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# "Enshrined in Golden Memories"

## Eastern Ontario's Commemoration of the North-West Resistance, 1885-1939

Elliot Worsfold

Captain Alfred Hamlyn Todd returned to Ottawa after participating in the North-West Rebellion<sup>1</sup> on 24 July 1885. In the four months prior to his return, Todd had led the Ottawa Sharpshooters, a group of approximately 50 men from Carleton County's Governor General's Foot Guards, in the conflict against Louis Riel and his allies in the Canadian west. Reflecting on his arrival to Ottawa, Todd described the "massed crowds packing the streets" as the entire city wanted a glimpse of the men who had fought on Canada's prairies. The streets quickly filled and those who wanted a better view sat on the tops of houses to avoid the pandemonium below. Todd was overwhelmed with the city's response and had never "witnessed anything like it in Ottawa."<sup>2</sup> Enthusiasm towards the Ottawa Sharpshooters did not wane in Ottawa in the following years, as in 1886 Anglican churches commissioned stained glass windows honouring those who died, and in 1888 the city erected a war memorial named the "Sharpshooters Monument" to honour and celebrate its participation in the North-West Rebellion. Peterborough, roughly 270 kilometers west of Ottawa, also erected a memorial of its own in 1886.

While the return of the Ottawa Sharpshooters from the North-West Rebellion caused great celebrations

**Abstract: This article explores how English Canadians in Eastern Ontario actively participated in commemorating the North-West Resistance by erecting war memorials, stained glass windows, and by writing commemorative poems. Using recent developments in memory studies and the "new imperial history," this study compares the images and symbols presented in these commemorative acts with surviving textual records and ephemera to investigate how English Canadians perceived and remembered the rebellion. This study suggests that the colonization of Aboriginals did not end on the 1885 battlefields, but continued in the commemorative practices of Eastern Ontarians. English Canadians portrayed themselves as inherently "good" Christians that helped define Canada as a nation, and excluded Aboriginals from the commemorative process. In doing so, English Canadians aimed to better participate in the imperial culture of the British Empire.**

in 1885, the commemorative acts and public rituals connected to the First and Second World Wars have largely eclipsed those of the North-West Rebellion in the Canadian imagination.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps as a result, the historiography of public memory in Canada focuses disproportionately on these conflicts.<sup>4</sup> Why did English-Canadians in Eastern Ontario celebrate and commemorate the

North-West Rebellion? What do these commemorative acts reveal about English-Canadian culture in 19th century Ontario and how its participants understood and remembered the North-West Rebellion? To explore these questions further, this study utilizes the method advocated by memory studies scholars that view commemorative acts as primary sources. Through looking at the images and rituals surrounding these commemorations and comparing them with surviving textual records, the historian can gain insight into how English Canadians understood the North-West Rebellion and, more broadly, the English-Canadian cultural relationship with war.<sup>5</sup> By surveying monuments and stained glass windows related to the North-West Rebellion, it becomes clear that English Canadians in Eastern Ontario portrayed themselves as "good Christians" who sacrificed themselves to protect Canadian nationhood from the "uncivilized." As a result, the rebellion's Aboriginal participants had little authority and were excluded from contributing to the North-West Rebellion's public memory through commemorative acts. This process and understanding shows striking similarities to the ways in which English Canadians commemorated the First World War, suggesting that English Canadians

tapped into a pre-existing discourse already formed in part by the North-West Rebellion to commemorate the First World War and remember another generation of war dead.

Modern accounts of the North-West Rebellion follow a remarkably similar narrative and rarely touch on issues of memory and commemoration. The standard narrative begins with a description of the various Aboriginal groups, primarily Cree, Blackfoot, and Métis, living on the Canadian prairies and emphasizes the disappearance of the Buffalo and the poor conditions on treaty lands. Furthermore, the narrative focuses on how Métis leader Louis Riel returned from the United States in 1884 in order to voice Métis concerns over white settlers infringing on Métis land.<sup>6</sup> The Canadian state did little to

acknowledge these serious claims, which spurred Riel and young Aboriginal leaders to take military action against local Indian agents as an act of protest. In response, the federal government sent militia units and the North-West Mounted Police to stop Riel and his “followers” from “insurrection” against the Canadian federal government. The narrative of the rebellion generally ends with Riel’s execution, and the imprisonment of Cree leaders Big Bear (Mistahimaskwa) and Poundmaker (Pitikwahanapiwiyn).<sup>7</sup> Most attempts to understand the rebellion’s impact on Canada have centered on Louis Riel as an individual rather than the rebellion as a conflict. Scholars of various disciplines have studied cultural representations of Louis Riel, both in art and fiction, and as a result have paid less attention to the

English-Canadian commemoration and memory of the North-West Rebellion.<sup>8</sup>

Recent developments in the “new imperial history” allow a better understanding of English-Canadian views of the North-West Rebellion in 19th century Eastern Ontario. While old imperial histories studied Canada’s relationship with Britain in terms of government policy and constitutional arrangements, the new imperial history explores the impact of imperialism on culture, gender, and race.<sup>9</sup> There are substantial studies on how imperialism shaped Britain’s culture, but the role “empire” played in shaping similar views in the colonies has received less attention.<sup>10</sup> This paper uses the new imperial history as a framework to further explore how English Canadians understood their past and

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**The Ottawa Sharpshooters shortly after they returned from the prairies in July 1885.**

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how imperialism shaped their commemoration and understanding of the North-West Rebellion.

This paper does not intend to describe the North-West Rebellion as it "truly" was, but rather aspires to shed light on how Eastern Ontario's English-Canadian participants interpreted the conflict in the years following the rebellion's end. To do so, this paper will use the language of its participants in order to gain an understanding of their sense of the past. Rather than critiquing the validity of their interpretation, this study will identify why and for what purpose they chose to present their actions during the North-West Rebellion through various acts of commemoration, while still paying attention to the exclusion of Aboriginal perspectives from these commemorative acts.<sup>11</sup>

## Eastern Ontario and the North-West Rebellion

In late March 1885, Todd received a message from the Minister of Militia to mobilize a company of men from the Ottawa Sharpshooters to assist with the suppression of the "uprising of Indians and half-breeds in the North West territories."<sup>12</sup> Over the next few days Todd selected the most suitable men from those who volunteered and prepared them for their journey out west. During the campaign, the Ottawa Sharpshooters were committed to the defence of Battleford, located in Saskatchewan, and participated in only one battle, Cut Knife Hill, on 2 May 1885. That engagement pitted English-Canadian militia units against Poundmaker's Cree and lasted for

Photo by the author



**The congregation at St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church raised enough funds to erect a six-panel stained glass window for William Osgood, a member of their congregation who died at the Battle of Cut Knife Hill.**

seven hours without either force being able to dislodge the other from its position. As both sides ran low on ammunition, the English-Canadian militia units eventually withdrew to Battleford. All told, approximately five Cree and eight militiamen died in battle, of which two were Ottawa Sharpshooters.<sup>13</sup> These were Private William Osgood, an employee of an Ottawa law firm, and Private John Rogers, a civil servant with the Department of the Interior. Both men were unmarried, Anglicans of British heritage, and lived in Ottawa's Sandy Hill neighbourhood.<sup>14</sup>

Peterborough's Edward Templeton Brown was another one of Eastern Ontario's casualties during the North-West Rebellion. The product of marriage between two of Peterborough's oldest loyalist families, Edward partook in all of the privileges granted to men of status in

late 19th century Canada. As a young man, Edward actively participated in Peterborough's local militia unit and gained note as a lacrosse player. In 1879 he left Peterborough to work as a land surveyor for the Hudson's Bay Company. Upon news of Riel's "insurrection," Brown joined Boulton's Scouts, a mounted unit. He participated in only one action, the Battle of Batoche, where he was killed. His comrades buried his body on the bank of the South Saskatchewan River.<sup>15</sup>

The first wave of commemorative acts in Eastern Ontario coincided with the first anniversary of the North-West Rebellion's end. In Ottawa, Anglican churches played a prominent role in commemorating the deaths of Osgood and Rogers. Both Anglicans, Osgood and

Rogers attended weekly services at St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church and Trinity Anglican Church, respectively. St. Bartholomew's and Trinity erected stained glass windows to honour the memory of their fallen congregation members once the rebellion ended.<sup>16</sup> St. Bartholomew's began a fundraising campaign after news of Osgood's death reached the congregation, and raised enough money through public subscription to order a large stained glass window composed of six different panels. On 2 May 1886, the anniversary of Osgood's death at Cut Knife Hill, the congregation unveiled the finished window to the public.

A committee in Peterborough erected a humble memorial to honour Brown's sacrifice on the anniversary of the Battle of Batoche on 12 May 1886. The Brown Memorial, funded by donations from the

public, resembled a Greek mausoleum in gothic design and sat prominently in the recently established Central Park.<sup>17</sup> A simple plaque attached to the monument, circled by the phrase "Pro Patria," stated that Brown was "a native of this [Peterborough] county" who died at Batoche.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to the Brown Memorial, Ottawa unveiled a large memorial titled the Sharpshooters Monument in 1888 thanks to the tireless efforts of Ottawa Sharpshooter veteran Frank Newby. Shortly after the Battle of Cut Knife Hill, Newby organized a small concert in Battleford and used the proceeds raised to start a fund for the creation of a memorial to honour the death of his comrades, Osgood and Rogers. Once back in Ottawa, Newby spearheaded a fundraising campaign. It took Newby three years, but he eventually raised enough money to commission the Sharpshooters Monument, which was erected directly beside Parliament Hill at the entrance to Major's Hill Park.<sup>19</sup> The finished monument included several small steps leading to a granite pedestal adorned with a mourning soldier figurine titled the "Guardisman," sculpted in Rogers's likeness and fastened on top of the pedestal.<sup>20</sup> Three plaques decorate the pedestal, two depicting Osgood and Rogers, and a third bearing the following inscription: "Erected by the Citizens of Ottawa to the memory of WM.B Osgoode,<sup>21</sup> and John Rogers, of the Guards Company of Sharpshooters who fell in action at Cut Knife Hill, on the second of May 1885."

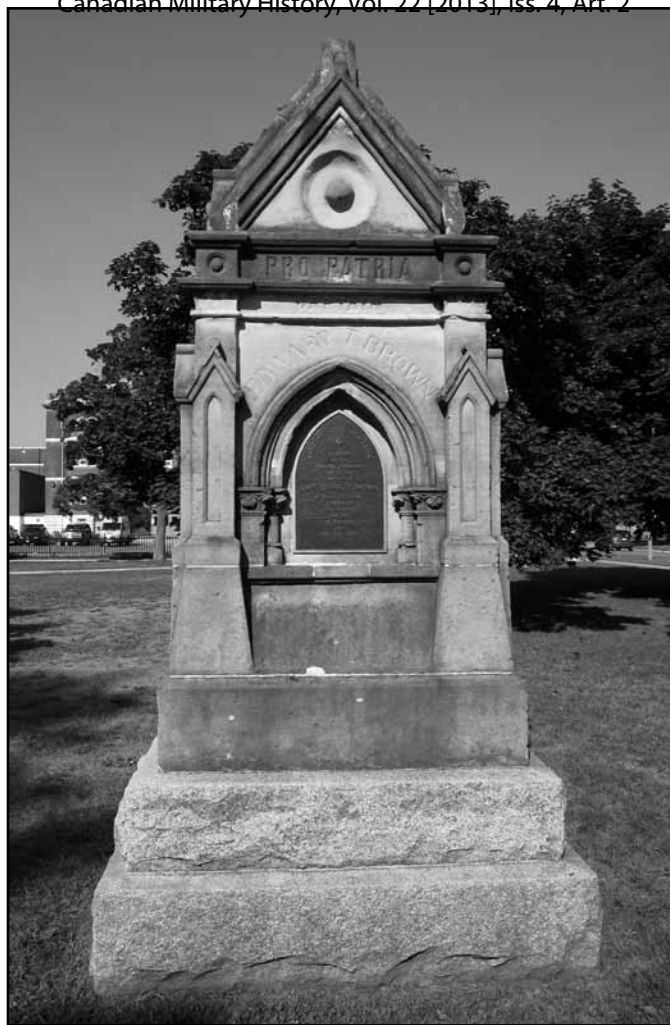


Photo by the author

**Peterborough's Brown family erected a memorial for their son, Edward Brown, after he died at the Battle of Batoche. They were able to place the memorial in the city's newly created Central Park in 1886 with the support of the community.**

### Victory for the Canadian Nation

The public spectacle that accompanied the unveiling of the Sharpshooters Monument on 1 November 1888 demonstrates both the willingness of English Canadians to participate in the British Empire and how closely intertwined English-Canadian culture was with British symbols and traditions. Both Governor General Frederick Stanley and General Frederick Middleton, the British officer who commanded the Canadian troops during the rebellion, gave speeches at the

unveiling ceremony. North-West Rebellion veterans attended the ceremony, and the Ottawa Sharpshooters paraded to Parliament Hill in full dress.<sup>22</sup> More strikingly, approximately 5,000 people attended the ceremony on Parliament Hill, suggesting that many without a direct connection to the North-West Rebellion also wanted to pay respects to their city's fallen.

A combination of military and political spectacle, the symbols on the Sharpshooters Monument and the content of the speeches at the ceremony all made it clear that the 5,000 attendees had gathered to celebrate a victory. Although historians who have recently assessed the battle have declared the engagement one of the most disastrous for Canada's militia units, this was not the perception in 1888.<sup>23</sup> The speeches focused on how the Ottawa Sharpshooters' service embodied "the Anglo-Saxon love of adventure" and demonstrated their

"loyal attachment to our Queen."<sup>24</sup> In a "welcome home" address presented to the Ottawa Sharpshooters, the Warden of Carleton County also stated that the group had "upheld the honour of the British Flag."<sup>25</sup>

English Canadians interpreted the Battle of Cut Knife Hill as a victory in part because Britain recognized Canadian achievements during the rebellion more generally. After Osgood and Rogers's death, a British officer visited the Ottawa Sharpshooters at their Battleford camp to express "the admirable conduct and gallant behavior of all ranks" during the Battle of Cut Knife

Hill. He further emphasized that their performance was "such as to fully convince an outsider that Canadians were quite capable of repeating the many heroic deeds of the British soldier."<sup>26</sup> At the unveiling ceremony, General Middleton thanked Ottawa's people for doing "their duty to their Queen" and it was further remarked that the British press commented positively on Canada's handling of the North-West Rebellion.<sup>27</sup>

British approval of Canadian action translated into a distinct sense of Canadian pride. English Canadians in Ottawa saw their victory as upholding Canadian law and tradition on their own, without Britain's help. Charles Winter, an Ottawa Sharpshooters veteran, wrote a memoir shortly after the Second World War in which he stated the North-West Rebellion was a founding moment for Canada; he believed the federal government had "insisted that the trouble in the West was a purely Canadian affair and they felt they should and could put their own house in order."<sup>28</sup> Similar sentiments are found in a May 1885 letter in the *Peterborough Review*, which argued that Edward Brown deserved his own war memorial since his death "brought honour upon his birthplace."<sup>29</sup> Eastern Ontario's participation in the North-West Rebellion represented a break with its British past and a shift towards the idea of a Canada worth recognizing independently from Britain.

While the North-West Rebellion as a "victory" for Canadian nationhood quickly became incorporated into the political discourse in the years following the rebellion, there is evidence to suggest that some English Canadians outside the political elite supported this view as well. Shortly after Edward's death, his sister Charlotte Brown penned a commemorative poem for her deceased brother. Titled "Tell My Mother That I died Like A Man



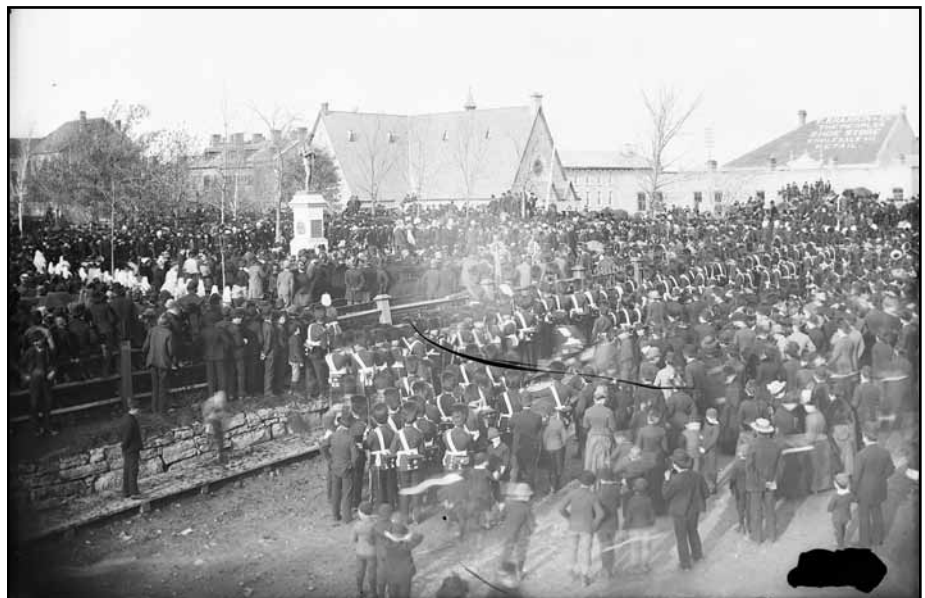
William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-027139

**Several prominent political figures attended the unveiling ceremony of the Sharpshooters Monument in November 1888. Great applause and cheer reportedly followed after Governor General Frederick Stanley officially unveiled the monument.**

On the field of Battle," Charlotte's poem gives voice to both her grief and her attempts to find meaning in Edward's death. Echoing the theme of victory so pronounced in the speeches about the Ottawa Sharpshooters, Charlotte's poem

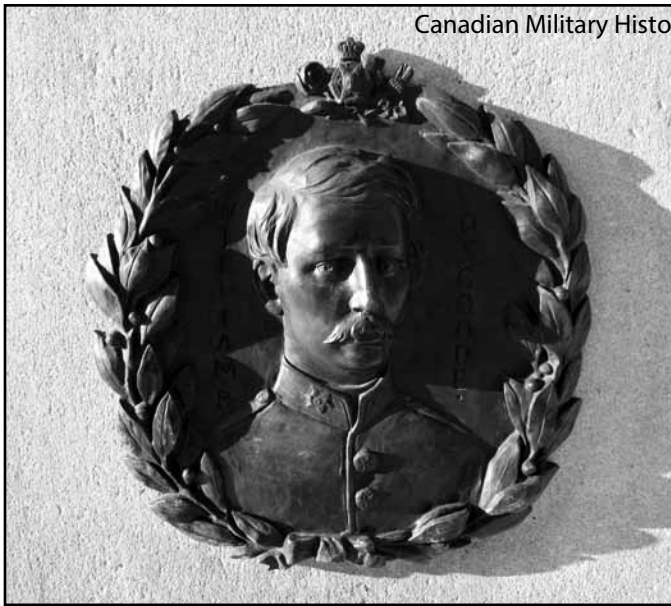
describes her "undying praise" for all the "Canadian hearts" who sacrificed their lives for their "country's sake."<sup>30</sup> Although struck by grief over the loss of Edward, Charlotte found meaning in his death by framing his sacrifice in terms of building a better Canada.

**Approximately 5,000 people attended the unveiling of the Sharpshooters Monument. Crowds gathered along Rideau Street and Parliament Hill to watch the unveiling.**



William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-012416





Photos by the author

**Above left: The Sharpshooters Monument also emphasized victory by containing a small portrait of Osgood circled by laurel leaves at the base of the monument. Above right: The sword and laurel leaves on St. Bartholomew's commemorative window suggests the congregation wanted Osgood to be remembered as a victorious warrior.**

An address presented to the Ottawa Sharpshooters in Carleton County suggested that Ottawa's participation in the North-West Rebellion "justly increases the self-respect and self-confidence of the Canadian people, and showed the world that whenever Canada has to defend her honour or her flag, her sons will not prove unworthy of their lineage."<sup>31</sup> This sentiment captures the duality that characterized English-Canada's understanding of its victory during the North-West Rebellion. Stressing both British and Canadian qualities was not a contradiction in the late 19th century, but was typical of English-Canadian nationalist rhetoric. Many English-Canadian leaders hoped to promote Canada as a type of "auxiliary kingdom" within the British Empire, and did so by expressing Canadian pride in an imperial context.<sup>32</sup> The commemoration of the North-West Rebellion in Eastern Ontario largely confirms the notion in the "new imperial history" that imperialism held considerable sway over culture in Britain's dominions. English Canadians in Eastern Ontario framed their experiences through the lens of "empire": the young

country had upheld British values and proved their British heritage by extending and upholding its laws. By doing so without Britain's direct assistance, English Canadians felt justified in putting forward the notion of independent status; this was a distinctly "Canadian" accomplishment. The imperialist and nationalist discourse embodied in commemoration of the North-West Rebellion ably demonstrates the efforts by English Canadians to participate and contribute to the idea of Empire, both Britain's and their own.

### Symbols, Space, and Story

Symbols and images used in commemoration of the rebellion in Eastern Ontario largely confirm the nation building discourse. English Canadians in Ottawa often incorporated laurel leaves, a Greek symbol traditionally used to denote victory, in their memorials. The two plaques located on the base of the Sharpshooters Monument each contain portraits of Osgood and Rogers circled with laurel leaves, suggesting that even though these men died in battle, they were

ultimately victorious. There is a similar message in St. Bartholomew's stained glass window for Osgood. On the far left panel there is a sword circled by laurel leaves, much like his portrait on the Sharpshooters Monument. English Canadians also used Canadian maple leaves to further emphasize the rebellion as a Canadian affair. The front panel on the Sharpshooters Monument is encircled with maple leaves, one of Canada's few distinct symbols in the 19th century that businesses and cultural groups commonly used to denote their Canadian identity.

The location where Newby and his associates placed the Sharpshooters Monument, adjacent to Parliament Hill, further reflected the English-Canadian view that the rebellion was fought to uphold law and contributed to the growth of the nation. During the unveiling ceremony, the minister of militia, Sir Adolphe-Philippe Caron, noted that the monument was close to a statue of Sir George-Étienne Cartier, and described how these two monuments celebrated Canada's national independence.<sup>33</sup>

English-Canadian nationalism easily transformed the rebellion into a narrative of "good" versus "evil."

The St. Bartholomew's stained glass window features Osgood in the main panel as Saint Michael, a warrior and guardian archangel. Saint Michael is generally described as wearing red, military dress, and most commonly seen in a triumphant pose with a demonic dragon or snake lying defeated beneath his feet.<sup>34</sup> Though the dragon motif is absent in St. Bartholomew's window, Osgood is shown in full military dress, complete with boots, cap, and sword, as well as a red halo encircling his head.<sup>35</sup> Surviving textual documents suggest that those involved with the North-West Rebellion similarly saw the conflict as a triumph of good over evil. An address presented from the Soldiers Aid Society, a local Ottawa organization that sent supplies to the Sharpshooters, told the surviving soldiers that they were "a noble body of men in suppressing wrong and being brave for right."<sup>36</sup> St. Bartholomew's utilized the mythology surrounding Saint Michael to express their view of Osgood as a warrior who ultimately achieved victory over the evils of the West.

Stained glass windows are traditionally designed around a particular religious text and often include quotations from scripture.<sup>37</sup> The congregation at St. Bartholomew's

drew inspiration from First Timothy in the New Testament and used passages from this text to highlight Saint Michael's dual nature as a warrior as well as guardian. Excerpts from First Timothy such as "fight the good fight" appear on the window. He is described as a "soldier of the cross" who, as a soldier of Christ, must "endure hardness as a good". This latter quotation is part of a larger passage that describes that there is no greater deed than to become a soldier fighting for Christ and Christianity. In the main panel, Osgood as Saint Michael stands before the Kingdom of Heaven with his sword drawn. Osgood's image was therefore tailored to fit into the larger narrative of "good" English-Canadian Christians protecting Canadian nationhood.

### Christian Grieving

English-Canadian patriotic sentiments were always accompanied by expressions of grief. The death of Osgood and Rogers could not be overlooked when celebrating the ideals for which they had died. When the Sharpshooters returned from the prairies, the welcoming address by Francis McDougal, Ottawa's mayor, lamented that "all who left our City in your ranks cannot hear our words of welcome." Although "Death has stopped the ears of Osgood and Rogers," their sacrifice was "worthy of eternal remembrance."<sup>38</sup> In a

certificate presented to a surviving member of the Ottawa Sharpshooters, the text praises the soldier for his excellent conduct while serving in the prairies, but mentions that he must not forget that "two of Ottawa's brave Sons nobly met their death."<sup>39</sup>

Grief features strongly in the Sharpshooters Monument, particularly in the pose and dress of the Guardsman. The Guardsman is depicted with his head bowed down in "mournful repose" with his hands clasped over the bottom of his rifle in "arms reversed," the traditional military stance for grieving.<sup>40</sup> The Guardsman is shown in the ceremonial dress of a rifleman, including a double-breasted jacket and bearskin hat. The Ottawa Sharpshooters did not wear this uniform during the rebellion; it was reserved for important public events, including funeral services. It is the latter the Guardsman is dressed for, a lasting symbol of a city's respect and mourning for the two lives lost during the North-West Rebellion.

Osgood and Rogers's sacrifice was often interpreted in a Christian context to echo the suffering and martyrdom of Christ. This theme is perhaps most present in St. Bartholomew's stained glass window for Osgood, which features a fleur-de-lis as the background



**Left: The Sharpshooters Monument's figurine, the Guardsman, was sculpted in the likeness of John Rogers. He is shown wearing the formal attire the Ottawa Sharpshooters would have worn at funeral services.**

**Right: The main panel of St. Bartholomew's stained glass window depicts Osgood as Saint Michael, a Christian warrior ready to defend the Kingdom of Heaven with his sword.**







**Above left: The Brown Memorial in Peterborough combined the styles of both a Greek mausoleum as well as a gothic church.**

**Below left: One of the top panels of St. Bartholomew's stained glass window portrays an angel surrounded by symbols of the prairies. These symbols distinguished the North-West Rebellion from other imperial conflicts.**



for most of the six panels. The fleur-de-lis is traditionally used in Anglican iconography to represent Christ's sacrifice on the crucifix. An address presented to the returning Sharpshooters in Carleton County describes Osgood and Rogers as "martyred heroes" who "died a glorious death, defending the honour of their country."<sup>41</sup>

Whereas Osgood and Rogers's bodies were returned to Ottawa, Edward Brown's body was never recovered. An editorial published in the *Peterborough Review* explained

that this fact "must be a terrible blow to [Edward's family] that they cannot even see his grave."<sup>42</sup> The theme of distance from Edward's body is featured prominently in Charlotte's commemorative poem. Her poem laments that Brown is buried "Not in the quiet churchyard/Near those who loved them best/But by the wild Saskatchewan."<sup>43</sup> The Brown family's desire to give Edward a traditional funeral and burial explains why the final memorial looks similar to a Greek mausoleum and incorporates elements of gothic design contained in many 19th century churches. The mausoleum design is a fitting style of tomb given his family's elite status in Peterborough as one of the county's founding families. Furthermore, the gothic design denotes the religious significance the family placed on his death. In her commemorative poem, Charlotte describes the North-West Rebellion as a holy cause.<sup>44</sup> The religious and elite background of the Brown family coupled with the overwhelming desire to visit his grave helps explain why the Brown Memorial was designed to represent a tombstone in contrast to the military motifs of the Sharpshooters Monument and the mythologizing of Osgood in St. Bartholomew's commemorative window.

### Images of the West

English Canadians frequently incorporated symbols of the Canadian prairies into their commemorative acts in order to distinguish their participation in

the North-West Rebellion from previous conflicts. Symbols of the prairies feature prominently in the St. Bartholomew's stained glass window, particularly in the image of an angel holding a bushel of wheat in one hand and a sickle in the other. Floating directly above the angel's head is a symbol of the "north star", similar to the symbol used to denote the direction "North" on compasses and maps.

The landscape of the prairies looms large in both Todd and Winter's recollections of their time out west. Prairie wildlife impressed Todd, a self-proclaimed "city man," as he hunted the "startled goose [and] wild fowl" during his time off-duty. He recalled bathing in alkali ponds, which offered a cool break after a day's marching.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the entire march across the prairies the Ottawa Sharpshooters "marveled" at signs of the buffalo, and found traces of their "skulls and bones [that] whitened the landscape in every direction."<sup>46</sup> Charlotte's poem also described "wild Saskatchewan" with "the music of the/Rivers swaying tide" and "the wild flowers that grow on every side" of Edward's prairie grave.<sup>47</sup> Images of the untamed prairie wilderness shaped English-Canada's understanding of the "never-to-be-forgotten and much prized adventure," which Todd viewed as awakening in him a "call of the wild" previously unfelt.<sup>48</sup>

Yet the emphasis on the west as an "untamed" area led English Canadians in Eastern Ontario to create unflattering and often racist descriptions of "uncivilized" Aboriginals. Encounters with the Cree feature prominently in Winter's recollection and seem to have captured the imaginations of the Ottawa Sharpshooters more generally. After meeting a Cree scout for the first time, Winter notes that "the men were intensely interested – it seemed all in keeping up with their boyish readings of Fenimore

Cooper and other Indian writers from former days."<sup>49</sup> Drawing on their romanticized notions of Aboriginals, English Canadians continued to incorporate Cree imagery into their commemorative acts. The best illustration of this fascination with Cree culture is a certificate presented to one of the Ottawa Sharpshooters, Hamilton Gray, in August 1885 for his excellent conduct during the rebellion. The certificate features five small illustrations that surround the text; four of them depict Cree life on the prairies, and the fifth is a view of Parliament Hill. Of particular note are the two illustrations portraying a teepee with a small campfire burning outside and another showing a frowning Cree brave with poor skin covered only by a blanket.<sup>50</sup> The half-naked Cree contrasts with illustrations of English-Canadian militiamen. The latter are standing straight at attention, weapons drawn and in perfect military uniform, the embodiment of "proper civilization."<sup>51</sup>

R.S. Cassels, a member of the Queen's Own Rifles who fought alongside the Ottawa Sharpshooters, describes how after the Battle of Cut Knife Hill he approached the bodies of two dead Cree. They "had nothing on but a shirt and leggings and a blanket over the shoulder. The hair long and plaited and the faces and bodies painted – most ferocious looking wretches."<sup>52</sup> Cassels's description matches the illustration on Gray's certificate, suggesting that dress was one way that English-Canadians saw Aboriginals as "different" and, by consequence, less civilized. This contrast was furthermore emphasized in speeches at the Sharpshooters Monument's unveiling, which portrayed Aboriginals as "different" while at the same time paid tribute

to the "upstanding citizens" of Ottawa.<sup>53</sup>

The depiction of Aboriginals as "different" and "uncivilized" assisted in the formation of the broader narrative of the North-West Rebellion as a story of good English-Canadian Christians versus bad, unlawful Aboriginals. The racist depictions of Aboriginals in English Canadian ephemera and recollections demonstrate the extremely limited opportunity Aboriginals had to voice their own memories of the conflict. English Canadians did not, and were

unwilling to, recognize Aboriginal perspectives on their forcible displacement by encroaching white settlers. The absence of Aboriginal voices in English-Canadian memories mirrors their lack of legal or even social authority within the Canadian state.<sup>54</sup> As Aboriginals were unable to shape the public memory of the North-West Rebellion, their memories of the conflict were instead discussed privately.<sup>55</sup> The process of subjugation and colonization therefore did not stop on the 1885 battlefields, but continued in the



William James Topley / Library and Archives Canada / PA-027447

**The Ottawa Sharpshooters Monument, photographed shortly after the unveiling ceremony.**

exclusionary English-Canadian memory of the North-West Rebellion.

### An Idealized Understanding

By defining themselves as “good” in opposition to the “bad” Aboriginals, English Canadians presented an idealized version of the North-West Rebellion that did not always accurately reflect the experiences of the Ottawa Sharpshooters. While the Guardsman on the Sharpshooters’ Monument is meant to convey Rogers’s likeness, there is a stark disconnect between how the Guardsman is portrayed and the reality of Rogers’s death and funeral. Todd recorded in his diary that he attended Rogers’s funeral in Battleford and noticed his glengarry, a Scottish styled military cap, on top of his coffin. Upon further examination, Todd found that the “cap was saturated with blood” from “where the bullet came through at the top.” Due to the bloody, disfiguring nature of Rogers’s fatal wound, Todd ultimately chose to bury the cap with Rogers rather “than return[ing] it to his relations” in Ottawa.<sup>56</sup> Osgood’s death was just as gruesome. In the hasty retreat from Cut Knife Hill, the Ottawa Sharpshooters did not have time to locate and retrieve Osgood’s body. A month later, a search party went looking for his corpse and found it mutilated and desecrated.<sup>57</sup>

While the Guardsman accurately depicts the balance of nationalism and mourning felt by English Canadians after the North-West Rebellion, it is nonetheless an idealized portrayal of events. The brutalities of Rogers’s and Osgood’s deaths are not reflected by the Sharpshooters Monument. The Guardsman wears a formal bearskin cap instead of Rogers’s blood-soaked glengarry. Osgood’s mutilated remains are reconfigured as Saint Michael. The Guardsman, forever grieving in his ceremonial dress, evokes a funeral

for Osgood and Rogers that was not possible due to the circumstances of their deaths. Similarly, the Brown Memorial in Peterborough, with its Greek mausoleum design, provided Edward’s family with a gravestone his actual burial place would never have.

The celebration of sacrifice in the cause of nationhood and empire in Eastern Ontario glossed over not only the brutality of the battlefield, but also widening divisions within the country. The execution and imprisonment of Métis and Aboriginal leaders further alienated these groups, and French-Canadians tended to sympathize with Louis Riel, as they were also Catholic and spoke French. For many French-Canadians, Riel’s execution in November 1885 provided yet another example of English-Canadian animosity against French culture.<sup>58</sup>

Only the militia minister, Sir Adolphe-Philippe Caron, mentioned the ethnic tensions heightened as a result of the North-West Rebellion at the Sharpshooters Monument’s unveiling. A bilingual conservative from Quebec, Caron urged that the memory of Osgood and Rogers’s sacrifice should bring French and English together. He described how French-Canadians had “contributed their share to the building up of this monument” through fundraising alongside their English-Canadian neighbours in Ottawa. To Caron, the joint efforts of English and French-Canadians showed that “these two people, no longer fighting against each other” would work “together under the Union Jack in unanimity... in efforts to make this a happy, contented, rich and prosperous country.” Though it is impossible to tell if the 5,000 attendees believed Caron, cheering and applause reportedly followed his statements.<sup>59</sup> The contentious issues created by the North-West Rebellion were conveniently erased and downplayed

to ensure that Osgood, Rogers, and Brown would all be, in Charlotte Brown’s words, “enshrined in golden memories.”<sup>60</sup>

### Impact of the First World War

Commemorative activity surrounding the North-West Rebellion largely prefigured English-Canadian commemoration of the Boer War and First World War. Montreal’s Boer War Memorial was completed in 1907 and, much like the Sharpshooters Monument, was unveiled by the governor general. The spectacle emphasized English Canada’s pride in being part of both the British Empire as well as a young but maturing nation. Tellingly, the monument was titled “Anglo-Saxon” and won over the rival design, named “Peace with Honour.”<sup>61</sup>

Patriotic discourse permeated in other Boer War memorials, particularly in London, Ontario. Memorial organization had the phrase “Pro Patria” inscribed on the top of their Boer War memorial. The monument depicts the figure of Britannia presenting a Canadian soldier with the laurel leaves of victory. The Boer War Memorial in Ottawa likewise contains laurel leaves, in this case encircling the honour roll of those who gave their lives. English Canadians took a leading role in initiating and funding these commemorative projects. French-Canadians had a very small role in these public commemorations, similar to the exclusion of Aboriginal participants in North-West Rebellion commemorative acts. By excluding

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**The Brooding Soldier, erected in 1923 at St. Julien, commemorates Canadian participation at the 2nd Battle of Ypres. It depicts a Canadian soldier in the same mournful pose as the Sharpshooters Monument from 1888.**

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any opposing opinions, English Canadians were able to present an idealized past.<sup>62</sup>

Commemoration of the First World War similarly idealized the past.<sup>63</sup> Historian Jonathan Vance demonstrates how, through acts of commemoration, Canadians in the interwar years spread the notion that the First World War was a war “worth fighting,” and a “good” war that saved civilization from German barbarism.<sup>64</sup> As this study has suggested, English Canadians similarly used commemorative acts to portray their sacrifices in the North-West Rebellion as “good,” Christian, in contrast to the “uncivilized” Aboriginal groups that rebelled.

A commonality exists not only between English-Canada’s understanding and interpretation of the North-West Rebellion and the First World War, but also in the symbols and methods it used to commemorate these events. In 1923, Frederick Chapman Clemesha’s memorial “The Brooding Soldier” was unveiled at St. Julien, Belgium, to commemorate Canada’s contribution to the 2nd Battle of Ypres. The memorial depicts a soldier with his head bowed and “arms reversed,” much like the grieving pose of the Guardsman in Ottawa. The same figure of a mourning soldier can be found on war memorials in other Canadian communities, such as those in Mount Brydges and Burlington, Ontario. With their heads bowed down and hands clasped over their grounded rifles, the only distinction between the three figures are the type of military uniforms worn, reflecting their associations with different conflicts and different time periods.

Stained glass windows remained a popular form of commemoration after the First World War. Much like St. Bartholomew’s depiction of Osgood, First World War stained glass windows most often portrayed their fallen soldiers as knights, frequently

using the image of the warrior Saint Michael.<sup>65</sup> Many memorial windows after the First World War depict Christ alongside their fallen soldiers or portray their soldiers as having Christ-like attributes.<sup>66</sup> While St. Bartholomew’s window is subtler, the accompanying text and fleur-de-lis reinforce the link between Osgood and Christ, and therefore bears strong similarities to the memorial windows of the First World War.

In 1911, the city of Ottawa relocated the Sharpshooters Monument to Ottawa’s city hall in order to make space for the construction of the Chateau Laurier.<sup>67</sup> Even with its relocation, the placement of the memorial suggests the ideas of civic duty and nationhood remained over two decades after its initial erection. However, when Canada’s national memorial for the First World War was erected and unveiled in 1939, it was placed right across the street from the place the Sharpshooters Monument once occupied. While Ottawa Sharpshooters veterans used to lay wreaths at the base of the monument every 2 May in remembrance of the Battle of Cut Knife Hill, in 1939 Canadians started the tradition of laying wreaths at the base of the national war memorial every 11 November.<sup>68</sup> The Brown Memorial in Peterborough underwent a similar transformation. In 1929, it was moved from its original position in Central Park in order to make room for Peterborough’s new First World War memorial. Though the Brown Memorial remained in Central Park, a war memorial for another generation of Peterborough’s war dead now stood at the focal point of the park. These instances suggest once again that English Canadians understood the conflicts in a similar light.

Common elements in commemorations of the North-West Rebellion and the First World War can be attributed to the large role English Canadians played in

defining the public memory of these conflicts. In each instance, Aboriginal perspectives and memories were not embraced in Canada’s dominant public memory. When referenced at all, English Canadians portrayed Aboriginal soldiers in the First World War as strong, silent, and tough, though uneducated.<sup>69</sup> These English-Canadian stereotypes did little to capture the actual experience of Aboriginal soldiers and their memories of divided communities, struggles for enfranchisement, and attempts to negotiate assimilationist policy.<sup>70</sup> Much like Aboriginal participants in the North-West Rebellion, their experiences did not form part of the dominant public memory in Canada.

The First World War remains unique in that it ushered in a period of unprecedented commemoration in terms of size, scope, and sheer numbers. Yet, a comparison between Eastern Ontario’s commemoration of the North-West Rebellion and English-Canada’s commemoration of the First World War suggests that the symbols and messages conveyed with these war memorials were not unique to either conflict. English Canadians tapped into a pre-existing discourse already formed in part by the North-West Rebellion to commemorate the First World War and remember another generation of war dead.

## Conclusion

Historian Carl Berger wrote that English-Canadian elites in the late 19th century did not view Confederation as a final or conclusive act, but rather saw it as a framework for the construction of a new nation within the British Empire.<sup>71</sup> Commemorative acts by English Canadians in Eastern Ontario showed their conviction that the country’s achievements in the North-West Rebellion gave

substance to Confederation, both in building the new nation and strengthening the empire. Memory of the rebellion and those who died were used to enhance a sense of a "Canadian" identity that was expressed through the lens of Eastern Ontario's British and Christian culture. The original location of the Sharpshooters Monument on Parliament Hill clearly signaled the conviction that English Canadian sacrifice in the rebellion helped build and protect the Canadian state.

The subsequent re-location of the Sharpshooters Monument and the Brown Memorial reflects the ways in which Canada's memory of the two world wars eclipsed that of the North-West Rebellion. Nevertheless, English-Canadians commemorated and understood the North-West Rebellion and the First World War in similar terms and relied upon an established set of symbols to describe and interpret their wartime experiences. Further still, the exclusion of Aboriginal participation and perspective in the commemoration of the rebellion foreshadowed their exclusion from the dominant collective memory of Canada's First World War.

Studying Eastern Ontario's commemoration of the North-West Rebellion suggests there was an English-Canadian cultural response to war that viewed participation as inherently "good," Christian, and as a force that defined Canada as a nation. Writing after the Second World War, Winter noted that the North-West Rebellion and its participants no longer occupied a place of prominence within the public imagination. He believed that in contrast to the two world wars, the Ottawa Sharpshooters "will appear small and of only local significance, but at the time, they were of tremendous importance to our Canadian Dominion."<sup>72</sup> More than that, as the present article has

argued, commemoration of the rebellion articulated strong threads in English Canadian culture that would shape responses to war in the twentieth century.

## Notes

1. The term "North-West Resistance" is currently preferred by Aboriginal groups and has received support from Parks Canada and Saskatchewan's provincial government. However, the term "rebellion" will be used hereafter in this paper as it was the name most often used by the conflict's English-Canadian participants in the commemorative acts discussed in this paper.
2. Library and Archives Canada [LAC], Alfred Hamlyn Todd fonds [ATF], MG29 E41, North West Rebellion 1885: Recollections and Reflections, p.23.
3. Ottawa Sharpshooters veteran Charles Winter expresses these thoughts in his memoirs. See LAC, Charles Winter fonds [CWF], MG30 E364, file 3, North West Rebellion Memoirs, p.12.
4. See for example Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Jonathan F. Vance, "An Open Door to a Better Future: The Memory of Canada's Second World War," in Geoffrey Hayes, Mike Bechthold, and Matt Symes, eds., *Canada and the Second World War: Essays in Honour of Terry Copp* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012); Alan Young, "'We throw the torch': Canadian Memorials of the Great War and the Myth of Heroic Sacrifice," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 24 (1989-90); Robert Shipley, *To Mark Our Place: A History of Canadian War Memorials* (Toronto: NC Press, 1987). For local and regional studies see Marilyn Baker, "To Honor and Remember: Remembrances of the Great War: The Next-of-Kin Monument in Winnipeg," *Manitoba History* 2 (1981); P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "War, Memory, and the Newfoundland Regiment at Gallipoli," *Newfoundland Studies* 15 (Fall 1999).
5. Jonathan F. Vance, "Documents in Bronze and Stone: Memorials and Monuments as Historical Sources," in Jeff Keshen and Sylvie Perrier, eds., *Building New Bridges: Sources, Methods, and Interdisciplinarity* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2005), p.185; Pierre Nora, "Between History and Memory: Les lieux de memoire," *Representations* 26 (1989).
6. Although the narrative of the North-West Rebellion is similar, the conclusions historians draw from these events vary. For a modern political and military history of the North-West Rebellion see Bob Beal and Rod Macleod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1994), p.14. For an Aboriginal perspective of the rebellion see Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House Publishers, 1997), p.21. Sarah Carter offers a useful overview of the historiography of the North-West Rebellion in Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers in Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), ch.8.
7. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, pp.234-237; Beal and Macleod, *Prairie Fire*, pp.334-343.
8. Chris Johnson, "Riel in Canadian Drama, 1885-1985," in Ramon Hathorn and Patrick Holland, eds., *Images of Louis Riel in Canadian Culture* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992); Monique Dumontet, "Controversy in the Commemoration of Louis Riel," in D.M.R. Bentley, ed., *Mnemographia Canadensis* (London, ON: Canadian Poetry Press, 1999); Albert Braz, *The False Traitor: Louis Riel in Canadian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).
9. Phillip Buckner provides a useful introduction to the new imperial history and its significance to Canada in Phillip Buckner ed., *Canada and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.vii-viii.
10. Buckner, ed., *Canada and the British Empire*, 14. For an introduction on how the new imperial history has shaped British historiography see Kathleen Wilson, "Introduction: Histories, Empires, Modernities," in Kathleen Wilson, ed., *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity, and Modernity in Britain and the Empire, 1660-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). In the Canadian context, both Sarah Carter and Adele Perry make significant contributions to the new imperial history in Canada in their essays on race and gender in Buckner's edited collection. In retrospect, Carl Berger's scholarship can also be interpreted as exploring the new imperial history. See Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).
11. Jonathan Vance used a similar method to evaluate Canada's memory of the First World War and has proved useful in framing this study. See Vance, *Death So Noble*, pp.4-5.
12. Todd's diary is published in a collection of biographical information on the Ottawa Sharpshooters compiled by John Reid. See Alfred Hamlyn Todd, "Diary," in John D. Reid, ed., *The Ottawa Sharpshooters* (Ottawa: British Isles Family Historical Society of Greater Ottawa, 2005), 29 March 1885.
13. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, pp.143.
14. For biographical information on Osgood and Rogers see Reid, *The Ottawa Sharpshooters*, pp.90-91, 94-96.



15. Biographical information on Edward Brown has been compiled from the Peterborough Museum and Archives [PMA], *The Brown Memorial Rededication Ceremony* brochure, p.5.
16. Trinity's stained glass window was destroyed in a fire in 1947. Trinity's window will therefore not be featured as prominently in this paper as St. Bartholomew's, as only a small black and white photograph of poor quality survives. See Reid, p.96.
17. In 1927 the name of the park changed to its current name, Confederation Park.
18. PMA, *The Brown Memorial Rededication Ceremony* brochure, p.7.
19. The entrance to Major Hill's Park in 1888 is now where the Chateau Laurier is located, on the corner of Rideau Street and Sussex Drive. Reid, p.29.
20. Reid, p.29.
21. The spelling of Osgood's name is inconsistent, though it appears most often without the "e".
22. LAC, *Ceremony of Unveiling A Bronze Statue Erected on Major's Hill Park, Ottawa To the Memory Ptes. Osgood and Rogers, of the Guards Company of Sharpshooters, who were killed in the North-West Rebellion of 1885* (hereafter Unveiling Brochure) (Ottawa: W.T, Mason, 1889), pp.2-3.
23. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*, pp.143-144.
24. LAC, Unveiling Brochure, pp.20, 10.
25. City of Ottawa Archives [COA], Historical Society of Ottawa fonds [HSO], MG110, AMIL 166, "Certification of Appreciation to Captain Todd, Officers and Men of the Ottawa Sharpshooters from Carleton County."
26. Todd Diary, 3 May 1885.
27. LAC, Unveiling Brochure, pp.35, 26.
28. LAC, CWF, MG30 E364, file 3, North West Rebellion Memoirs, pp.13.
29. "Our Peterborough Hero," *Peterborough Review*, 19 May 1885.
30. PMA, Charlotte Brown, "Tell My Mother That I died Like A Man On the field of Battle," 15 July 1885.
31. COA, HSO MG110, "Certification of Appreciation...from Carleton County."
32. Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power*, p.4.
33. LAC, Unveiling Brochure, pp.30-32.
34. Richard F. Johnson, *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend* (New York: The Boydell Press, 2005), pp.9, 21.
35. Johnson, *Saint Michael the Archangel in Medieval English Legend*, p.140.
36. COA, HSO MG110, AMIL 170, "Certificate of Appreciation to Captain Todd, Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men of the Ottawa Sharpshooters from the Soldiers Aid Society."
37. Vance, "Sacrifice in Stained Glass," p.18.
38. COA, HSO MG110, AMIL 006, "Address of Ottawa City Council to the Ottawa Sharpshooters."
39. COA, HSO MG110, AMIL 013, "Military Testimonial to H. Hamilton D. Gray."
40. LAC, Unveiling Brochure, p.5.
41. COA, HSO MG110, "Certification of Appreciation...from Carleton County."
42. "Our Peterborough Hero," *Peterborough Review*, 19 May 1885.
43. PMA, Charlotte Brown, "Tell My Mother That I died Like A Man On the field of Battle," 15 July 1885.
44. PMA, Charlotte Brown, "Tell My Mother That I died Like A Man On the field of Battle," 15 July 1885.
45. LAC, ATF, MG29 E41, Recollections and Reflections, p.8.
46. LAC, CWF, MG30 E364, file 3, North West Rebellion Memoirs, p.5.
47. PMA, Charlotte Brown, "Tell My Mother That I died Like A Man On the field of Battle," 15 July 1885.
48. LAC, CWF, MG30 E364, file 3 North West Rebellion Memoirs, p.12; LAC, ATF, MG29 E41, Recollections and Reflections, p.8.
49. LAC, CWF, MG30 E364, file 3, North West Rebellion Memoirs, p.7.
50. The image of a "satanic" or "savage Indian" was a common theme in many depictions of Aboriginals in English-Canadian literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. See Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1993), p.76; Sarah Carter, "The Exploitation and Narration of Captivity of Theresa Delaney and Theresa Gowanlock, 1885," in Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat, ed. *Making Western Canada: Essays on European Colonization and Settlement* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), p.32.
51. COA, HSO MG110, AMIL 013, "Military Testimonial to H. Hamilton D. Gray."
52. LAC, Richard Scougall Cassels fonds [RCF], MG29-E43, Diary of Lieut. R.S. Cassels: North-West Field Force 1885, p.34.
53. See Caron's speech in particular. LAC, Unveiling Brochure, 24-30.
54. Stonechild and Waiser, *Loyal till Death*; Sarah Carter, "Aboriginal People of Canada and the British Empire," in Phillip Buckner, ed., *Canada the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 216-217.
55. Maria Campbell's 1973 memoir provides powerful examples of how Métis memories of the North-West Resistance diverged from the more popular English Canadian memory of the conflict. Her memoir also demonstrates that this memory was discussed privately well into the 20th century. See Maria Campbell, *Halfbreed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1973), pp.8-11, 15, 24.
56. Todd Diary, 4 May 1885.
57. Reid, p.90.
58. A.I. Silver, *The French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 1864-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), p.156, chapter 8 more generally.
59. LAC, Unveiling Brochure, pp.24, 29.
60. PMA, Charlotte Brown, "Tell My Mother That I died Like A Man On the field of Battle," 15 July 1885.
61. Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), pp.75-80.
62. Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, pp.80, 170.
63. Vance, *Death So Noble*, pp.109, 135.
64. Vance, *Death So Noble*, pp.12-13.
65. Vance, "Sacrifice in Stained Glass," p.20.
66. Vance, "Sacrifice in Stained Glass," pp.20-21; Vance, *Death So Noble*, p.36.
67. Reid, pp.29-30.
68. LAC, ATF, MG29 E41, Recollections and Reflections, p.21.
69. Vance, *Death So Noble*, pp.245-250.
70. For Aboriginal experiences during the First World War see for example P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Katharine McGowan, "Indigenous Nationalisms and the Great War: Enlisting the Six Nations in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), 1914-17," in P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Craig Mantle, eds., *Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Military: Historical Perspectives* (Kingston: CDA Press, 2007); Katherine McGowan, "'In the Interest of the Indians': The Department of Indian Affairs, Charles Cooke, and the Recruitment of Native Men in Southern Ontario for the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1916," *Ontario History* 102 (2010); Timothy C. Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012).
71. Berger, p.4.
72. LAC, CWF, MG30 E364, file 3, North West Rebellion Memoirs, p.12.

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