

Introduction: Canadian Perspectives on the First World War

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FEW EVENTS had more impact on Canada than the First World War. A thumbnail sketch would include unprecedented government economic intervention, new national social programmes, accelerated urbanization and industrialization, new rights and roles for women, growing autonomy from Britain, intensified integration with America, bold challenges to civil liberties, and the flowering of Canadian nationalism. For decades, the common refrain was that Canada entered the war as a colony but emerged from it as a nation. Sacrifices and accomplishments on the battlefield and massive contributions on the home front buoyed national pride and confidence. This awareness intensified Canada's demand to stand as an equal to Britain, a conviction that led to a separate signature for Canada on the Treaty of Versailles, a separate seat for the dominion at the League of Nations, acceleration of the shift from Empire to Commonwealth, and Canada's autonomy over its own foreign policy with the 1931 *Statute of Westminster*. But the First World War also brought to the fore complexities based upon factors such as region, ethnicity, class, gender, and ideology that, as never before, threatened national unity.

Not until quite recently has the multi-dimensional impact of the First World War on Canada become evident in historical works. At the outset of the conflict, Canada had few professional or academic historians. Military history was characterized by stirring accounts of battlefield prowess and adventure. During the First World War, Canada's government did not appoint an official historian. Still, reams of documents were deposited with the London-based Canadian War Records Office. Its director was Sir William Maxwell Aiken, an expatriate Canadian millionaire and British newspaper mogul who was determined to raise Canada's profile in the Mother Country. In March 1915, he was also appointed as Official Eye Witness for Canada's army, meaning that his accounts became a principal source of public information about the country's military exploits. Although rarely getting close to the front, he turned military reports such as unit war diaries into tales of triumph. He did the same in *Canada in Flanders*,¹ a book released in January 1916 that told

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1 Max Aiken, *Canada in Flanders* (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916).

of Canada's military accomplishments up to the end of the 2nd Battle of Ypres in April 1915. So slanted was the work that some British commanders demanded that it be censored for giving the impression that the Canadians were winning the war on their own. Two more volumes of *Canada in Flanders* followed, the first by Aitken and the next by the well-known author and poet Charles G. D. Roberts, which took the heroic tale to end of 1917.² The end of the war and its immediate aftermath brought the publication of Fred James' *Canada's Triumph* and J. F. B. Livesay's *Canada's Hundred Days*, both of which focused on Canada spearheading the final push, resulting in Germany's surrender, and the six-volume *Canada and the Great War* published by the Makers of Canada (Morang) Limited, which had a military advisory board and, not surprisingly, was entirely uncritical of Canada's war effort.³

After the war, some 10,000 boxes of military records were transferred from London to Canada. The federal government planned a multi-volume official history, one that was to be balanced and meticulously documented. To lead the project, it turned to E. A. Cruikshank, who had written of the militia valiantly defending Canada during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. In 1919, Cruikshank published four volumes of documents on the war; without accompanying analysis, however, they generated little interest. He retired in 1921 with basically nothing completed.

Cruikshank's replacement, Colonel Archer Fortescue Duguid, was a curious appointment, being an engineer by training. He was meticulous, however, determined to cover every fact before writing any material. As a result, Duguid got bogged down in minutia; compounding the delay, he became sidetracked in a multi-year battle of correspondence with Britain's official historian, James Edward Edmonds, whose works Duguid felt did not give adequate credit to the Canadians at 2nd Ypres, and he provided loads of documents to Arthur Currie who, in the late 1920s, launched a defamation suit against the Port Hope *Times* for accusing him of needlessly sacrificing Canadian lives by launching an attack against Mons in the last days of the war. All the while, Duguid hoarded military files, thus preventing other researchers from turning out works. Not until 1938 was the first volume of the Official History released, taking the story up to mid-1915.⁴ Despite its claims of authenticity, it avoided controversies over Canadian leadership at the 2nd Battle of Ypres. With the Second World War starting the next year, Duguid's small historical section was quietly disbanded. No other official history of Canada in the First World War appeared until G. W. L. Nicholson's 1962

2 Max Aitken, *Canada in Flanders*, Vol. 2 (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917); Charles G. D. Roberts, *Canada in Flanders*, Vol. 3 (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918).

3 Fred James, *Canada's Triumph: Amiens, Arras and Cambrai* (London: Canadian War Records Office, 1918); J. F. B. Livesay, *Canada's Hundred Days: With the Canadian Corps from Amiens to Mons, Aug. 8 – Nov. 11, 1918* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1919); *Canada in the Great World War: An Authentic Account of the Military History of Canada from the Earliest Days to the Close of the War of the Nations* (Toronto: Morang, 1917-1923, 6 vols.).

4 A. Fortescue Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919, Vol. 1* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938).

book, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*,⁵ a one-volume work summarizing in some 600 pages what Duguid had planned eight volumes to cover.

Prior to 1980, nearly all academic work on Canada's First World War experience focused on military operations and was national in scope. With the rise of Quebec nationalism, more attention was paid to French-English divisions, particularly over the implementation of conscription.⁶ Growing Canadian regionalism during the 1970s was also reflected in Great War history, with one prominent example being John Herd Thompson's *Harvests of War*, which detailed how the conflict generated outpourings of patriotism, but also economic and social strain that exacerbated western Canadian discontent.⁷

Military history fell out of favour in academe in the 1970s and 1980s. A new generation of social historians, influenced by rising labour discontent, second-wave feminism, student radicalism, the black civil rights movement, demands from ethnic groups for greater equality, and the unpopular Vietnam War, characterized military history as presenting an inaccurate nationalist and triumphal view of Canada's past that papered over significant divisions. More recently, there has been a rapprochement or melding of social and military history. Some criticized the new trend as too negative, ignoring military accomplishments to focus on things such as the repression of organized labour or discrimination against ethnic groups, namely the Ukrainians, who were interned by the thousands on specious grounds.⁸

Still, in recent times, military history in Canada has grown more sophisticated, balanced, and thorough, including the official histories. Charles Stacey, Canada's Chief Official Historian of the Second World War, established an excellent team of highly qualified academics who set the standard for first-class and productive scholarship. Stacey's Army Historical Section became the National Defence History Directorate within the Department of National Defence and, in 1996, the Directorate of History and Heritage. Its historians have published several multi-volume and widely praised works on the First World War that provide extensive and meticulously documented information on training, logistics, tactics, and the

5 G. W. L. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War: Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962).

6 See, for example, Elizabeth Armstrong, *The Crisis of Quebec, 1914-1918* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1937); H. Blair Neatby, *Laurier and a Liberal Quebec: A Study in Political Management* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973); J. L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989).

7 John Herd Thompson, *The Harvest of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978). Also see Andrew Theobald, *The Bitter Harvest of War: New Brunswick and the Conscription Crisis of 1917* (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions, 2008).

8 See, for example, Norman Penner, ed., *Winnipeg 1919: The Strikers Own History of the Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co, 1975); David Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978); John Herd Thompson and Francis Swyripa, eds., *Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada during the Great War* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983); Lubomyr Luciuk, *In Fear of the Barbed Wire Fence: Canada's First National Internment Operations and the Ukrainian Canadians, 1914-1920* (Kingston: Kashtan Press, 2001); Bohdan Kordan, *Enemy Aliens: Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada During the Great War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002).

experiences of service personnel from the lowest to highest rank.⁹ Academic historians, working through masses of official papers, reports, attestation papers, personal letters, and dairies, have produced detailed and compelling assessments of battlefield leadership, trench warfare, the experiences of prisoners of war, and the evolution of Canada's military effectiveness on the ground, at sea, and in the air.¹⁰

Studies of the home front demonstrate most clearly the impact of the new military history, namely in delineating the multitudinous effects of total war. Several historians have conveyed this through intensive local studies of wartime Toronto, Winnipeg, Regina, Trois Rivières, Lethbridge, Guelph, and Halifax.¹¹ Those studying gender have assessed the ways and degree to which the war altered the lives of women based upon factors such as their leadership in massive voluntary campaigns, attaining the franchise, and joining the wartime workforce, often in positions traditionally held by men.¹² Studies of wartime information control, as well as the experiences of ethnic minorities, pacifists, conscientious objectors, the labour movement, political dissenters, and First Peoples, have assessed the impact of the conflict on civil liberties.¹³ Works on the Canadian

9 See, for example, S. F. Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Vol. 1* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); William Johnston, William Rawling, Richard Gimblett, and John MacFarlane, *The Seabound Coast: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Navy, 1867-1939, Vol. 1* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2011).

10 See, for example, Daniel Dancocks, *Arthur Currie: A Biography* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985); Ronald Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986); Michael Hadley and Roger Sarty, *Tin-Pots and Pirate Ships: Canadian Naval Forces and German Sea Raiders, 1880-1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991); Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Desmond Morton, *Silent Battle: Canadian Prisoners of War in Germany, 1914-1919* (Toronto: Methuen Publishers, 1992) and *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993); Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999); Shane Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (St. Catharines, ON: Vanwell, 2004); Jonathan Vance, *Objects of Concern: Canadian Prisoners of War Through the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin, 2007); Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Division at War, 1914-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin, 2009) and *The Madman and the Butcher: The Sensational Wars of Sam Hughes and Arthur Currie* (Toronto: Allen Lane Canada, 2010); Marc Milner, *Canada's Navy: The First Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

11 See John G. Armstrong, *The Halifax Explosion and the Royal Canadian Navy* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2002); Ian Hugh Maclean Millar, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada's Great War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); James Pitsula, *For All We Have and Are: Regina and the Experience of the Great War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008); Jim Blanchard, *Winnipeg's Great War: A City Comes of Age* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010).

12 Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998); Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, eds., *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012).

13 See, for example, Thomas Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Jeffrey Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship in Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996); Whitney Lackenbauer, *Battle Grounds: The Canadian*

Patriotic Fund and veterans' benefits demonstrate the link between the First World War and the evolution of Canadian social policy.¹⁴ Cultural studies have explained the way in which the First World War shaped literature, art, entertainment, and popular memory.¹⁵ Several works have compelled reassessments of long-held assumptions, such as the horrors of war destroying romanticized notions of combat as an adventure-seeking, manly pursuit.

When war was declared in August of 1914, Canadians believed that the conflict would be over by Christmas. The first section—Coping with Conflict—examines how Canadians on the home front and on the battlefield made sense of the world around them. At schools and universities across the country, students and teachers were well aware that the country was at war. In “‘Not Unless Necessary’: Student Responses to War Work at the University of Toronto,” Mary Chaktsiris reminds us that Canadian students' responses to war were more complex than past historians have acknowledged. Chaktsiris returns to sources frequently employed in studies of the University of Toronto, but mines them for what she calls “voices of discomfort” with the university's enthusiasm for the war. Chaktsiris finds that the question of compulsory military service and students' growing unease with calls to military service led to a campus-wide debate in the student paper that saw some students question the extent to which the university continued to support the war.

Public schools, like universities, across the country also shaped how students understood and responded to the war. In his examination of the primary education system in Berlin-Kitchener, Mario Nathan Coschi shows how educators who had once cast those of German heritage as desirable citizens dramatically changed their tune once war had begun. By drawing on local newspapers such as the *News Record* and *Daily Telegraph* as well as the minutes of the Berlin Public School Board, Coschi finds that, once public schools began to define the terms of citizenship as ones that revolved around money, manpower, and enthusiasm for the war, Germanness became a less desirable attribute of Canadian citizenship. Schools were pivotal, then, in defining and redefining the parameters of citizenship and they sought to replace students' pride in their German heritage with more acceptable British ideals. As Coschi's title so clearly captures, the options were limited: one was to “be British or Be Damned.”

Canadians were to demonstrate their enthusiasm for the war on campus, in classrooms, and especially through their support of voluntary associations. Social historians have long studied the ways in which Canadians across the country, in

Military and Aboriginal Lands (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); Amy Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objectors in Canada during the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008).

- 14 Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civil Life, 1915-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).
- 15 See Dagmar Novak, *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Dean Oliver and Laura Brandon, *Canvas of War: Painting the Canadian Experience, 1914 to 1945* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2001); Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Jason Wilson, *Soldiers of Song: The Dumbells and Other Canadian Concert Parties of the First World War* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012).

rural and urban communities, contributed to the war effort. In his paper, Steve Marti revisits patriotic work performed by English Canadians on the home front through the lens of spatial theory. By considering how space and scale shaped Canadians' participation in voluntary war work, Marti exposes the spatial limits of English Canadian identity. Drawing on the records of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, the Canadian Red Cross, the Young Men's Christian Association, and Voluntary Aid Detachments in places like Vancouver, Calgary, Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City, Fredericton, and Halifax, Marti argues that the decentralized nature of voluntary work, and the citizen mobilization it required of local communities, fundamentally shaped the patriotic work that occurred in English Canada.

Families and soldiers also coped with conflict in a variety of ways. Mélanie Morin-Pelletier uses the private correspondence of Ruth and William Antliff (a mother and son) and Sidney and Isabelle Brook (a husband and wife) to chart how families came to terms with a war that, for many, tore families and households apart. The written correspondence of these two families, housed at the Glenbow Museum and the Canadian War Museum, span the period from 1916 to 1919. Morin-Pelletier finds that little time was spent discussing the war itself in these letters; rather, ink was put to paper to discuss family matters or previous letters. Writing to loved ones provided an opportunity to escape, or at least forget, the war that had made such correspondence necessary. In contrast, Mark Humphries examines how some soldiers in the trenches and on the battlefields relied on self-inflicted wounds to cope with the trauma of the trenches. For some men (and boys) who lived with the perpetual fear that they would lose their friends, be maimed, or even be killed, the act of intentionally hurting oneself, argues Humphries, provided a remarkable and somewhat unanswerable challenge to military authority. By charting the various ways in which men resisted the state's authority over their male bodies by wounding themselves, especially in ways that diminished their capacity to serve, Humphries finds that self-inflicted wounds or the inhaling of gas provided some soldiers with the opportunity to determine when and how they left the trenches.

The papers in the second section—*Beyond Colony and Nation*—by Peter Campbell, Paula Hastings, Greg Marquis, and Brandon Dimmel, read international currents alongside local conditions to ask what we can learn about Canada, and Canadians' understandings of race and nation, politics and identity when we expand our frame to include places and peoples beyond the geographic parameters of the early-twentieth century nation-state. Brandon Dimmel examines how wartime acts of sabotage led the government of Canada to heighten international border security in the Detroit River region between 1914 and 1918. The transnational culture of this region, as in Berlin-Kitchener, had a significant German population but yielded a different history. For many in Detroit and Windsor, the German heritage of many residents was of little concern. In fact, the increased number of immigration inspectors along the border, part of Ottawa's attempt to regulate traffic across the international boundary and protect Canadians from the German "enemy within," had the opposite effect: residents of the Detroit River region

demanded that the federal government curtail its efforts to make crossing the international border more difficult.

Consumer goods, like people, also crossed the Canadian-American border during the Great War. Greg Marquis' article, "The War Within a War" examines how Canadians constructed understandings of race in relation to national identity, citizenship, and the treatment of minorities during the war by interrogating Canadians' reactions to D. W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation*. Between 1915 and 1916 the film was shown in theatres across the United States and Canada; most white Canadians accepted the film's inflammatory racial messages. Marquis interprets this acceptance to mean that Canadians' distorted and discriminatory attitudes towards racial minorities were deeply internalized. Yet this racism did not go unchallenged. Black Canadians in Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, and Saint John protested the screening of the film, actions that Marquis sees as influenced by the contemporary racial politics of the United States, reminding us that ideas about race and difference were lived locally but also tied to the international circulation of products, peoples, and ideas.

Canada was not only defined by its relationship to the United States, however; the ties between Canada, Empire, and the West Indies, as Paula Hastings argues, took on added significance during the Great War. In fact, the war provided some Canadians with the opportunity to imagine Canada as a "big white brother" to those in the West Indies, creating, in effect, a new type of imperial federation. Inspired, in part, by the anticipated territorial changes that would take place following the war, earlier ideas about the economic potential of the region, and their notions of racial hierarchies, Canadians expressed considerable interest in annexing the West Indies during the final years of the war. By 1919, however, interest had dissipated. Yet the struggles West Indians in Canada had during the war—whether over the question of military service or over access to post-secondary education—vividly expose the attitudes white Canadians held toward people of colour. Peter Campbell further expands the scope of this special issue by giving voice to leftists, feminists, anti-imperialists, and pacifists around the globe. Campbell explores the campaign against the Allied occupation of the Rhineland by African conscripts, initiated by the legendary Congo reformer and anti-war activist, Edmund Dene Morel, in the aftermath of the Great War. Campbell intricately reveals, what he calls, the complex "interplay of the universal idealism of the politics of racial uplift on the one hand, and racism on the other." By homing in on how this seeming contradiction came to be, Campbell exposes some of the ways that Great War muddied gender, racial, and class lines in the "colonies" and at "home".

The articles published here represent some of the ways in which historians are revisiting the impact of the Great War on Canada and Canadians 100 years after the first shots were fired. Collectively, these articles provide a wide-ranging understanding of the conflict that spans its local, national, transnational, and international dimensions. By considering how diverse groups of Canadians reckoned with the historical consequences of the First World War, the papers published here teach us about how Canadians at school and at home, in their communities and at war, made sense of, lived through, and coped with this conflict.

They also remind us that we can learn important lessons about Canada and how Canadians understood race, nation, and identity if we locate Canada's wartime history within international or transnational frames. This volume concludes with an essay by Desmond Morton wherein he reflects upon his prolific career as a historian of Canada and the First World War.

Section I:
Coping with Conflict

