deny Reformers and Americans access to opportunity were present at the bottom, in minute positions that could lead to social advancement. In Joel Stone’s 2nd Leed’s Militia after the War, Nathan Hirock was passed over for promotion to officer for having taken part in the Gourlay Convention of Reformers the previous year, despite having faithfully served during the War. However, in 1821 Stone would deem Hirock’s promotion acceptable now, after Hirock attained a pardon from Lt Governor Sir Maitland for his participation in the

41 Lucas, LDR, pg. 157.
42 Lucas, LDR, pg. 167.
Convention.\textsuperscript{43} Only after Hirock renounced his support of the Reform Party, was he given the opportunity to become an officer in the militia, one of the few avenues of advancement available for men of his stature. This little saga is revealing of the stranglehold the Tories would keep on access to opportunity throughout the government. The War of 1812 had made them fanatically distrustful of enemies who might gain access to “their” government, something they irrationally enforced from top to bottom in the ensuing decades. Lord Durham in his official 1840 Report on British North America captures their mindset almost two decades after the War:

> Like all parties long in power, was naturally unwilling to submit itself to any such responsibility as would abridge its tenure, or cramp its exercise of authority. Reluctant to acknowledge any responsibility to the people of the Colony.\textsuperscript{44}

**Immediate Results of the War: The Reformers**

So what was the actual message and actions of these Reformers whom the Tories insisted could not be trusted? Were they really men influenced by republican principles intent on overthrowing the government? Like most of the Tory rhetoric, these charges were simply false. An article in the *Kingston Gazette* would tear apart a Reform Party advertisement in 1832, calling it “perverted to a deceptive nature,” meant to spread chaos in the country. A look at the actual advertisement reveals that Marshall S. Bidwell, of the Reform Party, was simply trying to set up a local town hall meeting to discuss the grievances of the people.\textsuperscript{45} This was far from the Tory Party’s claims of them trying to overthrow the government. Indeed, a look at the actual message and actions of the Reformers reveals that their ideology was closer than the Tories to

\textsuperscript{43} Report of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Leeds Militia, 27 December 1818, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 2, no. 53, (LAC), Return of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Leeds Militia, 26 December 1820, Joel Stone Papers MG 23, H-II-I, Box 5, File 2, no. 1290, (LAC).

\textsuperscript{44} Lucas, LDR, pg. 150.

that of modern Canada and Canada around the time of Confederation in 1867. Far from republican radicals, most Reformers had equally distinguished records during the War of 1812 and held an ideology closer to that of the Tory Party than any in the United States. Their main objective was simply stated: “to making the Colonial Constitution an exact transcript of that of Great Britain,” and that, “in Upper Canada, as at home, entrust the administration of affairs to men possessing the confidence of the Assembly.”

Where they differed and what made them the true predecessors to the politicians of Confederation Canada was that they believed in an assimilative form of citizenship and accepted internalized faction as part of the political process. The Reformers developed a more modern sense of loyalty and politics, while the Tories kept things in the past with their exclusiveness. Perhaps the greatest setback to nationhood and nationalism that occurred during this time was that the true patriots and Canadian loyalists, the Reformers, were denied access to power. John A Macdonald, considered the “Father of Confederation” despite being a Tory in his own time, would likely have identified as Reformer in the post-War of 1812 period. Fortunately, these true predecessors could not be held down forever, as a cataclysmic event in Upper Canada would break the stagnation of the post-War period and get the country moving again.

**Immediate Results of the War: Rebellion**

This turbulent post-War period would culminate in the Rebellion of 1837. Although put down shortly after it began, it was nonetheless the greatest internal movement in Upper Canadian history to overthrow the government in power. It would serve as a wake-up call to the nation that there were serious problems in this post-War period. Although this may seem to prove the Tories right in their suspicion of the Reform Party, a deeper analysis for the reasons of the Rebellion

---

46 Lucas, LDR, pg. 151.
47 Mills, pg. 112.
puts most of the blame on the Tories in power. Despite this, in the immediate aftermath of the Rebellion the Tories would stick to their same rhetoric that there was nothing wrong with the country and that the Rebellion was the product of William Lyon Mackenzie’s personal ambition and supporters, “that he gathered over whiskey and cocktails and imaginary grievances.” However, their spin would not be enough this time to dupe the British officials, as Queen Victoria would commission Lord Durham, a former Governor General of Canada, to investigate and report on the causes of this Rebellion. He would produce The Durham Report of 1840, an incredibly influential Report in its own time and an incredibly valuable primary source in our own for its expertise and non-biased account.

Lord Durham clearly concludes that “this outbreak, which common prudence and good management would have prevented from coming to a head,” was a direct result of the discriminatory and self-serving policy of the Tory Party in the decades after the War of 1812. Their distrust of all things American after the War led them to produce “a monopoly of power so extensive and so lasting (that it) could not fail in process of time, to excite envy, create dissatisfaction, and ultimately provoke attack.” Durham states that the vast majority of those of the Reform Party and American background after the War were loyal subjects not wishing “to change their present connection with Great Britain for a junction with the United States.” However, by antagonizing and excluding these groups from Government, the Tories had awoken their ire and left them with no other option than to rebel in order to achieve their objectives. Thus

49 Lucas, LDR, pg. 163.
50 Lucas, LDR, pg. 149.
51 Lucas, LDR, pg. 167.
instead of making the country more loyal, their policies had in fact created rebels from where there were none.

Furthermore, Durham would report that while the Tories would direct the government’s energies to settling personal, political, anti-American battles in their favor, they neglected the development of the country. Durham stated that Canada had almost unlimited potential, with natural resources and land better than any part of the American Continent. However, due to the economic stagnation and depression resulting from the War not having been addressed, this potential was not being realized. As a result in 1840 he describes a scenario in which “the Province is without any of those means by which the resources of a country are developed, and the civilization of a people is advanced or upheld.”\(^5\) This stagnation, compared to the marvelous growth of New York State across the border during this same time, had perhaps made people who were loyal subjects, envious of American principles of government. By not addressing this stagnation in their policy, the ruling Tories had created a reason for people to envy the USA. In the end, to rectify this stagnation, Durham recommended many of the policies that the Reformers had been unsuccessfully advocating such as selling the Clergy Reserves for the public good and creating an education system for the country.\(^5\) He thus concluded that further Tory control and exclusion of the Reformers from power would only continue to retard the country’s growth.

Finally, Durham brought forth that by 1840 no sense of nationalism had developed, as instead localism dominated. Since none of the destruction had been cleaned up due to Tory policy, this negligence had allowed the regional divides it had opened up to crystallize. Durham reported on this by saying that despite there being no ethnic or linguistic divides in Upper

\(^5\) Lucas LDR, pg. 10.
\(^5\) Lucas, LDR, pg. 158, 179.
Canada, he believed that it is more divided and complex than Lower Canada.\textsuperscript{54} He stated that there was no common sentiment between regions, and that people from one region know very little about people from another. He states that Upper Canada shows, “apparently no unity of interest or opinion...there are many petty local centres, the sentiments and the interests of which, are distinct, and perhaps opposed.”\textsuperscript{55} He also demonstrated how this attitude was present in politics, as each district was out to further their own interests, even at the expense of the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{56} With no sense of unity in Upper Canada itself, it is no surprise that Durham also reported no sense of bonding or community between Lower and Upper Canada as well.

In sum, in Durham Report’s findings on the causes of the Rebellion of 1837, almost all of them were a result of the War of 1812. If Tory Party policies and power, the main cause of the Rebellion, was a by-product of the War of 1812, then the War itself can be considered the catalyst for the Rebellion of 1837. This suggests that the War produced an environment that led to an armed rebellion with the potential to prevent Canada from achieving nationhood. Furthermore, this post-War environment was so toxic that it inhibited the country from cleaning up the devastating damage that the War had incurred. The result was a turbulent period of economic stagnation and depression that delayed the creation of a Canadian nation. When we couple this with the localism and social divisions opened up in the Tory Party’s anti-American policies, it becomes clear that the War did little to foster a sense of Canadian nationalism as well. The Durham Report shows how in 1840, Upper Canada was no closer to realizing nationhood and nationalism than it was before the War. The generation that lived through the War of 1812

\textsuperscript{54} Lucas, LDR, pg. 47.
\textsuperscript{55} Lucas, LDR, pg. 146.
\textsuperscript{56} Lucas, LDR, pg. 153.
and its aftermath witnessed a black hole, in which little to nothing was accomplished on the path to developing a Canadian nation or a sense of nationalism.

**Unintended Consequences: New Beginnings**

However, as with most things in history the long-term story is more complex. Although a toxic event in its immediate effects, the War of 1812 and its consequential Rebellion of 1837 would exhibit many unintended consequences. In the longer run these unintended consequences would help Canada rebound from this disruptive event. One particular by-product of the War of 1812 was the emergence of a new source of immigration to Upper Canada. Influenced by his wartime experiences, the Reverend Alexander MacDonnell would spearhead an effort to encourage immigration to Upper Canada from the British Isles. Buying the Tory rhetoric that the rampant and well-known disaffection during the War was a product of the recent American immigrants, he believed this new tide of immigration would create, “a strong population of loyal subjects.”

Receptive to the Tory induced-American scare, MacDonell was successful in winning over Lord Bathurst in London, as in 1815 the British Government would begin to subsidize immigration from Scotland and Ireland by giving free passage, one hundred acres of land, and other Government aid. The Government would also provide for British soldiers in Canada, no longer needed in Europe, to settle in Upper Canada.

The program would prove to be a self-sustaining success. Between 1815 and 1842 159,000 immigrants, mostly Irish, would come to settle in Upper Canada. In this time the population of Upper Canada would quadruple to 432,159 in 1840. This would usher in a huge demographic switch, as immigration from the British Isles would outnumber the 32,000 American immigrants five to one. Once a heavy majority, by 1842 those of American descent

---

57 Taylor, pg. 442.
would comprise only seven percent of the total population.\textsuperscript{58} Through this program new Townships and Counties would pop up all over Upper Canada. This would include my own ancestor’s Township of Seymour in 1830 which, settled after the War, would reflect these new demographics. In 1878, of the 361 people living in the district, only 6 had come from the United States of America.\textsuperscript{59} The Upper Canada that was emerging by 1840 scarcely resembled the one that had gone through the War of 1812.

The unintended consequence is that ironically, these new immigrants would not rush to be considered “loyal” and support the Tories, but rather provide a healthy supply of Reformers such as Robert Gourlay and William Lyon Mackenzie. On top of this, without any bitter memories from the War of 1812, they would add to “Ancient disputants for power, an entirely new class of persons,” making the old Tory versus American rivalry obsolete.\textsuperscript{60} Able to suppress one group, the Tories began to find it increasingly hard to remain in complete control of the Government against British subjects whose loyalty they could not question. However, this would not stop them from trying, as despite the usefulness and success of this immigration to Canada, they began to put in measures to make immigration appear less attractive. This included making lawyers from England wait five years to get their license in Upper Canada and putting in legal obstacles for these immigrants to get the right to vote.\textsuperscript{61} Their efforts would “deter emigration from England to the Provinces, and thus both to retard the advance of the Colony, and to deprive the mother country of one of the principal advantages.”\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{58} Taylor, pg. 452.
\textsuperscript{59} Peter Wilson, \textit{Illustrated Historical Atlas of the Counties of Northumberland and Durham Ontario 1878 (MMVI)}. Stirling, Ont.: Fifth Line Press, 2006, pg. 139-150.
\textsuperscript{60} Lucas, LDR, pg. 154.
\textsuperscript{61} Lucas, LDR, pg. 170.
\textsuperscript{62} Lucas, LDR, pg. 171.
These new immigrants changing the dynamics of the Province, coupled with the fallout from Rebellion of 1837, would change everything for the Tory Party. After the dust settled from the rebellion, any doubts about the loyalty of the country were erased. People from all groups, especially these new immigrants, would flock to serve in Militia groups to put down the rebellion. This along with the Durham Report’s findings would heavily discredit the Tory Party and their fear rhetoric, which had goaded powerful officials into supporting them since the end of the War. Free from this American scare, British officials would re-organize its British colonies by combining the Colonies of Upper and Lower into a United Canada and allow for the elected Legislative Assembly to have greater power over the appointed Legislative and Executive Councils. No longer able to sustain its unpopular power in this reformed United Canada, the Tory Party was forced to adapt, abandoning its hardliner policies and beginning to appeal to the people at large. With this the Family Compact that had dominated since the end of War would fade into obscurity and history textbooks.

The result of this was a Canada that began to show the seeds of itself around Confederation and even Canada today. Reformers from Upper and Lower Canada would put aside their ethnic and linguistic differences in order to work together and remove the Tory Party from power. In their absence these Reformers would usher in a period when internalized faction and dissent were not equated with disloyalty, but rather a normal part of the political process. An assimilative idea of loyalty would also emerge, which would protect Americans or any other immigrants from the discrimination they saw under the Tories. Finally, with the Reformers in charge, the Government would begin to pass nation-building laws that sought to rebuild the country from the devastation of the War and allow for economic growth.
In sum, once the Tory Party’s stranglehold on power was alleviated, Canada began to show signs of nationalism and was on track towards becoming an independent nation. However, despite this happy ending, the period between 1815 and 1840 must be considered as a black hole for progress in Canada. For the generation that lived through the War and the immediate post-War period it was an incredibly divisive, elitist, and backwards time. The Tory policies that came out of the War would push Canada to the brink of collapse, doing more damage than any American invasion ever had. Only the unintended consequences of a new immigration policy and the positive side-effects of the Rebellion of 1837 would pull them back from this point and save the nation. Had Canada never corrected its course from this dark period, perhaps the map of North American today would look much different. All in all, the War of 1812 and its immediate effects are a black eye upon Canadian nationalism and nationhood, which eventually emerged in spite of, rather than because of, the War. If Canadians today are looking for a glorious foundation myth, a look into the historical record reveals that they should be looking elsewhere.
This broadside poster from 1821, of all those prosecuted for treason and known to have left the province during the War, was meant to help the government gain information on these suspects. The numerous names on the list attests to the vigor of efforts by Tories after the War to prosecute the Americans among them.

63 Poster Newcastle District Clerk of the Peace, May 25th 1821, RG 22-144 Alien Act Commission Fonds, Microfilm, (AO).
Oil Painting of the “Fiery” Bishop John Strachan in 1880, years after his death in 1867, exhibiting his tremendous following in Upper Canada.

This engraving depicts the Battle of Montgomery’s Tavern, where radical reformers, pushed to the limit by the Tory stranglehold on power would resort to armed conflict during the Rebellion of 1837 in Upper Canada. The Battle would be an overwhelming victory for those loyal to the government, crushing any probable success of the Rebellion in overthrowing the government. However, a message had been sent to the British officials that something was terribly wrong in Upper Canada.

Epilogue: Foundation Myths

Clearly, there is a significant gap between the message of the Canadian Government’s War of 1812 bicentennial commemoration campaign and the historical record analyzed in this thesis. This gap is defined not so much by what the bicentennial says, but rather by what it does not say. In sum, their message remains silent on many of the War’s negative impacts on the generation that lived through the War. Instead they distort the historical record by only focusing on its few positive consequences. This selective, politicized history tries to weave a foundation myth into Canadian social memory that is not grounded in fact. This charge, of the politicization of history, is not meant to deliver a partisan message. The Liberals are equally compliant with this message, having never attacked the campaign for its substance, but only for the spending it required. Politicians on both sides are content with this form of historical propaganda, which forces an incomplete and highly misleading story into Canadian social memory in an attempt to invent a foundation myth.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to establish what this term “foundation myth” means. The historian, John Tosh, in *The Pursuit of History*, explains that foundation myths are a story “about the foundation of a group or people,” which are products of their “collective memories” woven into distinctly “national narratives.”¹ Foundation myths are traditionally crafted through oral transmission and literature, but in our modern era film and television now perform the same role. We might now ask, why does it matter that this campaign tries to create a foundation myth? Is this not a good thing, as it provides something that the Canadian people lack? Answering these questions opens up larger questions about foundation myths themselves. Contrary to what people

---

may believe, foundation myths are not always beneficial. Tosh argues that foundation myths can have both a positive and negative effect on the societies they originate from. For instance, in the United States, foundation myths have served both positive and negative purposes. On the one hand, the founders’ ideals of democracy, equality, and freedom from coercive government power have left behind a positive message for Americans to aspire to in the present. On the other hand, the story of Frederick Douglass’ battle for popular memory of the Civil War shows how foundation myths can be exclusionary and harmful. After the Civil War, public memory in the United States forged an updated foundation myth in which blacks were excluded from the story of that War, leading to a reversal of many of the gains they had made. This foundation myth, not grounded in fact but in selective memory, would be used to justify the oppression of African-Americans for much of the twentieth century. These two American examples are evidence of how foundation myths can shape what we remember about the past and in effect influence how we behave in the future.

The fact that foundation myths influence people’s behavior requires the vigilant attention of historians. Although it is irrational to expect all foundation myths to be completely accurate, historians have a duty to create, in Tosh’s words, “historical awareness” in their work. This means that, “it is not enough to simply invoke the past; there must also be a belief that getting the story right matters.” When historians do live up to this calling, they have a role in thwarting the misconceptions of people’s social memory. By producing historically aware work, historians can diminish the effects of a foundation myth on society and in effect influence how people behave in the present. However, this is much easier said than done. Historians today are still fighting Frederick Douglass’ battle of making known to the public at large the true purpose of the Civil

---

2 Tosh, pg. 4-5.
3 Tosh, pg. 2.
War and its effects on race relations in America. This saga is proof that it requires the constant effort of historians, through the creation of historical awareness, to thwart the distorting effects social memory can have.

As a case study, the gap between the Canadian government’s bicentennial message and the historical record presented in this thesis, further testifies to the importance of historians critically assessing foundation myths. When one considers the potential ramifications of letting this message go unchallenged into Canadian social memory, it further validates the belief that historians have a duty to perform. Put simply, this misleading foundation myth has the potential to write into Canadian identity a militarized background that does not exist. If people believe that they have a proud military heritage that is responsible for the current nation they live in, they are more likely to act and consider military force acceptable in the future. This message becomes especially dangerous when you consider that Canadians are currently in the midst of deciding the proper role of their armed forces. This message from the bicentennial about the involvement of the Canadian people in the War is not far off from the rhetoric of the Reverend John Strachan in creating the militia myth in 1812. Although historians have debunked it once, its passive resurrection here attests to the constant battle historians must fight in order to create a historically aware public. There will always be people who try and spin history to their advantage, but hopefully there will always be historians to counter these efforts.

Furthermore, by omitting and distorting facts about the aftermath of the War, the campaign ignores the grave injustices that were done to the Indians by the government.

---

In 1912, at the centennial celebrations of the War of 1812, the Globe and Mail newspaper would report that the Indians added a “pathetic note” to the proceedings, by bringing up how they were “unfairly treated” after the War. One hundred years later, although very quick to give them credit for their military role, the bicentennial would avoid this “pathetic note” by not exploring their post-War fate in any detail. If the Canadian Government would like to own this story, then they need to own all of it. By not exploring the whole story, the bicentennial falls into the same theme of the Indians “being trotted out” as group in order to serve the political agenda of those in power. With this they miss a chance to rectify a wrong and only further reinforce this misconception into Canadian social memory. Once again, as historians it is important that we do not let stories that ignore a shameful history go unchallenged.

Although it will take some time for its effects to be felt, this episode of the Canadian Government’s bicentennial campaign is yet another example of how the politicization of history can lead to the production of a dangerous foundation myth. Generally perceived as a uniting force for a people, when not based in truth foundation myths can also be used to make a group of people behave in a manner they would never otherwise consider. To end with a note of optimism, Tosh also suggests that a foundation myth’s success “is judged by how effectively it contributes to collective cohesion and how widely it is shared by members of the group.” In a sense, no matter how much the Government tries to interfere, the people ultimately decide what their identity becomes.

---


The hope is that aided by historical efforts such as this work, Canadians will realize how absurd, unjust, and historically inaccurate this proposed foundation myth is. The Canadian government is trying to impress upon its people a military story from where clearly none exists. Although Canadians have numerous proud military moments to look back upon, Canada’s story is not primarily a military one, and it never will be. Instead the heart of the Canadian story lies in the peaceful efforts of reasonable individuals to establish and affirm our identity in the world. That is a story Canadians can be proud of, and that is the story that needs to be heard. However, this fractious foundation myth significantly undermines the potential for that true story to influence current behavior. What is most ironic about the Canadian government’s bicentennial is that in trying to create a distinctive Canadian identity, the militarized narrative they produce only mimics the American identity from which they are trying to escape. Indeed, how unnatural this narrative is to the Canadian character may suggest the real differences Canadians have with their American neighbors. Perhaps it is from these differences that Canadians might draw a more genuine and compelling national ideology.
Bibliography

I. Primary Sources

Abbreviations

LAC- Library Archives of Canada

AO- Archives Ontario

DHCNF- Documentary History of the Campaign upon the Niagara Frontier

LDR- Lord Durham’s Report on the Affairs of British North America

Record Groups in the Archives of Ontario (AO)

F 440 John Norton Fonds

F 543 Abraham Nelles Fonds

F 662 William Hamilton Merritt Family Fonds

RG 22-144 Alien Act Commissions, inquisitions and related records

Record Groups in the Library and Archives, Canada (LAC)

MG 23, H-I-4 William Dummer Powell Papers

MG 23, H-II-I McDonald- Stone Family Papers

RG 10 Indian Affairs

Images Cited


Printed Primary Sources


II. Secondary Sources


Arajs, Christopher. “All the King’s Men: The Militia of Western Upper Canada and the War of 1812.” MA. Thesis, Queen’s University, 2005.


