

Send-offs During Canada's Great War: Interpreting Hometown Rituals in Dispatching Home Front Volunteers

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In August 1914 and during subsequent mobilizations of volunteers for Canada's overseas forces, local civilian supporters and recruits joined their regiments in staging organized send-off rallies, dinners, and dances, as well as more informal, but often crowded, departures at the local railway station. Evidence from Lethbridge, Guelph, and Trois-Rivières suggests that precise local circumstances in these cities combined with national discourses to determine how new recruits and civilians experienced their parting as a public event, marked by ritual, ceremony, and implied meanings. Local circumstances remained more significant than national bureaucratic procedures, although this balance would shift with subsequent conflicts. Local settings and communities shaped the displays of armed mobilization that served as key links between Canada's civilian home front and the war overseas.

En août 1914 et lors des mobilisations subséquentes de volontaires pour les forces canadiennes outre-mer, les recrues locales et leurs partisans ont aidé les régiments à préparer des fêtes d'adieu, rallyes et danses organisés dans la communauté de même que des départs plus informels, mais souvent très courus, à la gare locale. La lecture de données recueillies à Lethbridge, à Guelph et à Trois-Rivières montre que la conjoncture particulière de chacun de ces endroits s'est conjuguée aux discours nationalistes pour déterminer la façon dont les nouvelles recrues et les civils vivaient l'événement public, sorte de rituel et de cérémonie chargée de sens, de leur départ. Les circonstances locales sont demeurées plus importantes que les procédures bureaucratiques nationales, bien que cet équilibre allait changer au fil des conflits. Les localités et communautés ont façonné les démonstrations de mobilisation armée qui ont servi de charnières entre le front civil intérieur au pays et la guerre outre-mer.

BOTH SOCIAL and military historians have considered Canada's response to the outbreak of the First World War as a significant sign of sentiment and

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action, expressing strong support for the war, even in Quebec. So pronounced were local responses that urban areas across the country, from downtown cores to city parks, quickly became crucibles for enthusiastic patriotic display. The first week of the war became, in many ways, an exuberant festival of wartime bellicosity. In earlier work drawn from newspaper descriptions from Halifax to Vancouver, I have examined patterns of public expression that prompted me to cast the outbreak of war in early August 1914 as a special kind of festival, or “time out of time”. The routine of ordinary life was interrupted for a celebration that expressed sentiment through public display rather than specific military action.¹

By mid-August, however, once the celebrations, speeches, parades, and other forms of public street theatre that greeted news of the expiry of Britain’s ultimatum to Germany had died down, the business of wartime mobilization took shape across the country as a significantly localized exercise of recruiting and dispatching volunteers. With respect to examining critically how Canadians responded to recruitment and send-offs, however, little work to date offers cultural readings of how local patriotic public gatherings in urban spaces worked to construct ideals and images of the fresh recruit as the object of public affection, fascination, or simple curiosity. While the August festival launched an outpouring of propaganda that was popular, ubiquitous, and captivating, it was also unofficial. Recruitment remained the state’s first priority. Secondary to this, as Jeff Keshen’s study of media control considers, was imposing censorship when deemed necessary and generating propaganda when deemed useful. In considering public displays, however, we are not looking primarily at the tools of the state but at the local contexts that often placed government in the background. Local send-offs for local recruits focused almost entirely on rituals that elevated the myth of the volunteer, military masculinity, and imperial nationalism through the media of local spaces and local sites. The hometown soldier, willing to serve

1 On my earlier work on crowds and the outbreak of war in Canada, see “Canada’s August Festival: Communitas, Liminality, and Social Memory”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 77 (1996), pp. 221–249. Here I consider civilian crowd descriptions generated across major urban centres at the start of the war, drawing from Roger Caillois’s observation that wars, like festivals, “inaugurate a period of vigorous socialization and share instruments, resources, and powers in common. They interrupt the time during which individuals separately occupy themselves in very many different domains.” Caillois noted this just before the return of world war in 1939, stating that “war represents a unique moment of concentration and intense absorption in the group of everything that ordinarily tends to maintain a certain area of independence in this regard”. See Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, trans. Meyer Barash (Illinois: Glencoe Free Press, 1959; 1939), p. 166. From the rich anthropological literature on festival and public celebrations, see Alessandro Falassi, ed., *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987). While mass mobilizations develop as large, bureaucratized national processes, they were experienced most directly as local events. Aspects of recruitment as a local process, including the relationship between changing national procedures and local campaigns, appear in my book, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada’s Great War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, forthcoming).

a cause far transcending his parochial roots, was constructed as the modern hero.

Send-offs marked a fundamental sense of connection between hometown setting and a nation engaged in the complex social and cultural processes of dispatching fighting forces beyond these settings and, in an imagined sense, over the meridians of hometown horizons. Offering potent moments of display, ritual, and marked passages, they provided a sentimental education for local audiences. The transition of enlistee to soldier became a series of communicative moments connecting the experiences of disparate towns, cities, and regions as local communities to an imagined sense of nation. Through send-offs, local populations combined their immediate worlds of family, friends, and community with their horizons of expectation in wartime. Parades, patriotic rallies, send-off dinners and dances, special sermons, and the more impromptu railway platform pull-outs made this process significant in two important ways. First, for Canadians, whose experiences were still based on regional contrasts and very different local social histories, entering an imperial war in a pre-electronic age, these rituals marked a fading end to an era in which primarily local settings and resources determined patterns of military display. While live send-offs would continue to be important public markers in future wars and conflicts, they did not regain the significance of those staged in every town and city across Canada during the early phases of the Great War. Secondly, for the early volunteers themselves, these public observances became a popular ritual celebrating manhood, militarism, imperial nationalism, and the associated doctrine of a just war that the struggle against Germany and its allies was to uphold. As profoundly liminal moments, send-offs marked for the troops, and for the local communities that produced them, thresholds crossed symbolically before they set out for the reality of further training and final departures overseas.

Most studies to date, however, consider the relationship between imagined nationality and wartime experience as something forged by the war experience and by memories of it that became transfigured into dominant myths. Jonathan Vance's work, most particularly, considers the important relationship between social memories of the Great War and the construction of a strengthened sense of nationalism after it ended. Vance highlights an era when Canadian civilians, joined by Great War veterans in Armistice Day rites, sought to forget the real war by remembering a sanitized, elevated version of it. The result became a compelling, forward-looking nationalism rooted in a romantic, backward gaze that gave meaning to the devastating losses overseas. Both social memories of the war and propaganda generated during it, as Alan R. Young notes in his reading of postwar commemoration discourse, often hinged on ideal images of the soldier, particularly the noble volunteer.²

² See Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship in Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996); Alan R. Young, "'We throw the torch':

The send-off observances that began in August 1914 set the stage for myths that, in powerful ways, bolstered the image of the raw recruit from the very start of the war.

Was this a national process, or a local one? To the extent that send-offs marked the dispatch of local troops to an imperial war, it might be said to have been both. As Jay Winter has pointed out, however, almost all of home-front life, from mobilization to postwar reconstruction, was experienced most directly and deeply in local communities. Nations do not wage wars, he reminds us, “groups of people organized in states do”. The “concrete, visible steps taken by Frenchmen, Germans, or Englishmen”, as he puts it, “to go to war, to provision the men who joined up, and to adjust to the consequences — the human dimension of war — were almost always taken within and expressed through collective life at the local level.”³ The same can be said for Canadians.

Case studies of recruitment indicate the power that locale — hometown settings — held, across Canada’s diverse regions, over the social and cultural responses to military demands. Evidence from three very different cities — Lethbridge in southern Alberta, Guelph in south-central Ontario, and Trois-Rivières, situated midway between Montreal and Quebec City — is used here to compare and contrast responses and to provide a focus for examining the public ritual of send-offs for freshly enlisted and dispatched troops. The details of select local evidence offer a cultural reading of the bridges we might draw between the euphoria of August 1914 and the disappointment and disillusionment over the stalemate that later set in overseas. Early troop dispatches little resembled later ones. Send-offs as public events collapsed. Enthusiasm waned, most precipitously after the Second Battle of Ypres in

Canadian Memorials of the Great War and the Mythology of Heroic Sacrifice”, *Journal of Canadian Studies/ Revue d’études canadiennes*, vol. 24 (1989–1990), pp. 5–28. On the larger question of the war’s impact on literary discourse, Paul Fussell’s seminal work still stands out. See Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975). Apart from these important treatments of wartime representation and memorialization, see R. Matthew Bray’s “‘Fighting as an Ally’: The English-Canadian Patriotic Response to the Great War”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 61 (1980), pp. 141–168, which served at the beginning of the 1980s as one of few studies of popular reactions to the outbreak and expansion of the war. Since then, research has turned to consider pacifism, public ritualizations, ethnic and religious differences, and, more recently, masculinity and gender. See Thomas Socknat, “Canada’s Liberal Pacifists and the Great War”, *Journal of Canadian Studies/ Revue d’études canadiennes*, vol. 18 (1984), pp. 30–44; James W. St. G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 70 (1989), pp. 1–26; Paul Maroney, “‘The Great Adventure’: The Context and Ideology of Recruiting in Ontario, 1914–17”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 77 (1996), pp. 62–98. On manhood constructions and militarism leading up to the outbreak, see Mike O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class, and Militarism in Ontario, 1902–1914”, *Labour/ Le Travail*, vol. 42 (1998), pp. 115–141; Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001).

3 Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert, eds., *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin, 1914–1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 3–4.

April 1915, which marked the first major battle involving Canadian troops and the first engagement in which chlorine gas was used.

At the beginning of the war, however, send-offs permitted the first opportunities for hometowns to view publicly and endorse the call to the colours. Amidst fears mixed with pride, those left behind used these moments to witness and give moral sanction to the mustering of the first available troops for war. Send-offs helped to stage, in focused displays, the complex discursive connections between war and society. Grounded in the bureaucratic, organizational systems that connected locale to home-front mobilizations, these displays were understood through ideals, social memories, and an imagined sense of nationhood. As visual and aural experiences, send-offs thus served as key symbolic moments.

They were far from anonymous, national exercises, however. Since much of their meaning remained attached to local regimental histories and hometown identities, send-offs linked the familiarities of local setting to the imagined community of national home-front mobilization. For the men leaving behind the daily ties to family and community, the thresholds they were crossing appeared public and ceremonial, yet remained significantly local assertions of manifold duty. Send-off rituals served to connect the diversities of town, city, and region to the ideals and complex realities of a country joined within an empire at war, before recruits set out for what really lay ahead. For the proportionately fewer French Canadians enlisting, an ambivalence toward the British empire could be replaced by a patriotism for Canada as it joined others in fighting a just war. Of course, few soldiers joined up for purely patriotic reasons. Multiple motives, from dreams of heroic glory to sheer economic necessity, underpinned individual decisions. For many ordinary, young enlistees and their families, their identities in the private and public spheres intersected amidst the noise and dogmatic speech-making of duty-bound dispatch.⁴ No matter what individual motives came into play, local events also took shape as highly personalized encounters between a departing regiment or other unit and the many regions and home towns that produced it. Such events served as cultural vehicles at the intersection between family and local community life and an imagined nation, empire, and war.⁵

4 For useful comment on the popular sentiment of Canadian recruits at this time, see Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the Great War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993). Studies of negative masculine sentiments, a thirst for killing in particular, may be found in Joanna Bourke's *An Intimate History of Killing* (London: Granta Books, 2000).

5 As a general point, how armies are raised reflects the social and cultural contexts that produced them, in circumstances that are often themselves undergoing radical change. When the Revolutionary wars began on both sides of the Atlantic during the late eighteenth century, mustering either citizen-volunteers in the American colonies or huge numbers of citizen-conscripts during the *levée en masse* in France took place at a time when citizenship, individual rights, and patriotic duty were being redefined in both countries. Decreed on August 23, 1793, by France's committee of public safety, the largely effective appeal for mass mobilization raised and trained an army of 800,000 within a year.

Studies of local rituals associated with sanctioned violence often connect us quite directly to intersections between armed force, social order, and local, community-based relationships. Send-off rituals, in particular, can offer useful windows through which changing conditions, often accelerated by the ensuing conflicts themselves, can be assessed. Before and since the Great War, Canada has raised fighting forces that have reflected the contexts of both the specific military engagements and the participating social hierarchies, from the colonial struggles in the Northwest in the late nineteenth century or the Boer war at the turn of the century to the First World War, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and the Korean War, up to the numerous United Nations peace-keeping commitments of the present. Each produced very different send-offs, large and small. The particular nature of each armed struggle intersected with new technologies, social practices, preparations, and expectations, prompting entirely different dispatches of fighting men and, in large numbers more recently, women.⁶

This new and powerful shift in armed mobilization presaged the armed mobilization system later refined by Napoleon to dominate Europe. Recent work has focused on Napoleon's reorganization of large-scale armed forces into smaller corps units as a strategic shift toward more modern tactics. See Robert M. Epstein, *Napoleon's Last Victory and the Emergence of Modern War* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1994), especially chap. 2. From the voluminous scholarship on mobilization and social contexts during the American revolutionary war, see especially Charles P. Niemeier, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for Armed Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, rev. ed. 1990).

⁶ From a substantial body of work that examines the popular reactions to each of these conflicts, see Desmond Morton's *A Military History of Canada: From Champlain to Kosovo*, 4th ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1999) for a useful overview, which now includes consideration of Canada's contemporary peacekeeping operations and the media. Social responses to troop dispatchments, in and beyond Canada, are now addressed in numerous relevant works, including R. C. MacLeod and Bob Beal, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 Northwest Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1985); Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Montreal and Kingston: Canadian War Museum and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Morton, *When Your Number's Up*; Mary Biggar Peck, *Red Moon Over Spain: Canadian Media Reaction to the Spanish Civil War* (Ottawa: Steel Rail Publishing, 1988). J. L. Granatstein and Desmond Morton's *A Nation Forged in Fire: Canadians and the Second World War* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989) presents a broad overview of armed service transitions to a war footing, which underscores the comparative growth in scale and complexity of military bureaucracies in this war, even in its early stages. As an anthology of diverse social and popular cultural depictions, on the other hand, Granatstein and Peter Neary's edited collection, *The Good Fight: Canadians and World War II* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995) offers varied glimpses of an escalating war that broke out after September 1939 in fairly discrete stages, compared to the Great War. Beyond this, Terry Copp's (with Richard Nielson) *No Price Too High: Canadians and the Second World War* (Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1996) offers a montage of photographs and descriptive text that includes home-front training and dispatchment scenes from this contrasting outbreak of war. For the Korean War, see David J. Bercuson, *Blood on the Hill: The Canadian Army and the Korean War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

Settings

Intersections between parochial, local settings and the wider public discourses of the Great War can be approached best through case-study evidence. Trois-Rivières, Guelph, and Lethbridge were selected to consider a variety of responses from contrasting settings (a predominantly francophone city in Quebec; a predominantly anglophone, mixed economy locale in southern Ontario; an ethnically diverse, rural service centre in the Prairie West) and because these cities supported newspapers and generated adequate source materials. Choices were made not to compare cities, but to consider what happened within them. Given the fundamental differences of locale and region they reflected, a close reading of particular responses can help us see how different local populations responded to broad wartime imperatives. Other cities would doubtless display countless, locally peculiar patterns. The question of how locales of any sort influenced specific responses can point to a general conclusion concerning the power of parochial perspectives at this transitional moment in history, as peace in Europe collapsed, the war broke out and escalated, and its human and material costs mounted.

As the oldest European settlement, the predominantly French Canadian city of Trois-Rivières (population c. 14,000 in 1914) is situated on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River, between Montreal and Quebec City. Colonized by Europeans during the early sixteenth century, the site on a three-pronged delta, at the confluence of the Mauricie and St. Lawrence rivers, provided the place name for a secured base of operations for fur traders and the town's first French settlers. Since then, the immediate area on the north shore of the St. Lawrence has been consistently occupied by French colonists and their descendants. At an increased rate in the early twentieth century, migrant families from the surrounding countryside moved to Trois-Rivières, seeking work at the mills and factories of what had become Quebec's third largest city. From its beginnings as a settlement in New France, Trois-Rivières remained predominantly French Canadian in origin, language, and religion. Over 95 per cent of the total population was French-speaking and Catholic in August 1914.

In mid-southern Ontario, Guelph (c. 16,000 in 1914) had developed into a diversified manufacturing and service centre. Since the agricultural settlement and milling era of the early nineteenth century, the town of Guelph, then located in Upper Canada, grew from a town site laid down in the 1820s by the Canada Company, a land-based enterprise set up to profit through control of agricultural production for commercial output. Settled by British newcomers beginning in the 1820s, with industrialization near century's end attracting a more diverse mix of Irish, Scots, English, and other Europeans, Guelph had about two-thirds of its residents claiming Anglo-Celtic ancestry in the last pre-war census of 1911. Guelph boosters in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century came to call their town the "Royal City", a label derived from the town founder John Galt, who had taken the name from a branch of royal genealogy. Guelph's percentages of Protestants and Catholics were

comparable to those of Ontario as a whole.⁷ Economic opportunities that attracted settlers coincided with the large-scale transition undergone by towns and cities in this region, from serving the needs of agriculture-based commerce in the mid-Victorian period to becoming retail, manufacturing, and transportation service centres by the early twentieth century.⁸ The cultural connection to the British empire, still strong throughout southern Ontario, was clearly identifiable in Guelph on the eve of the First World War.

Lethbridge (c. 9,000 in 1914) was not only the smallest, but the most recently incorporated of the three cities, a settlement that developed in the mid-1880s as a coal-mining site and in the early twentieth century as an agricultural service centre in southern Alberta. The influx of a mixed population to the Prairies, a region resettled rapidly between 1885 and 1914, reflected a continued dominance of Anglo-Celtic residents.⁹ The city's sudden growth, underwritten by government-sponsored concessions, had been driven mainly by the expansion of the surrounding grain-growing region. Irrigation projects and new railway spur lines, combined with a significant influx of newcomers of diverse ethnic origins lured by the promise of a better life in the Canadian West, gave Lethbridge an entirely different social mix by 1914 than that of Trois-Rivières or even Guelph. Colonization as a process of resettlement had been rapid and diverse and was still taking place in 1914. Yet, by the war's outbreak, the Lethbridge *Herald* had already begun to romanticize the city's beginnings as a frontier town built by pioneers of the rugged West.

The presence of militia volunteers in each city had also been shaped by very different local circumstances. Notably, Trois-Rivières had lost its only militia unit, the 86th Three Rivers Regiment, in June just before the war broke out, when the Department of Militia and Defence, under Col. Sam Hughes's direction, had disbanded the long-standing unit. In early August this left a gap in local recruiting resources, quite apart from the bitter resentment already expressed by Liberal partisans in Trois-Rivières who had long supported the militia presence maintained by the 86th Regiment. Guelph had in place the 30th Wellington Rifles, a unit with a strong local presence, which became the city's prime recruiting vehicle in August 1914. It soon would be

7 See *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911*, vol. II (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912), p. 431. Fairly even percentages of residents had stated belonging to Canada's four largest churches, which stood locally as Presbyterians (24.1%), Methodists (23.3%), Roman Catholics (20.4%), and Anglicans (20.1%). Baptists came next at 4.2%, largest among religious groups amounting to less than 5% in the city. These figures indicate that as a mid-sized, mid-southern-Ontario city, Guelph contained diversities in population that were hardly atypical, indeed paralleled those of many towns and cities in Ontario.

8 For a comparative study of agricultural and economic development in the two regions, see John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

9 For a study of ethno-cultural stereotyping and discrimination that accompanied immigration to agricultural Alberta in this period, see Howard Palmer's *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1982).

joined by the 11th Field Battery and later by the 38th Battalion in the spring of 1915. Guelph also contributed to Wellington County's 153rd Battalion that same year. Since 1905 Lethbridge had boasted the 25th Field Battery under command of an avid promoter, Lt. Col. James Stewart, a local dentist who would go on to command an army division in France. Lethbridge recruiters would subsequently take a lead in raising the 20th Field Battery and the 39th Battalion in 1915, followed by the 113th Lethbridge Highlanders' Battalion a year later.

From Local Circumstance to a Country at War

In August 1914 Canada had approximately 77,000 peacetime militiamen in volunteer units throughout the country and a permanent force of 3,000. At the first call for troops, most of the militia, especially those with families or jobs, chose to stay home. A short war was widely expected. For those who did join up, two-thirds of whom were British-born, peer pressure and economic necessity may, more often than not, have been a greater inducement than any war-inspired sense of duty.¹⁰ Moreover, dreams of adventure overseas and the bonds of male camaraderie, legitimized by patriotic imperative, attracted many. Newspapers often played this up and certainly did not hide a kind of vicarious excitement as they described scenes at or near the recruiter's desk. Above all, the rush to get into action reflected a general ignorance of the realities of trench warfare ahead, which leads to our focus on popular perceptions of the coming of war evident in send-off ceremonials.

Many of the public rituals connected to mobilization took place as parades on city streets or patriotic gatherings in city parks. When Hugh Guthrie, a Liberal MP from Guelph and Wellington County, addressed an inaugural rally for the Canadian Patriotic Fund by stating that "there is no statesman in England at the present time who doubts the value of the colonies, and no colonial who doubts the connection with Great Britain", he tapped into the powerful ideal of a reciprocal relationship in the Empire, frequently used at this time to justify Canada's support for an imperial war.¹¹ Or when the Rev. G. H. Cobbedick of Lethbridge's Wesley Methodist Church quoted a passage from the book of Exodus at a send-off for Lethbridge troops held in his church, imploring the fresh recruits to "Fear not, stand in marching order, and see the salvation of God", he drew from religious pastoral imagery, a regular tactic in public speech at this time.¹² The many public events employed in recruitment reaffirmed social hierarchies, reiterated the moral values of a

10 See, for example, Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, especially chap. 9. Ilana R. Bet-El underscores the point for Britain in "Man and Soldiers: British Conscripts, Concepts of Masculinity, and the Great War", in Billie Melman, ed., *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 75.

11 *Guelph Evening Mercury*, September 25, 1914, p. 8

12 *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, August 18, 1914, p. 6

society preparing for war, and often turned downtown thoroughfares and city exhibition grounds into instant public stages.¹³

The popular press, in Quebec as elsewhere, joined in calling on Canada's support for Allies and the Empire, prompting historians since to comment on the apparent unity with which Canada went to war.¹⁴ At a city hall meeting in Trois-Rivières called to inaugurate the local chapter of the Canadian Patriotic Fund, Mayor J.-A. Tessier led several other speakers in soliciting donations: "Chacun de ces orateurs entre pendant quelques minutes le public de l'idée patriotique", the *Nouveau Trois-Rivières* reported, "qu'avait présidée à cette démonstration en notre cité, et généralement dans toutes les villes du Canada."¹⁵ The 86th Regiment's former commander, Lt. Col. Louis-Phillipe Mercier, was saddled with the vexing task of reminding Ottawa that he had no troops to send. Through some oversight, Mercier had also received one of some 226 night lettergrams from the Militia department requesting enlistment rolls.¹⁶ Few, if any, had yet volunteered. The city's anglophone newspaper had heard of no one who had joined as yet, a conspicuous inactivity given that nearly 200 potential recruits had recently undergone training at the recently disbanded 86th.¹⁷ At the same time, the English Canadian press closely monitored news of preparations at Valcartier, as senior militia officers coped with the systemic problem of delays in communication from Ottawa.

While the military bureaucracy was being hastily assembled, grafting new and sometimes contradictory directives onto old procedures, volunteers lined up at militia armouries or other recruiting stations throughout the country. Most had never served in the Canadian militia, but did have military experience. Many felt disillusioned about Canada's future in the economic depres-

13 Rituals, as approached here, are considered as activating moments between pre-existing power relations — captured theoretically as "hierarchies", that is, structured, yet constantly changing power systems marked by class, gender, ethnic, or age-based differences through which agents attempt to preserve or impose both their agency and their identity. On the new approaches by historians to the complex relationships between culture and social structure, see Roger Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language, and Practices*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), especially chap. 7.

14 "Initially, Canadians united behind the war effort", as one recent textbook put it in noting the cheers that greeted Prime Minister Robert Borden's statement of support for Great Britain in the House of Commons, flag-waving and impromptu parades on major city streets, and even the endorsement of the anti-imperialist Henri Bourassa. See R. Douglas Francis *et. al.*, *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*, 4th ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Canada, 2000), p. 226.

15 *Nouveau Trois-Rivières*, November 27, 1914, p. 7

16 National Archives of Canada [hereafter NAC], Militia and Defence Records, Central Registry Files, Vol. 1220, HQ 593-1-5, "Preliminary Instructions for Mobilization War 1914", telegram dated August 8, 1914 from Lt. Col. L. P. Mercier to Adjutant General.

17 *Newcomer*, August 19, 1914, p. 2. An annual inspection completed by the Department of Militia and Defence in 1913 indicates that, in addition to the officers, the 86th Regiment had 181 non-commissioned officers and newly qualified riflers as well as 12 signalers. See Archives Musée Militaire du 12^e Régiment Blindé du Canada, FR KA 2.7, "Report of the Annual Inspection 1913 of the 86th Regiment (Three Rivers)", September 8, 1913.

sion which, it seemed, might only get worse. A paid-fare trip back home in a short, decisive war appealed to many who had emigrated from Britain. After the huge demonstrations that greeted the war, the press scrambled to cover scenes of jammed armouries, with “scores of able-bodied” men, as the *Guelph Mercury* put it, signing up. Militia commanders were familiar with ordinary enlistment routines, a task undertaken many times before.¹⁸ Specifications were checked, medical inspections completed, and lists drawn up, often within a day. The difference now, of course, was the deluge of volunteers facing commanders and their regiments. Civilians in Lethbridge and Guelph had in the past seen events at the local armouries as a closed affair, part of military business. Despite public fascination, this was still the case. Joining up remained a bureaucratic procedure. Forms had to be filled out, physical examinations completed. What many applicants at this point feared most was being turned down. Onlookers may have huddled close by, as this *Guelph* report suggests, but most could only read about it in the next day's papers.

In the animated discourse of masculinity and patriotism so much a part of ordinary press reports at this time, such reports advertised the fiction that every “man jack of those who crowded into the armouries was full of fight and anxious to get a chance to give battle to the enemy”; yet only a select few would be picked, “men of brawn and muscle, capable of standing hardship and long marches”.¹⁹ Images of gallant, eager, muscled men facing invigorating battles typified the press reports that described the enlistment flurry and the earliest battle scenes in Belgium and France. These depictions soon formed the metaphorical frames through which the imagined war, seen from hometown horizons, came into view. As stereotypes, these initial images of the noble recruit propped up what Ilana R. Bet-El has called the myth of the Great War volunteer, the soldier as “a man who enlisted in a spirit of intense patriotism: a brave knight who took himself off on a crusade of chivalry and sacrifice”.²⁰

In Lethbridge, the call to the colours was said to kindle the patriotic fires “in many a breast” in early reports that tended to downplay the mundane realities of the recruiting station — the queues, questionnaires, and automatic commands so much a part of army life.²¹ While masculine imperial images of “Old Countrymen”, filled with love for the motherland and fight for the Kaiser, became an instant genre, one *Guelph* man, a husband and father, admitted simply that he could not keep his family on three days of work a week. They would, he was to have said, “be much better off if he were at the front”, a murmur that “hungerscription” had begun with the war itself.²²

New recruits, whatever their social rank, were soon being marched along

18 On the general context for enlistment at this time as it affected ordinary men, soon-to-be soldiers, see Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, pp. 8–9.

19 *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 8, 1914, p. 1

20 Bet-El, “Man and Soldiers”, p. 73

21 *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, August 8, 1914, p. 1

22 *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 8, 1914, p. 1

city streets by unit officers. On pre-announced march-pasts, crowds of curious onlookers appeared to cheer or even sing in unison, many focusing on the familiar faces of loved ones or friends who had just signed up. As a usual climax, those closest to the troops gathered to catch a final glimpse of the men, in street clothes or later uniformed as compete units, making their way to the last place at home upon which many would set foot, the train platform. Figure 1 depicts a common scene during the early war of recent recruits on parade drill in street clothes. This photograph was taken in August 1914 at the Blacksmith's fountain at St. George's Square in Guelph, the very centre of town, with more onlookers than raw recruits on hand. While the *Mercury* delivered gendered depictions of "[g]ray haired mothers, sad-faced wives, proud sisters, and heart-broken sweethearts" left standing on the wooden planks at the Canadian Pacific Railway station, all city papers spoke of "tears in many an eye, and many a prayer [being] whispered for the brave sons of Canada".²³ Prior to departure, some families had portraits taken of a uniformed father or son surrounded by his family, as indicated in the scene captured by a city photographer in Figure 2. Beyond the private sphere, a series of press reports appeared in Guelph and Lethbridge of huge crowds crushed together for final embraces and good-bye waves, with steam engines hissing alongside, which conveyed among many things the ambivalence with which parting emotions were felt. Figure 3 is a postcard produced in Elora, Ontario, a small town near Guelph. Under the caption "Platoon Leaving for the Front" it depicts the movement of men from home town to fighting front as an uninterrupted path from point of departure to military action, which in fact it was not, since months of training lay ahead. Send-off organizers often sought to record the details of their community's role in the raising of men and, as evidenced by the Union Jacks bedecking several automobiles in this instance, their loyalty to the Empire.

Once individual units had pulled out of their various stations for further training, soldiers started to write their letters home. Despite censorship protocols, they often provided a glimpse of military life and served to maintain ongoing links between home and life in the forces. A mixture of earnest hope, fateful preparation, and boyish innocence ran through many. "Dear Mother," Pte. Cliff Allan wrote from the Royal School of Artillery in Kingston in the summer of 1915, as part of the Second Contingent's volunteers from Guelph. "We are leaving on Monday next — and sail I think on Thursday. I'll not get home again before sailing." He then provided details for a task required of all new recruits — to complete some form of will. We cannot be sure how most letters were read in any given instance, but Pte. Allen's shift of attention to his few assets would have reminded any parent of the worst: "I've written the [Militia] department — asking them to send \$35 per month to father, and deposit the remainder to my account in the Quebec

23 *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 20, 1914, p. 1



Figure 1 Marching in Mufti: With uniforms not yet available, new enlistments are encircled by a crowd in Guelph, Ontario. Onlookers are watching troops in marching drill through St. George's Square, around the Blacksmith's fountain. Such scenes, as common spectacles on city streets in the early days of the war, also signified customary ties between local life and military display, between the men's civilian pasts and the naive enthusiasm that accompanied early enlistment exercises. Photo courtesy of Guelph Museums, Photograph Collection, 983.24.2.



Figure 2 Father Leaving Family: Although this particular conjugal family portrait survives anonymously, it typifies a scene many families sought to preserve for posterity. As recorded moments, such portraits marked a popular, purchased, framing of the domestic sphere before the killing began. Photograph by Norman Lorenz, Hanover, Ontario, ca., 1915. Wellington County Museum and Archives, ph. 3834.

Bank at Ottawa.” He added that his “insurance policies are all with Ainslie Greene 5–8 Primrose Ave. of Ottawa also my will which he made out for me. I left a trunk at 261 Laurier West — containing some photos jewelry etc. There were also a number of books. I think that’s about all...” The rest shifts back to details of an unfolding adventure, picked up in later letters, of his journey overseas to England, exciting London, training in Kent, a glimpse of the French coast. He could hardly wait. At this point, though, the parades



Figure 3 Platoon at the Platform: Prepared as a commemorative postcard, this scene shows the crowd and parked cars jammed at the railway station for a final send-off in Elora, Ontario, near Guelph, in August 1914. A farewell dance had been held there shortly before. Such last glimpses served, for troops and well-wishers alike, as intimate encounters between local pasts and uncertain wartime futures. Photo courtesy of Wellington County Museum and Archives, ph. 1279.

and rallies in Guelph had brought him little farther than a stay with family friends near his unit's current base. From there, near the shores of eastern Lake Ontario, he imagined finally getting to the "big show" in France:

I am writing from the Smythes in Kingston. Two of the 38th officers are here. They are leaving tomorrow. We expect to go on the same boat but we were switched to a week later. I think the rest of the troops on our ship are from London so that probably some of the Guelph Battalion be on loan. We will be in England some weeks before we get over to the big show. We are doing great work in camp just now. Tomorrow a route march to Gananoque is on the boards.... The other two officers in our draft are awfully fine chaps and we are taking a good bunch of men. Remember me to all the Guelphites.²⁴

Early send-offs served in part to feed such optimism. The first public ceremonies to honour new recruits in Guelph and Lethbridge were organized by citizens belonging to imperial-national organizations. Members of the

²⁴ Wellington County Museum-Archives, A983.43, Cliff Allan to Mrs. A. S. Allan, undated, post-marked June 21, 1915.

Alexander Galt chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) and the Sons of England in Lethbridge, or the Ladies Garrison Club and the Army and Navy Veterans Association in Guelph, took active parts. They staged several rallies and helped to organize local chapters of the Canadian Patriotic Fund to aid families with breadwinners overseas. A group calling itself the “Overseas Club”, launched at the onset of war in Lethbridge, took charge of the city’s first send-off rally. Its acting secretary, Charles Westley, was past-president of the Alberta Sons of England, while another organizer, A. J. Blackburne, would soon be helping to revitalize Lethbridge’s Red Cross chapter.²⁵ In both Guelph and Lethbridge, local organizers solicited the participation of civic bands, the mayor and municipal councils, local clerics, assorted musicians, Boer war veterans, and other speakers. Blackburne, for instance, had organized a decoration committee in preparation for the “big send-off”, set for August 18, while others were asked to prepare clothing parcels, later distributed just before volunteers departed.²⁶

These displays thus served to interpret and justify recent events. The key to making them appealing and relevant, however, remained embedded in popular notions of heritage and tradition. Lethbridge was a new city in 1914, still laying down its cultural organizational roots. The Alexander Galt chapter of the IODE, established in February that year, would grow to 250 members during the war and be joined in 1917 by the Jack Ross chapter, named to commemorate a local officer killed in action.²⁷ Members of benefit societies like the Sons of England pledged to uphold the “character and traditions of England”. Ethnic affiliations like the Lethbridge Kentish Association, which helped find jobs for English newcomers, expressed particular loyalties for newcomers from this region of England. Ladies’ voluntary associations, like the Mathesis Club, joined the IODE and local Red Cross chapters in war relief projects. The 25th Battery Canadian Field Artillery had been active in Lethbridge since 1908. Its yearly training camps, drills, and parades reinforced an ethos of military masculinity.²⁸ The same was true for Guelph’s 30th Wellington Rifles, with a militia presence as a unit tracing back to the settlement’s Upper Canadian past.

In Guelph, a parade and concert preceded a final send-off rally that dispatched the city’s initial allotment of 25 men to the first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. On the evening of August 14, Wyndham and

25 *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, August 14, 1914, p. 1

26 *Ibid.*

27 Public Archives of Alberta, *The Alberta Club Woman’s Blue Book* (Calgary Branch of the Canadian Women’s Press Club, 1917), pp. 89–91. See also Sir Alexander Galt Archives [hereafter GA], Jack Ross Chapter, IODE, *Forty Years History of Major Jack Ross Chapter, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, 1917–1957* (n.p., n.d.).

28 GA, Dr. Alex Johnston, “Lethbridge and the Militia” (unpublished manuscript). Johnston noted that the battery’s first public appearance was on May 10, 1910, when it fired a 68-gun salute to mark the funeral of King Edward VII.

Woolwich streets, between the city's armoury and its exhibition park, were lined with spectators. The procession began at the official recruiting site, the armoury, led by two standard bearers representing both the army and navy constituents of the local veterans association. The Guelph Musical Society band came next. Like other city bands, the GMS band had helped bring a civic presence to many public events in an era of commercial boosterism and civic reform. Veterans of the Boer war followed, then the enlistees. The rear was made up of decorated automobiles carrying militia officers, city council members, and the mayor. At exhibition park, an audience that had paid a small admission in aid of soldiers' families was entertained by musical selections from "Rule Britannia" to "O Canada". Mayor Samuel Carter's speech referred to the war as "a straight fight for civilization, and Germany was in the wrong". In closing, trumpeter W. Aspen stepped forward and played, among several standards, "The Roll Call" and "The Cavalrymen's Last Post".

As collective experiences, these rallies evoked audience participation. Reciprocal exchanges took place constantly as the spectacle of speeches, prayers, and instrumental music on an elevated stage received enthusiastic responses. The crowd in Guelph's exhibition park was described as "spirited", displaying a fervour "aroused" by the outdoor experience. Entertained by a patriotic concert that included renditions of songs from "Old England" and Canada's national anthem, the gathering was far from passive.²⁹ These reflexive elements, as oscillations between performance and applause or between speeches and responsive singing while the band played, also suggest how these events displayed a collective sense of the past. A unified line of descent from British stock to Canadian people was a favoured theme across both lyrical verse and formal orations. Their most common purpose was to promote popular images of national community through signs of an imperial-national genealogy that upheld "Britishness" as a unifying heritage. The march-past itself followed the customary rites for urban parades with a strong military presence.³⁰ The order of procession, with a square of Boer war veterans followed by two larger companies of mostly green recruits, conveyed a notion of continuity, a rejuvenated rather than fading line of succession.

Send-offs, in all their forms, were far larger and enthusiastic during the Valcartier phase than at any subsequent time. Although enlistment itself took place as a largely bureaucratic process, local organizers were eager to represent its meaning through symbolic display. As soon as Lt. Col. J. J. Craig in Guelph and Maj. J. S. Stewart in Lethbridge received word to forward the

²⁹ *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 15, 1914, pp. 1, 4

³⁰ The use of the militia in parades to symbolize local associations with a military past had become a frequently rehearsed invented tradition by the end of the nineteenth century in many countries. See, for instance, from a large literature, 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), pp. 131–153; Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), especially pp. 49–72.

first “25 man” quotas per unit, plans were underway to arrange the first send-off observances, from the carefully organized public rally to the relatively unstructured good-byes at the railway station.³¹ Even the latter were far from spontaneous.

Guelph’s first railway platform ceremony began with a departing march-past from the armoury on the morning of August 19. Wyndham Street in the downtown core was said to be lined with thousands of spectators, eager to catch sight of the city’s first volunteers. Led by the GMS band, recruits selected through the 30th Wellington Rifles joined members of the Army Service Corps to form a line of 80 men. To the step of martial music, they marched through the rain to the Canadian Pacific station and onto its crowded platform, depicted as a “sea of umbrellas”. They broke ranks to strains of “Auld Lang Sine” and “The Girl I Left Behind Me” and began boarding. A series of farewell scenes with family and friends in tears are described in the *Mercury*, set within the intense ambiance of the CPR platform.³²

Corresponding scenes were depicted in the *Mercury* the following week, as recruits selected through Guelph’s 11th Field Battery left the city in an organized send-off, with Mayor Carter and members of city council also on hand. “There must have been several thousand citizens packed and jammed in every available corner,” according to one report. The “boys” were “cheered repeatedly” as they swung from Wyndham to Carden Street, this time toward the Grand Trunk station. It seemed difficult to dissuade the crowd from disrupting the 10:00 a.m. boarding. A halt had been ordered en route to give families and friends a last chance to say good-bye, a common scene at any march-past to the station. Ritualized as an embrace, a handshake, and a few conventional phrases of encouragement, these gestures accompanied what was feared most — a final parting. Perhaps for this reason, the interruption failed to satisfy everyone’s need to stay as close as possible to the troops as they pulled out, to maintain the final contact. “There was no holding back the crowd,” as the reporter put it, “which swarmed up on to the tracks and crowded right up to the coaches on which the boys entrained.”³³ Despite the mixed emotions they evoked, station pull-outs could serve, vicariously, as recruiting ploys. Stations invariably displayed, in convenient spaces, posters and banners for subsequent units signing on new men, as Figure 4 indicates. In this photograph, a Guelph crowd waves its good-byes above a large banner calling for recruits for the 11th Battery, CFA, then taking on enlistments.

Railway station pull-outs usually took place across the country as a climax to a series of preliminary send-off events. The special sermons, farewell dances and dinners, patriotic rallies, parades, or church services, to name the

31 NAC, Militia and Defence Records, Central Registry Files, Vol. 1220, HQ 593–1–5, “Preliminary Instructions for Mobilization War 1914”.

32 *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 20, 1914, p. 1

33 *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 28, 1914, p. 1

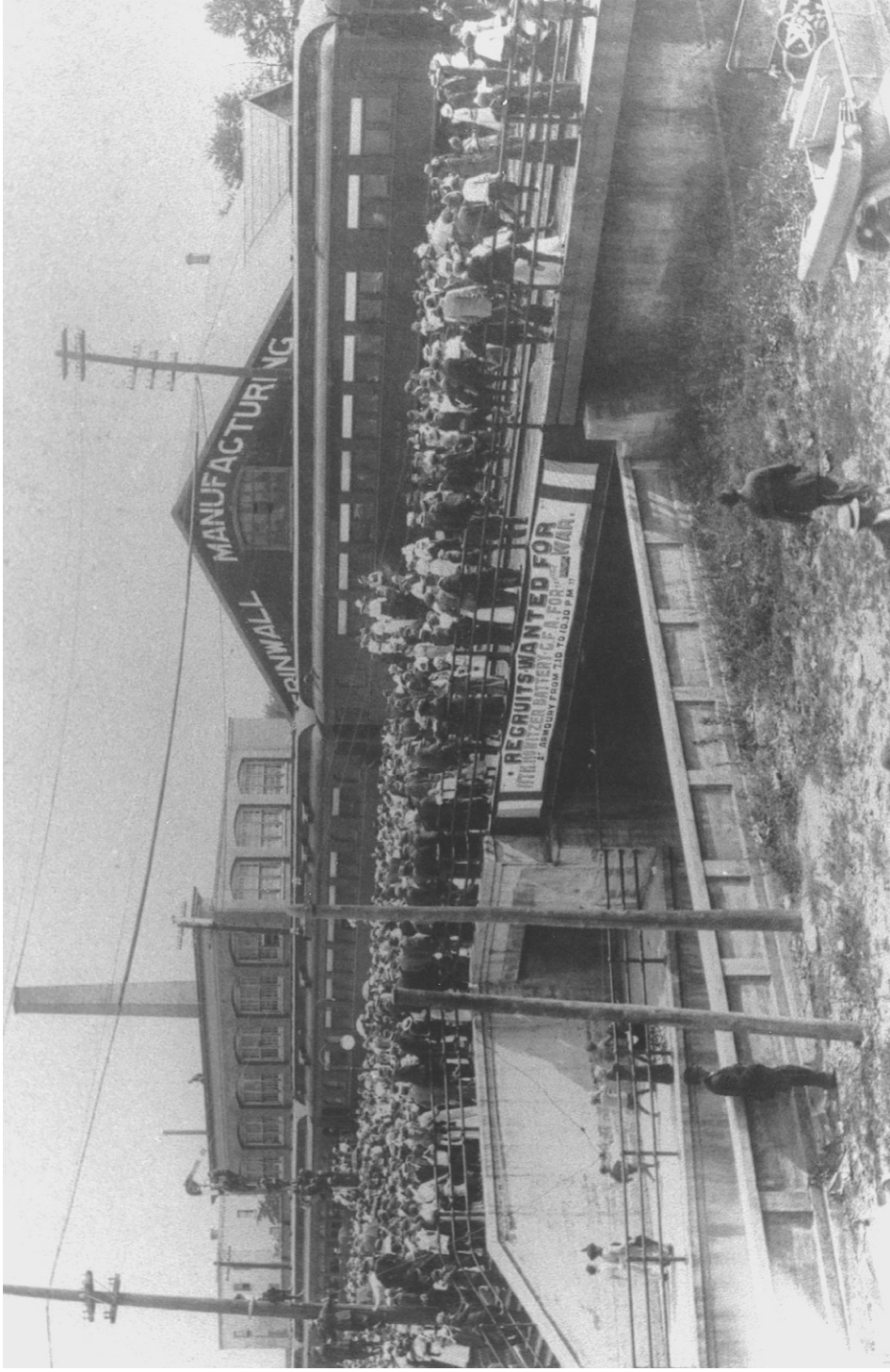


Figure 4 Crowd at the Big Send-Off: A huge crowd gathers at the CPR station in Guelph to see a troop train off in the fall of 1914. This was one of several scheduled troop car pull-outs to leave the city before the end of 1915. Subsequent recruiting was then underway, with a poster clearly visible beneath the rail overpass, calling for fresh enlistments for the 11th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery. Photo courtesy of Guelph Museums, Photograph Collection, 983.24.1.

most prominent, in some cases were spread over a week for a given regimental unit. Many at the Guelph station in this case would also have attended the huge public ceremony for the volunteers held the week before. There volunteers from Guelph and surrounding areas, including Harriston, Elora, Fergus, Drayton, and Mount Forest, displayed new uniforms in their first parade as an artillery unit. During their march from the armoury to the exhibition grounds they lined up in the same order, with Boer war veterans leading the new recruits. The GMS band, re-mustered from the send-off for the 30th Wellington recruits that morning, led a small company of locals who had served half a generation ago in the South African war, followed by the recent enlistees. A “round of cheers” greeted the marchers as they filed by on Wyndham Street. One reporter noted that the “citizens who lined the streets seemed to realize for the first time that the boys were really going to war”. The *Mercury*'s eye-witness account of the final ceremony for these troops that evening included a novel element — organized prayer.

When the procession arrived, the new soldiers and old veterans broke off to form a square in front of the bandstand. On one side sat the surpliced choirs of the city's largest Anglican churches, St. James and St. George's. “Thousands” present were said to have “joined in the singing” of hymns, and the Rev. C. H. Buckland of St. George's and Archdeacon Davidson of St. James conducted a joint service. In reference to perils of the battlefield, Buckland's sermon called for the “safe return” of the troops as he stood between them and the audience. The *Mercury* portrayed the event as a congregation of Christians rather than a “patriotic” crowd of imperial-nationalists. However dimly its scale was foreseen, the dangers ahead were imagined through sacred high diction, from hymn-singing to the sermon itself.³⁴ Moreover, Buckland's oration moved from the secular formalism of a public official to that of a cleric: “All of you”, he said, “will fight under one great banner — the banner of victory — the flag that represents liberty to all mankind.” That standard, as he put it, “was the banner of Jesus Christ”. Mayor Carter then took the stage and called for three cheers for the recruits which were “heartily given”.³⁵

As part of its salient religiosity, this open-air service pursued a basic aim for all send-offs — to offer a sentimental education for audiences from the perspective of their hometown horizons. The troops assembled provided a focus for what was experienced and felt as part of a local connection to an international war. There was nothing new in the fact that the street audience cheered, as others had, at the sight of the troops, *their* troops as it were, marching by. The stadium audience may have felt a closer connection to the real danger of war when many sang, listened, or saw the young men in standing formation, but this is only suggested in the prayers and Buckland's

34 On high diction and military ceremony, see Young, “‘We Throw the Torch’”.

35 *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 20, 1914, p. 6.

sermon. Carter's call for three cheers seemed an attempt to revive the tone of celebration witnessed on the streets, to clear the air of certain tensions apparently fostered in the stadium. Symbols of military tradition and ritual combined with notions of sacred mission converted this small assembly of volunteers into a poignant, yet ambivalent display. Prayers mixed with cheers likely cultivated a conflicted mood of heartfelt pride chastened by the promise of death. Hints of this had surfaced the week before when trumpeter Aspen played the somber notes of "The Cavalrymen's Last Post". Even Mayor Carter had noted then that not every volunteer would return: "they'll need our sympathy and prayers."³⁶ But at the church-led ceremony, tensions between admiration for the soldiers and apprehensions for their fate became more tangible. Apart from such torn emotions, it is important to recognize the multiple meanings derived by individual spectators as part of a large stadium audience that could not have been entirely Anglican nor entirely unified about what being Canadian now meant. Such rituals, interpreted by diverse individuals, conveyed polysemic messages. Despite the complexities and contradictions of perception, men and women as civilians and soldiers occupied ideal roles, drawn from a mythical past rather than a more complicated present. The models that separated soldiers from home-front citizens appeared in profoundly gendered forms. Send-offs, in many respects, were fashioned to highlight this.

Gendered Displays and Ideal Citizenship

Interrogating the use of local spaces and public rituals in patriotic display helps us focus on a recurrent problem in assessing the impact of war on gender systems. War's effects in this regard have not produced a stable consensus in the literature.³⁷ In their respective historiographical reviews of gender and war, Joan Scott, Angela Woollacott, and Billie Melman have each emphasized how changes in cultural systems that differentiated men from women varied enormously in different geographical and social contexts. They have argued that attending to localized outcomes brings us closer to how contemporaries experienced and expressed their wartime lives and underscores the salience of differences across both home and fighting fronts.

Groups of men and women, divided as well by class and ethnicity, experienced the war in divergent ways that both shaped and were shaped by their gendered identities. In reference to both world wars, Scott has suggested that searching for a single interpretation of wartime effects on gendered boundaries can lead to debates that "seem ultimately unresolvable".³⁸ Even studies that examine the roles women constructed closest to the equivalent of men in

³⁶ *Guelph Evening Mercury*, August 15, 1914, p. 1.

³⁷ On gender and war, see Margaret R. Higonnet *et al.*, eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott, eds., *Gendering War Talk* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

³⁸ Joan W. Scott, "Rewriting History", in Higonnet *et al.*, *Behind the Lines*, p. 25.

combat, as military nurses, munitions workers, and women's auxiliary corps, arrive at competing claims concerning the short- and long-term consequences, from looking at wartime responses optimistically, as an emancipation for women, to seeing obvious signs that many of its discourses stagnated or re-embraced patriarchal models. What Melman has termed aptly the "change conundrum", the question of whether or not the war fundamentally altered gendered identities, has not closed off debate, but has offered instead a starting point for more focused inquiries. The question of how gendered boundaries changed within a web of political, economic, and social relations pushes us toward issues of context and setting, some local and others that cut across more broadly shared discourses and experiences on a national level and beyond.

Religious sanctity, democratic idealism set against German autocracy, and British-imperial history and heritage, to cite three obvious themes, became enmeshed with manful, military assertiveness. Local displays, conveyed through vivid newspaper depictions, celebrated over and over again the masculine *esprit de corps* of "our boys", "our splendid troops", or, as was stated in Lethbridge, "their loyalty, their willingness to sacrifice, and [their] zeal". What was typically cast as the lusty, yet noble spirit of young manhood in uniform appeared in contrast to the home front, particularly in contrast to certain ideals, values, and patterns of life that reflected a "gentler and humane" society than that of the enemy. Close attention should therefore be paid to how cultural constructions of military masculinity appeared on a discursively feminized home front, from the "motherland" of Great Britain at the heart of the empire to the women "left behind" to "keep the home fires burning". Simply to contrast the experiences of men as soldiers with those of women who played a variety of roles, both at home and as volunteers overseas, seems problematic, given the relational aspects of gendered boundaries. George L. Mosse's argument for European countries, that the war "remasculinized" continental nationalisms, tends therefore to subsume a growing historiography on women's gendered experiences that took shape in relation to those of men.³⁹ To focus on gendered behaviour of soldiers, their ethos, and their cultural impact tends to overlook their relational constructions, both between the sexes and over time. Send-offs invariably expressed this complex and interconnected set of messages, and should be approached with this in mind.

In terms of gendered expression, the first big send-off in Lethbridge, at

39 Angela Woollacott, *On Her Their Lives Depend: Munitions Workers and the Great War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); in addition to Higonnet *et al.*, *Behind the Lines*, and Cooke and Woollacott, eds., *Gendering War Talk*, see Helen M. Cooper *et al.*, eds., *Arms and the Woman: War, Gender and Literary Representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Gail Braybon, *Women Workers in the First World War: The British Experience* (London: Croom Helm, 1981); Claire Culleton, "Gender-Charged Munitions: The Language of World War I Munitions Reports", *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1988), pp. 109–116.

first glance, seems a curious contrast to Guelph's open-air Anglican service. A religious aspect was not absent, but appeals to imperial-nationalism combined with a display of masculine *esprit de corps* were more amplified. Its function as a liminal ritual — a three-step process of formal recruitment, public display, and final departure — seems equally apt. Though the speeches and a presentation of recruits were actually held in two churches, it was not an overtly religious observance.⁴⁰ Wesley's preacher, the Rev. G. H. Cobblestick, did deliver one of several addresses, but he spoke just briefly, defining the war as one of basic principles: "Liberty and Democracy pitted against despotism and autocracy." His words, though not his presence, suggested nothing beyond a secular message. Cobblestick also spoke last, after Mayor Hardie, long-time Lethbridge resident and lawyer Charles Conybeare, and most noticeably, regimental commander Maj. J. S. Stewart.

The entire program, organized by the Overseas Club, began at 8:00 p.m. and lasted throughout the evening until the troops finally boarded the train at 1:00 a.m. Two bands, Lethbridge's 30-piece Citizen's Band and the Kilty Band, led the troops to Wesley's auditorium where the first reception took place. From there, they marched to St. Augustine's hall, where the Alexander Galt IODE had prepared a special dinner and where its rector, Canon Murrel-Wright, spoke of the Cross and the flag conjoined in true patriotism. While the Overseas Club presented what became a long evening of events in a "program that went off without a hitch", the recruits and their commander stole the show. The scene in Lethbridge's Wesley church, which drew a smaller, more select audience than the huge crowd in Guelph, underscored the appeal of a military unit's homosocial culture, rather than anything overtly religious.

Maj. Stewart presented his "battery boys" in an overt display of masculine camaraderie. His attention, deliberately focused on the regiment, gave family and friends on hand a chance to view the men in terms of their ideal manhood. As Stewart rose to speak on behalf of the regiment he was said to have been applauded "vociferously" by the audience and given "three lusty cheers" by the men seated on the platform beside him. Their devotion to duty he depicted as part of their manfulness. Stewart spoke "mostly of the boys, their loyalty, their willingness to sacrifice, and the zeal for the Motherland". His own experience, and what can be documented concerning the field battery he led, serves as a useful backdrop not only for his choice of words but for the frequent blurring of genres, of manful association and military rites, evident that evening. A comparatively long-serving militia commander, Stewart, a Lethbridge dentist by profession, had led the 25th Battery since its inception in 1908 and had served in the Boer war as a trooper in Strathcona's Horse. Like other units across Canada, the 25th had undergone training at summer camps authorized by the Militia and Defence department,

40 Wesley Methodist, built the year before, and St. Augustine's Anglican.

events often of gregarious display and bravado that would have little tactical significance overseas, but may best explain how these men experienced their final send-off.

The attraction some men felt toward these kinds of experiences, of “playing” together in imaginary wartime drills, quite unlike anything actually faced in the trenches, also underscores the appeal to manhood with which the war began. During the 25th Battery’s last summer militia camp, held the month before at the Sarcee training grounds, the men got their first taste of live shell practice and, according to one of the unit’s members, nearly blew themselves up with a missing round.⁴¹ Despite such mishaps, these camps were part of a voluntary militia movement that had undergone significant reforms under Col. Sam Hughes. Funding had been increased in recent years, and a series of baronial, red-brick armouries were built in cities across Canada. To redirect masculine behaviour, in fact to police it through the discipline of a militia directive, Hughes also introduced strict prohibition for the camps, which had hosted their fair share of drinkers in the past. Moreover, equipment, training exercises, and inspections were taken more seriously each year. By 1914 some 55,000 volunteers had taken part in militia summer training, up from less than half that number a decade before.⁴² In recent years, the 25th Battery had welded itself into a close group. As one member recalled, the 1914 camp had “boosted the esprit de corps of the unit to a marked degree”. But the camp was still more a sport than a useful training exercise. The 25th had just competed and won the Gzowski Cup, awarded for a second-place showing across Canada in battery manoeuvres.

The evening of departure at summer’s end became, partly because of the 25th’s recent past, a celebration of manful loyalty and pride, coupled with a sense of mission that leaving for the front together helped to dramatize. In the Wesley auditorium, Stewart introduced each recruit individually, pausing to salute him with a few words on his conduct and character. For Stewart, as he put it, it was their manhood that counted, cast in terms of unity, strength, and a just cause. Stewart drew cheers by stating they would be fighting “shoulder to shoulder with a combination the world could not beat”. After dinner the recruits marched to the CPR platform where the

band played several musical selections and escorted the party to the station, where the largest crowd ever assembled out-of-doors in Lethbridge waited to say the good-byes and God-speeds. Members of the battery were carried aloft on the shoulders of their comrades, and cheer after cheer followed them down the platform. The reservists were also the property of their friends and relatives during the last few moments. When the train pulled in the special coach was ready, and the crowd prepared for the final wrench that would take their heroes away. Three cheers and the singing of “God Save the King”, led by the city

41 F. H. H. Mewburn, *The 25 Battery, Canadian Field Artillery* (n.p., 1938).

42 Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990), p. 127.

band, accompanied the music of the moving wheels, and the Lethbridge contingent of the Overseas forces had a last look at their home town that will remain with them throughout their campaign, no matter where it may take them.⁴³

The affair was hailed in next day's *Herald* as the most "momentous occasion" in Lethbridge's history. Though reports like these were mediated through the lens of popular journalism, texts that often sanitized, sensationalized, or glorified events, fairly detailed and comparable descriptions of send-offs accumulated in city newspapers across Canada. Through popular cartoon caricature, Figure 5 depicts keen anticipation among enlisted men, this time hearing directly from their commander that they are to be dispatched overseas at once. His hand rests, in a masculine pose in this James Frise cartoon, on his sword as he reads of promised battles, of escape from the monotony of further training and waiting for orders, and perhaps of glory in the combat field. Taken as a whole, such images reflected many parallel currents in popular culture. An imagined "community of August" was being rapidly manufactured, in ways referred to first in Eric Leed's work on societies entering the war and since more famously in Benedict Anderson's approach to nationalism as a cultural force. Those making up the crowds, reading audiences, families, and countless other groups responded to wartime solidarity through representational ideals. Traditions, or at least references to their most recognizable signs, such as a Highland Scotsman singing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary", as shown in the newspaper coverage reproduced in Figure 6, were incorporated in the public faces of the regiments and brigades of the CEF training overseas, with their endearing mascots, dashing commanders, and stalwart men. At this point, the onset of fighting remained cast within tropes of war as a noble form of manful emancipation from the constant burdens of the present, from unemployment to the stifling entrapments of bourgeois respectability.⁴⁴ Yet, throughout the war, ties to home remained an appealing feature of much of the coverage of Canadians overseas. While Canadians trained on Salisbury Plain, the *Herald* proudly reported, as shown in Figure 7, that none other than Lethbridge men had been "signally honored" by being selected for an advance-line machine gun squad. The true patterns and horrors of trench warfare remained unclear to many home-front audiences, who continued to feed on the distorted expectations fuelled by such upbeat reports.

As a social movement, send-offs also engaged the support of large numbers of women. Middle-class rather than working-class women tended to fill most local volunteer ranks, from organizing troop departures to war relief work. From the beginning, women's participation in the Red Cross, the Cana-

43 *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, August 19, 1914, p. 4

44 See Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 37–72; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991; 1983).

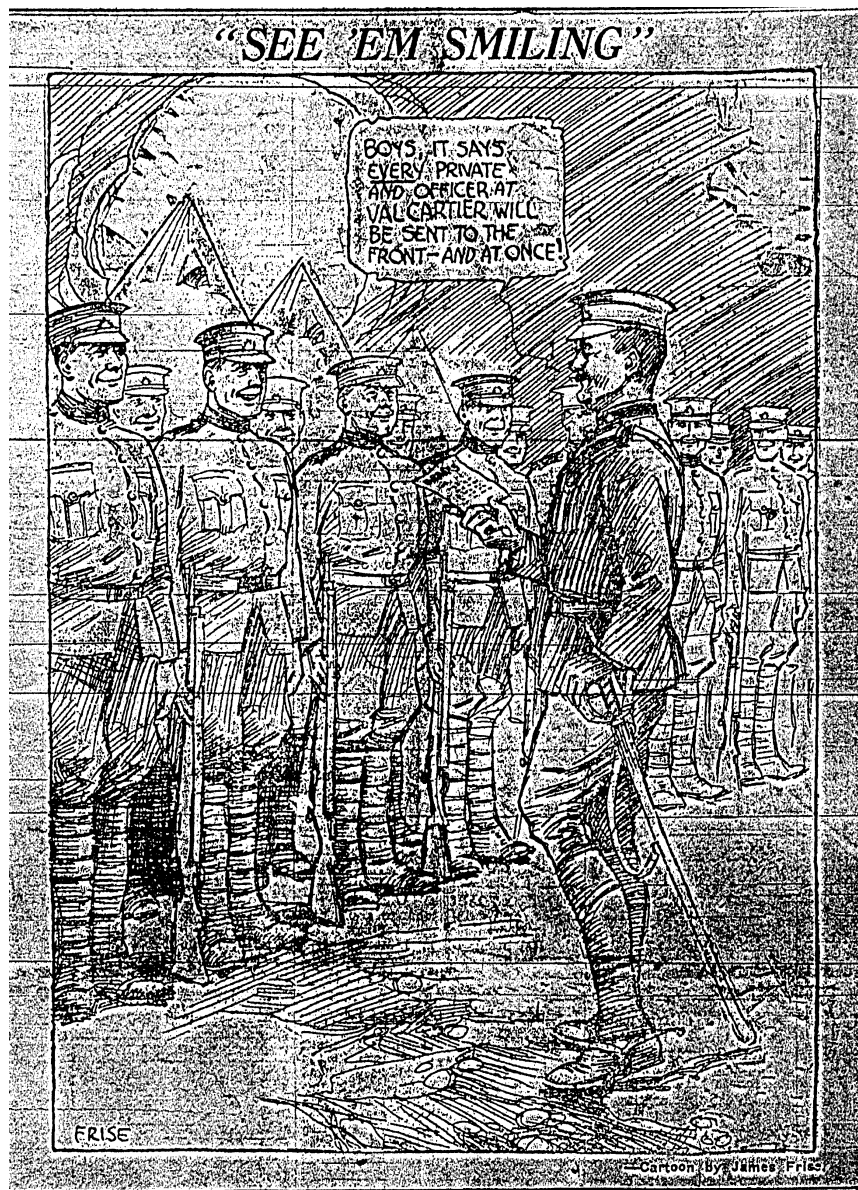


Figure 5 “See ’em smiling”: This James Frise cartoon appeared on the front page of the *Lethbridge Daily Herald* at the end of September 1914, as the First Contingent continued preliminary training amid much confusion at Valcartier. Its simplistic idealism typifies popular signs through which local readers pieced together an imagined view of the early war. For the newspaper business, such depictions also helped to feed the sustained eagerness with which mass circulation audiences consumed news coverage of Canada’s preparations for the front. Photo courtesy of *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, September 29, 1914, p. 1.

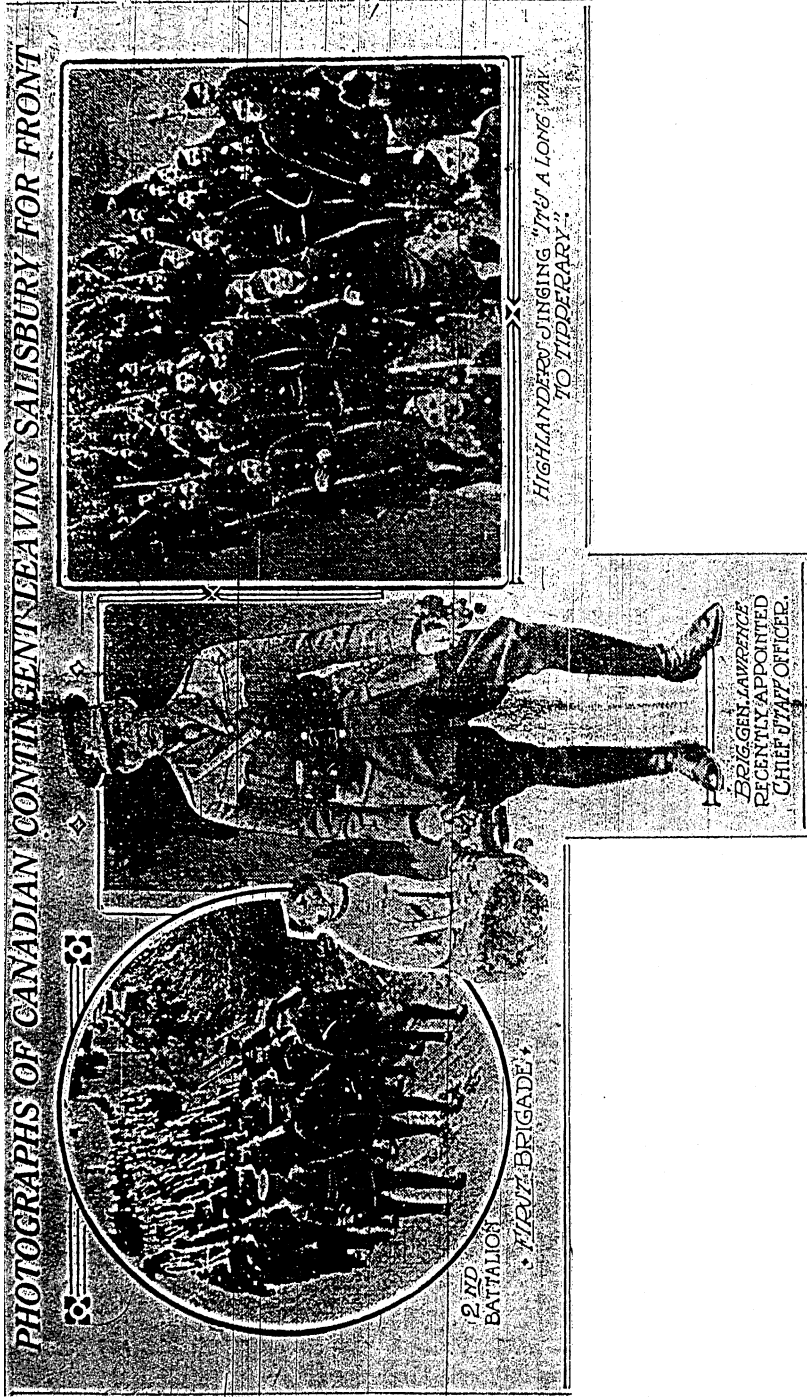


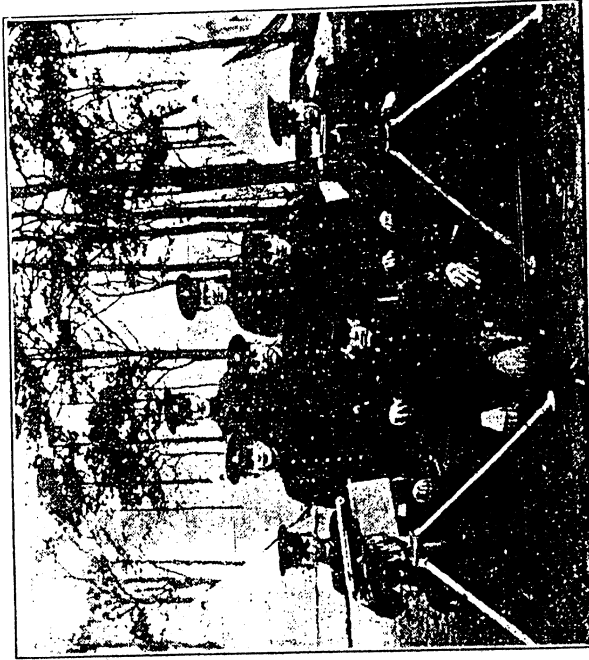
Figure 6 Leaving for the Front: In keeping with the moment, the *Lethbridge Daily Herald* followed its close coverage of Canadians training in Salisbury to present this front-page montage of their departure for the front in mid-February, 1915. Photo courtesy of *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, February 19, 1915, p. 1.

LETHBRIDGE HONORED BY HAVING SUPPLIED WHOLE MACHINE GUN SQUAD

Likely Now on Firing Line in France--Make-up of the Squad

Here are the boys who will drill rapid-fire lead bullets into the German lines, and who may at the present time be levelling their weapons at the vaudal Huns. Everyone of the above are from Lethbridge, and left with the first contingent for the front. They were delegated, on account of their superiority, to the machine gun section of the 10th Battalion, first contingent C. F. F. When the victories of the Allies are recounted, the soldiers from the prairie city on the Lethbridge river, who journeyed close to 10,000 miles in order to help maintain the principles of freedom under which they lived, will undoubtedly figure in the narratives.

The men whose efficiency was so signally honored are: W. Carnill, formerly a teamster here, S. Dobbs, F. Lay, formerly on the city police force and later a guard at the provincial jail, E. P. Chappleau, for over a year on the staff of the Bank of Montreal, popularly known as "the count", E. Thomas, a teamster, J. Müller, formerly a corporal



in the 25th Battery, and a miner at formerly with the Leicester Electric Number 3, C. F. Higgins, insurance company. The battalion to which the detachment belongs is commanded by agent, and a member of Wesley choir, (Jock Waddell), a Calgary man.

Figure 7 Local Presence: Also in keeping with local press coverage, the *Herald* highlighted, when possible, notices of local troops overseas. As its text began, with the naive bravado of this period: 'Here are the boys who will drill rapid-line lead bullets into the German lines, and who may at the present time be levelling their weapons at the vaudal Huns.' See *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, March 9, 1915, p. 1.

dian Patriotic Fund, and various relief campaigns took shape as an activation of gendered practices. Local networks of women volunteers employed their leisure time, social positions, and organizational skills in projects forging links between home town and home front. Yet distortions appeared in local press coverage. First, city dailies simply preferred to cover women's very public participation in send-offs, recruiting, and war relief work, often neglecting significant, but less salable, coverage of working-class women's participation in non-traditional paid labour. War relief was newsworthy; war production more mundane. Secondly, despite women's growing participation by the end of 1915 in munitions, textile, and transportation sectors, city editors also tended to cast all women's war work in androcentric terms, particularly in depictions of ideal womanhood.⁴⁵ The *Herald*, for example, carried an editorial on the Alexander Galt IODE captioned "Where Womanhood Shows Itself". The "Daughters of the Empire of Lethbridge, representing the motherhood and the sisterhood of the city," it read, "have done the woman's part in the active and practical interest they have shown in helping towards a send-off" of the city's first volunteer contingent. Such stories were being "read throughout our Dominion and Empire".⁴⁶ Apart from the maternal ideal upheld in such reports, tens of thousands of women across the country did meet and organize on local levels. As J. Castell Hopkins put it in the *Canadian Annual Review* of 1915, "Women's organizations of every kind had been at work in every corner of Canada and of them the most conspicuous was the Imperial Order, Daughters of the Empire, with its 500 chapters and 30,000 members."⁴⁷ A plethora of other local women's groups, active alongside the IODE with significant membership overlaps, created new war-time roles for women in local projects and causes. Most, and this should be underscored, worked through existing local networks that privileged Anglo-Celtic, Christian, middle-class identity.

Maternalistic and essentialized notions of the "woman's part" in war relief, as depicted in such texts, were little more than patriarchal figments. How these gendered fields were actually being mapped out suggests empowerment by particular groups of women, not a relinquishing of control within merely supportive roles. This underscores the importance of approaching gendered activities as relational responses to sexual difference, particularly in wartime. Over the course of the war, home-front projects attracted a vocal and determined force of women volunteers. The pattern began with mobilization itself.⁴⁸ Across a variety of local volunteer projects, women sought, in

45 On relationships between androcentric perceptions, practices, and representations of gender, see Sandra Lipsitz Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

46 *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, August 19, 1914, p. 4.

47 J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review 1915* (Toronto, 1916), p. 331.

48 Patriotic organizations in all three cities elected many women to their executive committees who can be readily identified as the spouses of leading business or professional men from each locale. Women not only shared their husbands' social status (a woman's membership was often recorded using her

many ways, to re-feminize their ideals as much as men in uniform sought to re-masculinize theirs. Formal interactions between IODE women and uniformed men, whether special visits or reviews of the men, hosted dinners, or gift distributions, were configured by highlighting signs of gendered difference seeking reinforcement, not redefinition, in the first year of war. A dinner given for the 25th Battery by the Galt chapter women suggests how carefully charted these affairs could be. Wesley Methodist church hall is described in April 1915 as:

aglow with life and color with flags of Allied nations and bunting, added to by the kaleidoscopic red, white and blue caps and aprons worn by the amateur waitresses. These were relieved by the drab of the khaki of the men along the long lines of tables. Gaskell's orchestra enlivened the proceedings, and the whole scene was one of animation and good cheer. Not only in the selection of viands for the spread but in the capable manner in which the items were served by the voluntary attendants and dispensed by those in charge, every want of the guests being anticipated, the entertainment was a triumph to the organizing capabilities of the Daughters of the Empire.

Lethbridge's Galt chapter also staged a strikingly elaborate send-off ceremony, featuring a presentation of engraved pipe drums, for the 113th Highlanders. This unit had been recruited as a community-based regiment in the spring of 1916. As a communicative, didactic exercise, this ritual seemed designed to amplify patriotic sentiments through references to ideal gendered difference. The ceremony was structured, solemn, and tactical. An elevated review stand used by the IODE may also have signified a sense of their proper role in endorsing the dispatch of troops. The presentation began at 2:00 p.m. on a Saturday afternoon at Henderson Park, an expansive facility of some 296 acres that encompassed a small lake and agricultural exhibition grounds with a permanent bandstand.⁴⁹ The battalion marched into the main exhibition field and formed a hollow square in front of the bandstand. The IODE executive and president G. W. Robinson were seated. Before the drummers of the regimental pipe band stood the pipe drums, each engraved with full identification of the IODE, the battalion, and the date of presentation. "The youngest member of the pipe band then stepped forward to present Mrs. Robinson with a large bouquet of red roses tied with the battalion colors, yellow, black, and green." Its commander, Lt. Col. Pryce-Jones, then "thanked the members of the order for their interest in the Highlanders". Robinson replied:

husband's first name or initials such as Mrs. James Barr or Mrs. George Ross) but conferred such respectability to their particular organizations. A commemorative history of Lethbridge's Major Jack Ross Chapter of the IODE, organized in 1917, notes, for instance, that the "Chapter's first Regent was the late Mrs. G. L. DeVeber, wife of a then prominent Lethbridge Physician and member of the Canadian Senate." See GA, Jack Ross Chapter, IODE, *Forty Years History of Major Jack Ross Chapter*.

49 GA, *Lethbridge Board of Trade, Annual Report 1915*, p. 2

We feel confident that the men of the Lethbridge Highlanders will worthily uphold the reputation for bravery won long ago by other Highlanders, and which gives you the proud distinction of being allowed to take your pipe band to the firing line.... To those of you in the ranks leaving families behind, I can safely promise for the Order, which I have the honor and pleasure to represent, that we will at all times and in all ways do our best to help them and "keep the home fires burning" in anticipation of the time when the enemy shall be vanquished, and you will return covered with glory and honor....

Robinson's oration was reprinted in full in both the *Herald* and the *Telegram*.⁵⁰ The presentation of roses by the youngest member of the battalion to Robinson, as an idealized portrait of maternal connection, hardly seems an accidental gesture. Although unreflective of the trenches, the hospitals, the munitions works, or other wartime realities, such interpretations fed vicarious notions of gender and virtue. Public send-off events, in part, served to signify idealized notions of combative manhood and feminine virtue. In terms of the significance of war for the social order, they take us back to cases of ritualized retreat, to speeches and public events designed to foreground the more familiar sensibilities of cherished traditions amid the uncertainties of the hour.

Ethnicity and an Imperial War: Separate Spheres of Recruitment in Trois-Rivières

Unlike the case in English Canadian towns and cities, there were no rousing send-offs staged in Trois-Rivières at beginning of the war, though rallies and demonstrations were held in its downtown streets. Throughout Quebec the press, as elsewhere, joined in endorsing Canada's participation in the war. The rhetoric of the mayor of Trois-Rivières, noted previously, helped to instil an imagined sense of why support was necessary and what others were doing across the country to maintain it.⁵¹ The success or failure of recruitment, however, ultimately reflected regional variations between Ottawa's prerogatives and local conditions.

Sustained enthusiasm for what was really a war of empires ultimately collapsed across French Canada, and of course later inverted into outright hostility during the conscription crisis. In general, reaction to the war across Quebec's majority francophone population displayed a pattern of initial support giving way to increasingly divisive reactions to imperial nationalism. The political crisis faced by the Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal party, and the social upheaval surrounding Quebec's reaction to conscription, came on the heels of three years of prolonged losses of men and protracted debate. At the outbreak, newspaper reports tended to emphasize the degree of national unity evident in speeches, crowd formations, and other displays of endorse-

⁵⁰ See *Lethbridge Daily Herald*, May 15, 1916, pp. 1, 7; *Lethbridge Telegram*, May 18, 1916, p. 5.

⁵¹ *Nouveau Trois-Rivières*, November 27, 1914, p. 7.

ment for the British declaration of war and for Canada's pledge of voluntary contributions. Since then, historians have characterized the escalation of the conscription crisis in contrast to Quebec's many pledges of support for Canadian participation in the war in the heady days of August 1914, with the crucial proviso that it would not entail compulsory military service.⁵²

In Quebec City, the *Quebec Chronicle* described how, "[b]efore a massed crowd, Albert Sevigny, the brilliant young member for Dorchester, made it plain that the French-Canadians realized the seriousness of the present menace to the Empire in general and Canada in particular and that were standing shoulder to shoulder with their fellow-citizens of other races. He recalled how France had gone down before German arms in 1870." At this moment, displays of national unity were imperative, in Sevigny's depiction of the crisis in ethno-cultural terms both for the French of France and for their Canadian descendants "in their original Motherland and in the Motherland which had adopted them", as he put it. The *Chronicle* noted as well how "Armand Lavergne expressed the attitude of the Nationalist party with regard to the present war. The French Canadians whom he represented, he said, considered that their chief duty was to preserve Canada to the British Empire." In return for an end to enduring battles in francophone education in Ontario and Manitoba, Lavergne said, they would fight "even in Europe.... Their lives belonged to the King of England and they were ready to give them. They were loyal."⁵³

Others, like Mayor Joseph-Adolph Tessier of Trois-Rivières, soon added their voices to the dogmatic formalism of the moment. When Tessier applauded what proved to be an ephemeral unity between French and English Canadians, his words echoed the symbolism underpinning recent street demonstrations in Quebec City, Montreal, and Trois-Rivières. Such expressions failed, however, to translate into significant enlistment numbers locally. Perhaps this was not their real intent. From the beginning, very low recruitment

52 See Rutherford, "Canada's August Festival", especially pp. 225–226. Elizabeth H. Armstrong's *The Crisis of Quebec, 1914–1918* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974; 1937) remains a useful source of Quebec's response to the war in general and conscription in particular. Armstrong also considers the collapse of early support for the war prior to the debate over conscription. J. L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman's *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977) remains the standard political study of the issue in Quebec. Jean-Pierre Gagnon's *Le 22^e Bataillon (canadien-français), 1914–1919 : étude socio-militaire* (Quebec: Presses de l'Université Laval en collaboration avec le Ministère de la défense nationale et le Centre d'édition du Gouvernement du Canada, 1986) provides a detailed analysis of the context and patterns of recruitment in the largest of French Canadian regiments during the war. On efforts to maintain cordial relations between French and English business leaders and other concerned citizens before passage of the *Military Service Act* of 1917, see Brian Cameron, "The Bonne Entente Movement, 1916–1917: From Cooperation to Conscription", *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, vol. 13 (1978), pp. 42–55. For analysis of the prelude to and events that took place during an anti-conscription riot in Quebec City in the spring of 1918, see Jean Provencher, *Québec sous la loi des Mesures de Guerre, 1918* (Trois-Rivières: Éditions du Boréal Express, 1971).

53 *Quebec Chronicle*, August 5, 1914, p. 3.

rates in Trois-Rivières reflected quite different sentiments between the city's small anglophone minority and most Trifluviens. Ethnic divisions ran deep in Trois-Rivières, as they did across the country between English and French Canada as the war dragged on. While at the beginning, some might have made symbolic appeals to ethnic unity, to an inclusive sense of citizenship that put Canada's role behind Britain on an even keel, it was clear that no singular course could be found for both French- and English-speaking Canadians, who defined their sense of citizenship and historical identity in different terms. Enlistment levels mirrored this ambivalence.

An intense fascination with reports of war nonetheless remained high throughout Quebec, and Trois-Rivières was no exception. Interpretations of the war as a religious manifestation appeared in several sources. As destructive as the first days of fighting in Belgium and France were, and as inconclusive as the race to the sea among the French, British, and German armies proved to be, some in Trois-Rivières saw the outbreak and early escalation as either regenerative or apocalyptic. The view of one veteran of Europe's battles between religion and politics appeared in the correspondence of Gédéon Désilets, who had left Trois-Rivières in 1868 as a young man to join a regiment of Papal Zouaves in defending Catholic Rome against Garibaldi.⁵⁴ Just days after Germany's march through Belgium, Désilets disclosed his sense of unfolding events in a letter to his son, then a teaching brother at Montreal's Écoles chrétiennes au Mont-Lasalle. Europe had been swept into a merciless sea of self-destruction because its citizens and their governments had lost contact with God. This dreadful war, which he claimed to have long anticipated, was a scourge promoted by the atheism of governments and the corruption of man's moral spirit. As he put it, "C'est le fléau animé par l'athéisme des gouvernements et la dépravation des mœurs ches [*sic*] son trop grand nombre." Désilets also conveyed a lingering loyalty to France, but particularly to Catholic France, in his concluding thoughts on the war: "Pour moi," he wrote, "Lourdes et Montmartre garantissent le succès final de la France ... et je fais des vœux pour le triomphe de la France catholique."⁵⁵

The editor of the bi-weekly *Bien Public*, Joseph Barnard, also cast the beginning of war as God's stern retribution for a fading sacred concern. So did the Bishop of Trois-Rivières, M^{gr} François-Xavier Cloutier, who interpreted its coming as a sign that modern society had gone astray in pursuit of secular goals, from commercial and industrial exploitation to technological advance.⁵⁶ Perhaps the best literary sample of local sentiment is found in the

54 For a brief history of Gédéon Désilets's exploits in Italy, see an account written by his son, Georges, entitled "Un cinquantenaire mémorable : les zouaves canadiens et le Régiment des Zouaves Pontificaux" dated January 18, 1918, in Archives du Séminaire de Trois-Rivières, FN-0356, Fonds Gédéon Désilets, famille.

55 *Ibid.*, Gédéon Désilets à Gédéon Désilets (son fils), August 8, 1914, p. 1.

56 See the *Bien Public*, August 6, 1914, p. 1; *Mandements, Lettres Pastorales et Circulaires de S. G. M^{gr} F.-X. Cloutier, 3ième Évêque des Trois-Rivières, 1914-1923*, vol. 4 (Trois-Rivières, 1923), p. 38.

work of Nérée Beauchemin, the gifted and celebrated poet of Nicolet and Yamachichi nearby. Beauchemin was already widely read among Quebec's literate bourgeois. His volume, *Patrie intime*, was his best-known collection, an emotive, mythical commemorative for Quebec's European heritage. Shortly after the invasion of Belgium he wrote: "Amende honorable à la France,/ À la mère des bons Français,/ Qui triomphe plus que jamais,/ Des mille morts de la souffrance./ Le sang chrétien n'est point tari...."⁵⁷

French Canadians' enlistment might connect with distinct, national identities, but at the outbreak of the war French Canada's recruits had no distinct regimental corps units to join. Col. Sam Hughes would soon begin to deal with this, as he recognized that concrete steps would have to be taken to attract recruits from Quebec. Just before he left for England, as the Valcartier recruiting phase ended, Hughes informed Borden that provisions would be made for raising a French Canadian brigade. "Our French Canadian country fellowmen would, under this plan," he explained, "have the opportunity of furnishing a brigade of four regiments."⁵⁸ Until these culturally designated, francophone-led and manned units could begin their enlistment campaigns, the appeal of English-Canadian battalions and regiments remained a hard sell. As part of Quebec's recruiting for the Second Contingent of the Expeditionary Force, the creation of the 22nd Battalion, authorized in December 1914, began to draw Quebec francophones from mainly urban parts of the province.⁵⁹ Its first commander, Col. Frédéric-Mondelet Gaudet, a Trifluvien-born officer serving in the permanent force, quickly established a recruiting programme co-ordinated from the former barracks of Montreal's 65th Regiment located on the avenue des Pins.⁶⁰ Shortly after recruiting for the 22nd began, the Trois-Rivières anglophone newspaper, the *Newcomer*, claimed optimistically that the city was "beginning to awake to a sense of the importance of the Great War", although only ten men were reported to have "volunteered for the French Canadian Contingent forming in Montreal".⁶¹ By the end of the war, according to an extensive socio-statistical study of the battalion's history, these numbers increased, yielding a total of 56 from Trois-Rivières in its ranks, though conscripts from the city are not identified.⁶² Formation of the 22nd Battalion nonetheless marked an important step toward creating francophone units in the CEF. The 22nd recruited from across the province, not locally, and its traditions grew accordingly, with no recruiting presence in the form of an actual military unit established in Trois-Rivières at any point during the war.

57 Archives du Séminaire de Trois-Rivières, FN 0011, Fonds Nérée Beauchemin, unedited manuscript in file 109, calepin no. 16

58 Cited in A. F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914–1919*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, 1938), p. 425.

59 For a detailed historical and statistical analysis of the creation of the 22nd Battalion, see Gagnon's *Le 22^e Bataillon*, especially chaps. 1, 2.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 33–36.

61 *Newcomer*, October 21, 1914, p. 4.

62 Gagnon, *Le 22^e Bataillon*, p. 356.

From connections made from schooling to work, young men's existing social networks could be important. Class, occupational status, and ethnic differences came into play in these situations.⁶³ With respect to the anglophone minority in Trois-Rivières, large employers in the city, such as the Wayagamack Pulp and Paper Company, the Wabasso Cotton Company, and the Canadian Iron Corporation, supplied many of the city's English Canadian volunteers from their clerical and managerial ranks. Lance-Cpl. John B. Adams, manager of Wayagamack's Rat River logging district, was one of the handful of recruits who joined the first contingent.⁶⁴ Killed in action the following spring, "Jack" was commemorated in the *Newcomer* as one of several "well known and highly respected young men" who "gave up a lucrative position" at Wayagamack to join Montreal's 5th Royal Highlanders.⁶⁵ Another employee, R. A. Gillis, later enlisted in the McGill University Officer Training Corps, as had Peter Clark, son of the Rev. J. Aitken Clark of St. Andrew's Presbyterian.

Gillis was given two farewells, first in late June 1915 by the Three Rivers Rifle Association which presented him, as the first of their number to join the active forces, with a silver wrist watch, and later by his friends at Wayagamack. Then, on a Saturday evening in July, three months after Adams was killed, the Wayagamack office staff held a "quiet little ceremony" at the Canadian Hotel to honour the step Gillis was taking. One colleague "wished Mr. Gillis a safe and speedy return. He also hoped that Mr. Gillis 'might get the Germans and that they would not get him'." As an office worker turned recruit, Pte. Gillis was then presented with a purse containing \$65 on which was inscribed: "From your friends and the staff at Wayagamack."⁶⁶ Wayagamack employees later that autumn also bade farewell to co-worker Richard J. Hamilton, who, on the night before he left, was presented with an inscribed silver watch and a sum of money.⁶⁷ Earlier that summer, those who knew James Fotheringham through their mutual employment at the Canadian Iron Corporation had given him a farewell supper the evening before he

63 Systematic studies of enlistment patterns and many anecdotal accounts demonstrate connections between prior social status, enlistment, and regimental careers. Recruitment patterns from universities, in particular, have been well documented. See Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting in the C.E.F., 1914–1918", *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire*, vol. 51 (1982), pp. 53–79; J. M. Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 49 (1968), pp. 213–233; Paul Maroney, " 'The Great Adventure': The Context and Ideology of Recruiting in Ontario, 1914–17", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 77 (1996), pp. 62–98; C. A. Sharpe, "Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914–1918: A Regional Analysis", *Journal of Canadian Studies/ Revue d'études canadiennes*, vol. 18 (1983–1984), pp. 15–29; James W. St. G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 70 (1989), pp. 1–26. "In Port Credit, a little town west of Toronto," Desmond Morton noted in one poignant example, "the local football team finished a game and joined en masse." See Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, p. 10.

64 *Newcomer*, August 19, 1914, p. 2.

65 *Newcomer*, June 30, 1915, p. 2.

66 *Newcomer*, July 14, 1915, p. 2.

67 *Newcomer*, September 22, 1915, p. 5.

left to join Montreal's 73rd Royal Highlanders. He too received a wrist watch and send-off speech, as the "evening was spent in songs and social intercourse". One report added that Fotheringham's employers "have done well as regards [*sic*] volunteers".⁶⁸ Hamilton was later joined at the 73rd by V. Elsdon of the Wabasso Cotton Company.⁶⁹ Both men had roomed at the same boarding house, known as "The Hutch", and several reports place them on leave returning to visit old friends there.⁷⁰

Two months later, when several of Gillis's former office mates learned that he was sailing for England aboard the *S.S. Missanabie*, slated to moor briefly near Trois-Rivières, arrangements were quickly made for a large number of the Wayagamack staff to greet the vessel aboard the *Eric R*, a company tug-boat. When the tug drew alongside and hailed the troopship, its railings were soon lined "with solders who heartily responded to the cheers from those on board the tug". Gillis's departure was observed because of his connection to a mostly male, anglophone group of co-workers. "The tug saluted the liner in the orthodox manner, and the liner responded, as she swung from her moorings and headed downstream with the 'ERIC R' in close attendance."⁷¹ Whether or not they actually caught a glimpse of Gillis himself is unclear. What Gillis's boisterous pals tried to express, a last-minute send-off salute for a departing workmate, may not have been typical in form, but it certainly was in intent. Their hurried jump aboard the tug and dash out onto the river served to replace the dense congregating of thousands at rallies and railway stations, especially in English Canadian locales, cheering on their "own boys".

In Trois-Rivières, French Canadian recruits joined their own regiments, led by the 22nd and later the ill-fated 41st Battalion. The 41st became the first French Canadian unit to raise a sizable contingent of some 70 men from the city in the early spring of 1915. Their departure was ritualized with a procession "throughout the principal streets" of Trois-Rivières led by the city's Union Musicale band.⁷² This particular unit, however, was soon plagued with serious morale problems.⁷³ Desertions soared after the unit moved from the Citadel at Quebec, where the Trifluvien troops were first stationed, to Valcartier in June 1915.⁷⁴ A few, possibly from Trois-Rivières, deserted even sooner. Within a month, according to the *Newcomer*, several had been apprehended there.⁷⁵ Another was arrested in early July during the main wave of desertions that followed the regiment's move to Valcartier.⁷⁶

68 *Newcomer*, June 23, 1915, p. 2.

69 *Newcomer*, September 15, 1915, p. 5.

70 See *Newcomer*, September 22, 1915, p. 2; November 2, 1915, p. 3; November 24, 1915, p. 3.

71 *Newcomer*, September 8, 1915, p. 6.

72 *Newcomer*, March 24, 1915, p. 1; September 1, 1915, p. 3.

73 For a concise history of the demise of the 41st Battalion, see Desmond Morton, "The Short, Unhappy Life of the 41st Battalion, CEF", *Queen's Quarterly*, vol. 81 (1974), pp. 70–80.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 74.

75 *Newcomer*, May 5, 1915, p. 1.

76 *Newcomer*, July 7, 1915, p. 2.

Nonetheless, French Canadian regiments kept the pressure on in a series of recruitment campaigns. Given its location and size, Trois-Rivières certainly got its fair share of these itinerant shows, in which officers and local dignitaries appeared on a stage or podium to make speeches, surrounded by posters and flags. Larger rallies often featured bands or brass ensembles that drew from a repertoire of military and patriotic scores. Near the end of June 1915, one low-key report noted that a “couple of officers from Québec were in town last week trying to pick up a few recruits”.⁷⁷ By summer's end, public rallies for particular regiments and for more French Canadian volunteers became commonplace throughout Quebec, especially its urban centres. In late August Mayor Tessier, along with Maj. Firmin Bissonette and several officers, “addressed a meeting in the City Hall. The meeting was held with the object of raising funds for the Regimental Funds of the 69th Regiment of Montreal, also to try secure [sic] some recruits.”⁷⁸ Trois-Rivières' *hôtel de ville* was a frequent local site at this time both for recruitment drives and for public appeals for the Canadian Patriotic Fund.

These efforts, along with local enlistment drives of other French Canadian units, met with limited success. Ten men from Trois-Rivières joined the 69th Regiment in the wake of Bissonette's recruiting tour, overshadowed the following week by what became the peak in voluntary enlistment amongst Trifluviens: a further 182 signed on with the 41st Battalion, and another 18 joined the 57th Regiment. An officer from the latter unit also expected “to leave, as soon as harvesting is finished for the northern part of the province, where he believes a large number of good men may be found”.⁷⁹ Tapping rural areas in Quebec often proved difficult, sometimes due to seasonal variations in the pool of willing men.

For the volunteers leaving for Valcartier with the 41st and 57th, however, “a good send-off”, as the *Newcomer* put it, was expected. Arrangements were underway as soon as the news was made public for “bands to play them to the station and a big crowd to cheer as they leave”.⁸⁰ Once again, the Union Musicale band led a parade and station platform send-off. The affair probably attracted a larger and mostly francophone gathering, certainly as compared to the gesture Gillis's co-workers made in escorting his troopship past the city that same week.

Evidence from Trois-Rivières, in particular, indicates that the apparent unity between French and English Canadians of August 1914 expressed in public demonstrations, and often cited by the press and contemporary observers as evident throughout Quebec, could not be sustained. Instead, private and less frequent English-dominated send-off rituals accompanied a general pattern in this city of unsuccessful recruitment drives. From the late

⁷⁷ *Newcomer*, June 23, 1915, p. 2.

⁷⁸ *Newcomer*, September 1, 1914, p. 5.

⁷⁹ *Newcomer*, September 8, 1915, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

fall of 1914 onwards, most francophone recruits from the city joined the new French Canadian units that Hughes had authorized. Probably all who signed up, French or English, joined units based in Montreal or Quebec City. In total, recruitment throughout the Trois-Rivières region did not exceed 300 by the end the war.

Wherever it occurred, the drive to enlist and to signify the dispatch of those who did took shape far more as diverse local experiences than simply a compelling wave of national unity. Local communities became connected to wartime imperatives through a patriotic discourse based on a sense of history, tradition, and duty. Much of this was based on notions of a collective past, on images of either French or English identities, whether uttered by an Albert Sevigny, by a Sam Hughes, or in editorials across the country. Appeals to the French “race” and loyalty to Canada dominated French-Canadian themes. At the same time, imperial-national narratives did so in English Canada as crowds lined the streets to cheer troops on parade, filled the parks to sing in unison at patriotic rallies, occupied church pews in unusually large numbers in the first weeks of the war, or gathered at a host of other community-based events staged to convey a sense of local connection to the war. The events that local populations witnessed and in which they participated were shaped by very different local and regional circumstances. Despite the repeated calls for a united response, public demonstrations of support for the war hardly solidified English Canadians, French Canadians, or other ethno-cultural groups under a cohesive umbrella of imagined nationality. Send-offs no doubt depended on this fiction, but sending Canada’s soldiers overseas did not bring Canadians closer together. Revived faith in either a national or imperial-national connection reinforced many recruitment and send-off messages, but it was mediated through a parochial sense of citizenship. Canada’s colonial traditions, social plurality, and fluid levels of mobility and transience that had shaped urban life before the coming of war continued to influence the design of a home front under construction.

“Seeing Our Boys Off”:

The Fading Importance of Place and Local Circumstance in the Great War

Examining how local populations go to war can reveal much about how they imagined themselves, their pasts and destinies, and their most pressing demands in the face of the enemy. Local send-offs in Canada provide revealing sites in which these perceptions can be considered, though the importance of local circumstances and resources was not revived after the First World War. The displacement, though not disappearance, of locale has in fact been part of a long-term shift in civilian-military relations. Local community involvement has given way to varied alternatives to the conventional march-past and departure. The effects of electronic media, the sheer scale of mobilizations in the Second World War, and the use of trained standing forces and

more protracted military-bureaucratic procedures have since moved this process far away from the early days of August 1914.⁸¹

In the watershed period of the First World War, however, the functions of local send-offs became multiple and diverse. Among those considered here, they sanctioned the state's authority to appeal to Canadian manhood, offering displays, designed to appeal to sentiment, for would-be recruits of the homosocial camaraderie that might lie ahead. They uplifted military traditions through tropes that across the country were gendered, nationalist, and religious. In different regions, cities, and towns, however, local peculiarities not only shaped such messages but added countless variants. On city streets, at exhibition grounds, in church halls, at dinners, or at hundreds of railway platform pull-outs, sending Canada's soldiers to fight overseas took shape within the confines of local, cultural spaces. But such moments of ritualized and, on the railway platform, very real departures intersected with much broader histories, narratives, and social memories. To understand why men went to war, particularly as volunteers, rests critically in the powers of perception, moments of intense meaning and experience that combined local histories and knowledges with the imagined aspects of nation, Empire, and a distant battlefield overseas.

In our cases here, the importance of local settings and resources, of hometown perspectives that comprised a national home front, were underscored at a time when news and immediate responses remained confined to a public sphere shaped by city newspapers and by the carefully orchestrated use of public spaces. Before the use of electronic media, this was made visible by the face-to-face rituals of parades, rallies, and community religious services, combined crucially with the press. In Canada, enthusiastic send-offs peaked with the formation of Canada's Second Contingent in October 1914, but they faded quickly following the carnage Canadians suffered during and after the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915. Throughout the following year, aligning recruiting rallies and send-off ceremonies with public sentiment became increasingly difficult.⁸² The real war had smashed so many earlier images of what lay ahead. At the same time, images of the fallen soldier began to feed the myths of the sacrifice overseas. Only after the Armistice did the ideal of the volunteer citizen-soldier who had sacrificed his life begin to take shape as a usable national icon, however. The search for an elevated meaning for the slaughter began, in other words, as the large waves of men returned

81 On Canada's early mobilization, see Norman Hillmer *et al.*, eds., *A Country of Limitations: Canada and the World in 1939* (Ottawa: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1996). Relevant sections are also useful from W. A. B. Douglas and Brereton Greenhous, *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War*, rev. ed. (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995); David J. Bercuson, *Maple Leaf Against the Axis: Canada's Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1995); Granatstein and Morton, *A Nation Forged in Fire*.

82 For recruiting rallies in Ontario, see Maroney, " 'The Great Adventure' ", especially pp. 71–74.

home in 1919 with very real and very difficult challenges. Soon, a long, protracted “second battle” fought by returned soldiers began to unfold that would extend well into the interwar period.⁸³ Ironically, the search for symbols to embrace the ideal, fallen soldier led to a revival of the languages and myths with which the war began, amidst the send-offs for volunteer enlistments in local towns and cities across the country.

83 The term “second battle” refers to Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright’s study of the veteran’s struggle to expand Ottawa’s responsibility to provide re-establishment programmes. See Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).