For Kin and County: Scale, Identity, and English-Canadian Voluntary Societies, 1914-1918

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The impact of the First World War on Canadian identity has been understood in terms of victories won by soldiers on the battlefield such as Ypres and Vimy Ridge or the gains made by statesmen in the Imperial War Cabinet or at the Paris Peace Conference. This article explores the relationship between the war and identity through an examination of patriotic work performed on the Canadian home front. Both space and scale influenced the way English Canadians chose to coordinate their voluntary efforts for the war overseas and thus how they constructed the spatial boundaries of their imagined communities.

IN OCTOBER 1915, a group of students at the University of Alberta formed the Soldiers’ Comforts Committee to send care packages to fellow students who were serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. The members of the committee were glad to coordinate their work with the Wauneita Society, a women’s student club, but both clubs were reluctant to combine their efforts with local chapters.

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of the St. John Ambulance and the Canadian Red Cross Society. At a meeting of the Soldiers’ Comforts Committee in November 1915, members discussed the possibility of combining their efforts with the St. John Ambulance “so long as we do not lose our identity.” At their next meeting, the members felt that this condition could not be met, and the club resolved not to unite with the St. John Ambulance. This decision reveals that identity was an important consideration in the coordination of voluntary patriotic work. Even though the Soldiers’ Comforts Committee performed the same work and was devoted to the same cause as the St. John Ambulance, members wanted to ensure that their patriotic effort was identified as the work of students at the University of Alberta and directed to benefit their classmates overseas. The decision of the Soldiers’ Comforts Committee was reflected in the deliberations of many other English-Canadian voluntary societies, which debated whether to include or exclude neighbouring societies into larger cooperative efforts. These debates allow us to examine how ideas of scale, space, and place factored into the coordination of patriotic work and to draw larger conclusions on the construction of the spatial boundaries that defined imagined communities in Canada.

Defining the limits of Canadian identity has been a perennial challenge for Canadian historians. As members of the British Empire, English Canadians could understand spatial boundaries of their identity through a number of concentric scalar categories such as their hometown, province, region, nation, or empire. The mobilization of Canadians on the home front prompted conversations among and between communities across Canada as they sought to coordinate their voluntary efforts, and these conversations provide a lens through which to examine how English Canadians weighed these concentric categories by directing their voluntary contributions to support war effort on a local, regional, national, or imperial scale. The relationship between patriotic work and social limits of identity are noted by Katie Pickles, who observes that voluntary societies were “local containers of identity” with membership defined according race, gender, ethnicity, location, and religious belief. The voluntary societies examined here were composed of, if not controlled by, members of the English-Canadian middle class. British historians Susan Grayzel and Matthew Hendley have demonstrated

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1 University of Alberta Archives [hereafter UAA], University of Alberta Soldiers’ Comforts Club fonds, Acc. no. 70-91, Item no. 136, File 1, Minute Book 1915-1919, Meeting Minutes, October 28, 1915; Wauneita Society fonds, Acc. no. 77-149, Constitution and Minutes 1909-1919, Meeting Minutes, January 19, 1915.
2 UAA, University of Alberta Soldiers’ Comforts Club fonds, Acc. no. 70-91, Item no. 136, File 1, Minute Book 1915-1919, Meeting Minutes, November 15, 1915.
3 Ibid., November 19, 1915.
that women’s participation in the war effort through domestic work, such as knitting or nursing, reinforced middle-class conceptions of femininity, and Sarah Glassford’s and Amy Shaw’s edited anthology shows that these conclusions also hold true in the Canadian context. With race, class, gender, and ethnicity well established as boundaries defining the “local containers” that were wartime voluntary societies, this article explores how spatial boundaries were drawn between different communities. A broad examination of English Canadians that includes Anglophone communities in Quebec, a border that has traditionally separated English and French Canada, reveals the freedom with which middle-class English Canadians were able to define, through patriotic work, the spatial limits of their identity and their imagined communities.

Rather than treat spatial categories as fixed or permanent, this article draws on poststructural studies showing how conceptions of scale were fluid constructions that could be defined and redefined through social processes such as voluntarism and philanthropy. Ideas about gender and domesticity are important because women performed and coordinated much of the voluntary and patriotic effort. The connection between women’s work and scalar identities has been explored in Sallie Marston’s study of the domestic work performed by middle-class American women in the late nineteenth century. Marston argues that this domestic work connected a woman’s private sphere in the home to the national scale because the practices of home economics or domestic science prescribed in popular periodicals were modelled as practices of good citizenship. The domestic work of household management, then, doubled as an exercise of citizenship, thereby conjoining a woman’s home and the nation. Given that women’s war work often took forms that reflected ideals of domesticity, such as knitting or nursing, Marston’s arguments about the transcendence of concentric scalar categories through work is particularly useful for a study of wartime voluntary societies. If the consumption of domestic goods can bring the nation into the household, as Marston argues, then the production of knitted items and the performance of domestic work for the war effort can be seen as a projection of the household outward, into larger spatial scales. This article relies heavily on Marston’s assertion that the performance of work can be examined to reveal the fluidity of spatial conceptions of identity.

Patriotic work performed by members of national and international voluntary societies such as the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), the

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8 Magda Fahrni’s chapter on the relationship between French- and English-Canadian historiographies points out the role of territorial boundaries in defining, implicitly or explicitly, English Canada as a category that excludes the province of Quebec. See “Reflections of the Place of Quebec in Historical Writing on Canada” in Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson, eds., Contesting Clio’s Craft (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009), p. 12.


Canadian Red Cross Society, the St. John Ambulance, and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) are examined here to show how the members of these national and international organizations defined the scale of their efforts as they mobilized local communities in support of the wider imperial war effort. I first examine the coordination between the national and primary chapters of the IODE to reveal the conflicts that arose as this national organization mobilized itself for war. Tensions emerged as primary chapters defined the scale of their work in response to requests from national and provincial executives. The role of place further complicated the definition of spatial boundaries. Activities of the IODE, the St. John Ambulance, and the YMCA in port cities such as Halifax and Quebec City reveal how the movement of soldiers who embarked and disembarked in these ports could reshape conceptions of scale, turning local efforts into work of national importance—or vice versa. The demographic and economic import of major cities such as Montreal or Saint John, New Brunswick, was also reflected in patriotic work coordinated by voluntary societies based in these cities. Lastly, I examine how transnational conceptions of identity were reflected in voluntary societies whose membership was composed of recent Anglophone migrants from the United States, Britain, and the empire. This broad examination of patriotic work demonstrates the complexity of concentric scalar identities through which English Canadians could understand their efforts as they mobilized the home front for a distant war, fought for a distant empire.

Voluntary contributions to the Canadian war effort were substantial: the Canadian Red Cross Society collectively raised over $9 million over the course of the war, nearly one-fifth of the sum achieved by the Canadian Patriotic Fund.\footnote{Sarah Glassford, “Marching as to War: The Canadian Red Cross Society, 1885-1939” (PhD dissertation, York University, 2007), p. 146; Philip H. Morris, \textit{The Canadian Patriotic Fund: A Record of its Activities from 1914 to 1919} (n.p., n.d.), p. 26.} The coordinators of Canadian Red Cross efforts in England often wrote to their counterparts in Canada pleading for donations in cash rather than in kind.\footnote{Library and Archives Canada [hereafter LAC], MG 28.1.35, Vol. 4, File 4-17, World War I, Canadian Red Cross Correspondent.} Monetary donations did not take up valuable shipping or storage space and could be used to purchase goods in response to immediate needs, but most members of voluntary societies preferred to donate tangible home-made items. Women knitted socks and sewed bandages, and they often used the funds they raised to purchase knitting and sewing supplies rather than forward donations of cash. The results were prodigious: the Red Cross of New Brunswick collected over 150,000 pairs of socks over the course of the war—roughly six pairs for every soldier born in the province—and donated a further 119,000 hospital garments, 129,000 linens, and tens of thousands of sundry hospital supplies such as dressings and bandages.\footnote{Canadian Red Cross Society, \textit{The Work of the Canadian Red Cross Society in the Province of New Brunswick During the Years of the Great War} (Saint John, NB: The St. John Globe Publishing Co., 1919), pp. 30-31. C. A. Sharpe estimates that there were 24,430 New-Brunswick-born soldiers serving in the Canadian Expeditionary Force; see “Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918: A Regional Analysis,” \textit{Journal of Canadian Studies}, vol. 18, no. 4 (1984), p. 23.} Fundraising efforts were sometimes pooled to purchase equipment that could not be sewn or knitted. The IODE raised enough funds to supply 19 motor ambulances,
22 sterilizing units, 942 cots, and enough material to equip 36 hospital wards to the Allied war effort. Not having a strong centralized state or a military-industrial complex, the Canadian Department of Militia and Defence was eager to accept these donations.

Patriotic donations were not given freely. Canadians sought to control who received their gifts, and the Department of Militia and Defence was faced with the difficulty of accommodating the conditions that English-Canadian volunteers attached to their donations. Edgar Nelson Rhodes, Member of Parliament for Amherst, Nova Scotia, wrote to the Secretary of the Militia Committee to request that the medical supplies sent by his local chapter of the IODE be directed to the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station because that unit’s staff was primarily from Nova Scotia. In many cases the Department of Militia received subsequent inquiries to confirm that donations had been distributed according to instructions. Colonel John Wallace Carson, Sam Hughes’ “special representative” in London, was obliged to confirm that the 50 pounds of tobacco donated by the Nova Scotia Steel Company had indeed reached the Quartermaster of the 17th Battalion so that it could be distributed among soldiers from Nova Scotia. Daniel Chisholm, a commissioner for the city of Toronto, wrote to the Canadian Army Post Office to inquire about the distribution of 14,000 packets of cookies that the city had sent as Christmas gifts to be distributed among soldiers from Toronto. Chisholm’s inquiry followed a letter of thanks sent to the mayor by a soldier in the British Army. This letter raised suspicions that the Canadian Army Post Office had been less than diligent in delivering all the cookies to their intended recipients and prompted an investigation. The desire to make a specific type of contribution to the war effort and then to direct its distribution reflected how donors channelled their efforts to recipients who were part of a clearly defined community.

When volunteers decided who would receive the results of their patriotic efforts, they were, in effect, defining the limits of their imagined community. The mayor of Toronto wanted to send cookies to soldiers from Toronto, just as the Nova Scotia Steel Company wanted to send tobacco to soldiers from Nova Scotia. These contributions were not given freely but conditionally, and donors followed up to make sure those conditions were fulfilled. All told, these gifts were drops in a bucket that poured into the greater national and imperial war efforts. Patriotic donations were far from being simple expressions of nationalism or imperialism, these examples reveal how voluntary contributions reflected the donors’ desire to place priority on the needs of their own local or regional communities. In most cases, however, Canadians were not able to engage directly with the state but contributed to the war effort by participating in patriotic work organized by a

14 Pickles, Female Imperialism, p. 43.
15 LAC, RG24, Vol. 1038, HQ 54-21-33-10, Proposed Gifts from Daughters of the Empire to Troops Overseas 1914, E. N. Rhodes, MP Amherst NS, to Charles S. Panet, Secretary of Militia Council, June 29, 1915.
voluntary society. The ability for a community to self-mobilize as part of a voluntary society allowed members to debate and determine the scope and reach of their efforts, ultimately reflecting how they perceived the scale of their own identities.

The records of the IODE are especially useful in demonstrating the degree of autonomy that local chapters could exercise in a national voluntary society. At its incorporation in 1901, the IODE was a collection of local, independent primary chapters affiliated with the National Chapter in Toronto. The growth of the organization during its first ten years prompted the formation of provincial and even municipal chapters that coordinated the activities of primary chapters within a given jurisdiction. Yet the minutes of these various chapters reveal the limited authority of the National Chapter. In December 1915, for example, the national executive of the IODE incurred a debt of over $20,000 to purchase a small Christmas gift for every Canadian soldier overseas. The following month, the National Chapter asked its primary chapters to donate funds to correct this overdraft. The Provincial Chapter of New Brunswick reluctantly decided to contribute some funds, but its members observed that, despite the good intentions behind this spending, the National Chapter “should not be encouraged to do it too often.”

The Loyalist Chapter in Saint John, New Brunswick, acknowledged the National Chapter’s request but refused to commit any funds, while the Coronation Chapter in Vancouver dispatched a letter to protest the incursion of such a large debt without even consulting the provincial chapters. When the members of primary chapters resisted requests from their national or provincial executive, tensions surfaced as the members of voluntary organizations such as the IODE tried to define the scale of their efforts.

The autonomy of primary chapters of the IODE gave members considerable freedom to direct their own contributions to the war effort. In October 1915, the Royal Edward Chapter of the IODE clearly preferred to limit its efforts to a provincial scale as it chose to devote $400 of the $438 the chapter had raised that month to support the Prince Edward Island Ward of the Canadian Stationary Hospital in Le Touquet, while only contributing $25 to the National Chapter’s 1915 Trafalgar Day appeal to raise funds for the British Red Cross. In 1917, the Victoria and Albert Chapter in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, declined to participate in the provincial chapter’s appeal to raise funds to send Christmas gifts to soldiers overseas because it had organized its own campaign to send parcels

19 Ibid., January 3, 1916.
21 Public Archives and Records Office, Prince Edward Island [hereafter PARO, PEI], Acc. no. 2990, Royal Edward Chapter, IODE Fonds, Series 1, File 3, Minute Book February 1913 – January 1917, Meeting Minutes, October 21, 1915.
“directly” to local soldiers serving overseas. When faced with the option, many chapters preferred to organize their own initiatives to support the war in ways that benefited the members of the local community.

The pull of local communities could even blur the lines between different voluntary societies. In March 1915, the Victoria and Albert Chapter voted to knit under the direction of the Red Cross, rather than send members’ work to be collected and counted by the provincial IODE. In Calgary, the Royal Scots Chapter struck a deal with the local Red Cross, agreeing that, if the chapter purchased its own supplies, all of its members’ work would be included in Red Cross shipments but counted as a separate contribution. To a large extent, primary chapters of the IODE decided whether credit for their wartime contributions would be shared with other organizations in the local community or whether they would be counted as part of the provincial or national contributions of the IODE. Most primary chapters preferred to coordinate their work on a local scale, rather than contribute to provincial or national efforts.

Cooperation between voluntary societies in the same vicinity was common because individuals volunteered with more than one society. The Regents of the Colonel Macleod Chapter and the Military Chapter of the IODE in Calgary, for example, both sat on the executive of the Provincial Red Cross Society. Dual membership often facilitated cooperation between voluntary societies. At the outset of the war, the members of the Royal Edward Chapter of the IODE eagerly contributed to the Canadian Patriotic Fund. Two years later, however, the members voted to stop raising funds for the Canadian Patriotic Fund as a chapter because most were already making donations through their church. The Women’s Institute of Crossroads, Prince Edward Island, changed the date and time of its meetings to ensure that its members could also participate in the patriotic work of the Hazelbrook Ladies Aid Society, while the Red Cross Society in Mount Herbert, Prince Edward Island, amalgamated with the MacDonald Women’s Institute, on the condition that Red Cross work was continued.

That primary chapters always preferred to coordinate their work on a local scale rather than follow directions from a distant executive is a generalization that cannot be taken as a rule. The Golden West Chapter of the IODE in Saskatoon, for example, was compelled to contribute $25 to the efforts of the IODE of Winnipeg to purchase a field kitchen for the 28th Battalion because 300 men from

22 Saskatchewan Archive Board [hereafter SAB], GR 427, IODE fonds, Series VI, Regional Chapters: 5. Minutes, h) Victoria and Albert Chapter, Prince Albert, i) Minute Book 1909-1920, Meeting Minutes, September 25, 1917.
23 Ibid., March 23, 1915.
24 Glenbow Archives [hereafter GA], IODE (Calgary) fonds, M-1690, Royal Scots Chapter, File 1, Minute Book 1917-1924, Meeting Minutes, February 5, 1918.
25 GA, Red Cross fonds, M-8228.15, Minute Book 1914-1916, Meeting Minutes, October 10, 1914.
26 PARO, PEI, Acc. no. 2990, Royal Edward Chapter, IODE Fonds, Series 1, File 3, Minute Book February 1913 – January 1917, Meeting Minutes, September 8 and October 21, 1914.
27 Ibid., February 28, 1916.
28 PARO, PEI, Acc. no. 4761, Crossroads Women’s Institute Fonds, Minute Book 1916-1920, Meeting Minutes, October 11, 1916.
29 Ibid.
Saskatoon were serving in that unit, demonstrating that local identities sometimes encouraged collaboration on a larger scale. The question of counting, recording, and publicizing patriotic contributions of funds or knitted items presented a choice between collaborating with members of a local community or as part of a larger imagined community. Primary chapters of the IODE weighed between these two impulses as they directed the work of their members and sought recognition for their contributions to the war effort. Funds and comforts could be turned over to the provincial or national chapter to be counted as IODE contributions, or patriotic initiatives could be coordinated with other local organizations and distributed to ensure that the work benefited members of that community. It was up to the members of a primary chapter to determine the scale at which their efforts would be projected.

The conversations and conflicts that arose between different chapters of the IODE as they debated the scale of their patriotic efforts reveal the importance of space and scale in defining identity. The members of a primary chapter of the IODE were able to discuss among themselves whether they would collaborate with another local organization or whether they would contribute to the initiatives of a distant provincial or national executive. In doing so, voluntary societies defined the spatial boundaries of their community as they determined the scale of their patriotic work as local, provincial, or national. In a country as vast as Canada, which was part of an even more vast empire, these competing ideas about the scale of patriotic efforts provide a means of understanding how English Canadians grappled with the spatial limits of their imagined community.

Identity can be constructed in spatial terms such as distance or scale, but these abstractions are not sufficient to explain why English Canadians were able to express a multiplicity of different identities through their patriotic work. A closer consideration of local conditions can illuminate how the unique social processes of a given place shaped the construction of identities in Canada. The influence of place on patriotic activity was evident in ports such as Quebec City, where soldiers embarked for their voyage overseas and disembarked on their return. The Municipal Chapter of the IODE in Quebec City, formed in 1916, identified the traffic of 15,000 returned soldiers in one year as a major catalyst to the growth of its membership and the creation of new primary chapters in the city. The impact of convalescing soldiers arriving in Quebec City can be seen in the evolving activities of the Baden-Powell Chapter of the IODE.

Prior to the outbreak of war, the Baden-Powell Chapter’s chief philanthropic activity was sewing children’s clothing for poor migrant families in the city. In October 1914, the chapter decided that it would turn this activity into a contribution for the war effort by sending the children’s clothes to Belgium. As the war progressed, however, the activities of the Baden-Powell Chapter were

30 SAB, R-766, IODE fonds, Series II, Regional Chapters, 5. Golden West Chapter, b) Minutes 1914-1917, Meeting Minutes, July 12, 1915.
increasingly devoted to the reception and care of wounded soldiers arriving at the city’s Discharge Depot. In April 1916 it was decided that, each week, three club members should visit soldiers staying in local hospitals.\(^{33}\) and by December 1916 the chapter voted to tax its members ten cents per month so the chapter could provide refreshments to the Khaki Club and the Overseas Club. Fewer and fewer shipments of children’s clothing were sent to Belgium.\(^{34}\) The flow of returned soldiers into Quebec City prompted the Baden-Powell Chapter to adjust its activities to provide a patriotic contribution more suited to local conditions and of greater significance to the national war effort. The mobility of soldiers leaving for and returning from overseas created a unique space in port cities such as Quebec and dramatically altered the manner in which voluntary societies in these cities performed their work and understood their identity.

The social interactions of a place such as a port city could have a paradoxical effect on conceptions of scale. Halifax was another major transit hub, and the traffic of soldiers likewise influenced the activities of the local YMCA. The constant passage of troops made Halifax a “strategic point” for the national YMCA.\(^{35}\) As a result, the responsibility for YMCA work in Halifax was shared between the local and national chapters. The national chapter paid the salary and expenses of a full-time secretary to assist the YMCA’s activities in Halifax, but the establishment of a nationally administered Triangle Club, for the rest and recreation of soldiers, was left to the discretion of the local branch.\(^{36}\) Halifax’s role as a major embarkation point for the Canadian Expeditionary Force created a unique environment for the activities of the local YMCA. The city’s effect on the expression of the local YMCA’s identity is best evidenced in the chapter’s annual reports. The annual report from 1917 boasted of the chapter’s provision of shower and bathing facilities to transient troops. A shower usually cost five cents for non-members, but it was agreed that the National YMCA would cover this fee for passing soldiers as a patriotic service—a detail left out of the locally published annual reports, which advertised the YMCA’s bathing facilities as a local contribution to the national war effort.\(^{37}\) The same report recalled with pride that the Halifax YMCA often provided support to passing YMCA secretaries and military chaplains in transit for Europe and highlighted that the local chapter had administered the ballot for a passing Vancouver battalion during British Columbia’s provincial election.\(^{38}\) Special mention was made of a draft of 500 soldiers from the Prairie provinces, which had passed through the chapter’s showers and showed their appreciation with “three tremendous cheers and a ‘tiger’.”\(^{39}\)

The YMCA of Halifax was certainly not unique in opening its doors to Canadian soldiers. The YMCA in Kingston organized twice-weekly entertainments for

\(^{33}\) Ibid., April 26, 1916.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., December 8, 1916.

\(^{35}\) Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management [hereafter NSARM], MG 20, Young Men’s Christian Association fonds, Vol. 373, Minutes 1911-1927, Meeting Minutes, January 11, 1917.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., November 22, 1917.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., November 30, 1917.

\(^{38}\) NSARM, MG 20, Young Men’s Christian Association fonds, Vol. 373, Annual Report 1916-1917, p. 5.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., pp. 12-13.
soldiers training nearby, and the Edmonton YMCA offered free swimming lessons to local soldiers, while the only comfort the cash-strapped YMCA in Charlottetown could extend was free access to its facilities and permission for soldiers to smoke in its otherwise smoke-free bowling alley. The location of the YMCA of Halifax, however, meant that it provided comforts to soldiers from all across Canada. The chapter’s annual reports did not just boast about comforts provided to local regiments or the chapter’s involvement in community projects, but accentuated its work as a contribution to the national war effort. The YMCA of Halifax acted locally, but members understood their contributions on a national scale. The YMCA’s clubrooms and bathing facilities were not just open to local soldiers; these facilities served the nation as soldiers from across Canada passed through Halifax en route for France.

The movement of returning soldiers through Halifax also changed how Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses in the St. John Ambulance defined the limits of their community. From the outset of the war, the St. John Ambulance trained middle-class women as auxiliary nurses to assist in the work of military hospitals by performing unskilled tasks such as bathing or feeding patients. In reality, however, the St. John Ambulance found that there were few opportunities for Canadian VAD nurses to work overseas. According to one annual report, 1,609 women completed Home Nursing courses organized by the St. John Ambulance Ontario Council in 1917, but only 130 VAD nurses from Ontario found work in England and France. Eagerly seeking a patriotic outlet, many VAD nurses found themselves performing work that was not at all related to their training. In Ottawa VAD nurses devoted their efforts to distributing refreshments to soldiers on passing troop trains. More commonly, detachments of the St. John Ambulance turned their role as instructors of first aid into a patriotic outlet by donating their students’ $5 registration fee to the Red Cross. The arrival of convalescing soldiers into the port of Halifax, however, created a unique opportunity for VAD nurses in the city.

Volunteer nurses of the Centre North Division of the St. John Ambulance Brigade in Halifax worked under the supervision of local military authorities to assist with the care of convalescing soldiers as they waited on Pier 11 for transport

40 Queen’s University Archives, YMCA Kingston fonds, Box 1/1, Minute Book 1890-1919, Meeting Minutes, November 18, 1914.
42 PARO, PEI, Acc. no. 2887, YMCA Charlottetown, PEI Fonds, Series 1, Minutes and Annual Reports, File 6, Minute Book 1914-1928, Meeting Minutes, January 21, 1916.
43 Glassford, “Marching as to War,” p. 114.
45 AO, F 823, St. John Ambulance Ontario Council fonds, Box 3, Annual Reports 1912-1919, Report of Commandant, Ottawa Women’s Voluntary Aid Detachment, November 8, 1918. Linda Quinney also makes a note of these activities, but interprets them as “publically promoting” the activities of the St. John Ambulance; see “‘Assistant Angels’: Canadian Women as Voluntary Aid Detachment Nurses During and After the Great War, 1914-1939” (PhD dissertation, University of Ottawa, 2002), p. 61.
to the Discharge Depot. The work of VADs on the pier and in the Discharge Depot was to assist the professionally trained nurses of the Canadian Army Medical Corps. In mid-April 1917, however, the arrival of large numbers of women and children accompanying returned soldiers created a niche for VAD nurses, who were asked to receive and provide comforts to these able-bodied passengers. The Military Hospital Commission allocated a room and a small grant to a sub-committee of the St. John Ambulance Division so that VAD nurses could dispense refreshments and other comforts for women and children disembarking in Halifax.\(^{47}\) The receiving depot provided a rare opportunity for VAD nurses to work independently from the supervision of professional CAMC nurses.

The opportunities presented by this receiving depot created a sharp conflict within the community of VAD nurses in Halifax. The sub-committee evidently monopolized work at the receiving depot and in doing so was accused of “undermining the loyalty of the membership[,] enlarging the committee without authority,”\(^{48}\) and “severing”\(^ {49}\) its ties with the rest of Halifax’s St. John Ambulance Brigade. In the ensuing standoff, the superintendent of the St. John Ambulance Division called on the National Relief Committee and the Soldiers’ Wives League to take over the receiving depot from the rogue sub-committee.\(^ {50}\) Neither the National Relief Committee nor the Halifax chapter of the Soldiers’ Wives League had enough staff on hand to take on the additional responsibility, and the conflict re-ignited when the offending members of the St. John Ambulance answered a new call for volunteers to staff the receiving depot. This time, the volunteers chose not to wear their VAD uniforms to make it clear that their actions were neither associated with the St. John Ambulance nor the defunct sub-committee; however, this technicality only aggravated the situation because the same group of women had once again cornered this local outlet for patriotic work.\(^ {51}\)

The fracas that surrounded this secondary receiving station on a pier in Halifax demonstrates how mobility factored into the spatial construction of identity. The arrival of convalescing soldiers and their families satisfied VAD nurses’ desire to fulfil their feminine identity through patriotic work.\(^ {52}\) Most relevant to a study of space and identity, however, is that this episode reveals the importance of place in shaping the relationship between patriotic contributions and the expression of identity. The Halifax Explosion of December 1917 certainly provided VAD

\(^{47}\) NSARM, MG20, St. John Ambulance, Nova Scotia Council fonds, Acc. no. 2003 39/001, file #1, Letter from R. V. Harris to Mrs. J. G. McDougal, March 1, 1918.

\(^{48}\) NSARM, MG20, St. John Ambulance, Nova Scotia Council fonds, Acc. no. 2003 39/001, file #1, Telegram from R. V. Harris to C. J. Copp, April 17, 1918.

\(^{49}\) NSARM, MG20, St. John Ambulance, Nova Scotia Council fonds, Acc. no. 2003 39/001, file #1, Letter from R. V. Harris to Mrs. J. G. McDougal, March 11, 1918.

\(^{50}\) NSARM, MG20, St. John Ambulance, Nova Scotia Council fonds, Acc. no. 2003 39/001, file #1, Letter from W. Hoare to R. V. Harris, April 22, 1918.


\(^{52}\) Linda Quinney, “Bravely and Loyally They Answered the Call: St. John Ambulance, the Red Cross, and the Patriotic Service of Women during the First World War,” *History of Intellectual Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1 (2005), pp. 1-19; Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*. 
nurses with an immediate and important outlet for their patriotic service, but in the meantime the arrival of wounded soldiers and their wives and children into Halifax was one of the few services that matched VAD nurses’ skill-set and allowed them to work independently while still making a direct contribution to the war effort.

Mobility adds an important dimension to the process through which voluntary societies conceived of the scale of their work. The limited opportunities for VAD nurses to serve abroad impeded the mobility of their wartime contribution. The VAD nurses’ limited skill-set and their immobility meant that there were more volunteers in Halifax than there were meaningful opportunities to contribute to the war effort. Personal disputes could erupt anywhere, but the receiving depot in Halifax created unique conditions that induced a group of VAD nurses to break away from the St. John Ambulance and exclude other nurses from their work, while the superintendent of the St. John Ambulance Brigade collaborated with other organizations to recover control of this depot. Elsewhere, VAD nurses found they could only contribute to the war effort by hosting receptions for troop trains or raising funds for the Red Cross by teaching first aid. In Halifax, however, VAD nurses of the St. John Ambulance found work at the receiving depot so rewarding that they broke their ties with their own Brigade and limited the scale of their efforts so as to exclude their fellow VAD nurses. The movement of soldiers through Halifax led members of the local YMCA to understand the significance of their contributions on a wider scale, but drove a wedge through the community of VAD nurses who coordinated their efforts on a scale reserved only for members of an exclusive sub-committee. The work of these two co-located societies demonstrates the paradoxical effect that place and mobility could sometimes have on shaping the scale of an imagined community.

The sheer size of an urban centre could also change how conceptions of scale were reflected by patriotic work. The Municipal Chapter of the IODE in Montreal oversaw a total of 27 primary chapters and was the largest of the municipal chapters. Located near an embarkation point for soldiers sailing overseas, the Montreal chapters of the IODE took part in entertaining passing soldiers, but the size and scope of the Montreal Municipal Chapter also allowed it to send its work overseas without outside assistance. At the outbreak of war, the Municipal Chapter quickly established a central depot for the collection of knitted comforts from its primary chapters and displayed their communal accomplishments by labelling all items and boxes “IODE Montreal.” In September 1915, the Municipal Chapter engaged its own agent in Le Havre to receive the chapter’s shipments and distribute

56 Ibid., October 27, 1914.
them among Canadian soldiers in France. The Montreal IODE was thus entirely independent from efforts of the National IODE to send comforts overseas.

The Municipal Chapter of Montreal took great pride in the role it played in coordinating patriotic activity in the region of Montreal and even parts of Eastern Ontario and became quite protective of its territory. When the National Chapter suggested changing the representation of its primary chapters, the Municipal Chapter of Montreal interpreted this measure as an attempt to wrest primary chapters located outside Montreal from its jurisdiction and responded with a strong letter of protest. When it was understood that the National Chapter only meant to amend the number of delegates each chapter could send to the national convention, the municipal executive ordered that its letter of protest and all other correspondence relating to the incident be destroyed. This sharp reaction suggests that the Municipal Chapter strongly resented the National Chapter’s incursion on its autonomy. The organization of Montreal’s Municipal Chapter reflected the place in which it coordinated patriotic work. The weight of resources it was able to marshal surpassed that of most provincial chapters and allowed the IODE of Montreal to coordinate its war work independent of the National Chapter. In resisting direction from the national executive in Toronto, while still exerting control over the primary chapters in Montreal and the surrounding area, the Montreal Chapter of the IODE drew boundaries that made clear its efforts were to be coordinated on a local scale, outside the provincial and national hierarchies of the IODE.

Tensions did not just arise between the national and primary chapters of the IODE, but also between chapters in the same province. The organization of a provincial chapter in Fredericton, New Brunswick, in 1915 received considerable resistance from members of the Valcartier and Loyalist Chapters in Saint John, who refused to recognize the authority of the provincial chapter. Primary chapters in Saint John eventually participated in the meetings of the Provincial Chapter, but municipal rivalries were a persistent barrier to cooperation. Rumours circulated well into 1916 that the more established primary chapters in Saint John were conspiring to force the Provincial Chapter to relocate from Fredericton to the larger city of Saint John. At the Provincial Chapter’s annual meeting in April 1917, delegates from Saint John stormed out in response to the Provincial Chapter’s “unbusinesslike & unsatisfactory” conduct and later forwarded a letter of protest to the National Chapter. Tensions continued at the following meeting

57 Ibid., September 28, 1915.
60 New Brunswick Museum [hereafter NBM], S66-1, IODE Valcartier Chapter Minute Book 1914-1918, Meeting Minutes, April 9, 1915; PANB, MC525, IODE Loyalist Chapter fonds, MS1.A, Minute Book 1915-1919, Meeting Minutes, April 23, 1915.
61 PANB, MC 200, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) Provincial Fonds, MS 1.A2, Minute Book 1915-1919, Meeting Minutes, April 24, 1916.
62 NBM, S66-1, IODE Valcartier Chapter Minute Book 1914-1918, Meeting Minutes, May 7, 1917.
when Mrs. Chisholm, a representative from Saint John, opined that the present meeting was invalid. Chisholm argued that the annual meeting was still ongoing because quorum had been lost when the Saint John delegation walked out, and the meeting could thus not vote to adjourn.\footnote{PANB, MC 200, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) Provincial Fonds, MS 1.A2, Minute Book 1915-1919, Meeting Minutes, May 8, 1917.}

The source of this obstinacy was nothing more than a rivalry between New Brunswick’s largest city and its provincial capital. The Provincial Chapter was derided for conducting its meetings in an “unbusinesslike” fashion, but it achieved considerable success in its patriotic work. In January 1916, the Provincial Chapter set a goal to raise $4,000 to support the IODE’s Maple Leaf Club in London.\footnote{Ibid., January 19, 1916.} By April, the Provincial Chapter had surpassed its goal by $2,000 and used the surplus funds to purchase an X-ray machine for the Daughters of the Empire Hospital in London.\footnote{Ibid., April 24, 1916.} In February 1915, before the Provincial Chapter was organized, members of the Valcartier Chapter in Saint John noted that they should make an effort to conduct meetings in a more “business like” fashion, yet refused to recognize the Provincial Chapter only a few months later because it was “not being properly organized.”\footnote{NB, S66-1, IODE Valcartier Chapter Minute Book 1914-1918, Meeting Minutes, February 2 and April 9, 1915.} The Provincial Chapter, however, stuck to coordinating work on a provincial scale. For all the differences between the Provincial Chapter in Fredericton and the primary chapters in Saint John, the Provincial Chapter heartily endorsed the formation of a branch of the Navy League in Saint John, in cooperation with the Saint John chapters of the IODE, because contributions from other primary chapters in New Brunswick could “help St John to make a good showing rather than send separate amounts to Toronto.”\footnote{PANB, MC 200, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) Provincial Fonds, MS 1.A2, Minute Book 1915-1919, Meeting Minutes, January 15, 1918.}

Large urban centres were able to exert a certain amount of cultural gravity on the activities of voluntary societies that could sometimes lead to conflict. The urban centres discussed above were port cities that experienced the traffic of soldiers. The movement of soldiers through their ports was only one element that shaped the social processes in which members of voluntary societies made their decisions. The social interactions that transpired in Canada’s large urban centres and port cities could influence an organization such as the YMCA of Halifax to think of its work on a national scale, while IODE chapters in Montreal or Saint John restricted the scale of their work to the boundaries of their respective cities and resisted initiatives to collaborate on a provincial or national scale. The St. John Ambulance Brigade in Halifax, unlike its local YMCA, limited its efforts to an even smaller scale and excluded members of its own organization from patriotic work.

The effects of place could also expand the scale of efforts to reflect transnational identities. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad at the turn of the century, the Canadian West experienced its largest wave of migration. A significant
number of those migrants arrived from Britain and the United States, an influx that changed the demographics of the Canadian Prairies and was reflected in the membership of English-Canadian voluntary societies. Voluntary societies whose members’ personal networks extended outside Canada tended to accord their work to suit these international identities. The United States’ entry into the war prompted American women living in Canada to organize their efforts in support of the war. An American Women’s Club was organized in Winnipeg in May 1917 as a patriotic response to the American declaration of war, but the organization also sought to “cement the spirit of friendliness between the American and Canadian women.” The desire to balance the dual imperatives of supporting the American war effort and promoting good relations between the two nations led the American Women’s Club to divide its efforts. Socks were knitted for sailors in the United States Navy, but the club also donated funds to the local IODE to buy a public bench reserved for returned soldiers in Winnipeg. Sometimes the two identities overlapped, as the club purchased fresh fruit to be given as a parting gift for soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force who had been recruited from the United States and were training near Winnipeg. An American Women’s Club was established in Calgary in 1911, but its wartime voluntary work prior to 1917 was limited to a single fundraiser for the Serbian Relief Fund and a small drive to collect “dainties” for Canadian soldiers at the front. Work began in earnest in April 1917, when the club voted to raise money to purchase a sewing machine to expedite the manufacture of Red Cross comforts. The Calgary club was less concerned about balancing its dual American-Canadian identity. In December 1917 the club raised $402 for the United States Navy League, but sent only $25 to assist with the relief of the Halifax disaster.

Over the course of the war the National IODE shifted between championing imperialism in Canada to promoting Canadian nationalism, but ties to Britain and the Empire remained strong in certain chapters of the IODE. The Baden-Powell Chapter in Quebec City had sewed children’s clothing for Belgian relief and later contributed to the care of convalescing soldiers arriving in Quebec, but the chapter always honoured its namesake with prompt answers to local and international appeals from the Boy Scouts; $60 was sent to purchase warm clothing for Boy

69 Archives of Manitoba [hereafter AM], American Club of Winnipeg fonds, P4776/1, Minute Book 1917-1920, Meeting Minutes, May 4, 1917.
70 AM, American Club of Winnipeg fonds, P4776/1, Minute Book 1917-1920, Meeting Minutes, November 9, 1917.
71 Ibid., July 3, 1918.
72 AM, American Club of Winnipeg fonds, P4776/1, Minute Book 1917-1920, Minutes of annual meeting, April 1918.
73 GA, American Women’s Club, Calgary fonds, M5979.14, Minute Book 1916-1922, Meeting Minutes, August 28 and October 27, 1916.
74 Ibid., April 27, 1917.
75 Ibid., December 28, 1917.
76 Pickles, Female Imperialism, p. 50.
Scouts on coast guard duty in England. The Royal Scots Chapter of the IODE was based in Calgary and coordinated its knitting with the local Red Cross, but in January 1918 the chapter raised $622 to send maple syrup to soldiers of the Royal Scots, a regiment of the British Army, while in June 1918 the chapter forwarded $625 to the City Chamberlain of Edinburgh to provide additional comforts to the soldiers of the Royal Scots. Similarly, a number of Welsh women in Vancouver organized the Tywysog Chapter of the IODE in May 1918 and sent whatever funds they raised to Margaret Lloyd George, for the benefit of Welsh soldiers of the British Army.

One of the most illustrative examples of the growing tension between national and imperial identities within the IODE was the annual commemoration of Paardeburg Day. The IODE observed numerous historic dates throughout the year to celebrate its imperial mandate and as occasions to raise funds. The Canadian victory at Paardeburg was celebrated by the IODE as a significant contribution to the defence and maintenance of the Empire. In February 1916, however, the Regent of the Beaver House Chapter in Edmonton raised a motion against the continued celebration of Paardeburg Day because it was “a most ungracious and ungenerous act” given the sacrifices that the Union of South Africa had made during the current war. This motion was also prompted by local factors, as a prominent member of the chapter was born in South Africa and served as a reminder of the holiday’s contradiction to imperial unity. Paardeburg Day ceased to be observed by chapters of the IODE in Edmonton, and the motion was forwarded to the National Chapter for consideration at the next national convention.

The delegates to the IODE’s 1917 convention decided that “national patriotic holidays” that framed an ambiguous—if not complementary—relationship between nation and empire, such as Empire Day, the monarch’s birthday, Victoria Day, and Dominion Day, would remain mandatory observances. Celebrating Paardeburg Day, however, was made optional. Primary chapters were left to define the imperial relationship for themselves by deciding whether or not commemorating the Canadian victory at Paardeburg was a nationalist affront to imperial unity. Such decisions reveal how members of an individual chapter of the IODE could choose to define the scale of their identity as either national or imperial.

International organizations such as the American Women’s Club certainly demonstrated how voluntary organizations were motivated by transnational considerations rather than national or local conditions, but, for an organization

78 GA, IODE (Calgary) fonds, M-1690 f.1, IODE Royal Scots Chapter, Minute Book 1917-1924, Meeting Minutes, January 2 and June 6, 1918.
80 PAA, IODE Fonds, Acc. no. 65, 103/41, Beaver House Chapter IODE, Minute Book 1915-1919, Meeting Minutes, February 3, 1916.
81 PAA, IODE Fonds, Acc. no. 77.137, Box 1, Item 1, Municipal Chapter of Edmonton. Minute Book 1913-1918, Meeting Minutes, February 10 and 28, 1916.
82 AM, IODE Fonds, P5513/1, National Chapter, Annual Reports 1910-1982, Resolutions, Annual Meeting, IODE, 1917.
such as the IODE, tensions between national and imperial identities were just as difficult to negotiate. The changing social composition of place in cities across Western Canada shaped the patriotic work of voluntary societies whose membership was a product of recent waves of migration. The presence of recent imperial migrants changed the social composition of these chapters and clubs. As a result, these organizations projected their work on a scale that supported the wider imperial or Allied war effort, to reflect their members’ transnational identities. These transnational identities were often weighed against local initiatives. The Royals Scots Chapter of the IODE in Calgary coordinated its knitting with the local Red Cross, but devoted considerable efforts for the welfare of Scottish soldiers. The ties of the Anglo world were not unique to the migration patterns of the Prairies; the Baden-Powell Chapter of the IODE in Quebec City focused its efforts on receiving repatriated soldiers, but was always ready to contribute to the welfare of British Boy Scouts. The scale to which voluntary societies decided to perform their work was never completely rigid and could accommodate multiple concentric identities.

The ability of English-Canadian voluntary societies to transcend concentric spatial categories through their work reveals how space factored into the construction of identity. English Canadians did not just think and act locally when contributing to the war effort; they could act locally and project their patriotic work on a local, regional, national, or transnational scale. The trains and ships that brought soldiers to and from Halifax, Quebec City, and Saint John allowed voluntary societies in those cities to experience the traffic of the national war effort, but the social interaction of volunteers within these cities was just as likely to shape the scale of their work. The Beaver House Chapter of the IODE was located in Edmonton on the northern fringe of the imperial periphery, but, because one of its members was from South Africa, its regent raised the contradiction between the IODE’s imperial mandate and its celebration of Paardeburg Day. The transportation networks that brought Scottish and American women to Calgary to form the Royal Scots Chapter, IODE, and the American Women’s Club also allowed those women to send comforts across national boundaries to aid members of their transnational imagined communities.

Mobility was certainly an important factor that shaped the processes through which voluntary societies negotiated the scale of their identity. Communication and transportation networks made it possible for the members of voluntary societies to project their work on a national or transnational scale, but these networks did not force anyone to adopt a wider conception of identity or to gain a sense of a larger imagined community. Many local chapters only sought to send comforts to members of their own communities who were serving in France—individuals who would normally be a part of the same place but were now separated by space. This desire to place priority on local identities could lead to bitter conflicts. Members of the Saint John IODE were able to make the one-day train journey to participate in meetings of the provincial chapter in Fredericton, but their attendance at meetings only exacerbated the rivalry between IODE chapters in the two cities. In Montreal, the IODE was able to send comforts directly to Canadian soldiers in France, but
the chapter achieved this without cooperating with organizations outside Montreal, and its executive was bitterly antagonistic to a perceived attempt by the National IODE to exert more influence over its municipal jurisdiction. Isolationism in patriotic work was not conducted in isolation, but was the deliberate effort of local voluntary societies that resisted wider cooperation.

Women who donned the uniform of the VAD certainly performed domestic duties in military hospitals, but their services extended beyond the domestic sphere as an exercise of patriotic service performed in the name of the nation or empire. Nursing, however, only provided mobility to a small number of women who were selected for overseas service. The remainder of VAD nurses remained immobile, and the limited opportunities to turn their voluntary work into a meaningful contribution to the war effort could raise conflicts within a community, as was the case in Halifax. The majority of IODE chapters pursued patriotic efforts that extended domestic tasks such as knitting to produce commodities to be sent across the world in a manner that reflected the perceived scale of their identity. Members of the middle and upper classes certainly had more disposable time and income to make frequent contributions to the work of voluntary societies, but knitting socks and dropping coins into a collection box were not necessarily exclusive of lower classes. The ability to control the projection of these goods by facilitating shipping arrangements or brokering agreements with government agents, however, was generally reserved for individuals of greater financial means and social standing. The work performed by voluntary societies was not necessarily restricted by class, but the ability to project a particular identity from these efforts was the domain of upper- and middle-class English Canadians who controlled the means of mobility to transport or transmit their work.

Almost entirely absent from the records of voluntary societies is any reference to non-Anglophone populations, who are usually only mentioned in discussions of philanthropic efforts such as travellers’ aid and educational funds that made non-British migrants the object of their charity. Chapters of the IODE located in the province of Quebec seemed largely unconcerned by their coexistence with an overwhelmingly Francophone population and coordinated their activities based on a spatial conception of their jurisdiction over other IODE chapters in their municipal boundary. The Municipal Chapter of Montreal was more concerned with intrusions from the National Chapter than with coordinating its efforts with neighbouring Francophone voluntary societies, just as Scottish or Welsh chapters of the IODE in Western Canada sent aid to communities in Scotland or Wales rather than contribute to the welfare of soldiers serving in locally raised battalions. English-Canadian voluntary societies grappled with cooperating or competing with neighbouring societies, but the ability to identify and coordinate work with similar organizations regardless of distance provided voluntary societies with a means of excluding non-British populations from their work and thus from their constructed identity. Communication networks made it possible to project patriotic work to reflect larger conceptions of identity, but these networks also allowed the members of English-Canadian voluntary societies to work around members of their local community who did not fit their Anglo-centric conception.
of identity. The means by which they distributed their work allowed the members of voluntary societies to express their identity within any of the concentric scales of the hometown, province, region, nation, and empire to transcend spatial limits without needing to cross social boundaries. The importance of space in the expression and construction of identity among English Canadians reveals how power relationships defined by social boundaries of class, race, and ethnicity were intertwined with conceptions of scale, space, and identity.

English Canadians had the opportunity to define their efforts locally, provincially, nationally, or transnationally because these concentric identities of the Anglo world were not mutually exclusive. A broad examination of patriotic work can reveal how disparate communities across Canada understood their relationship to the larger imagined communities of the nation or empire through the discussions and decisions that shaped voluntary contributions to the war effort. The crux of describing imagined communities is defining their limits, particularly in a vast and diverse context as Canada. From the records of a large number of English-Canadian voluntary societies, it is evident that each local chapter or sub-branch of a society was able to transcend spatial categories to reflect its members’ own conception of scale and identity. Examples that demonstrate competing scalar identities within the same region, province, or even the same city suggest that spatial conceptions of identity were more than an expression of regionalism. When pressed with the choice of cooperating or competing with another community, as their records reveal, voluntary societies were influenced not only by geographic location, but also by the exchanges and social interactions that took place within that location. The social processes of a given place thus influenced the manner in which English Canadians constructed the spatial boundaries of their imagined communities as they defined the scale of their patriotic work.

Approaching the question of identity by examining patriotic volunteerism on the home front provides a means of exploring effects of the First World War on Canadian identity that fall outside nationalist narratives built around Vimy Ridge or the Imperial War Cabinet. Identity was not just constructed through abstract ideas of nationhood or imperial unity, but through a series of conversations that joined communities near and far in collaborative patriotic projects, and sometimes kept communities apart as members of voluntary societies competed for control over the ends and means of their work. Modern communication and transportation networks allowed English Canadians to send patriotic donations to members of a far-flung imperial or transnational community, but the anti-modern mobilization of the home front, which relied on decentralized voluntary contributions, meant that patriotic work could also be reserved for a much smaller local community. In the decentralized and voluntary mobilization of the home front, English-Canadian communities could choose for themselves whether to devote their efforts to king and country, or just kin and county.