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Robert Vineberg

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The British Garrison and Montreal Society, 1830-1850

Robert Vineberg

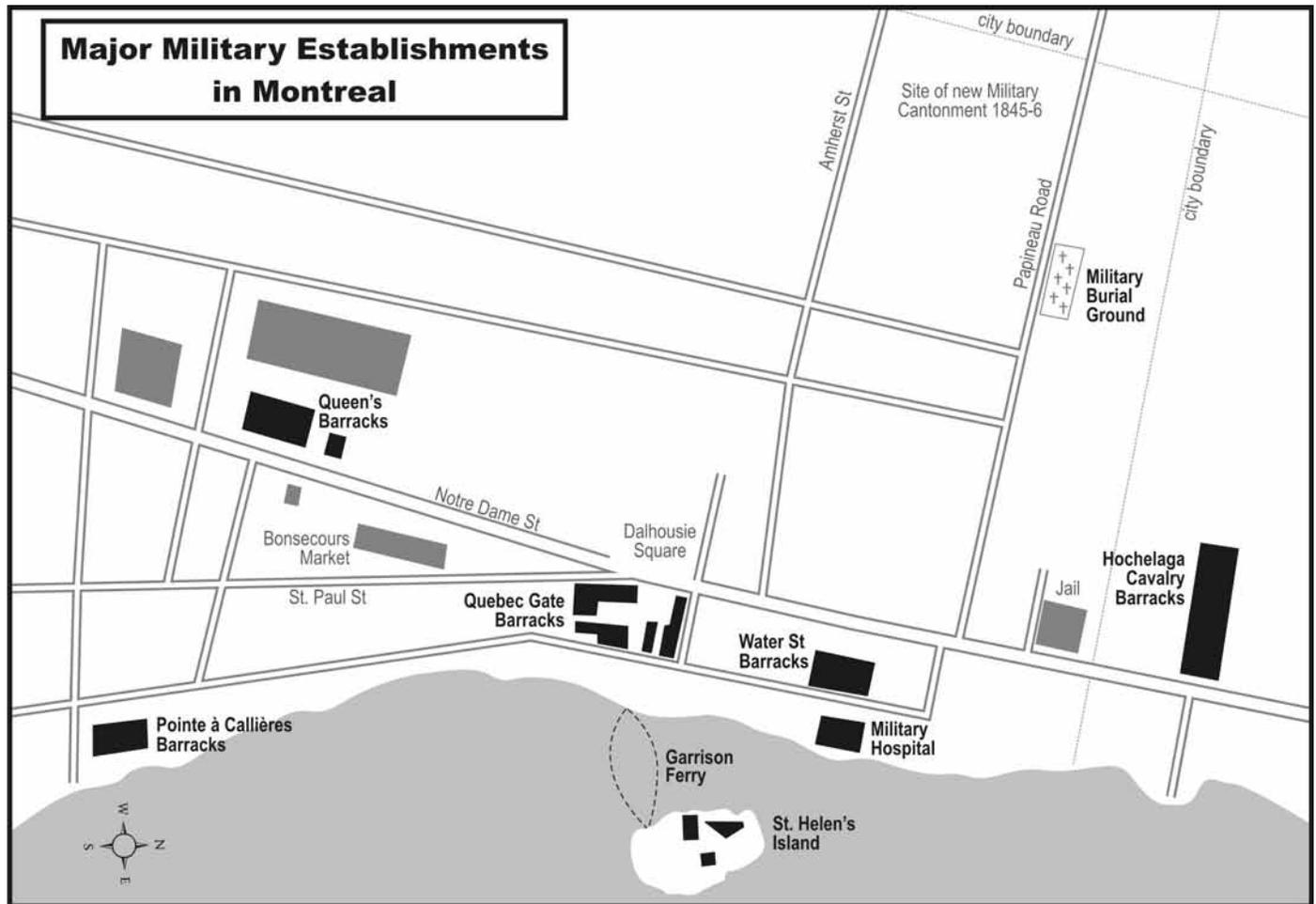
Montreal had always been a garrison town. The French had garrisoned Montreal virtually from its founding followed by the British Army who garrisoned it continuously from 1760 to 1870, except during the American occupation in 1775-76. During that period Montreal grew from a small frontier village into British North America's major commercial centre but, with a population of some 40,000 in 1840, it remained a small community by world standards and the presence of several thousand British soldiers inevitably had a major impact on the life of the community. However, perhaps most important, the garrison provided a "ready made" high society in the form of the officer corps comprised of gentry and nobility. In a colonial community trying to emulate the ways of the mother country, the presence of dozens of well-born British officers was bound to set the social standard, in particular, for English-Canadian society in Montreal. The period examined by this paper – 1830-50 – covers the time of the garrison's greatest influence, because of its size relative to the population of the city. This article examines the role of the garrison in reinforcing the imperial pretensions of Montreal society in the context of the changing social

Abstract: This article examines the influence of the British Army garrison in Montreal on society in that city society from 1830 to 1850. The garrison served as a tangible symbol of that link to Empire. The leisure activities of the garrison soldiers, particularly the officers who were generally "well-born," well-connected, and wealthy, set a standard of social behaviour for the well-to-do English-speaking citizens of Montreal who sought to emulate imperial society in colonial Montreal. The social legacy of the garrison was the establishment of a tradition of theatre, music, sporting events and socializing along British lines that long survived the withdrawal of the garrison. However, the garrison also served to reinforce a colonial mind-set and to inhibit the development of indigenous institutions within Montreal society. It would not be until the garrison withdrew that most music, theatre and sporting organizations in the city became truly Canadian.

and political environment of the time. The early years of the 1850s saw the garrison gradually reduced in size. By 1855 it numbered only a few hundred as troops were recalled for service in the Crimean War. The garrison, although greatly reinforced in the early 1860s as a result of crises in relations with the United States during the American Civil War, was sharply reduced again in 1869 and withdrawn in 1870, shortly before the

last British troops left Canada in the following year.

The Montreal Garrison was one of several British garrisons in British North America. The other major garrisons in this period were in St. John's, Halifax, Saint John, Fredericton, Quebec City, Kingston, Toronto (York), Niagara-on-the-Lake, London and Amherstburg.¹ While a reasonable amount has been written from a military and political perspective about the British Army in Canada by eminent historians, including Stacey, Stanley and Preston², there has been little written about the impact of garrisons on the lives of the people living in the host communities. Few books have been written specifically on the subject of a British garrison in Canada. Parks Canada researchers have published two short books on the Quebec Garrison and both touched briefly on social activities of that garrison.³ Carl Benn's book on Fort York has a chapter on the Toronto Garrison that briefly mentions social activities,⁴ as does John Spur's account of the Kingston Garrison,⁵ and Mike Parker's *Fortress Halifax* includes a chapter on "Rest and Relaxation" that relates some of the leisure activities of the officers and men but notes that, Halifax society was principally comprised of the officers of the



Map drawn by Mike Bechthold ©2012 after original in Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal*, p.5

naval base and the army garrison, and their involvement with the broader community was limited.⁶ The only book that has looked at the British Garrison in Montreal is Elinor Senior's *British Regulars in Montreal – An Imperial Garrison, 1832-1854*.⁷ As Yvon Desloges noted, in his review of Senior's book, "Quant aux relations entre soldats et civils, à peine retrace-t-on quelques lignes, sauf lorsqu'il est question de la répression des émeutes."⁸ In a relatively short section, "The Cultural Dimension of the Garrison," Senior described its activities within the community but she did not attempt to examine the impact of those activities on the community, nor how the garrison served to reinforce other imperial-colonial links. The garrison's role as aid to the civil power was important and well described by Senior. Operations to suppress violence and unrest served to strain and even

break relations with certain elements of Montreal society, especially during the rebellions of 1837 and 1838, and at the time of the riots over the Rebellion Losses Bill in 1849. The focus of this article, however, is to examine the relationship of the garrison with its host community precisely when it was *not* engaged against parts of the population to restore order.

There is a significant literature, in the form of travelogues and memoirs, that refers to entertainments staged by the various garrisons in Canada. This article draws on many that relate to Montreal but in none of these is the garrison the focus. In more recent times, social historians have done much valuable work in recreating the living environment in early nineteenth century Canada. A recent issue of *Ontario History* is entirely devoted to the subject of how Upper Canadians entertained themselves in the nineteenth century.⁹ The common

theme, regardless of location, was the imperial link. Of York, Elizabeth Jane Errington wrote: "wives, daughters and mothers of prominent merchants, politicians and government officials consciously tried to emulate not just the genteel lifestyle of polite British society but also that of an imperial centre."¹⁰ Similarly, Michel Beaulieu concluded "that many Kingstonians still...looked to England for their social and cultural standards," and observed: "As elsewhere in British North America, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, Kingstonians who desired appropriate amusement looked to the military garrison."¹¹ This was very much the case in Montreal as well. The major difference between Kingston and Montreal, apart from the latter's larger population, was the cultural makeup of the two cities. Kingston was almost entirely of British extraction, whereas in Montreal the large French Canadian

population did not feel the same connection with the garrison, or interact to the same extent as the English speaking population.

The officers and subalterns of a garrison combined the necessary attributes and resources to create a vibrant social life: wealth, leisure time, organizational and leadership skills, and a dedicated workforce (the other ranks). The situation was similar in every garrison town. Several factors, however, set Montreal apart. Due to Montreal's strategic location, the Montreal Garrison was often the largest army garrison in British North America and the growing wealth of the commercial elite in Montreal afforded them the means to take part in the often expensive social activities of the officers of the garrison. Even the substantial garrison in Quebec City exercised relatively less societal influence because Quebec City's English speaking community was small in comparison to that of Montreal; Quebec City remained a predominantly francophone community.

The present study examines the social legacy of the Montreal

Garrison including the establishment of a tradition of theatre, music, sporting events and socializing along British lines that long survived the withdrawal of the garrison. It demonstrates that the garrison served to reinforce a colonial mind-set and, therefore, inhibited the development of truly indigenous institutions within Montreal society. It would not be until the garrison was withdrawn that most music, theatre and sporting organizations in the city started to evolve into truly Canadian institutions.

The Garrison

With the exception of the winter of 1775-76, when the Americans occupied the city during the Revolutionary War, the British Army had continuously garrisoned Montreal since Vaudreuil's capitulation in 1760. Accordingly, British society in Montreal meant British Army society.

In the 1830s and 1840s the garrison was large, and had extensive installations and seemed permanent. The main barracks were located

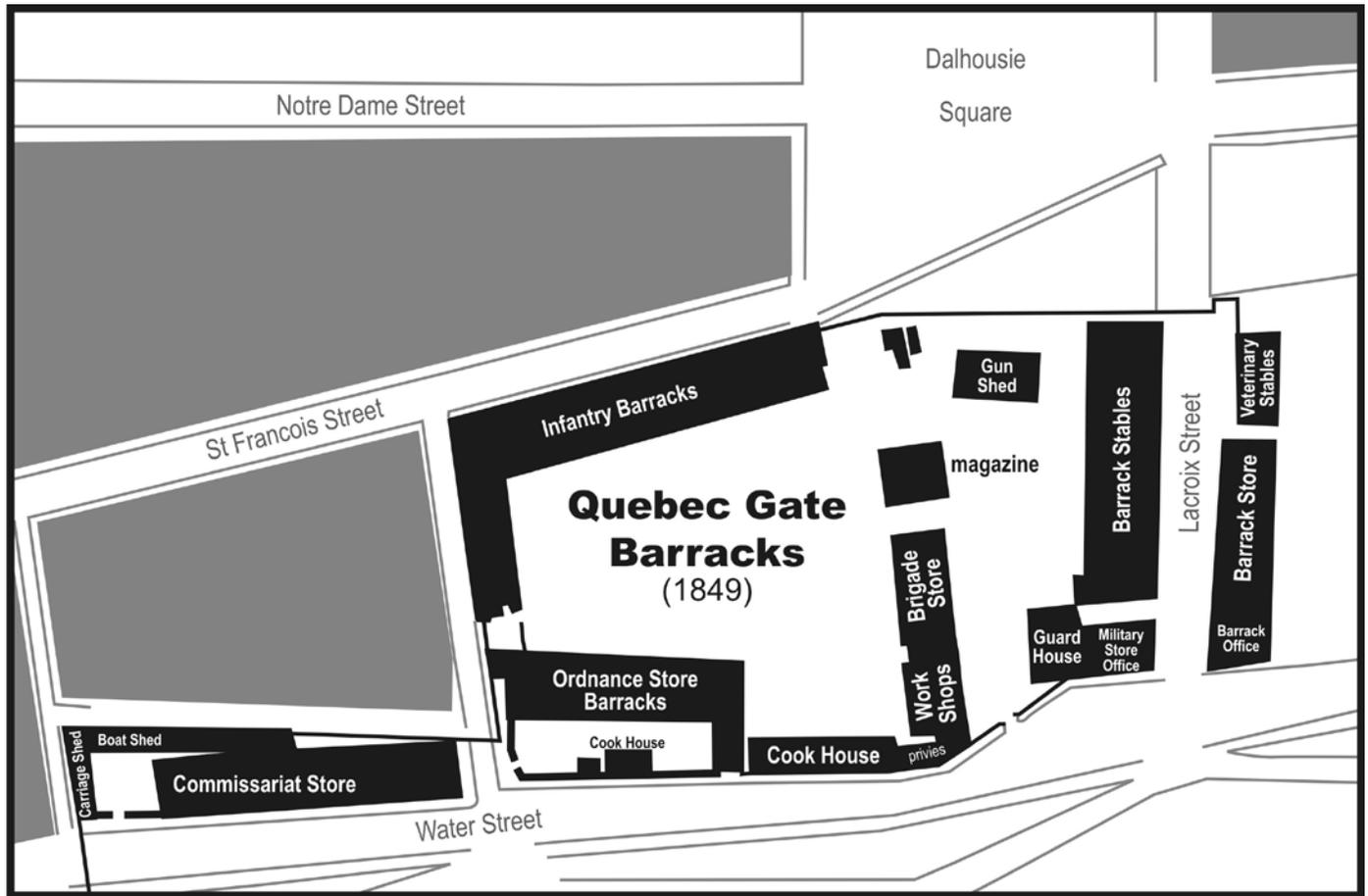
at Dalhousie Square, to the east of the present Bonsecours Market, just inside the old city walls by the road leading to Quebec City. For this reason they were known as the Quebec Gate Barracks. The original building was quite old, having been a convent during the French regime. Like many barracks, they were not terribly prepossessing. Robert Mackay, author of a contemporary guide to Montreal, observed that the "Barracks, Commissariat Stores, &c, are situated on Water Street, and are a pile of uncouth looking buildings, which by no means add to the beauty of the city; they contain accommodations, however, for more than one thousand men."¹² The name of these barracks was itself an anachronism as the city walls and the gate on the road to Quebec City were long gone. The city had torn them down in 1801 rather than pay for their repair. The only remaining fortifications, on St. Helen's Island, had been built in 1819 and, a generation later, were rapidly deteriorating.¹³

The fortifications and barracks on St. Helen's Island had been built

Mr. England's tandem at Royal Artillery barracks, Montreal, QC, 1866.



Photo by William Notman, McCord Museum, I-19859.1

Map drawn by Mike Becinthold ©2012 after original in Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal*, p.6

there because of the island's secure location in the middle of the St. Lawrence River. The artillery was stationed on the island and large quantities of military stores were kept there as well.¹⁴ In addition, a cavalry squadron was stationed at Hochelaga, a little to the north of the city limits, where there was sufficient space for forage. All these locations were within easy reach of Montrealers and this facilitated the interaction between the citizens and the garrison.

Montreal's population, some 40,000 in 1840, was slightly more English speaking than French speaking, but there were significant divisions among the English speakers. About 9,000 were Irish and Catholic so, together with the *Canadiens*, they made Montreal a much more Catholic than Protestant community. Of the remaining English speakers, about two-thirds were from England and about one-third from

Scotland.¹⁵ The "high society" was drawn principally from the English and Scottish population with the participation of a relatively small number of Irish and *Canadiens*. This society was a small and close-knit group.

The garrison was large for a city the size of Montreal. British policy was to maintain a military presence in British North America roughly equal to the standing United States Army of some 7,000, though in the aftermath of the rebellions of 1837 and 1838, this number was exceeded. During the 1830s and 1840s the Montreal Garrison always consisted of at least an infantry regiment, the artillery batteries on St. Helen's Island and some cavalry as well as the required ordnance, supply, transport and other units necessary to support the combat arms. At a minimum, the garrison would number 1,000 and was often larger. In the wake of the rebellions, the garrison grew to include up to

five infantry regiments and a total of some 3,000 men in the early 1840s.¹⁶ From 1836, Montreal was also the headquarters of the British Army in Canada and its staff. This brought the total British military presence in Montreal to some 5,000 in the early 1840s.¹⁷ However, this exceptional troop build-up had been in response to the threat posed by the *Patriotes* during and after the rebellions and, in later years, the number of soldiers in Montreal was more often in the range of 2,000.

The impact of such numbers on all facets of life – political, social and economic – was enormous. Socially, having the army headquarters in Montreal meant that the city boasted about 100 officers, "many of them distinguished men of high rank and fame."¹⁸ In addition, most of the senior officers, some of the junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and a small number of enlisted men had their families

with them in Montreal. The wives of enlisted men carried out domestic chores for the garrison in return for room and board. Only eight men in a company could be married. The garrison also hired many civilians as well.

Finally, it is worth noting that the garrison made participation in local militia units all that more attractive as a militia commission would serve as an entrée to British Army society for many young Montrealers who would not otherwise have had the opportunity, either due to class or to lack of finances.

Romance

Love is a passion that hath friends in the garrison.

Advice to a Daughter from George Savile, 1st Marquess of Halifax

Love did indeed have friends in the British garrisons throughout the Empire, and Montreal was no exception. The long sleigh rides shared by the officers of the garrison and the young ladies of Montreal are quite well known from paintings by

Cornelius Krieghoff and watercolours by the officers themselves. Sleigh rides were the perfect opportunity for romance to bloom between the many Captain Busbies, named for their headwear, and the equally numerous Miss Muffins, named after the ubiquitous hand warmer of well-bred Canadian daughters. During the long, quiet winters, sleighing was the “only way of entering into the social pleasures of a Canadian Winter.” The British officers vied for the best rig. “Their sleighs and horses were the smartest they could find...Garrison officers never lacked companionship.”¹⁹

General Sir Daniel Lysons, who, as a young officer, had been stationed in Montreal with the 1st Regiment of Foot (2nd Battalion, Royal Regiment), recalled:

Winter picnics were much the fashion. We used to drive out in our sleighs, each taking a lady – commonly called a muffin – and a share of the dinner. A band was also sent out, and there were several good rooms in habitants’ houses that were used for these parties. After dinner

we danced for several hours, then drove home together on the snow roads all in a long string of sleighs, by moonlight, which was often nearly light as day. These drives were most charming; and on a still night to hear all the sleigh-bells jingling as the horses trotted merrily along was most fascinating, to say nothing of the young lady who was rolled up in the warm fur robes by your side!²⁰

Similarly, Sarah Lovell remembered her youth in Montreal: “Our streets presented a lively appearance when the British troops were here. Several of the officers had handsome sleighs and beautiful horses. They invited ladies to accompany them on their drives. It was delightful to listen to the music of the well organized bands.”²¹

Romances were many but, to the dismay of Miss Muffins, the number of marriages was relatively small. British officers were in the army for advancement, which required money and social standing in an army of privilege. A subaltern might have to pay £1,000 for his commission; an aspiring colonel would need £10,000

Cornelius Krieghoff, “An Officer’s Room in Montreal,” 1846.



Royal Ontario Museum © ROM, ROM2006 733 1



McCord Museum, M21614

Cornelius Krieghoff, "Sledge Race near Montreal."

and a well-connected British wife as well. Marriage had to be a practical affair for an officer. Few Canadian dowries were big enough to pay for a commission and still fewer holders of the dowries had sufficiently good connections at the War Office.²² There was, of course, the consolation that many officers already had money and position and, therefore, could make a free choice for their mate. Sometimes, in spite of everything, or perhaps because of everything, Miss Muffin and Captain Busbie did marry and he, in turn, became Colonel Busbie. But more often than not, the officers would risk ruining their career and losing their place in London society if they were to marry a colonial girl. Field Marshal Sir Garnet Wolseley, who served in Canada a decade after the period of this paper, recalled that,

Life in Montreal was very pleasant. Of course I bought horses and a sledge, in which I daily drove very charming women...and many were the sledge expeditions we made into the neighbouring country. Altogether, it was a[n] elysium of

bliss for young officers, the only trouble being to keep them single. Several impressionable young captains and subalterns had to be sent home hurriedly to save them from imprudent marriages.²³

"High Society"

Official society life revolved about the younger military officers who, though best remembered for their extravagances, were largely responsible for the beginnings of Montreal's "heritage of culture, literature and art."²⁴ This was to be expected as their administrative responsibilities would be less and they were more numerous than the older officers of higher rank. Montreal in the early nineteenth century was very much a colonial society that looked to London for its example. The men of the garrison were the tangible expression of the Imperial connection in Montreal and for a Montrealer to be able to partake in that society was to seem to have a personal link to Imperial society. This was a phenomenal buttress to

the small group of "gentry" in the city who perceived themselves as a minority within even the anglophone population of Montreal.²⁵

Montreal society relied on the garrison to orchestrate much of its entertainment. One observer, as late as 1864, noted that in Montreal:

Almost all the amusements of the military are got up and maintained by themselves....here is a sad deficiency of public places of amusement, and such as are there, are but indifferently patronised. The theatre is very poor, and there are not so many means of evening enjoyment or improvement as in towns quarter its size in the other provinces or in England.²⁶

The officers of the garrison often filled this gap in local society, and in so doing, not only provided social activities to the community but also, likely, inhibited the growth of the community's own social institutions. Whether local social institutions would have flourished in Montreal without the presence of the garrison is impossible to know. We do know,

however, that they did not develop alongside those established by the officers of the garrison.

Many contemporary visitors to Montreal drew comparisons with the "Old Country" and the comparison invariably involved the military. On a visit in about 1850, B.W.A. Sleigh, a retired officer who had earlier been stationed in Montreal, remarked:

I went to see the regiments in garrison mount the guard and troop the colours, in the Champ de Mars....The number of well-dressed people and the assemblage of beauty would reflect credit on an English city. Indeed, in Montreal, you cannot fancy you are in America; everything about it conveys the idea of a substantial handsomely-built European town...The *habitans'* [sic] strange dress...is certainly foreign.

There are also to be seen stalking about numbers of Indians [and voyageurs and Yankees]...Throw into this crowd...Highland soldiers in the kilt, Infantry soldiers, with the [*becoming?*] Prince Albert Chacos [sic]²⁷, Artillerymen, Sappers and Miners, Rifles, Officers, Aides-de-camp, gold-lace, cocked hats and feathers, and you have a fair description of the motley masses, who every day swarm the streets of Montreal.²⁸

A local observer agreed with Sleigh and noted that the soldiers and the public were very comfortable in each others' presence:

The ordinary people participated indirectly in the gaiety of the military regime through the brisk, lively trade with the officers and the soldiery, who spent freely...The life, colour, and zest they gave were also a free entertainment...The people would make their way to the Champ de Mars during the day to see the evolutions of the military, where

the firing of the cannon frightened the timid...or in the early evening the young folk would stroll sweet-hearting to Dalhousie Square...to hear the regimental bands in Barrack Square...The music would resound with laughter till the sun-down gun from St. Helen's Island proclaimed the time for early bed.²⁹

Ceremonies such as the changing of the guard and the trooping of the colours were meant to impress the local population. The officers and men of the Montreal Garrison, when in the public places of Montreal, were constant reminders of the Imperial connection and the fact that Montreal was under British rule.

Music

The regimental band was something no aspiring city, anywhere in the Empire, could do without. In Montreal, they offered free entertainment to the population on the Champ de Mars, "where the enlivening strains of the military bands are to be heard every fine afternoon."³⁰ The *Montreal Gazette* wrote in 1835 that their "presence has been asked from time immemorial, at all public dinners and public amusements occurring within the city."³¹ These events included meetings of fraternal societies or Saints' Days parades and, of course, the weekly regimental procession to church on Sundays:

The band went in last, marched right up to the pulpit, and deposited their drums in pyramid shape, with brasses standing against the drums. When all were seated, it was a wonderful sight...At the end of each pew was a pile of bearskins, ending at the pulpit with a pile of instruments.³²

The soldiers, too, made no small contribution to the service. The same observer continued, "If you have

never heard a thousand soldiers singing hymns, you have something to hear."³³ And the band, of course, would play on the return march to barracks: "In addition to a selection from the operas of MOZART, ROSSINI, or AUBER, we hear some of the ordinary airs of the Mother Country, perhaps diversified with 'the Dashing White Serjeant' once a month, and 'C'est l'amour' equally often. The CANADIAN boat-songs are as often performed as any of the tunes of ENGLAND."³⁴

The church parade was one of the oldest institutions of the British Army, dating back to the seventeenth century. It was far more than just emphasizing the importance of the Church of England and its religious teaching as a guiding force for the army; it was an important military ritual involving the regiment being paraded in full dress uniform, inspected by the commanding officer and only then being marched to church. Following the service, the regiment would re-form and march back to barracks. Church parades also served to keep the army in the public eye and to show off its units to their best.³⁵ That the established church supported the army and the army supported the established church was a message sent loud and clear to all observers.

Regimental bands often attracted more attention than the regiments themselves. That was the case in the *Gazette's* report of the arrival of the 1st Regiment of Foot (2nd Battalion, Royal Regiment) in July 1837: "The Royals appear a fine body of men – the band is numerous and is mentioned as being a very superior one."³⁶ The intention had been that the Royals would replace the 32nd Regiment (1st Battalion, Duke of Cornwall's light Infantry), but the 32nd in fact remained because of the growing political unrest in the city and the surrounding area. At this news, the *Gazette* rejoiced not over

the fact that the garrison was being reinforced at a perilous time but rather that there would now be two fine bands to give concerts on the Champ de Mars.³⁷

Not all the citizens of Montreal appreciated the popularity of the Army's bands. Several musicians wrote to Sir Richard Jackson, commander of the forces in Canada, 1839-1845, to protest that, "in consequence of military bands being permitted to attend such balls, quadrille parties, public assemblies and at private residences...in many cases free of charge, and in all cases at very low rates, advantage thereof is meanly taken by the citizens to the detriment of your petitioners who are wholly dependent on such sources for their livelihood."³⁸ It was hard for small groups of local musicians to compete with the size and quality of a regimental band. Perhaps the regimental bands' encouragement of the fledgling Montreal Philharmonic Society in 1846³⁹ was in reaction to the local musicians' protests against the military bands. It also represents a rare example of the garrison promoting the development of local cultural organizations.

Theatre

While music on the Champ de Mars was public and could be enjoyed by all, the greatest cultural contribution to the city may well have been the theatre. There was no permanent theatre group in Montreal except that of the "Garrison Amateurs." The "Amateurs" were organized by the officers of the garrison but they drew liberally on the acting talent of NCOs and men as required. They gave regular performances at their own tiny Artillery Theatre that had been set up at the Quebec Gate Barracks in 1835 while performances intended for the larger public were given at the Theatre Royal. Robert Mackay wrote in his guide to the city that the Theatre

Royal, "in the winter is frequently crowded, to witness the performances of the Garrison Amateurs, who get up their theatricals in a style not often surpassed by the regular heroes of the sock and buskin."⁴⁰ The "regular heroes" was a reference to touring companies of professional actors that periodically passed through Montreal. The Theatre Royal had been built by the Molsons in 1825. It seated 1,000, had two tiers of boxes and a full proscenium arch. Later known as the Queen's Theatre, the Theatre Royal was demolished in 1844 and the Bonsecours Market was built on the site.⁴¹ Originally it had an in-house company but it went bankrupt after a year, leaving the theatrical field largely to the Garrison Amateurs. Though they were amateurs in the strict sense, the best actors in the garrison had little else to do but to rehearse on the pay of the British Army. No professional company could compete with this financial advantage.

The officers and NCOs of the regiments in garrison were up to the challenge of keeping "alive the dramatic spirit in Montreal."⁴² By the 1830s, thanks to their efforts, it was thriving. At the Artillery Theatre, the Amateurs presented a season of plays running usually from November to Lent and consisting, on average, of a performance of two or three plays every month. "It was of modest dimensions, yet very well equipped with the requisite appurtenances."⁴³ The spirit of the evenings at the theatre is captured in the following review from the *Gazette* in 1834:

The 24th [South Wales Borderers] Amateurs performed last night to a crowded and highly gratified audience, PLANCE's romantic drama of the *Vampires, or the Bride of the Isles*, in which our old favourites, NICKENSON, GREER and FIELDS, displayed their usual versatility of theatrical genius. Corporal GREER, as the *Vampire*, evinced,

in several difficult passages, the finest conception of the character he adopted...[his] excellence of dying... could only be equalled by reality... The music was admirably executed, and the evening was passed in no small degree of rational recreation.⁴⁴

It was indeed "rational recreation," for the proceeds from the 2s 6p admission⁴⁵ invariably went to a good cause. These causes included families who had lost their husband and father, the Orphan Asylum, the Ladies Benevolent Society, the Montreal General Hospital, and the House of Industry (a euphemism for the Poor House).⁴⁶ One performance was even given "for the benefit of a gentleman of highly respectable family and connection, who, from circumstances entirely beyond his control, has been reduced from affluence to a state utterly destitute, and whose friends have resorted to the present means, solely to relieve the necessities of himself and family, until an opportunity presents itself of obtaining employment."⁴⁷ Thus the merriment of the stage supported many charities in the city.

The ubiquitous regimental bands often took part in theatrical evenings. Sometimes the bands seemed to overshadow the performers. The *Gazette* review of one theatrical singled out the band as the highlight of the evening: "[the] splendid military band filled the orchestra, and with their delightful symphonies drew rapturous applause from all parts of the house." The reviewer also added, almost as an afterthought, that the actors did equally well.⁴⁸ Evenings that combined music and theatre were quite common at the time and the garrison could supply both.

The high-point in the history of the Garrison Amateurs came in late May 1842. On the 25th in a private performance for the officers and wives of the garrison and again on the 28th, in a public performance, Charles



The Garrison Amateurs, Montreal, circa 1867.

Dickens made his theatrical début⁴⁹ on the stage of the Theatre Royal as the Amateurs of the 23rd Regiment (Royal Welsh Fusiliers) presented three plays (*A Roland for Oliver* by John Madison Morton, *Two O'Clock in the Morning*, adapted from the French by Charles James Matthews and *High Life Below Stairs* by John Poole) with the great novelist taking a role in each. Dickens, in a letter to a friend, described the occasion of the private performance, writing, "We had the band of the 23rd (one of the finest in the service) in the orchestra, the theatre was lighted with gas, the scenery was excellent, and the properties were all brought from private houses. Sir Charles Bagot [governor-general], Sir Richard Jackson and their staffs were present, and as the military portion of the audience was in full uniform, it was really a splendid scene."⁵⁰

Here we have as close to a court setting as one could find in British North America. The attention that Dickens attracted from Montreal

society is simply another indication of how much the city's society wanted to identify itself with what it considered to be the ideal to emulate – British society.

Private Diversions

The official life was complemented by private entertainment and, again, the presence of officers was considered an important attribute to any entertainment. "The officers gave many parties, balls, receptions, dances and hunts, all of which the prominent citizens participated in and returned."⁵¹ The balls were traditional and by no means did they cease in times of war. As Wellington's officers danced the evening before Waterloo; so had Prevost's during the War of 1812;⁵² and so also did Colborne's in 1837-38 during the rebellions. The greater concentration of troops and, therefore, of officers led to more enthusiasm for such events. Sir Daniel Lysons, who was with the garrison at this time,

remembered that, "Montreal, between the expeditions [to fight the *patriotes*] was very gay, and there were plenty of balls and parties."⁵³ Of course, the balls, both official and private, were nothing without the presence of a regimental band.⁵⁴

While the winter picnics, mentioned earlier, are most famous, summer picnics were very popular as well. Military hospitality and the location in the middle of the river made St. Helen's Island a most popular place for picnics.⁵⁵ The winter picnics were organized by the Tandem Club which, though a civilian organization, was usually presided over by a senior officer. The sleighs assembled at Dalhousie Square, in front of the barracks⁵⁶ and from there, drove in procession through the streets of the city⁵⁷ and up the slopes of Mount Royal, considered the finest site for tandem driving west of St. Petersburg.⁵⁸ For those who could not afford sleighs and horses, snowshoeing and tobogganing were popular.⁵⁹ For

the Scottish officers and men of the Highland regiments, curling was the favourite winter sport.

In the summer, the Tandem Club gave way to the Harness Club and the Hunt Club. Longue Pointe was a favourite location for the hunt to take place, "the hounds usually starting off from Elmwood, the farm of Captain Charles Oakes Ermatinger of the Royal Montreal Cavalry."⁶⁰ The hunt provided the opportunity for citizens lacking a good rig to partake of this society, but the "brush" was most often taken by an officer who was likely a better rider and with a better mount.⁶¹ The British officers seemed addicted to the hunt and Sir Daniel Lysons recalled that even *patriotes* drilling on the Champ de Mars did not deter them from going on the hunt.⁶² Yet for all this involvement, the historian of the Hunt Club relates that only by the end of the 1840s did the military dominate the club. By then they

provided the bulk of the membership, monopolized the offices and shaped the programmes until the withdrawal of the garrison from Montreal.⁶³ Still, the hunt offered an opportunity for local riders to participate in the social aspects of the hunt more or less as equals to the officers of the garrison.

As with the hunt, the annual race meets were largely a military initiative. They were highly popular and those officers who did not participate went to watch along with crowds of the citizenry. The Montreal Turf Club "organized the annual three days of races in August at the old Lachine racecourse when townsman and soldier vied for the rich purses, including the Garrison Plate."⁶⁴ The Garrison Plate was a race of two mile heats for "Gentleman riders" and carried a substantial prize of £15.⁶⁵ The Turf Club was also dominated by officers of the garrison. During most of the 1840s, Colonel (later Major-General) Sir Charles

Gore was its president.⁶⁶ The race meet was sufficiently important that during his brief time as governor-general, Lord Durham made his way up to Montreal from Quebec City in 1838 especially for the races.⁶⁷ The newspapers supportive of the government, led by the *Gazette*, always reported the results of the races while the reform journals, such as the *Vindicator*, wrote disapprovingly of the scuffles between armed soldiers and "innocent" civilians at the race course.⁶⁸

The Army brought with them traditional British sports. The English officers enjoyed cricket on a pitch laid out in the wide open spaces of St. Helen's Island⁶⁹ and the non-commissioned officers of the 89th Regiment (Royal Irish Fusiliers) introduced boating to Montreal when they imported the first scull to Canada in 1844.⁷⁰ As noted earlier, the Highland regiments introduced curling to Canada. Thus the range of

Curling on the St. Lawrence, Montreal, 1878

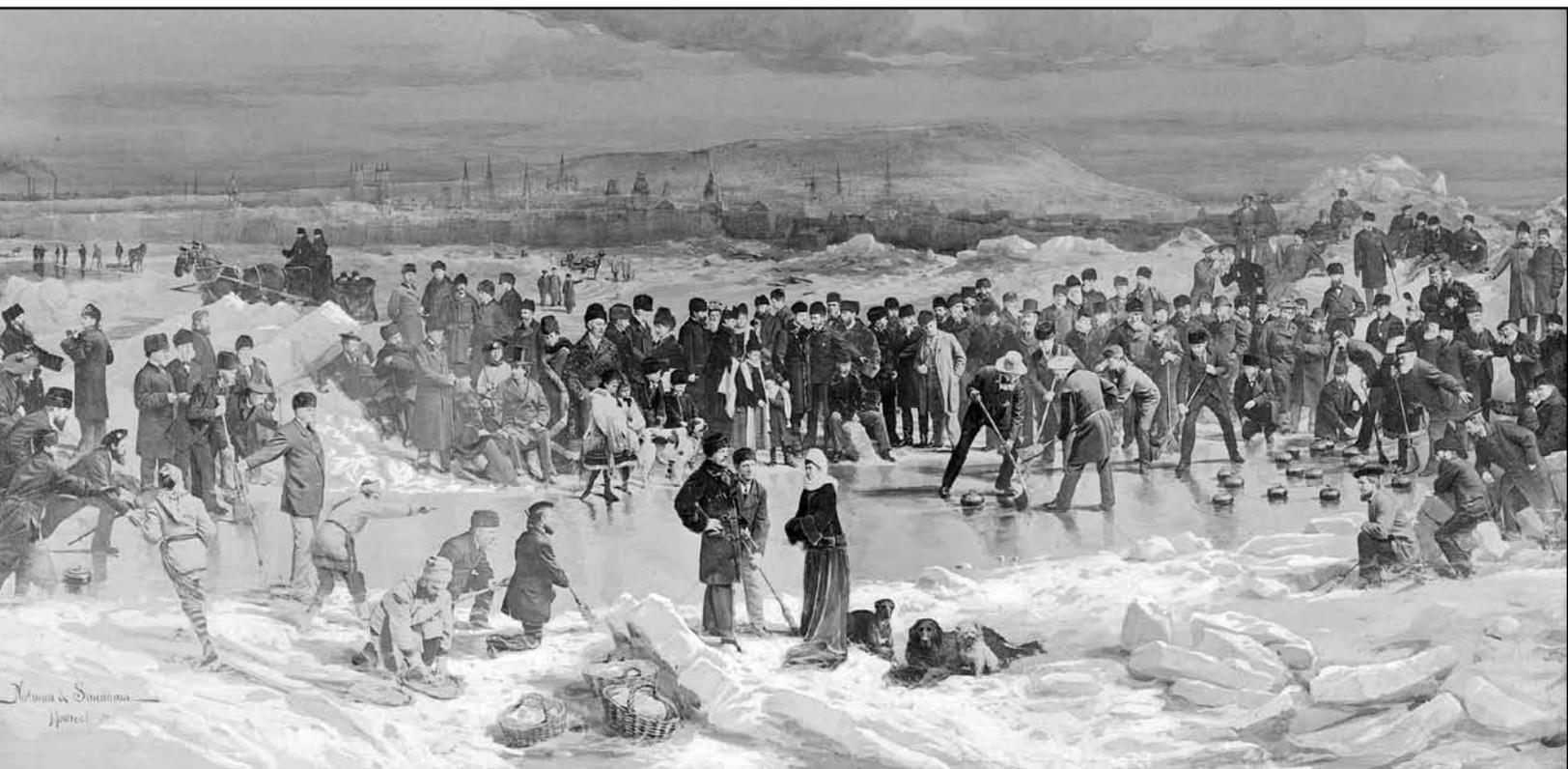


Photo by William Notman, McCord Museum, view 2551



“Tandem drive on Mount Royal Park, Montreal, QC, about 1890.”

sporting and recreational activities available to Montrealers was enhanced considerably as a result of the presence of the garrison but, at the same time, placed an indelibly British stamp on sporting activities in Montreal.

Morale

The intense social activity of the garrison was not simply born of itself. All the various musical, theatrical, sporting and other events were very important to the morale of the officers and men of the garrison. They served, in part, as a response to boredom which was the greatest enemy of both officers and men in garrison. The social élite could while away idle hours at the nearby Rasco's Hotel on rue St. Paul. "The garrison officers knew it well."⁷¹ When it opened in 1834, Rasco's was among the most luxurious hostleries in Canada and was patronized both by the officers of the garrison and the well-to-do of Montreal,

especially those who wished to meet or do business with the garrison officers. However, enlisted men would not have been welcome in Rasco's even if they could afford to go there. It is not surprising that some would sometimes decide to look for something more stimulating and better paying than garrison duty. The United States was only 70 kilometres away and if a soldier could make it across the border, he would escape court martial for desertion. One officer recalled a day in the 1830s when a group of 15 men deserted *en masse*.⁷² In 1836, the *Gazette* reported on a regiment that had just been moved west from Montreal: "Desertion from the ranks of the 15th Regiment [The East Yorkshire Regiment] had increased to so great an extent that the Commanding Officer has felt it necessary to offer a reward of five pounds for every deserter, who shall be delivered up to him or to a Magistrate."⁷³

Some of the soldiers who remained managed to find trouble

as well. Drunken and armed soldiers often found themselves in gaol for the night.⁷⁴ A few others spent idle time planning to augment their incomes by robbery,⁷⁵ but if caught a conviction brought heavy penalties. Simple break and enter could attract a sentence of up to fourteen years hard labour.⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that reports of these events are not to be found in the *Gazette* but in the reform-minded *Vindicator* and *Minerve*.

The purpose of the garrison was two-fold, to protect the northern colonies against attack, but also to ensure order within the colonies, and it was in the latter role that the garrison was most active. Aid to the civil authorities included not only police functions, but helping to fight serious fires in the city.⁷⁷ The troops could not carry out any function, however, if large numbers fell victim to disease, and, during the cholera epidemic of 1834, the entire garrison retreated to the safety of St. Helen's Island.⁷⁸ This prompted the *Vindicator* to remark wryly that "They seem to

have abandoned the city without any hesitation to the Radicals, the moment danger appears."⁷⁹ This comment was far more humorous in 1834 that it would be after the British Army put down the rebellions in 1837 and 1838.⁸⁰

The Radicals, nevertheless, did know the garrison could deploy rapidly and with deadly effect. During a Legislative Assembly by-election in 1832, three *patriotes* were killed when troops fired upon a crowd on the last day of polling.⁸¹ After the intense operations against the rebellions of 1837 and 1838, the use of deadly force became much less frequent; during the 1840s only four people were killed by British soldiers acting in aid to the civil power.⁸²

After decades of enforcing the law upon the reform elements of society, it is supremely ironic that the last such action prior to the large reduction in the force during the early 1850s, was against the same "loyal" elements of society that the British soldiers had spent so long protecting. With the development of responsible government in 1848, the Tories no longer controlled the legislature which, at long last could pass legislation to compensate those who suffered damage or destruction of property during the rebellion, including many who supported the *patriotes*. The passage of the Rebellion Losses Bill in 1849, and its acceptance by the governor-general, Lord Elgin, who gave royal assent, demonstrated that responsible government had truly been achieved. The legislation infuriated Montreal Tories, however, and their bitter demonstrations culminated in the burning of the Parliament Buildings, though troops of the garrison were able to limit further violence. The garrison proved that the military were truly obedient to the civil power by supporting and protecting a government most officers of the garrison likely despised. Thus responsible government in Canada

was protected in its infancy by the British Army.

The End of an Era

For Montreal, its great military era went up in the flames of Parliament. When Lord Elgin moved the capital from Montreal to Toronto, the Army headquarters also left. The officer corps in Montreal was effectively halved. The impact of such a loss was obvious to city officials, and, fearing further defeats, they sought to cover their losses. As C.P. Stacey wrote, "Lack of barrack accommodation at Montreal – and the fact that the [British] Colonial Secretary feared to approach the [British House of] Commons with a supplemental estimate for £12,000 to provide it – led to a decision to withdraw a battalion thence, unless the local government cared to supply quarters; and as (in the view of the recent serious rioting in the city on the occasion of the Rebellion Losses Bill crisis) the local government was anxious for the troops to remain, Elgin prevailed upon them to meet the cost."⁸³ Whether Montrealers would continue to support a sizable garrison with their pocketbooks soon became a moot point.

The garrison remained in some strength as the year 1850 approached. However, Imperial obligations elsewhere soon led to the substantial reduction of the garrison. In 1854, Britain was at war with Russia and the Canadian garrisons were drawn down in order to furnish troops for Crimea. On 1 January 1853, the Montreal Garrison mustered 1,164 officers and men but two years later the garrison numbered only 273.⁸⁴ Still, it continued to play an important role in Montreal society even until the last Imperial soldier left the city. In its declining years the garrison acted as a shield protecting Montreal society from "progress." Progress was, by many, considered

as a pejorative term that alluded to the Americanization of Canada in general and Montreal in particular. The presence of the garrison, even in reduced numbers, served to buttress the Britishness of Montreal's English-speaking society.

But withdrawal was inevitable. Massive reinforcement of the British forces in the northern colonies to some 18,000 troops in 1862 fully restored the Montreal Garrison, but only for a few years. The additional troops had been sent because of a crisis in British relations with the United States early in the American Civil War that, although resolved, ushered in a period of profound tension along the border between the United States and the colonies. One of the reasons why Britain supported Canadian Confederation in 1867 was that the new nation would be expected to defend itself, relieving the Imperial treasury of the enormous financial burden of the reinforced garrisons. Furthermore, the British closely watched the course of the American Civil War, in which the North and South mobilized almost three million men. The War Office realized that even the greatly expanded garrisons could not resist a determined American assault on Canada.⁸⁵ It was best not to have the garrisons at all as they remained an irritant to British-American diplomatic relations. The units of the Montreal Garrison in the city proper were recalled in 1869⁸⁶ and the units on St. Helen's Island followed a year later.⁸⁷ The last British garrison to leave Canada was that of Quebec City, in late 1871.⁸⁸

By 1870, Montreal had advanced far beyond the cosy compact society that the gentry of Montreal still imagined to exist. Confederation and the Dominion government's purchase of the North West Territory from the Hudson Bay Company had expanded Montreal's commercial horizons and the city was on the

verge of a long period of economic ascendancy in Canada. The departure of the garrison drove home the fact that it was time for Montreal and Canada to move on.

Montreal society that had benefited so much from the presence of the garrison lamented its loss. Adèle Clarke felt that "With the departure of the garrison, the character of Montreal society life entirely changed. The people about whom I have written...have been replaced by another society which has gradually developed itself, but on totally different lines, not united as in the old days, but broken into numerous sets, who scarcely meet each other, and occupied with thoughts and avocations quite dissimilar."⁸⁹ What Clarke meant was that the closed society she had so enjoyed had now to share the stage with those who did not come from her circles. It would be a far more egalitarian society offering, in time, greater opportunity to people of all social classes. American journalist, C.H. Farnham of *Harper's* put it more bluntly, writing, "What aristocracy there was disappeared with the garrison."⁹⁰ However, it was no longer an expatriate aristocracy that Montreal needed. It was time, indeed past time, for Montreal society to develop and flourish by its own efforts and along its own lines. The city's growing financial, commercial and industrial strength would drive the evolution of its society once the expatriate aristocracy had departed.

Few Montrealers in 1850 could have foreseen the departure of their garrison a mere 20 years hence; fewer still understood the changes going on around them, but the parliamentary decision of the previous year had cast their future. The evolution from colony to nation had begun and implicit in nationhood was the responsibility to defend one's sovereignty. The Baldwin-Lafontaine administration was laying the

groundwork for a new country that would join in confederation with the Maritime Provinces. Their work would be carried on by Cartier and Macdonald and the new country would have to learn to bear the responsibility for its own defence. Therefore, quite apart from the geopolitical considerations of Whitehall, within the new Dominion, the presence of the British garrisons in Canada and their society were an anachronism and it was time for society in Montreal and, elsewhere in Canada, to find its own way. For all the good that came from the presence of the garrison, in supporting the substance and the trappings of colonial society, it had inhibited the growth of an indigenous Montreal society. It was time for a change.

Benjamin Disraeli understood clearly what Adèle Clarke could not comprehend when he exclaimed:

An army maintained in a country which does not even permit us to govern it!
What an anomaly!⁹¹

Montrealers who had revelled in the social life and the economic benefits created by the presence of the garrison, in the first half of the nineteenth century, had seen it diminished in 1854 and then withdrawn in 1870. With its passing, came the close of one of Montreal's most colourful social eras but also the beginning of a new era marked by a society far more relevant to the Montreal of the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

Notes

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 8. Yvon Desloges, "British Regulars in Montreal - An Imperial Garrison, 1832-1854" (book review), *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 36, no.4 (1983), pp.600- 601.
 9. *Ontario History* CII, no.2 (Autumn 2010).
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 11. Michel S. Beaulieu, "'Not that I lov'd Fleas less, but that I lov'd England more': Entertainment in Kingston, 1816-1837," *Ontario History* CII, no.2, (Autumn 2010), p.202.
 12. Robert W.S. Mackay, *The Strangers' Guide to the City of Montreal* (Montreal: Lovell and Gibson, 1843), p.8.
 13. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers*, pp.131, 185.
 14. Newton Bosworth, *Hochelaga depicta: the early history and present state of the city & island of Montreal* (Montreal: William Grieg, 1839), pp.161, 162, 176.
 15. Fernand Ouellet, *Eléments d'histoire sociale du Bas-Canada* (Montreal: Hurtubise HMH, 1972), pp.193-200.
 16. United Kingdom, War Office, *Troop Returns*, for 1 January of each year, WO 17/1563-59, cited in Elinor Kyte Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal*, pp.218, 219.
 17. Sir Daniel Lysons, *Early Reminiscences* (London: John Murray, 1896), p.103.
 18. W.H. Atherton, *Montreal 1535-1914, Vol. II: Montreal Under British Rule* (Montreal: S.J. Clarke, 1914), p.216.
 19. John Irwin Collard, *Montreal: The Days That Are No More* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1976), p.204.
 20. Lysons, *Early Reminiscences*, p.63.
 21. Sarah Lovell, quoted in Edgar Andrew Collard, *Call Back Yesterdays* (Toronto: Longmans, 1965), p.60.

22. Preston, "Military Influence on the Development of Canada," p.60.
23. Sir Garnet Wolseley, quoted in John Irwin Collard, *Montreal, The Days That Are No More*, p.207.
24. Atherton, *Montreal 1535-1914*, p.136.
25. Preston, "Military Influence on the Development of Canada," pp.66, 67.
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29. Atherton, *Montreal 1535-1914*, pp.216, 217.
30. Mackay, *The Strangers' Guide to the City of Montreal*, p.9.
31. *Montreal Gazette*, 5 November 1835.
32. Fred T. Claxton, quoted in Edgar Andrew Collard, *Call Back Yesterdays*, p.118.
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36. *Montreal Gazette*, 4 July 1837.
37. *Ibid.*, 11 July 1837.
38. Elinor Senior, "The British Garrison in Montreal in the 1840s" (unpublished paper given at the Canadian Historical Association annual meeting, 1972), p.14.
39. *Ibid.*, pp.15 and 21 (note 103).
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44. *Montreal Gazette*, 20 February 1834.
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48. *Ibid.*, 7 February 1837.
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50. Graham, *Histrionic Montreal*, 2nd ed., p.84.
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52. Lawrence M. Wilson, *This Was Montreal* (Montreal: Chateau de Ramezay, 1960), p.48.
53. Lysons, *Early Reminiscences*, p.89.
54. Atherton, *Montreal 1535-1914*, p.204.
55. Adèle Clarke, *Old Montreal, John Clarke: His Adventures, Friends and Family* (Montreal: Herald Publishing, 1906), p.46.
56. *Ibid.*, p.32.
57. Sarah Lovell, quoted in Collard, *Call Back Yesterdays*, p.60.
58. Collard, *Call Back Yesterdays*, photo caption between pp.118 and 119.
59. Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal*, pp.176, 177.
60. *Ibid.*, p.175.
61. *Montreal Gazette*, 22 September 1836.
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63. John Irwin Cooper, *The History of the Montreal Hunt, 1826-1953* (Montreal: Montreal Hunt, 1953), p.45.
64. Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal*, p.174.
65. *Montreal Gazette*, 7 September 1833.
66. Mackay, *The Strangers' Guide to the City of Montreal*, p.26; Senior, "The British Garrison in Montreal in the 1840s," p.16.
67. Patricia Godsell, ed., *Letter and Diaries of Lady Durham* (Toronto: Oberon, 1979), p.77.
68. *Montreal Vindicator*, 6 September 1833.
69. Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal*, p.177.
70. *Ibid.*, p.177.
71. Atherton, *Montreal 1535-1914*, p.199.
72. Sleigh, *Pine Forests and Hacmatack Clearings*, p.243.
73. *Montreal Gazette*, 15 September 1836.
74. *Montreal Vindicator*, 14 January 1834; *Montréal Minerve*, le 15 juin 1835.
75. *Montreal Vindicator*, 20 March 1834.
76. Provincial Statutes of Canada 1841, 4&5 *Victoriae*, Cap. 25, *An Act for consolidating and amending the Laws in this Province, relative to Larceny and other Offences connected therewith*, s.XIX.
77. *Montréal Minerve*, le 12 décembre 1835.
78. *Montreal Gazette*, 30 September 1834.
79. *Montreal Vindicator*, 5 August 1834.
80. It is, unfortunately, impossible to compare newspaper coverage regarding the societal impact of the garrison during the rebellions because in November 1837 a mob ransacked the offices of the *Vindicator* and it never published again. Later that month, the Sheriff seized the press of *La Minerve* and it did not resume publishing until 1842.
81. *Montreal Gazette*, 24 May 1832.
82. Senior, "The British Garrison in Montreal in the 1840s," p.12. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, Stacey in *Canada and the British Army 1846-1871* and Senior in *British Regulars in Montreal* both provide good descriptions of the historical and political events of the time. A new look at the political thought of this period in Canada can be found in Michel Ducharme, *Le Concept de liberté au Canada à l'époque de révolutions atlantiques 1776-1838* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).
83. Stacey, *Canada and the British Army*, p.73.
84. United Kingdom, War Office, *Troop Returns*, for January 1 of each year, WO 17/1563-59, cited by Senior, *British Regulars in Montreal*, p.220.
85. Desmond Morton, "On Our Own," *Canada's History* (June-July 2011), p.14.
86. Atherton, *Montreal 1535-1914*, p.365.
87. Collard, *Call Back Yesterdays*, p.134.
88. The sole exceptions were the Royal Naval Dockyards and Army garrisons at Halifax and Esquimalt that were retained until 1905, not to defend Canada but to support British warships.
89. Clarke, *Old Montreal, John Clarke*, p.47.
90. C.H. Farnham, in *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, June 1889 cited in Collard, *Call Back Yesterdays*, p.204.
91. Disraeli (Chancellor of the Exchequer) to Derby (Prime Minister), 30 September 1866, cited in Stacey, *Canada and the British Army*, p.193.

Robert Vineberg has a BA in History from University of Toronto as well as an MA in Canadian History and a Graduate Diploma in Public Administration, both from Carleton University. His career in the Federal Public Service spanned over 35 years, of which 28 were with the immigration program, serving abroad, in policy positions at national headquarters and, more recently, as Director General of Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Prairies and Northern Territories Region, based in Winnipeg. He retired from the public service in 2008. He is currently a Senior Fellow with the Canada West Foundation. Mr. Vineberg has written and published articles on immigration history, military history and opera.