

Picnics and Politics: Expanding Ontario's Public Sphere during the Late Victorian Era

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The 1870s brought a marked increase in the number of large-scale political picnics taking place in rural and small-town Ontario. Generally held between elections, their purpose was to solidify party allegiance by exposing the broader public to party leaders, by presenting and defending party policies, and by creating through ritual the sense of membership in a powerful organization. The extent to which the picnics were effective in winning elections is impossible to judge, but this article argues that they strengthened deliberative democracy by expanding the period during which political issues were brought directly to the attention of the public. Furthermore, because the picnics and the processions that preceded them were broad-based community events, women and others not yet eligible to vote were incorporated—at least for the day—within the discursive community that constituted the political public sphere.

Les années 1870 ont connu un accroissement marqué du nombre de grands pique-niques politiques dans les campagnes et les petites villes de l'Ontario. Ces activités, qui avaient généralement lieu entre les élections, visaient à consolider l'allégeance au parti; elles permettaient d'exposer le grand public aux dirigeants du parti, de présenter et de défendre les politiques du parti et de créer, par le biais d'un rituel, un sentiment d'appartenance à une puissante organisation. On ne peut mesurer à quel point les pique-niques ont aidé à gagner des élections, mais, selon l'auteur, ils ont renforcé la démocratie délibérative en prolongeant la période pendant laquelle les enjeux politiques étaient portés directement à l'attention du public. En outre, parce que les pique-niques et les défilés qui les précédaient étaient socialement populaires, les femmes et les autres personnes qui n'avaient pas encore le droit de vote étaient intégrées – du moins pour la journée – au groupe d'acteurs qui constituait la sphère publique sur le plan politique.

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MUCH LESS is known about the culture of early elections in Canada (particularly English Canada) than in England, where Frank O’Gorman’s pioneering works on what he referred to as the “unreformed electoral system” began to appear in 1989.¹ Prior to the electoral reform acts of the middle third of the nineteenth century, O’Gorman writes, “election rituals were an amalgamation of the ceremonial culture of the ‘official’ election campaign and a customary folk culture of surprising strength and resilience.”² In his view, the traditional culture of the English election campaign went into decline thereafter, largely because of the increasing respectability of the electorate, the growth of literacy, and the development of party organizations.³ Following in O’Gorman’s footsteps, James Vernon stressed the regulatory and disciplinary nature of the new electoral system, with its voters’ registers, shortened election periods, and multiplication of polling places undermining the role of what George Rudé had referred to as the “crowd.” Paradoxically, according to these historians, Britain’s electoral reforms actually limited popular political influence.⁴

Michael McGerr described much the same diminution of grassroots influence in the United States, though largely due to the transformation of the “style” of electoral campaigns. He argued that the “democratic theatre” of the nineteenth century, driven by a virulent partisan fervour, featured torchlight parades and other events that made the voter a community member rather than a simple voice lost in the multitude. Such popular ceremonies began to be replaced in the 1870s, McGerr states, by an emphasis on the written word with the distribution of political pamphlets. As a result, occasions when elites met the masses became limited, and identification with community was slowly replaced by the citizen consumer who was no longer much interested in political contests, the result being that voter turnout began to decline to the lamentable level it is at today.⁵

Renaud Séguin argues, similarly, that early nineteenth-century elections in Lower Canada were primarily community affairs. In his words, “les rencontres, les rituels, les rastels entourant l’élection, tout comme la définition de l’électorat, sont déterminés localement par des coutumes et des ententes tacites.”⁶ Furthermore, the money spent by candidates to entertain, feed, and inebriate their electorate was a reflection of popular independence, for it demonstrated that deference and obligations alone could not guarantee electoral support. Séguin claims that community control was eroded, however, by the institution of the voters’ registry in 1853, and by the introduction of the secret ballot for federal elections in 1874

1 Frank O’Gorman, *Voters, Patrons, and Parties: The Unreformed Electoral System of Hanoverian England, 1734-1831* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

2 Frank O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals and Ceremonies: The Social Meaning of Elections in England, 1780-1860,” *Past and Present*, vol. 135 (May 1992), p. 112.

3 O’Gorman, “Campaign Rituals,” pp. 113-14.

4 James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 99-102; George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* (London and New York: John Wiley, 1964).

5 Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

6 Renaud Séguin, “Pour une nouvelle synthèse sur les processus électoraux du XIX^e siècle québécois,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 16, n^o. 1 (2005), p. 98.

and for provincial ones the following year, making the vote a personal and private act rather than a public one.⁷ But the fact remains that small-scale bribes and election-day “treating” persisted in Quebec to the end of the Duplessis regime in 1959.⁸ Furthermore, mass public participation in election campaigns did not end in that province with the introduction of the secret ballot, for—in the words of historians Jean and Marcel Hamelin—“assemblées contradictoires” became “un sport aussi populaire que le hockey de nos jours.”⁹

Other election rituals also persisted, as Jean-François Drapeau has demonstrated in his detailed analysis of Wilfrid Laurier's visit to Quebec City during the 1896 election campaign. Organized by the local Liberal committee, the “grande demonstration” took the shape of a drama that unfolded in three acts: reception, procession, and assembly. With the first act, Laurier's arrival at the train station was reminiscent of a European monarch being welcomed by local notables at the gates of a city. Once the speeches had ended, the second act unfolded with the triumphal procession of various voluntary societies, an honour guard surrounding Laurier's carriage, and thousands of marchers, thereby providing the public with an opportunity to acclaim their hero from windows, sidewalks, and street corners. Finally, after arrival at the meeting place, a young girl presented Laurier with a large flower bouquet, the local Liberal club president said a few words of welcome, and the political orators followed. The programme culminated with Laurier's address and then the closing words of the club president who requested three cheers for Laurier and the Queen of England. Adding to the festive atmosphere were the marching bands, the colourful banners, and the fireworks.¹⁰ This may have been a ritual orchestrated from above, but it did engage the public and stimulate their political passions. Indeed, historian Martin Pâquet claims that after the secret ballot was introduced Quebec politics was increasingly viewed as a team sport conforming to the rules of British fair play with the organization of public debates, parades, and partisan meetings featuring flags, pennants, slogans, county clubs, and so on.¹¹ In short, the spontaneous carnivalesque character of popular politics may have been weakened, but public interest appears to have remained higher than ever.

As for Ontario, in his detailed study of Oxford County's elections, George Emery states that the introduction of the secret ballot and the abolition of hustings nominations for federal elections after 1874 resulted in a “nearly complete

7 Séguin, “Pour une nouvelle synthèse,” pp. 87, 91, 98.

8 See Herbert F. Quinn, “Administrative and Electoral Practices Under the Union Nationale,” chap. 7 in *The Union Nationale: Quebec Nationalism From Duplessis to Lévesque* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

9 Jean Hamelin and Marcel Hamelin, *Les mœurs électorales dans le Québec de 1791 à nos jours* (Montreal: Les Éditions du Jour, 1962), pp. 60-61.

10 Jean-François Drapeau, “Les manifestations Laurier des 6, 7, et 8 mai 1896: un exemple d'usage des rites et rituels politiques en contexte électoral à Québec,” *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2005), pp. 34-39.

11 Martin Pâquet, “Le ‘sport de la politique.’ Transferts et adaptations de la culture politique britannique au Québec, 1791-1960,” in Jean Morency, ed., *Des cultures en contact. Visions de l'Amérique du Nord francophone* (Quebec: Nota Bene, 2005), pp. 151-52, 161-65.

emasculatation of the electoral process.”¹² This clearly did not affect voter turnout, however, for it continued to be quite stable—ranging between 68% and 76% in southwestern Ontario prior to the end of the century, and one study found that only 5% of eligible voters in the region were persistent nonvoters.¹³ Furthermore, even though public political debates were evidently less popular in Ontario than in the French-speaking parishes of Quebec, locally organized large-scale picnics were a central feature of the political process in the former province, particularly during the 1870s and 1880s. These may have been partisan events, designed to solidify support that could no longer be assured by bribes or intimidation once voting took place in secret, but they were not closed to supporters of the opposing party. They therefore provided rural and small-town voters and nonvoters alike with the opportunity not only to see, hear, and judge the party leaders, but also to discuss current affairs among themselves. Far from detracting from the political importance of these picnics, the fact that they generally took place between elections rather than during campaigns themselves helped to ensure that public interest in politics remained more constant than it would have otherwise.

Political picnics were therefore a vital part of what Jürgen Habermas refers to as the public sphere, namely “a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed,” and which is “open in principle to all citizens.”¹⁴ Furthermore, as we shall see, women were included within that sphere during the picnics even though it would be many years before they were given the right to vote in federal and provincial elections. Nor were political picnics exclusively attended by the European-origin population, for the Six Nations of Grand River and the Afro-Canadian community of Chatham each organized at least one political picnic to make their influence felt.

This article relies heavily on the Toronto *Globe*, which was edited by the prominent Liberal politician George Brown. Using the ProQuest Historical Newspapers index as a research tool, articles were identified by using the search phrases “Conservative picnic,” “Conservative meeting,” “Conservative demonstration,” “Liberal picnic,” “Liberal meeting,” “Liberal demonstration,” “Reform picnic,” and “Reform demonstration.” (The *Globe* preferred the word “Reformer” to “Liberal” to identify its party, possibly because the full name of the rival party was “Liberal-Conservative.”) The word “picnic” was used less frequently for the Liberal events than for the Conservative ones, perhaps because the *Globe* was hesitant to identify Liberal gatherings with frivolous pleasure, but they followed essentially the same pattern as for the Conservatives. That said, not all these events took place in rural groves, for during the early spring and late fall a relatively small number were held in sports arenas and exhibition grounds, and

12 George Emery, *Elections in Oxford County, 1837-1875: A Case Study of Democracy in Canada West and Early Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 172. For Emery’s description of hustings nominations, see pp. 178-79.

13 Gail G. Campbell, “Voters and Nonvoters: The Problem of Turnout in the Nineteenth Century: Southwestern Ontario as a Case Study,” *Social Science History*, vol. 11, no. 2 (Summer 1987), pp. 189, 198.

14 Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), p. 398.

this practice became more common in the 1890s. Despite its Liberal affiliation, the *Globe* provides detailed descriptions of the picnics sponsored by both parties, though it clearly began to ignore many Conservative events in the 1880s, as revealed by references to them in Sir John A. Macdonald's correspondence.¹⁵ The ProQuest index was also used for the *Toronto Mail*, but the Conservative mouthpiece evidently paid little attention to political picnics, presumably because it did not have correspondents in the field, as did the *Globe*. Incomplete as our list of political picnics examined between 1863 and 1895 may be, however, the thirty-four Conservative events and thirty-one Liberal ones are sufficiently numerous to be representative, particularly during the 1870s when they numbered twenty-nine and nineteen, respectively.

Strategy

The purpose of the political picnics of the 1860s and early 1870s was generally to celebrate an election victory. Thus, several were reported in 1863 following the gains made by George Brown's Reformers in the election of that year, and others in 1871 following the Reform victory in that year's provincial election.¹⁶ The Macdonald blitz in the summer of 1876—when the *Globe* covered nine Conservative picnics—had a more serious goal. It was designed to lay the ground for the party's return to power by serving as a launching pad for what became known as the National Policy. In his description of what he referred to as the picnic grounds of Ontario, Donald Creighton simply assumed that these events were the product of Sir John A. Macdonald's political genius, leaving readers to wonder why the Conservative leader decided to adopt them as a political tool, how the Liberals responded, what the role of the local party organizers was, and what the picnics suggest about popular engagement with the democratic process.¹⁷

To begin with the first question, even though Macdonald did not invent the large-scale political picnic, as Creighton implies, it was quite natural for the Conservative leader to seize upon what had been a largely celebratory ritual as a means of restoring his own popularity following the damage caused by the Pacific Railway Scandal in 1874. Also, as Creighton stresses, the picnics provided an opportunity for the Conservatives to promote their new economic policy, namely a protective tariff. Macdonald may have been a Canadian Disraeli in many respects, but in adopting this tactic he was possibly inspired by Disraeli's bitter Liberal opponent, for it was William Gladstone who initiated the political technique of presenting his case directly to the people by stumping the English countryside.¹⁸

15 The ProQuest index to the *Globe* also failed to capture the Conservative picnic that took place in Bath in 1880 and which was recreated in 2015. Michael Lea, "Sir John A. speech to be recreated at picnic," *Kingston Whig-Standard*, June 16, 2015, <http://www.thewhig.com/2015/06/16/sir-john-a-speech-to-be-recreated-at-picnic>.

16 See Bruce W. Hodgins, *John Sandfield Macdonald, 1812-1872* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 68-69; *Globe*, July 18, 1863; July 31, 1863; Aug. 8, 1863; May 19, 1871; June 6, 1871; and June 8, 1871.

17 Donald Creighton, "The Picnic Grounds of Ontario (1876-1878)," chap. 7 in *John A. Macdonald: The Old Chieftain* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955).

18 See J. A. Blyth, "Gladstone and Disraeli: 'Images' in Victorian Politics," *Dalhousie Review*, vol. 49 (1969), pp. 392-93. Blyth (p. 395) states that "John A. Macdonald was a Canadian Disraeli with the same droll wit,

As for the Liberal response to Macdonald's picnics, the *Globe* had to concede early in the fall of 1876 that "the Conservative mind is just now greatly elevated by the effects of the recent picnics, and the highly coloured speeches of 'the chieftain' on those occasions, not to mention other less notable deliverances." In fact, the *Globe* added, Reformers were now "urging counter attractions along the same line," and "in one or two instances Reform picnics are announced at which the Premier of the Dominion is expected to be present." The newspaper noted, however, that unlike the opposition leader and his lieutenants, the "Ministers of the Crown have public business to attend to." Furthermore, "while the country is being well governed, and there is no great issue before it, the members of the Government may be excused if they do not spend any great amount of time in addressing meetings."¹⁹ The Reformers finally did hold a picnic in Brant in mid-September, but, otherwise deprived of entertainment by their own party, Liberal supporters had flocked to the Conservative gatherings, making them truly community events.²⁰ Thus, the *Globe* had reported earlier in the month that the "sturdy Reformers" of South Oxford "turned out in such immense numbers to see the gentlemen who had long been known as opponents to fight against, that an audience was collected larger than any which has been got together at the previous picnics which have been organized to greet the peripatetic leaders of the Conservative party."²¹

The year 1877 was quite different as far as the Liberals' strategy was concerned, for they organized two series of picnics that summer and fall. Thus, the *Globe* reported that there had been "nine great meetings" between June 27 and July 9, "embracing an aggregate attendance of eighty thousand of the best class of the citizens of the Province."²² The second series took place in September, culminating in Simcoe with a record crowd of fifteen thousand.²³ The *Globe* reports did not go far beyond the speeches, however, and it claimed that "we are not so silly as to base our expectations of the result of the next general election on any such fallible symptoms as the exuberance of spirits manifested by a crowd of holiday seekers, to whatever political party they may happen to belong." The most the *Globe* would claim was that the Reform picnics had served a good purpose "by affording the leading members of the party in both the Dominion Parliament and the Ontario Legislature an excellent opportunity of meeting with the people of different localities, and of explaining face to face to them, and through the press to others, their views on the public questions of the day."²⁴ The fact was, though, that with Alexander Mackenzie as their national leader, the Liberals did not have a star attraction to compare with Macdonald, and they lost the election

the outstanding parliamentary skill, and the eloquent espousal of the cause of national unity."

19 *Globe*, Sept. 1, 1876.

20 On the Reform picnic, see the *Globe*, Sept. 15, 1876.

21 *Globe*, Sept. 7, 1876.

22 *Globe*, July 10, 1877. The "Grand Field Day in North York," for example, reportedly attracted between nine and ten thousand people to the village of Newmarket. *Globe*, July 3, 1877. See also, *Globe*, July 4, 1877; and July 17, 1877.

23 *Globe*, Sept. 22, 1877. See also, *Globe*, Sept. 19, 1877; and Sept. 24, 1877.

24 *Globe*, Oct. 9, 1877.

of 1878, taking only twenty-six seats in Ontario to the Conservatives' sixty-two.²⁵ In short, the Liberal response to the Conservatives' political picnic strategy was a rather belated one, and the chief Liberal mouthpiece did not express a great deal of enthusiasm about its effectiveness, thereby underestimating the power of what would in a later era be referred to as political momentum. The *Globe* reported on only a half-dozen Liberal picnics during the 1880s, for even Laurier was slow to focus on the picnic as a political tool, not doing so until six years after he had replaced Edward Blake as party leader. Finally, in the fall of 1893, Laurier embarked upon a three-week tour that attracted an audience of six thousand to Leamington's Seaview Park, another six thousand to Owen Sound, and, as we shall see, an even larger number to Newport.²⁶

Turning to the third question posed above, namely that concerning the role played by the local organizers, Creighton claims that it was Macdonald who initiated picnics as a strategy in 1876, which may well be true, but they were generally organized at the local community level, with each town attempting to outdo the others with its displays. Among the considerable number of requests that Macdonald attend such events, for example, the one from a member of the Workingmen's Liberal-Conservative Club in 1882 specified: "Without wishing to be forward, I am to suggest Saturday June 10th as the day most suitable for the Club." Three months later, a telegram invited Macdonald to the "great picnic" that the Peel and Holton men were "working to get up." The correspondent added, "it will be a success if you will come and if so who can you bring with you."²⁷

The latter telegram is a good illustration of political scientist S. J. R. Noel's thesis that "the Ontario Conservative party machine was built by formalizing—and enriching with new federal patronage—the bonds that already existed between the party leadership and the local elites ... whom Macdonald had always cultivated."²⁸ Not surprisingly, then, the local party stalwarts and notables were recognized and honoured with prominent positions in the processions and on the speaking platforms. Noel argues that the provincial Liberals had a more modern and centralized party machine that was less beholden to traditional elites, but—to take only one example—the *Globe's* report on the Liberal picnic in Metcalfe in 1886 lists the names of sixty-seven "prominent citizens" present, including the townships they came from, and their official positions in some cases.²⁹

Ritual

Rather than being an age-old ritual, picnics had a relatively recent history in North America. They were adopted from Europe in the early nineteenth century by the social elite of the northeastern United States, but grew increasingly popular

25 J. M. Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 37.

26 *Globe*, Sept. 6, 1893; Sept. 13, 1893; and Sept. 23, 1893.

27 Library and Archives Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald Papers, vol. 387, part II, 180518, Henry Somerville to Macdonald, May 19, 1882 (Online MIKAN no. 539153); 182960, A. Boulton to Macdonald, Toronto, Sept. 5, 1882 (Online MIKAN no. 549316).

28 S. J. R. Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791-1896* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), p. 278.

29 *Globe*, Sept. 4, 1886.

after city parks were developed with their picnic groves, and railways provided increased urban access to the countryside.³⁰ Picnics were often public events, such as those organized by Sunday schools and temperance societies, as well as those associated with annual holidays and parades, particularly (in Canada) on Victoria Day, Orangemen's Day, and Labour Day.³¹ One can only assume that most people who attended Quebec's open-air political debates also packed a lunch or purchased food on site, but it seems doubtful that these competitive events held during (rather than between) elections when emotions ran high were family affairs to the extent that Ontario's one-party picnics were. To take one example, in its detailed description of the "assemblée contradictoire" in the village of Ste-Croix de Lotbinière—said to be the major event of the 1875 provincial election—Quebec's *Morning Chronicle* mentioned the number of steamers that transported audience members from the city, and that many of them were public servants, but made no mention of women or food.³²

Historians have ignored political picnics as ritual events, but Creighton painted a vivid picture of the Conservative one that took place in Uxbridge, Ontario on Dominion Day, 1876. Stressing its inclusivity but also its respectability, he wrote: "They were all there—from the elegant young barrister, with his brocaded waistcoat and fashionably checked trousers, who had come on the train from Toronto, to the thick-set, bearded farmer from Greenbank or Blackwater in his sagging 'best' black coat and rusty top hat." Not forgetting the women, whose presence he clearly felt was strictly ornamental, Creighton also described "the wife of the harness-maker at Port Perry, in her snuff-coloured taffeta gown, with the bustle and the golden-brown satin trimming, made at home by the visiting dress-maker," and "the banker's lady, expertly fitted in the 'tied-back' dress that had been made for her in Toronto or London, in all the modishness of smoked pearl buttons, pleats and bows and laces, dragged edges and chenille fringe." Creighton concluded with a grand flourish: "These were the Canadians. They had come in an amiable holiday mood, to relax and chatter, to see each other, but, above all, to see him. They had dressed themselves in their best, for a memorable occasion, at once serious and entertaining; and they greeted him with a curious mixture of awe, as for a reigning monarch, and joyous familiarity, as for a beloved friend."³³ In short, even though the details of Creighton's description are clearly products of his rich imagination, political picnics contributed to the glorification of the party leader by enabling him to be in the crowd as well as above it.³⁴

30 Mary Ellen W. Hern, "Picnicking in the Northeastern United States, 1840-1900," *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 24, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1989), pp. 139-45.

31 Canada's Labour Day parades and picnics began in the 1880s. See Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, *The Workers' Festivals: A History of Labour Day in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), pp. xiv, 124, 129.

32 *Morning Chronicle*, June 7, 1875; and June 8, 1875; J. I. Little, *Patrician Liberal: The Public and Private Life of Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, 1829-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), pp. 116-17.

33 Creighton, *The Old Chieftain*, pp. 219-21.

34 On Creighton's admiration of Zola, and his use of what George Orwell referred to as the "unnecessary detail," see Donald Wright, *Donald Creighton: A Life in History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), pp. 9, 91, 179, 269.

Evocative as Creighton's imaginative description may be, he skims rather lightly over the ritualistic aspects of the political picnic. His description of how Macdonald was greeted at the local train station by a large crowd, two brass bands, and an address of welcome by the local party president does, however, conform to the first act of the ritual as outlined by Drapeau for Laurier's grand entry into Quebec City in 1896 (as we saw above). And, like Macdonald in 1876, Laurier was very much the star attraction at the Liberal picnic held in Newmarket in September 1893. The *Globe* reporter declared rather breathlessly that "no public man in Canada ever received a more emphatic welcome," adding that "from all quarters of the county and all points of the compass the yeomen of York—worthy descendants of the stout-hearted men who fought for responsible government—came to greet the leader and do honour to the cause." As was customary, the *Globe* emphasized that many leading Conservatives of the area joined in, giving the demonstration "a largely non-partisan aspect." Additional cars had been added to the train in Toronto, but they were reportedly filled before many stations had been passed. At the Aurora railway station, where the procession was to begin, "there was a large crowd upon the platform, and in the yard a labyrinth of vehicles and a tangle of horsemen and pedestrians. The air was filled with flags and music, and everyone and everything seemed decorated with bright colors."³⁵

Drapeau's second act, namely the procession from Aurora to Newmarket, was still more colourful, though it lacked the militia-style organization of most contemporary urban parades.³⁶ Thus, after the "splendid 11th Battalion Band of Aurora" had played "The Maple Leaf Forever," the 13th Battalion Band led the procession which consisted of carriages provided for Laurier and his wife as well as other distinguished guests, the reception committee, and the town councillors, who were followed by crowds of people. Winding through the main streets, the procession from the Aurora train station passed by decorated buildings and under arches bearing slogans such as "Repeal of the Franchise Act" (referring to the act passed by the Macdonald government in 1885), "Economy is Expenditure," "Purity in Administration," "Government for the People and not the Few," "Tariff Means Taxation," and "Unity of Empire." The *Globe* also claimed that other processions "from all sides" marched into the town with bands playing "cheerful strains." Having arrived at Aurora's town park, which was the first stop in the day's busy schedule, "the crowd was so great that it was with much difficulty that the immense platform erected at the farther side of the park was reached." The platform itself was "gay with the costumes of the ladies [thirty-four of whom were named], who vied with their husbands and fathers in extending an enthusiastic welcome to Madame Laurier, Mrs. Mulock, Mrs. Willson and Miss Jones, who were of the leader's party." Once the preliminary speeches were over, Laurier asked to be introduced to as many people as possible, but this assembly was only

³⁵ *Globe*, Sept. 6, 1893.

³⁶ See Heron and Penfold, *Worker's Festival*, pp. 4-27. Keith Walden writes that there were four main types of parade: the militia street marches, the commercial parades, the parades mounted by voluntary associations, and the trade processions. Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), pp. 299-300.

the end of part one of Drapeau's second act, for the parade marshals then did their best to "arrange the masses of mounted men, bands, bicyclists [a new feature], and carriages of all descriptions into what became an almost endless procession" that actually consisted of "several independently-organized processions." After a four-mile march to the northern town line of Newmarket, this "great body of people" was met by another procession so large it initially "looked almost as if an opposing army, head[ed] by a band of mounted men with bands playing and flags flying, were about to challenge Mr. Laurier's further progress."³⁷ The procession route through Newmarket was decorated much as that through Aurora was.

In the third and final act, the picnic took place in what was referred to as a grove, suggesting an intimate space, though it was also described as a plateau "sheltered from storm by the surrounding hills" and occupied by what one speaker referred to as two solid acres of people.³⁸ In short, it was a public space in a tangible sense that contributed to the development of the public sphere.³⁹ After the brief initial addresses, there was an early afternoon break, during which people passed the time "talking politics and crops and all those other things that interest farmers and townsmen when they meet for an hour's good-fellowship." As was the Liberal custom, this event was called a meeting rather than a picnic, thereby stressing its serious nature. The only mishap reported was that in the midst of Laurier's ninety-minute speech the speakers' platform collapsed and its hundred occupants were "thrown in a chaotic heap on the ground beneath," but no one was injured and the damage was soon repaired.⁴⁰ This memorable occasion would prove to be the climax of the Liberal picnics in the nineteenth century.⁴¹

Several features of these Victorian-era political events stand out. First, based on the distinction made by Roberto Da Matta, the word "procession" is more fitting than "parade" because the latter was aimed at impressing the audience with the power, or at least the status, of those who were marching, while the former—with its religious connotation—involved no real barrier between the marchers and those on the sidelines.⁴² Admittedly, the organizers wished to demonstrate the popularity of their political party, but a procession has a destination, in this case the picnic grounds, while the purpose of a parade is solely to enable the participants to present themselves to the citizens gathered along the route. The American parade of the early nineteenth century, Mary Ryan notes, "was clearly organized into separate marching units, each representing a pre-established social identity," but

37 *Globe*, Sept. 6, 1893.

38 *Globe*, Sept. 6, 1893.

39 In her examination of Upper Canada's taverns, Julia Roberts applies the term "public space" in a conceptual as well as a material sense. Julia Roberts, *In Mixed Company: Taverns and Public Life in Upper Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), pp. 56, 63.

40 *Globe*, Sept. 6, 1893.

41 For another good description of a Liberal picnic, see the *Globe*, Sept. 6, 1886.

42 Roberto Da Matta, "Carnival in Multiple Planes," in John J. MacAloon, ed., *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1984), pp. 217-19. For the Canadian context, see Ronald Rudin, "Marching and Memory in Early Twentieth-Century Quebec: La Fête-Dieu, la Saint-Jean-Baptiste, and le Monument Laval," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1999), p. 212; and P.G. Goheen, "The Ritual of the Streets in Mid-19th-Century Toronto," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 11 (1993), pp. 127-46.

there were no voluntary or occupational associations marching beneath banners in Ontario's political-picnic processions.⁴³ Instead, as the foregoing description of the Aurora-to-Newmarket procession reveals, people simply joined in groups from surrounding communities.

Furthermore, while women were relegated to the role of spectators in most of Canada's urban parades, they presumably walked or—depending on the distance—rode in horse-drawn vehicles with their male family members in the largely undifferentiated rural and small-town processions.⁴⁴ (The report on the Liberal picnic at Winchester Springs near Dundas in the fall of 1886 states that there were over 1,400 rigs inside the fences of the grove alone.)⁴⁵ It would doubtless be going too far to suggest that these women shared in the “ceremonial citizenship” that Ryan claims male marchers in American parades laid claim to, but they were taking public part in a political event, even if it was in the role of wife or daughter rather than voter.⁴⁶

Another notable feature is that the arches along the procession route were rich with symbolism. Originating in ancient Rome, the role of the triumphal arch was originally to commemorate victorious generals or significant public events such as the accession of a new emperor.⁴⁷ Instead of being decorated with carvings, sculpted reliefs, and dedications, as in Rome, the temporary arches erected for Ontario's picnic processions displayed political messages, Liberal examples of which have already been noted. One of the more imaginative structures, pointing to local humour, was the model of a beehive in Newmarket in 1882. Attached to it was the motto, “The Grit Hive Swarms” and the verse, “Within this hive we're all alive; Victory makes us merry; If you enquire the reasons why, Echo answers Gerry,” which was clearly a mocking reference to the recent gerrymander of the constituency's boundaries.⁴⁸

Not surprisingly, many of the Conservative messages prior to the 1878 election focussed on economic policy. Thus, Macdonald's procession from the Markham railway station to its fair grounds in June 1877 passed through arches on which there were slogans such as “Moderate Protection for Home Industries,” “Our Dominion and its Architect—Sir John A,” and “Mechanics Welcome to

43 Mary Ryan, “The American Parade: Representations of the Nineteenth-Century Social Order,” in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), p. 134.

44 Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 92, 116. Bonnie Huskins found, nevertheless, that Halifax and Saint John women did participate in nineteenth-century temperance marches, and that toward the end of the century parades included small numbers of women as icons and symbolic images. Huskins, “The Ceremonial Space of Women: Public Processions in Victorian Saint John and Halifax,” in Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), pp. 145–46, 153–55. On the role of women in the American parade, see Ryan, “The American Parade,” p. 148.

45 *Globe*, Sept. 6, 1886.

46 Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 59.

47 Wikipedia, s.v. “Triumphal arch,” accessed August 14, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triumphal_arch.

48 *Globe*, July 28, 1882. For a vivid description of the parade and picnic organized by the Young Liberals of London, an event that apparently featured no political speeches, see *Globe*, Aug. 10, 1893.

Sir John A.” There was also a suspended steel rail with more unique messages, namely: “Steel Rails will Rust,” “Interest on Outlay \$75,000 per Annum,” “Sister Counties and Gibbs Bros.,” and “The Limestone City and Her Representative.”⁴⁹ Cobourg’s Conservative picnic a couple of months later featured a particularly impressive arch, for it consisted of fifteen-thousand yards of coconut matting from the recently opened local factory. While the procession passed under the arch, two men stood above it, “one holding a rake, scythe, and shovel, and supposed to represent agriculture, the other representing manufacture, holding a number of tools used in the mechanical arts.”⁵⁰

There was nothing overtly religious in these symbols or messages, but because picnics reflected a Romantic celebration of nature, as the repeated reference to “groves” illustrates, the organizers’ goal would have been to provide the sense of a return to political purity and a fresh beginning.⁵¹ Furthermore, the *Globe* reports resorted to Christian imagery with phrases such as “sacred enclosure.”⁵² And, reflecting the fact that religious revivals traditionally took place outdoors, one account in 1876 referred to benches ranged in front of the platform for the “faithful.”⁵³ Judging from the *Globe*’s descriptions of Liberal picnic lunches, there was also a sense of communion despite the large size of the crowds. Thus, for the Aylmer event in July 1863, families “provided their own provisions, and for the most part united in a most friendly and social manner with their neighbours, and partook in common.”⁵⁴ Three weeks later, at the Liberal picnic in Welland, “a number of families clubbed their stores of provisions and made free tables, at which mere spectators, who had come unprovided, were heartily welcome and generously entertained.”⁵⁵

But the political picnics were not entirely devoid of less earnest amusements, as described by the *Globe* reporter at an event near Welland in August 1875. Far from the speakers’ platform there were

numerous stalls, where the admirable qualities of lemonade, tea, and coffee were loudly advocated; a cart, from which a ‘cheap-Jack’ eulogised and sold his wares; a ‘merry-go-round,’ whose patrons showed their enjoyment by their merry boisterousness; a stage, where the votaries of Terpsichore danced with a great deal more heartiness than grace; a gallery, at which those skilled in the use of the rifle shot for peanuts, and various other amusements.⁵⁶

49 *Globe*, June 28, 1877.

50 *Globe*, Aug. 30, 1877.

51 Hern, “Picnicking,” pp. 142-44.

52 *Globe*, July 3, 1876.

53 *Globe*, July 28, 1876. Ronald P. Formisano states that during the late 1830s Whig political picnics in Michigan “resembled camp meetings, Whig rhetoricians spoke a political idiom resembling that of the evangelist, and the party caught an enthusiasm in those years which can be compared only to that of the extended revival.” Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 133, <https://books.google.ca/books?isbn=1400868440>.

54 *Globe*, July 18, 1863.

55 *Globe*, Aug. 8, 1863.

56 *Globe*, Aug. 23, 1875.

Clearly, not everyone at the event was listening to the speeches. The fact remains, however, that key elements of the carnivalesque were missing, for, even when describing the picnics of the opposing party, the *Globe* rarely alluded to alcohol or disorderliness of any kind.⁵⁷ The only minor exception was its description of Macdonald's arrival at the London station in June 1877, when the reporter complained about the "unnecessarily strong party spirit" that was being fostered. He noted that "on the platform some young men pounded another young man whom they accused of groaning.... Other young fellows were to be seen going around wishing for some one to tread on the tails of their coats."⁵⁸

That orderliness was the general rule without the apparent presence of any law enforcement officers seems remarkable considering the size of the crowds and the history of mass violence in Toronto's mid-century street rituals.⁵⁹ The *Globe* may have deliberately ignored transgressive activities that were taking place on the margins of the picnics, but the fact remains that the presence of women and children must have had a taming effect. The sense of the political picnic as family outing is nicely captured by the description of the event organized in 1887 by Erastus Wiman, the prominent champion of unrestricted reciprocity.⁶⁰ In the words of the *Globe* reporter, many of the farmers and businessmen "were accompanied by their families, and the white dresses of the ladies, with the picnic baskets carried by the children, told that the car loads of people who stepped off at the various stations in the neighborhood of Dufferin Lake were not going merely to attend a mammoth convention and hear great speeches, but were also going to have a day's enjoyment in true picnic style."⁶¹

Furthermore, the energies of some of the young men were channelled into participation in the processions on horseback in what can only be described as a quasi-militaristic manner. Thus, in September 1877 the *Globe* reported that the procession from the Aurora train station to the Conservative picnic in Newmarket featured "thirty or forty youths, mounted on warlike steeds" and holding banners in their right hands. The obviously impressed *Globe* reporter added: "The sight of this squad of horsemen, as they careered wildly to and fro through the clouds of dust on either side of the procession, had a novel and startling effect on one accustomed to the average picnic."⁶² A year later, the Conservative procession from the train station to the Strathroy picnic grounds was headed by the 26th Battalion Band followed by "about 100 youths mounted on black horses, and decorated with blue ribbons about their hats, and rosettes of a similar colour." In addition, the parade marshals wore blue sashes, but a red flag floating in front "raised some unpleasant recollections of the Commune." The somewhat envious *Globe* added,

57 Referring to the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, Walden writes that carnival was "a triumphant plebeian deflation of all forms of authority and privilege... allowing common people to enter a realm where perfect community, freedom, equality, and abundance were potentially possible." Walden, *Becoming Modern*, p. 293.

58 *Globe*, June 12, 1877. Walden claims that throughout carnival, "aggression was endemic." Walden, *Becoming Modern*, p. 293.

59 See Goheen, "The Ritual," p. 142.

60 Beck, *Pendulum of Power*, p. 60.

61 *Globe*, July 2, 1887.

62 *Globe*, Sept. 15, 1877.

however, that “the only forms of socialism the Conservatives supported were those induced by a ‘national policy.’”⁶³ Not to be totally eclipsed, the Liberals organized a political picnic two months later that featured “the attendance of some fifty young men, mounted on horses, and commanded by a marshall.”⁶⁴ Finally, in 1879 the *Globe* reported again on a group of sixty young men mounted on grey horses, “it being made a special point by them to have all the animals of that colour.”⁶⁵ Rather than emulating the rigidly organized urban parades, however, the presence of these young horsemen served as entertainment for the participants in what were, in many cases, rather lengthy and tiresome processions. In short, the political processions and picnics featured not only speeches but—perhaps more memorably—the sight of colourful flags and banners, the sound of brass bands and galloping hoof beats, the feel of the hot sun or the pouring rain, as the case might be, and the taste and smell of dust as well as basket lunches, though the rather prosaic newspaper reports leave much to the imagination, as Creighton’s description illustrates.⁶⁶

Significance

Ontario’s political picnics can be viewed as exercises in “deliberative democracy,” defined by historian Jeffrey McNairn as the process by which individuals act as citizens “who form a discursive community in which they exchange information and arguments while learning more about each other and the process of deliberation.”⁶⁷ But the community that the picnics helped to bond together was more than a discursive one, for the rituals appealed to underlying emotions. Even if the picnic crowds were remarkably well behaved, it is difficult to imagine most people in an outdoor audience of thousands paying close attention to, or even hearing, unamplified political speeches that lasted for hours at a time. The fact that many Liberals attended the Conservative picnics, and vice versa, suggests that people were more attracted to the processions with their brass bands and colourful displays, as well as by the opportunity to see prominent politicians in the flesh and to socialize with friends and neighbours. Speeches could be read later in the lengthy reports published by the *Globe* and its local competitors, for it is worth noting that the Liberal *Globe* published the Conservative speeches in some detail.

We might then ask in quasi-McLuhanesque fashion if the picnic message was as important as the picnic medium in generating excitement about party leaders (though the oratorical skills of Macdonald and Laurier, in particular, were clearly also important factors), and in building party support. Certainly, the picnic as a social event would strengthen the sense of belonging to a greater whole, one with considerable political strength, as well as fostering a sense of personal attachment to a party leader. Indeed, the ritualistic focus on the leader suggests a somewhat

63 *Globe*, July 10, 1878.

64 *Globe*, Sept. 3, 1878.

65 *Globe*, July 10, 1879.

66 For one recent example of sensory history, see Nicolas Kenny, *The Feel of the City: Experiences of Urban Transformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

67 Jeffrey L. McNairn, *The Capacity to Judge: Public Opinion and Deliberative Democracy in Upper Canada, 1791-1864* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 8.

diluted element of what sociologist Bruce Curtis refers to as Lord Durham's "performance of grandeur," which included condescension by "reaching down" to members of the public.⁶⁸ The picnics were democratic, however, insofar as they were organized not only by the ruling party but by the opposition as well.

American art historian Angela Miller nevertheless argues that the classic small-scale picnic was a conservative social force insofar as it combined "rural restoratives" with "civilized amenities."⁶⁹ From that perspective, the political picnic, despite its large scale, would seem to have been an ideal medium for Macdonald's Conservative party, which stood for traditional social values and liberal economic ones, and also for the Liberals with their strong rural base. That said, picnics were also associated with shedding inhibitions, and they no longer had exclusively genteel associations by the mid-nineteenth century.⁷⁰ Alan Gordon claims, for example, that even though the parade to the parish church remained the central feature of Montreal's Saint-Jean-Baptiste day celebrations after 1845, "working people regularly celebrated the holiday with picnics where rough games, gambling, and a scandalous intermingling of men and women demonstrated their willingness to ignore official prohibitions."⁷¹ Similarly, American historian Roy Rosenzweig notes that the rough and boisterous July Fourth picnics organized by Worcester's Ancient Order of Hibernians during the 1880s offered opportunities "to get drunk, let off steam, or settle old scores."⁷²

Ontario's political picnics were more peaceable, as we have seen, but they might be considered to have revived in a less confrontational way the political spectacle associated with elections during the first half of the nineteenth century. They also represented a step towards widening the political public sphere insofar as they attracted nonvoters, most notably women who were generally more confined to the home interior than were their husbands.⁷³ The presence of women is well documented in the political picnics described in the *Globe*, the first being the one organized in Welland by the Conservative opposition in 1863.⁷⁴ The *Globe* admitted that the event drew "a good-sized crowd," but added that many were Liberals "attracted by curiosity to hear the firing off of the great guns of the Opposition." Furthermore, two-thirds of the 2,500 who attended were women and children. The first speaker was the local Member of the Provincial Parliament who claimed that he was "glad to see before him the honest and hardy yeomen, the prosperous merchants, and the industrious, thrifty mechanics of the county,

68 See Bruce Curtis, "The 'Most Splendid Pageant Ever Seen': Grandeur, the Domestic, and Condescension in Lord Durham's Political Theatre," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 89, no. 1 (March 2008), pp. 55-88.

69 Angela L. Miller, "Nature's Transformations: The Meaning of the Picnic Theme in Nineteenth-Century American Art," *Winterthur Portfolio*, vol. 24, no. 2/3 (Summer-Autumn 1989), pp. 119-20.

70 See Melissa Holbrook Pierson, "The Seductive Nostalgia of the Picnic," *The Atlantic*, March 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2017/03/the-seductive-nostalgia-of-the-picnic/521313/>.

71 Gordon claims that by the mid-1880s commercialism had turned Saint-Jean-Baptiste day into just another opportunity to sell tickets to carnivals and picnics. Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, p. 148.

72 Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, p. 153; Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 74, 77-78.

73 This is not to suggest that women were not previously included to some extent in public spaces, one example being Upper Canada's inns or taverns. See Roberts, *In Mixed Company*, pp. 5, 63, 72, 138-64.

74 For a critique of the separate spheres paradigm, see Roberts, *In Mixed Company*, pp. 139-41, 146-47, 166.

and to see also that they had not come alone, but had brought with them their better halves and their young and blooming daughters—(laughter)—the pride of their households and the boast of the county.” He even suggested that his recent electoral victory was due “chiefly to the efforts and exertions of the fair sex,” who quite naturally supported a party “whose principles were to love and honour the Queen, to respect and obey her laws, and to maintain and protect inviolate the institutions of the extended empire of which we form a part.” As one of the main speakers, George-Étienne Cartier also attempted to flatter the women in the audience, “lamenting that the House of Assembly was entirely composed of selfish men, with no admixture of the fair sex to mollify them,” but then excusing himself for having to address the men upon serious political issues. The women present were presumably meant to turn their minds elsewhere rather than leave the site, for Cartier promised to save a few more words for them at the end.⁷⁵

The *Globe* report on the Liberal picnic in Aylmer that also took place in 1863 referred to the farmers—“the bone and sinew of the country”—being accompanied by “happy wives, their cheerful sons and daughters, dressed in holiday attire, and presenting every evidence of wealth and prosperity, of comfort and happiness, of intelligence and refinement.”⁷⁶ Describing the Strathroy picnic in June 1871, the *Globe* reporter wrote, “a pleasant feature in the entertainment was the presence of wives and families of the farmers of the two constituencies ... who turned out in large numbers to show by their attendance their interest in the cause.”⁷⁷ Three years later, in October 1874, the Liberal mouthpiece noted that at the “Great Reform Demonstration at Aurora” seats were reserved for the ladies, “of whom over 200 were present.”⁷⁸ And in 1875 the *Globe* reporter estimated the size of the crowd at Markham’s Conservative political picnic to be two thousand, of whom five hundred were women. He also admitted that “the arrangements were very good, raised seats being provided for the ladies and the press near the carpeted platform from which the speakers addressed the audience.” Dr. Charles Tupper of Nova Scotia, who was the main speaker, ended his lengthy tirade against the Liberal government by “panegyrising the ladies.”⁷⁹ Edward Blake did the same in 1879, claiming that “he was glad to see that the ladies had responded so numerously to the invitation of the Committee to be present. He believed that woman did not yet occupy the sphere she would soon be called upon to fill.” Although they did not generally take “a very decided interest” in political matters, Blake added, “with their quick intelligence there was no reason why they should

75 *Globe*, July 31, 1863. A contemporary of Joseph Howe of Nova Scotia recalled that at political picnics he would “fly about the crowd, shaking hands with everybody, and especially devoting himself to the women.... He would be seen in the course of an hour walking arm-in-arm with a dozen different women, and all the while lighting up every place where he moved with his warm greetings, his sparkling humor, and his pleasant repartee.” Hon. J. W. Longley, “Joseph Howe,” *The Canadian Magazine*, vol. 4, no. 1 (November 1894), p. 79, <https://books.google.ca/books?id=calOQAAlAAJ>.

76 *Globe*, July 18, 1863.

77 *Globe*, June 6, 1871.

78 *Globe*, Oct. 5, 1874.

79 *Globe*, Sept. 2, 1875.

not be as well informed upon political affairs as men," and they could contribute much "in keeping down party rancour."⁸⁰

There was little if any hint in these speeches that women should be given the vote, but the theme that they could play a significant role in politics continued into the 1880s. Thus, in his description of the Metcalfe meeting in 1886 the *Globe* reporter stated that the many ladies who were present "manifested quite as keen an interest in the discussion of public affairs as the electors."⁸¹ He also wrote in 1886 that the audience in Wingham was comprised of "many ladies, for whom the best seats had been reserved," and that the galleries in the Brantford rink had been reserved for ladies and their escorts.⁸² The fact that women were given seats rather than having to stand during the political speech making reflects the assumption that they were the weaker sex, but organizers clearly felt it necessary to encourage their presence. Given the association of picnics with women and family, these events could be said to represent a feminization of what had been a rough masculine political culture. But even though one reason that picnics in general had become so popular was undoubtedly that they strengthened the familial bond and therefore traditional gender roles, it was clearly assumed that women were not only there to provide lunches but that they took an interest in the speeches and even influenced their husbands' and fathers' votes. In fact, Macdonald attempted, unsuccessfully, to give the vote to propertied women with his 1885 Electoral Franchise Act.⁸³

That act did, however, give the vote to adult male residents of First Nations reserves in eastern Canada, and in July of the following year the *Globe* announced that the Reform Association on the Six Nations reserve planned to organize the "great picnic of the season," one that would include Conservative speakers as well as Liberals.⁸⁴ Macdonald attended a sizeable, strictly partisan meeting at the Six Nations Grand Council House in early September, but even though it featured a marching band, this was not a picnic.⁸⁵ The next event with Six Nations participation that was reported on was the "monster meeting" that took place in Brantford's indoor rink in November.⁸⁶

In contrast to the First Nations living on reserves, the Afro-Canadian population had always had the same voting privileges as those of European descent. We can doubtless assume that a smaller ratio met the property requirements, but members of Chatham's Black community were clearly aware of their political power, for they organized a Reform Party picnic in 1874. After the procession of over 150

80 *Globe*, July 10, 1879.

81 *Globe*, Sept. 4, 1886.

82 *Globe*, Oct. 21, 1886; Nov. 9, 1886.

83 See Colin Grittner, "Macdonald and Women's Enfranchisement," in Patrice Dutil and Roger Hall, ed., *Macdonald at 200: New Reflections and Legacies* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2014). On the political role played by Lydia Child, wife of Stanstead County's Member of the Provincial Parliament during the early 1840s, see J.I. Little, *The Child Letters: Public and Private Life in a Canadian Merchant-Politician's Family, 1841-1845* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

84 *Globe*, July 14, 1886. On this theme, see J. I. Little, "Courting the First Nations Vote: Ontario's Grand River Reserve and the Electoral Franchise Act of 1885," *Journal of Canadian Studies* (forthcoming 2018).

85 In the photograph taken in front of the council house, either before or after the meeting, the crowd is clearly too large for everyone to fit inside, but there are very few women. Library and Archives Canada, C-1634, Six Nations Grand Council House, Ohsweken, Sept. 6, 1886.

86 *Globe*, Nov. 9, 1886.

vehicles and 800 to 900 individuals had passed through the town's two principal streets, the chief organizer explained why "the coloured people" had decided upon the political demonstration instead of the "time-honoured" Emancipation Day celebration. He contrasted what the Conservatives had not done for the Black population during their previous twenty years of power with what the "Reform party had done towards according them civil rights during the last year or two," the chief examples being "the appointment of coloured men to positions of honour and trust, and to sit on juries, as they had a right to do." Another speaker advised the community "to read carefully and reflect upon the acts of their representatives, to use their votes intelligently, and, above all, to go to the polls unitedly, not touch the money with which they were sometimes approached by base men, but to stand up bravely for their rights and privileges as British subjects, to demand all these rights, and to enforce their demands by the influence of their votes."⁸⁷

There is no record in the Toronto press of subsequent political picnics organized by Chatham's Black community, and the heyday of those in the province as a whole had clearly ended by the mid-1890s, if only because the accelerating pace of industrialization left people with less spare time to travel to distant rural groves and spend a leisurely day watching parades, listening to speeches, and socializing over picnic lunches.⁸⁸ Instead, large-scale rallies were now held in drill halls as well as town parks, frequently during evenings when the day's work was done. Thus, in 1894, the afternoon meeting of five thousand in Brantford, which was "intended primarily for the rural visitors," was held in the town's agricultural park and the evening meeting was in the town drill hall.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the equally large meeting in Brampton that year was located in the town's lacrosse field where the "picnic feature was subordinated to the desire to see and hear Mr. Laurier."⁹⁰

The evidence from the Toronto *Globe* nevertheless suggests that print had not begun to replace personal contact in Ontario elections in the 1870s, as McGerr claims was the case for the United States. In fact, the spread of the railway network increased the frequency and scope of the contacts between politicians and the public. As a result, the picnic—originally an intimate affair for upper-class families and their friends—was transformed into a broad-based, festive occasion aimed at cementing partisan political loyalties through ritual and oratory, as well as by fashioning a reassuring sense of rural nostalgia and plenty. Beyond partisan

87 *Globe*, Aug. 5, 1874. On the history of the Black community in the Chatham area, see Robin Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp. 145, 148-49, 215, 245-46, 248. On Emancipation Day in Ontario, see Colin McFarquhar, "A Difference of Perspective: The Black Minority, White Majority, and Life in Ontario, 1870-1919" (MA thesis, University of Waterloo, 1998), chap. 4. McFarquhar discusses the 1874 picnic on pp. 184-86.

88 The *Globe*'s reports were already more sporadic in the 1880s, but there were large rallies prior to the June 1882 federal election, and a "great demonstration" featuring tug-of-war contests in Toronto's exhibition grounds in 1889. See *Globe*, June 6, 1882; June 8, 1882; June 13, 1882; and June 26, 1889.

89 *Globe*, Aug. 21, 1894. On May 29, 1896 the *Globe* did cover a bipartisan picnic held in East Simcoe to celebrate the Queen's birthday.

90 *Globe*, Aug. 24, 1894. Large political gatherings had taken place indoors as well during the 1870s and 1880s, but only in the late fall and winter. The "Grand Reform Demonstration" of 1,200 held in the St. Catherines city hall in November 1870 is one example, and the "Great Reform Demonstration" of 2,000 in the Aurora drill shed in October 1874 is another. *Globe*, Nov. 16, 1870; and Oct. 5, 1874. See also, *Globe*, Feb. 23, 1866; and Nov. 6, 1874.

politics, however, the picnic and the procession associated with it also served to foster community-wide sociability in an era when industrial organization and technology were beginning to erode cultures of intimacy.⁹¹ Political picnics may have moved public political discussion beyond the intimacy of sites such as taverns, but that does not necessarily mean that such discussion was more muted or subject to centralized control.⁹² And even though the ritualistic elements were clearly designed to appeal to the senses more than the mind, as well as to maintain order within a mass event, the picnics did provide a medium for certain marginalized sectors of the community to become more politically aware and to have their voices heard—in short, to enter more fully into the public sphere.

Conclusion

Further research will be needed to determine how popular political picnics were in Canada's other provinces, and to learn how they evolved in the twentieth century. From the narrow political history sense, it is difficult to judge whether the mass gatherings of the later nineteenth century were of great significance in deciding individual election outcomes, given that they were generally held between elections rather than during the campaigns, which rarely took place during the summer. By politicizing what had originally been a nonpartisan social event, however, the effect was to expand the period during which people were exposed to leading political figures and national political issues, and to build party momentum prior to elections. Thus, Macdonald's Conservative party resorted to political picnics as a staging ground for its comeback from disgrace following the Pacific Scandal and electoral defeat in 1874. And, in terms of a more general strategy for both parties, it was quite likely no accident that political picnics became increasingly popular after the introduction of the secret ballot, which somewhat weakened the influence of patronage distribution, and that the focus was on the charismatic party leader, for political allegiance would now have to be solidified by strengthening emotional ties to the party.⁹³ That said, insofar as the parades and picnics appealed to the community as a whole, they forced party organizers to attempt to outcompete each other in order not to lose the more fickle of their flock to the other party as well as to win the votes of those who had tended not to be interested in politics.

As for the broader significance of these picnics, from one perspective they represent the extended grasp from the metropolis to the hinterland of a national and provincial institution—the political party. But the fact that they were organized at the local level is a reflection of how decentralized the party structure remained

91 See Walden, *Becoming Modern*, pp. 85-87, 117-18, 192. Company and other group picnics served the same purpose in the twentieth century. See J. I. Little, "Vancouver's Playground: Leisure and Sociability on Bowen Island, 1902-57," *BC Studies*, no. 171 (Autumn 2011), pp. 37-68.

92 On Upper Canada's taverns as sites of political discussion, see Roberts, *In Mixed Company*, pp. 72-73.

93 Dennis Pilon writes that prior to the secret ballot, "the crucial role of patronage in the colonial economy had a coercive effect on voters who had to announce their voting intention openly, in front of those who controlled the purse strings." As Pilon further argues, however, patronage did remain a powerful political tool long after the secret ballot was introduced. Dennis Pilon, "The Contested Origins of Canadian Democracy," *Studies in Political Economy*, vol. 98, no. 2 (2017), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07078552.2017.1342990>.

in the later nineteenth century.⁹⁴ Furthermore, although picnics in general were a socially conservative force as far as the patriarchal family was concerned, and even though political picnics in particular reflected a taming of rough culture, they were also a potentially destabilizing force insofar as they represented an expanded public space. Relatively few industrial wage workers would have had the time or the means to travel to the picnic sites, but Afro-Canadian and Indigenous communities did take the opportunity to make their political influence more visible as well as audible to the general public, and newspaper coverage reveals that women attended all these events in considerable numbers. The presence of women at a political event may have been initially viewed as a novelty, but they were clearly assumed to be politically knowledgeable as well as influential in determining electoral outcomes. In short, although Ontario's political picnics may have helped to undermine popular protest culture by channelling local energies along formally organized partisan lines with a focus on party leaders, they can also be said to have strengthened deliberative democracy insofar as they stimulated public interest in political discourse as well as incorporating marginalized groups in a highly visible, if still tentative, way within the discursive community that constituted the public sphere.

94 That is still the case to a considerable extent today according to research findings by Kenneth Carty and Munroe Eagles, who stress that the fate of Canada's national parties is ultimately determined at the local constituency level. Carty and Eagles, *Politics is Local: National Politics at the Crossroads* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2005).