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# Failure to Launch

## Canadian Federal Government Attempts at Memorialising the Second World War, 1945-1967

THOMAS M. LITTLEWOOD

*Abstract: Between the end of the Second World War and the mid-1960s, the Canadian federal government made several attempts to commemorate and memorialise those who died during the war. Despite strong government support and advocacy from the Royal Canadian Legion, the Canadian population did not believe that building a new memorial was a wise expenditure of taxpayer money. This article uses newspaper records, The Legionary and government documents to examine how successive federal governments tried and failed to commemorate and memorialise the Second World War with a national war memorial. This article also problematises the current understanding of how the Second World War has been remembered in Canada. The current historiographical understanding of Canadian Second World War memory suggests that the country has done a poor job commemorating the dead of that war. However, the lack of traditional memorials and monuments does not necessarily indicate that the Second World War has gone unremembered, but that conceptualisations of memory need to be expanded to take stock of the commemorative landscape.*

ON 22 AUGUST 1945, urban planner Jacques Gréber received a telegram from Alphonse Fournier, the Minister of Public Works in William Lyon Mackenzie King's government, asking Gréber to redesign the city of Ottawa. The telegram read, in part:

IN LIEU OF ANY OTHER MEMORIAL OF THE WAR JUST  
ENDED THE GOVERNMENT HAS APPROVED FURTHER

DEVELOPMENT OF CANADA'S NATIONAL CAPITAL AND ITS ENVIRONMENT ON BOTH SIDES OF THE OTTAWA RIVER<sup>1</sup>

The intent behind the urban plan was explicit: King wanted Canada's capital to be transformed into a memorial to the Second World War. Gréber set to work and was given a wide mandate, a large budget and significant personnel resources to draft a plan for the future of the capital region. Published in 1950, Gréber's plan was a comprehensive redesign of the national capital region which sought to improve public transportation, greenspace and traffic problems. He wanted Canada's capital to rival international capitals like Washington D.C., London and Paris.<sup>2</sup>

To make the connection between the plan's memorial purpose and commemoration of Canada's role in the Second World War, Gréber suggested a Vimy-like memorial on the Gatineau Hills overlooking Parliament. King loved the idea and wanted Gréber to get started on the memorial before the report was even published.<sup>3</sup> However, the memorial never broke ground, despite many of Gréber's urban development proposals (such as greenspace, transit and roadways) being implemented.<sup>4</sup> The Gatineau Hills memorial was but one of several memorial proposals in the 1950s and 1960s that never materialised. Each one of these proposed memorialisations shows that Canadian governments, both Liberal and Conservative, considered commemorating the Second World War an important way by which they could frame and solidify Canadian postwar identity. While governments supported these memorials, the public, generally, did not, which meant that no traditional Second World War memorial was ever built. However, attempts by different federal governments to memorialise the Second World War were a means to promote national identity in a time that was crucial to Canadian nation building. Canadians did remember the Second World War, but commemoration manifested in a more abstract way. Newspaper articles, documents

<sup>1</sup> Jacques Gréber, *Plan for the National Capital General Report* (Ottawa: National Capital Planning Service, 1950), 1.

<sup>2</sup> David Gordon, "Weaving a Modern Plan for Canada's Capital: Jacques Gréber and the 1950 Plan for the National Capital Region," *Urban History Review* 29, 2 (March 2001): 45.

<sup>3</sup> William Lyon Mackenzie King Diaries [WLMK Diaries], 19 March 1948, 3-4, Library and Archives Canada [LAC].

<sup>4</sup> Gréber, *Plan for the National Capital General Report*.

from the Royal Canadian Legion and letters to political officials all suggest that Canadians remembered the Second World War through the lens of the First and that the absence of a standalone memorial did not indicate a lack of commemoration of the past.

Much of the historiographical understanding of commemoration of warfare is concentrated on the First World War. Initiated in 1975 by Paul Fussell's book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, the historiography of First World War memory focuses on the war's relationship to modernity. In the Canadian context, the debate about the legacy of the First World War has focused on whether Canada emerged out of the war as a 'new,' united country. Jonathan F. Vance shows that Canadian communities chose to memorialise the war in a chiefly local fashion, using victorious and triumphant imagery and statuary which breathed life into the country and gave "birth to a national consciousness that would carry the country to the heights of achievement."<sup>5</sup> First World War memorials portrayed the nationalist myth of heroic sacrifice, often symbolised in depictions of crucifixion motifs and crosses of sacrifice.<sup>6</sup> The nationalist myth has been questioned by historians such as Denise Thomson, Alan Gordon and Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, who all argue that there is much more room for nuance in the discussion of nationalist commemoration.<sup>7</sup>

Though commemoration of the Second World War is far less well-understood, a review of what literature exists shows that the themes that dominate the discussions of the memory of the First World War

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 11. See also Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); and Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Alan R. Young, "'We Throw the Torch': Canadian Memorials of the Great War and the Mythology of Heroic Sacrifice," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 24, 4 (Winter 1989): 18.

<sup>7</sup> Denise Thomson, "National Sorrow, National Pride: Commemoration of War in Canada, 1918-1945," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 30, 4 (Winter 1995-96): 5; Alan Gordon, "Lest We Forget: Two Solitudes in War and Memory," in *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 159-73; and Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *The Vimy Trap: Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2017).

were not present after 1945.<sup>8</sup> For example, by the end of the Second World War there could be no doubt that Canada had been thrust into the modern world. One aspect of the historiography of war commemoration, however, does remain constant: national identities, contexts, literatures and experiences of war were crucial to how Canadians remembered past conflicts. Politicians and the political elite used wars to promote national ideals and unifying principles and those ideals and principles shaped the practice of commemoration. Furthermore, national contexts shaped the nature of the scholarship in each nation.

In 2020, noted Canadian historian Tim Cook published *The Fight for History* in which he recounts some of the various ways Canadians have and have not remembered the Second World War. It is the only book-length consideration of Second World War commemoration in Canada. His chief argument is that, though Canadians made a significant contribution to the Allied victory in the Second World War, the “war faded rapidly from social memory” after the conflict’s end.<sup>9</sup> No war memorial to the Second World War was ever built, few major films or television series were created and stories of the First World War dominated the narratives of Canada’s wartime experience. Critical to Cook’s argument is that the general public did not know what its fellow Canadians did during the war, despite a tenth of the country’s population having served in uniform during between 1939 and 1945.<sup>10</sup> This article suggests that it is

<sup>8</sup> Tim Cook, *The Fight for History: 75 Years of Forgetting, Remembering, and Remaking Canada’s Second World War* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2020); Malcolm Ferguson, “Canada’s Response: The Making and Remaking of the National War Memorial” (MA Thesis, Carleton University, 2012); Alan Gordon, “Lest We Forget: Two Solitudes in War and Memory,” in *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2007), 159–73; Keir Reeves et al., eds., *Battlefield Events: Landscape, Commemoration and Heritage* (Oxford: Routledge, 2016); Matt Symes, “The Personality of Memory: The Process of Informal Commemoration in Normandy,” in *Canada and the Second World War: Essays in Honour of Terry Copp*, ed. Geoffrey Hayes, Michael Bechthold and Matt Symes (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 443–60; Jonathan F. Vance, “An Open Door to a Better Future: The Memory of Canada’s Second World War,” in *Canada and the Second World War: Essays in Honour of Terry Copp*, ed. Geoffrey Hayes, Mike Bechthold and Matt Symes (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 461–79.

<sup>9</sup> Cook, *The Fight for History*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Cook, *The Fight for History*, 3–4.

unnecessary to know exactly what happened during a war to be able to commemorate it. Regardless if one knew the details or even the broad strokes of what happened during the Second World War, standing in silence at cenotaph ceremonies and keeping the memories of those who died during the war was commemoration. While there was no national war memorial to the Second World War, the conflict featured prominently in postwar Remembrance Day ceremonies and it is clear that Canadians did remember service members' efforts and sacrifices over the four and a half years of the war. For example, battles of the Second World War were prominent in newspaper coverage of Remembrance Day ceremonies across the country in the years following the war.<sup>11</sup>

Cook argues that postwar Canadians did not know about the country's war efforts and what Canadian service members did overseas. He suggests that the general Canadian population had a better understanding of what happened during the First World War. Indeed, Vimy was commemorated in the interwar period as Canada's birthplace.<sup>12</sup> Cook also notes that Canadians' understanding of that conflict was, and continues to be, warped by romantic notions of nationhood, independence and unity.<sup>13</sup> Myths are not reflective of a lack of memory and indeed all collective memory is mythologised to a degree. This is the very nature of memory and is what distinguishes commemoration from history.

History and memory are in many cases diametrically opposed. For Pierre Nora, the foremost theorist of history and memory, memory is magical in that it only includes those facts which suit it. Memory is created by those communities that develop and shape it, not by the societies it purports to remember. It "installs remembrance within the sacred" and takes root in particular spaces, rituals and objects.<sup>14</sup> What this rather ethereal definition does not touch on is that commemoration and memory are not analogous. Commemoration, particularly in the

<sup>11</sup> "Veterans of Two Wars Being Honored on Remembrance Day," *Ottawa Journal*, 11 October 1945; "Veterans of Two Wars Pay Tribute to Fallen," *Vancouver Daily Province*, 13 November 1945; "Former Chaplain Asks Renewed Fight on Evils," *Calgary Herald*, 12 November 1946; and "The Dutch Do Not Forget," *Ottawa Citizen*, 12 November 1947.

<sup>12</sup> Cook, *Fighting for History*, 422-23.

<sup>13</sup> Tim Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2017), 218-48.

<sup>14</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 8-9.

case of war, encompasses the formal and informal acts of joining with fellow citizens to pay public tribute to the activities and sacrifices of service members. Often commemoration takes place in the rites and rituals of Remembrance Day, but commemoration can also be the socio-cultural notion of grouping together to bear in mind preceding generations. Often, these rites and rituals take place at memorials or monuments and those objects are part of commemoration, but they are just part and not the whole. Commemoration is a societal activity, whereas memorialisation is a physical construction project. Neither commemoration (gathering) or memorialisation (built structures) inherently require memory. Postwar Canadians did not oppose public memory or even commemoration, they opposed the (perceived) superfluous building of monuments and memorials.

From the end of the Second World War, the Canadian government prioritised overseas commemoration of the conflict over domestic commemorations of specific battles. Canadian diplomats and dignitaries were invited to these ceremonies and attended with great honour. The first overseas ceremony attended by Canadian officials was a 1946 ceremony in the Netherlands. Considering the special relationship developed between the Dutch people and Canadian soldiers during the Second World War, this is perhaps no surprise.<sup>15</sup>

Each Dutch region and town wanted the opportunity to commemorate the Canadian soldiers who liberated their area. As such, there were several ceremonies each year in the first few years after the war. The duplicative ceremonies suggest that while ceremonies were planned by Dutch government and military officials, there was a lack of central coordination. The first of these ceremonies was on 15 April 1946 in Leeuwarden, near the northern coast. Canada's Minister in the Netherlands, Pierre Dupuy, was the guest of honour at the Leeuwarden ceremony, which was an all-day event including a luncheon, factory visits, a reception and a lecture given by Dupuy about the relationship between Canada and the Netherlands. After the ceremony, Dupuy reported to the Secretary of State for External Affairs that "judging by the enthusiasm shown by the population...

<sup>15</sup> Cook, *Fighting for History*, 206-10; letter from Charles Foulkes to the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, 4 April 1946, RG25 G-2, file 8769-40, LAC; and Andrew Horrall, "An 'Eternal Memorial for Canadian Heroes': The Dutch Town of Putte Commemorates the Essex Scottish Regiment," *Canadian Military History* 20, 3 (Summer 2011): 3-18.

the presence of Canadian uniforms and a Canadian representative was greatly appreciated. This is only the beginning of a long series of similar occasions, as each town liberated by the Canadians is anxious to have its turn to celebrate.”<sup>16</sup> However, 5 May, the day on which Canadian soldiers broke into the Netherlands, soon emerged as the obvious date of commemoration for overseas ceremonies,<sup>17</sup> overshadowing both 6 June (D-Day) and 19 August (Dieppe).

The first official ceremony—organised by the Dutch government—was on 5 May 1946 at the Canadian Military Cemetery at Bergen op Zoom, chosen because of the high number of Canadian soldiers buried in that cemetery.<sup>18</sup> Dupuy painted a picture of the ceremony as taking place on sacred soil to commemorate the “most significant date in Canadian military history.”<sup>19</sup> The ceremony was attended by ambassadors and representatives from Belgium, China, France, the UK, the US, Brazil, Denmark, Greece, Luxembourg, Mexico, Norway, Poland, Australia and Portugal. Children of the local community had decorated each grave with flowers prior to the service and several thousand people were present.<sup>20</sup>

The ceremony, its organisation, its content, the dignitaries and, perhaps most significantly, the children present at the service suggest that the Dutch considered Canada’s contribution to the liberation of the Netherlands to be important, not only to the expulsion of the Nazis but to the Netherlands’ very survival. By broadcasting the ceremony on the radio, organisers made it available for all Canadians to listen and pay tribute to what their fellow Canadians did during the war.<sup>21</sup> Archival records from the Ministry of External Affairs indicate that the Canadian government followed the lead of its European counterparts and commemorated the Liberation of the Netherlands instead of the Dieppe Raid or the Normandy

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Pierre Dupuy to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, 18 April 1946, RG25 G-2, file 8769-40, LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Pierre Dupuy to N. A. Robertson, 15 March 1946, RG25 G-2, file 8769-40, LAC.

<sup>18</sup> “Bergen-Op-Zoom Canadian Cemetery,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission, accessed 11 February 2021, <https://www.cwgc.org/visit-us/find-cemeteries-memorials/cemetery-details/2061700/BERGEN-OP-ZOOM%20CANADIAN%20WAR%20CEMETERY/>.

<sup>19</sup> Speech by Pierre Dupuy, 5 May 1946, RG25 G-2, file 8769-40, LAC.

<sup>20</sup> Dispatch No. 251 from Pierre Dupuy to William Lyon Mackenzie King, 6 May 1946, RG25 G-2, file 8769-40, LAC.

<sup>21</sup> Speech by Pierre Dupuy, 5 May 1946, RG25 G-2, file 8769-40, LAC.

Landings as Canada's premier commemoration and date of memory for the Second World War.<sup>22</sup> The radio broadcasts further solidified the Liberation of the Netherlands on the Canadian commemorative calendar. The commemoration of the Liberation of the Netherlands as a purely Canadian action is one early example of Canadians' emerging nationalistic memory of the Second World War. In many ways, it is logical that the Canadian government chose to prioritise the Liberation of the Netherlands. The other engagements that might seem like more natural commemorations—the Dieppe Raid and D-Day—have a more complicated historical narrative that made them more difficult to remember in a nationalistic or patriotic way.

Future prime minister John Diefenbaker (at this time an opposition MP from Saskatchewan) took an early lead spearheading the memorialisation of the Second World War at home. In 1955, he made a series of statements which pressured the government to move forward on a memorial to the dead of the Second World War. Diefenbaker saw the National War Memorial at Confederation Square as a memorial to the First World War and did not want its purpose usurped by the Second World War. Diefenbaker was not alone in his estimation of the National War Memorial; many commentators, politicians and public figures noted that the memorial's imagery and symbolism were very much reflective of the First World War and adding another conflict to that would be incongruous. Furthermore, the Book of Remembrance for the Second World War was nearing completion and Diefenbaker was concerned that there would be nowhere appropriate to house the new book.<sup>23</sup> The Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower in Parliament's Centre Block—which housed the Book of Remembrance for the First World War—was dedicated specifically to the memory of the First World War. Therefore, Diefenbaker considered it an inappropriate location for Second World War commemoration.<sup>24</sup>

In response, the government built the Veterans Memorial Buildings on Wellington Street in Ottawa in 1956. Chiefly meant as a government office building, the Veterans Memorial Buildings were

<sup>22</sup> Letter from Pierre Dupuy to WLMK, 6 May 1946, RG25 G-2, file 8769-40, LAC.

<sup>23</sup> A Book of Remembrance is a heavily stylised book containing the names of all who died in war. One was made after the First World War and similar books have been created for subsequent wars. They are designed for public display.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Swanson, "Urging War Memorial to Dead of All Wars," *Ottawa Citizen*, 31 May 1955.

also seen as one logical location for the Book of Remembrance. The Royal Canadian Legion (RCL) opposed the scheme on the grounds that the buildings would be insufficient memorialisation because of their dual purpose as office buildings and a memorial.<sup>25</sup> The RCL's official position was that only aesthetic monuments were suitable memorials.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, one veteran wrote that if the plan went forward, the Book of Remembrance would be reduced to a "model ship, open to the gaze of every junior clerk heading for the canteen for the office gang's morning coffee."<sup>27</sup>

The RCL also considered the Peace Tower to be a memorial only for the dead of the First World War. As such, a standalone Second World War monument was still required. RCL leadership called for the government to erect a monument similar to the cenotaph in Whitehall, London, UK. RCL Dominion Command wanted the memorial to be inexpensive so that monies could be spent to further improve the lives of veterans and Canadians. The theoretical war memorial that the RCL proposed was not to have a date- or war-specific inscription so that it could be the memorial for all wars, past and future.<sup>28</sup> In response to these calls, the government planned to start commissioning a new memorial.<sup>29</sup>

Louis St-Laurent's Liberal government let the memorial plans percolate for a year, but when the Progressive Conservative John Diefenbaker was elected prime minister in 1957, his government took up the mantle. An advocate for memorial building, Diefenbaker's government quickly set to work approving the plan for a large memorial on Nepean Point, citing the need for a repository for the newly-completed Book of Remembrance, which had a temporary home in the Memorial Chamber.<sup>30</sup> The architecture firm selected, Toronto's Mathers and Haldenby, had no budget; according to the

<sup>25</sup> Ferguson, "Canada's Response," 90.

<sup>26</sup> John Hudenvad, Editorial, "Criticism of Plan Answered," *The Legionary* (April 1963): 14-15.

<sup>27</sup> Fred R. Inglis, "It's Time for Action!," *The Legionary* (January 1955): 19-21.

<sup>28</sup> "Legion Seeks New Memorial for All Wars," *Ottawa Citizen*, 10 November 1955.

<sup>29</sup> Frank Swanson, "Building New War Memorial not Plan of Near Future," *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 March 1956.

<sup>30</sup> Alex Hume, "To Build 'All-War' Shrine," *Ottawa Citizen*, 12 November 1957; and "May Place Second Book of the Dead," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 October 1957. That home was to become permanent.

*Ottawa Citizen*, their only task was “to produce perfection.”<sup>31</sup> They designed a church: it was to be 70 feet long, 50-tapering-to-35 feet wide, 50 feet high and it was to include sculptured figures in “heroic size of Canadian warriors, down the generations since the beginning of Canadian history.”<sup>32</sup> The memorial was to be topped by a spire-like “sword of service”<sup>33</sup> and include a place of prayer.<sup>34</sup> The estimated cost of the memorial was pegged at \$600,000 and it was to be placed prominently on Nepean Point in Ottawa—the current home of the National Gallery of Canada. The government planned for the national Remembrance Day ceremony to be moved to the new memorial once it was finished, which the government expected to be in 1958.<sup>35</sup> That target date soon came and went.

At this point, a few different memorial ideas were conflated into one design. Early proponents of the Nepean Point memorial, like the RCL, St-Laurent and Diefenbaker, advocated for a Second World War memorial in order to properly house the Book of Remembrance for the Second World War. However, as plans about the memorial became established, officials wanted a memorial with broader appeal and less focus on a single conflict. Under such a proposal, the memorial was to house Books of Remembrance for the South African War, the Second World War, the newly-concluded Korean War as well as reproductions of those from the First World War. By September 1958, newspapers reported that the memorial was also to include those who died in the North-West Resistance.<sup>36</sup>

Despite support from the RCL and important government officials spanning the two major political parties, the federal government appeared to be reluctant to begin building a Second World War memorial. When memorialisation plans were announced in 1956, it was to be completed within two years. With Nepean Point still bare in 1958, Diefenbaker’s government announced that construction would begin in 1959, but the end of that year came and went and no sod

<sup>31</sup> Charles King, “Cost no Object in Plans for Stark War Memorial,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 22 November 1957.

<sup>32</sup> J. A. Hume, “\$600,000 Memorial ‘On Point,’” *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 May 1956.

<sup>33</sup> Charles King, “Cost no Object in Plans for Stark War Memorial,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 November 1957.

<sup>34</sup> Greg Connolley, “Start Next Year on Memorial at Nepean Point,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 November 1958.

<sup>35</sup> “Nepean Point,” *Ottawa Journal*, 2 May 1956.

<sup>36</sup> “DVA Checking Design for a New War Memorial,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 September 1958.

was turned. Indeed, in September 1959, the Department of Public Works and the Department of Veterans Affairs had only just sent the memorial plans to the Design Committee of the National Capital Commission for approval instead of beginning construction. The government did, however, announce that the price tag had more than doubled since 1956 and estimated that it would take approximately a year to build.<sup>37</sup> The historical record—newspapers, *The Legionary* and archival documents—is silent as to why the memorial fell to the back burner during this time.

In 1960, the National Capital Commission (NCC) came back to Cabinet with the recommendation that the memorial be divided: one memorial building to house the Books of Remembrance and a separate cenotaph for public ceremonies. The NCC proposed that the building be erected in Rockcliffe and the cenotaph at Nepean Point.<sup>38</sup> The NCC felt that the scale of the memorial building would “injuriously affect the fine massing of buildings on Parliament Hill,” obscure the parliamentary views (which was a protection proposed in the 1950 Gréber report) and “cause a curious conflict in purpose with the statue of Champlain who is known to have visited the site.”<sup>39</sup> Cabinet decided to continue the original course but to take account of the NCC’s decision.<sup>40</sup>

Despite, or maybe because of, the long delay and prevarication about the new memorial, it was not without controversy. Since the end of the First World War, war memorials have elicited emotional and impassioned debates and the post-Second World War period was no different. The editorial team of the *Ottawa Journal* made its case clear. For that conservative-leaning newspaper, the National War Memorial already in place in Ottawa was sufficient to commemorate all wars. The *Journal* advocated for adding dates of the Second World War—and potentially subsequent wars—to The Response (the official name for the National War Memorial at Confederation Square) which would make it more obviously applicable to those service members.<sup>41</sup> If a memorial was necessary, the *Journal* suggested that

<sup>37</sup> “War Memorial Study Nearing Completion,” *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 July 1959.

<sup>38</sup> Letter from A. J. Brooks to R. B. Bryce, 5 February 1960, RG2-B2 W-1-1(b), LAC.

<sup>39</sup> National Capital Commission Resolution RE War Memorial Building, RG2-B2 W-1-1(b), LAC.

<sup>40</sup> Record of Cabinet Decision, National Memorial Building and Cenotaph, 20 February 1960, RG2-B2 W-1-1(b), LAC.

<sup>41</sup> “One Memorial,” Editorial, *Ottawa Journal*, 12 November 1955.

a utilitarian memorial would be a more suitable way to remember Canada's Second World War dead.<sup>42</sup>

However, the editors of the more liberal *Ottawa Citizen* thought that the proposed memorial's serene location and the ability to remember all war dead at one location was one of the proposal's more positive elements and the editorial team asked its readers to support the new memorial.<sup>43</sup> The newspaper called the initial memorial plans "sensible" and suggested that the memorial would meet a crucial need to commemorate the dead of all wars. According to both the federal government and the *Ottawa Citizen*, the existing National War Memorial could not serve as an all-encompassing war memorial because its imagery and symbolism were so aesthetically tied to the First World War.<sup>44</sup>

Despite political and journalistic support, Diefenbaker's government struggled to get construction underway. It seems as though the government, and perhaps Diefenbaker himself, was distracted from its memorial scheme by other issues. So, in 1961, Diefenbaker used the upcoming centenary celebrations as a tool to garner support for the yet-to-be-started war memorial.<sup>45</sup> Like King, Diefenbaker saw commemoration of the Second World War as an opportunity to shape a Canadian national identity. Newspapers remarked on Canada's lack of vigorous patriotism,<sup>46</sup> and in the years before the centenary celebrations, Diefenbaker's and Pearson's governments sought to forge national identity through, in part, advocating for the commemoration of the Second World War. National identities are forged in public and the 1960s were an important time for federal governments, both Conservative and Liberal, in forming Canadian identity.<sup>47</sup> Though Diefenbaker was supportive of the new war memorial on Nepean Point, it simply was not a priority for his government. Update after update published in newspapers said that the memorial was in the last stages of planning and considerations, but the government continued

<sup>42</sup> "Would Not the War Dead Prefer a Useful Memorial," Editorial, *Ottawa Journal*, 20 February 1960.

<sup>43</sup> "National Cenotaph on Parliament Hill," Editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 March 1955.

<sup>44</sup> "War Memorial," Editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 May 1956; and Ross Smith, "Site of Cenotaph a Vexing Question," *Ottawa Journal*, 15 March 1956.

<sup>45</sup> "Make Canada's Centennial Moment to Remember— PM [Prime Minister]," *Ottawa Citizen*, 12 May 1961.

<sup>46</sup> José Eduardo Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945-71* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 165.

<sup>47</sup> Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution*, 6.

to drag its feet. Other priorities, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War, and internal party politics put the project on hold.<sup>48</sup>

Interested citizens expressed their support for or displeasure about the memorial's plans and designs in the pages of the *Ottawa Journal*, the *Ottawa Citizen* and in letters to the prime minister, some of which were preserved by the relevant ministries. On the whole, public reaction to the newly-revealed war memorial plan was negative. Some thought it was too ostentatious and that an understated memorial would be more suitable.<sup>49</sup> Most others who voiced their opinions thought that the Peace Tower and The Response were more than sufficient to commemorate the Second World War and that a new memorial would be a waste of taxpayer money.<sup>50</sup>

Though Diefenbaker lost the 1963 election, the Shrine of Remembrance (as the church-like memorial came to be called) remained politically important enough for his rival and successor, Lester B. Pearson, to continue to support it. The Department of Veterans Affairs began to receive letters objecting to the memorial in February 1962. According to the new minister, Roger Teillet, the letters coincided with comments circulating in Ottawa about a "live memorial." Teillet initially dismissed these comments, arguing that utilitarian memorials (also known as live memorials) "quickly lose their Remembrance connotation and revert to their utilitarian purpose." He felt that the public reaction to the Shrine of Remembrance was based on a "misunderstanding of the primary function" of the memorial. Teillet redoubled his commitment to the new memorial building and cenotaph and was prepared for new proposals to be submitted which took into account the NCC's concerns.<sup>51</sup>

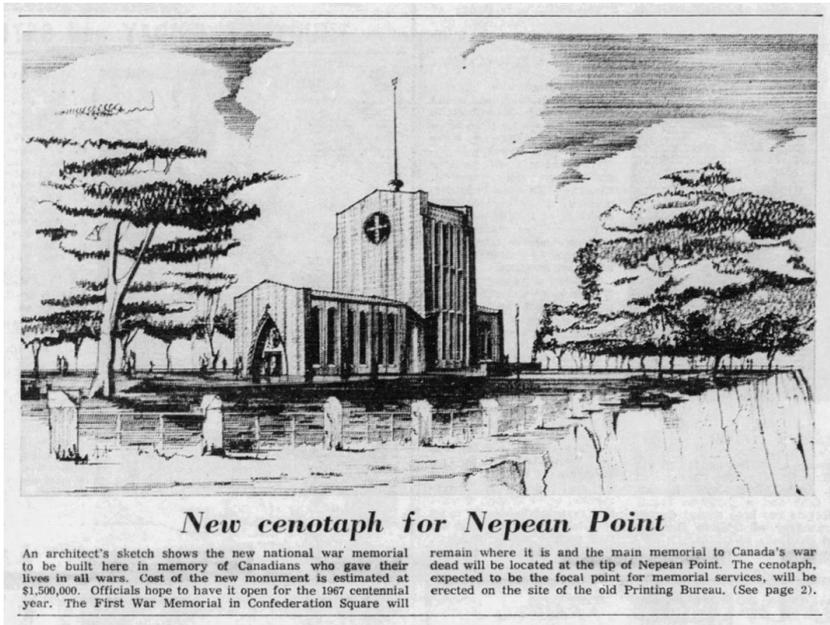
By 1963, the government and design firm Mathers and Haldenby managed to approve and publish a design. The memorial complex (Figure 1) was to be a "Remembrance Shrine" and include both a

<sup>48</sup> Cook, *The Fight for History*, 166.

<sup>49</sup> P. Z. Weinstein "The Proposed New War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 February 1963; and P. J. H. Barratt, "War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Journal*, 23 February 1963.

<sup>50</sup> W. C. Howard, "War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Journal*, 27 February 1963; "Planetarium is Proposed," *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 February 1963; "Not Three Memorials," Editorial, *Ottawa Journal*, 3 March 1963; E. Girdler, "War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 March 1963; and R. B. Morrison, "War Memorials," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Journal*, 23 March 1963.

<sup>51</sup> Memorandum to Cabinet: The Canadian Shrine of Remembrance, 11 September 1963, RG2-B2 W-1-1(b), LAC.



Artist's rendering of the proposed Shrine of Remembrance. [*Ottawa Citizen*, 20 February 1963]

“Place of Remembrance” and an “Altar of Repose.”<sup>52</sup> The interior was designed to resemble a large chapel. Indeed, the “Place of Remembrance” was meant to *be* an altar—an altar in the house of worship of Canadian identity. Invoking religious language was one way by which Diefenbaker’s and Pearson’s governments promoted the new memorial and therefore the sacred nature of the act of remembering the war dead. Though politicians repeated that the new war memorial was not meant to usurp The Response in Confederation Square, the *Ottawa Journal* reported that the new war memorial was to be “THE National War Memorial for the Canadian dead of ALL wars in which Canada had fought.”<sup>53</sup> The Second World War was critical to the national identity that Canadian politicians wanted to promote; therefore, it was important, and perhaps obvious, that the memorial to that war was critical to shaping postwar identity.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Jackson, “Cenotaph, Memorial Plans Set,” *Ottawa Journal*, 20 February 1963.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Jackson, “Cenotaph, Memorial Plans Set,” *Ottawa Journal*, 20 February 1963. Emphasis in original.

However, maybe as a recognition of the delay and the public's opposition to the memorial, Pearson launched a review of the monument plans in September 1963. Perhaps he thought a redesign of the memorial might make the public more supportive.<sup>54</sup> While much of the general public did not support the memorial plans, Pearson's government was wholly committed to the Shrine of Remembrance, much to the delight of the Royal Canadian Legion.<sup>55</sup> The editorial team at the *Ottawa Citizen* also stood by its earlier decision to back the memorial,<sup>56</sup> but the public continued to be skeptical and critical of the government's decision.<sup>57</sup>

Clearly, both Diefenbaker and Pearson thought that a Second World War memorial would be an important nation-building symbol for Canada. The debate concerning the proposed memorial, however, was not the only contentious issue of nation-building happening in the early 1960s. Passions rose and national unity and identity were tried and debated as Canadians determined whether they needed a new flag to represent a new, modern country.<sup>58</sup> Gregory A. Johnson argues, however, that the standard understanding of Canada's new flag was that it was a political and cultural win (and perhaps a personal one) for Pearson, John Matheson and George Stanley, the flag's designers. Recent studies of the flag debate reveal that the debate was more controversial than that: Pearson used Britain's declining imperial influence and prestige after the Second World War as a moment to create a new national identity underpinned by a new flag. The Royal Canadian Legion was not impressed by Pearson's new flag. He and Matheson pitched their plans at the Dominion Convention in 1964 and they were "booed and hissed" out of the meeting and told to "drop dead." For the RCL, re-

<sup>54</sup> Greg Connolly, "PM Won't Cancel Nepean Shrine," *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 September 1963; and Norman Campbell, "Minister Seeks Reappraisal for Nepean Shrine," *Ottawa Citizen*, 10 October 1963.

<sup>55</sup> "Shrine Delights Legion," *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 August 1963.

<sup>56</sup> "A Memorial to Canada's War Dead," Editorial, *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 August 1963.

<sup>57</sup> J. Grant Wanzel, "War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Citizen*, 12 August 1963; Zoe Booth, "Living Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Journal*, 17 August 1963; and M. Mowat, "War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Citizen*, 30 August 1963.

<sup>58</sup> John Ross Matheson, *Canada's Flag: A Search for a Country* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), 69.

designing the flag represented the government's desire to do away with their wartime contributions.<sup>59</sup>

The flag debate and the Shrine of Remembrance plan are both indicative of a perceived necessity to foster Canadian identity and national unity prior to the centenary celebrations. While Pearson won the flag debate, reaction to the memorial proposal continued to garner a considerable amount of opposition. Doris Anderson, the editor of *Chatelaine*, for example, called the proposed memorial “unimaginative.” She argued that the men who died during the Second World War were products of the Great Depression and therefore would not have appreciated a memorial that did not serve a clear purpose for the common good.<sup>60</sup> An Ottawa architect thought the memorial would fall flat because it failed to reflect contemporary Canada.<sup>61</sup>

The RCL's leadership supported the proposed memorial, but not all veterans or veterans' groups liked the memorial plans. At their annual meeting in 1963, the Naval Officers Associations of Canada passed a motion—which was forwarded to the prime minister—opposing the expenditure of \$1.5 million for a shrine. It further supported a “living memorial” such as a scholarship, library or public building and called on the government to reconsider the memorial through consultations with a broader section of veterans than just the RCL.<sup>62</sup>

There were no letters to the editor of either the *Ottawa Citizen* or the *Ottawa Journal* that supported the proposed Shrine of Remembrance. It appears that most Canadians felt that if the nation's capital truly needed a new war memorial, it would be most appropriate to have a memorial that would be useful: whether it be a public building, a library, a scholarship or a park, even a planetarium

<sup>59</sup> Gregory A. Johnson, “The Last Gasp of Empire: The 1964 Flag Debate Revisited,” in *Canada and the End of Empire*, ed. Phillip A. Buckner (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 232-34.

<sup>60</sup> Doris Anderson, “A Birthday Present We Don't Need,” From the desk of the Editor, *Chatelaine*, October 1963, preserved in MG26 N3, vol. 39, file 189.22, LAC.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Stig Harvor to Lester B. Pearson, 29 November 1963, MG26 N3, vol. 39, file 189.22, LAC.

<sup>62</sup> Letter from Captain L. B. McIlhagga to Lester B. Pearson, MG26 N3, vol. 39, file 189.22, LAC.

was suggested.<sup>63</sup> Canadians saw The Response as their war memorial and did not believe that there was any purpose to be had in erecting a new, expensive memorial.

The public's overwhelmingly negative reaction to the proposed Shrine of Remembrance had an impact on Pearson and his government. In July 1963, Pearson's government announced that they were "reviewing the 'philosophy'" behind the proposed memorial because of the opposition from the Canadian population.<sup>64</sup> Pearson did not understand the criticism, but he acknowledged that because of the public opposition, the memorial decision needed to be "reconsidered or some effort should be made to explain why the 'shrine' is being erected."<sup>65</sup> Despite the review, Pearson and his cabinet decided to continue with the memorial as planned.

Notwithstanding non-partisan governmental support, plans for the new memorial soon fell off the table. The public simply did not support spending public money on a memorial which was perceived as unnecessary. The RCL still supported the Shrine of Remembrance and "deplore[d] the criticism which forced the Government to postpone its implementation."<sup>66</sup> RCL leadership lobbied the government throughout the mid-1960s for a new national cenotaph, regardless of the public's perception of the plans.<sup>67</sup> For the RCL, the Shrine of Remembrance was integral to the country's ability to adequately mark its centennial anniversary.<sup>68</sup> The RCL believed that commemorating the war dead would contribute to the nationalism and patriotism required to appropriately observe the country's centennial; it was through the actions and efforts of those who died at war that Canada's achievements would be properly understood.

<sup>63</sup> W. C. Howard, "War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Journal*, 27 February 1963; "Planetarium is Proposed," *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 February 1963; "Not Three Memorials," Editorial, *Ottawa Journal*, 3 March 1963; E. Girdler, "War Memorial," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 March 1963; and R. B. Morrison, "War Memorials," Letter to the Editor, *Ottawa Journal*, 23 March 1963.

<sup>64</sup> "Govt. Reviews Plans for New War Memorial," *Ottawa Citizen*, 23 July 1963.

<sup>65</sup> LBP's marginalia on Record of Cabinet Decision, 25 July 1963, annotation by Lester B. Pearson, RG2-B2 W-1-1(b), LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Royal Canadian Legion Brief Presented to the Prime Minister of Canada and the Cabinet, 11 November 1964, MG28 I298, box 53, file 11, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> Letters from Legion Leadership, 1966-1968 MG28 I298, box 53, file 11, LAC.

<sup>68</sup> Royal Canadian Legion Brief to the Prime Minister of Canada, 25 November 1965, 6, MG28 I298, box 53, file 11, LAC.

Even the Royal Canadian Legion was not a monolith and there were differing opinions about the Shrine of Remembrance. Different veterans' groups amalgamated to form the RCL in the 1920s and that patchwork led to significant diversity between different branches and regions. In its spring 1966 meeting, the Ontario Command of the RCL passed a motion which instructed the Dominion Command to “vigorously oppose the expenditure” of millions of dollars for a memorial in Ottawa when many veterans were “in dire circumstances with regard to food, lodging and medical attention.”<sup>69</sup> The Valour Road Memorial Branch in Winnipeg also opposed the memorial, calling it a wasteful expenditure of funds.<sup>70</sup> This was also the sentiment of the general public at the time. In the 1920s and 1930s, Canadians had done a comprehensive job of building memorials to commemorate the war dead and for many 1960s Canadians, new memorials were a waste of public money.

Because of public opposition to the memorial, the government quietly and permanently abandoned the plans sometime in 1966 or 1967. This was a defeat for the politicians who wanted to use commemoration of the Second World War as a nation-building tool. Canadians were keen to commemorate the Second World War—widespread attendance at Remembrance Day ceremonies was evidence of that, as was Canadians' engagement with the memorial question—but they did not want the government to spend taxpayer money on a memorial because there were already suitable methods of memorialisation. Nation-building and national identity were important for Canadians, but the opposition to the Shrine of Remembrance makes it clear Canadians had to be on board with the method by which national identity would be fostered.

While national identity may be conceptualised by politicians and other elites, those creations are doomed to failure if the general public does not also accept what has been established.<sup>71</sup> St-Laurent, Diefenbaker and Pearson were slow to realise that Canadians did not want public money spent on a new war memorial and therefore that they did not have the power or authority to foist national identities

<sup>69</sup> Memorandum from Murray MacFarlane to D. M. Thompson, 16 March 1966, MG28 I298, box 53, file 11, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Richard A. Smith to Gordon Churchill, 12 January 1965, MG28 I298, box 53, file 11, LAC.

<sup>71</sup> Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution*, 5.

wholesale onto the Canadian population. The Second World War is often seen as a turning point in Canadian nationalism and national identity: Canadians were proud of “their” efforts in the war and that pride manifested in the public pushing the government to redefine and reaffirm the country’s identity. That does not mean that Canadians wanted to sever ideological ties with Britain, quite the opposite, and Diefenbaker’s 1957 election was evidence of that fact. However, the social and political revolutions of the 1960s gave the Canadian people the space to assert their will more forcefully.<sup>72</sup> The debate over the Shrine of Remembrance demonstrates that the 1960s brought Canadians to a place wherein they wanted to define themselves rather than being told by the government and other elites how to identify.

Successive Canadian governments failed to launch a new memorial to the Second World War, but they did commemorate the war with the introduction of a variety of social programs for veterans, including education, housing and healthcare programs. This is an argument that has been made before, namely in a short book review by Jonathan Vance,<sup>73</sup> but it remains an important point to make. Commemoration is more than standing at a cenotaph ceremony, even if that is an important societal act. To pay due commemoration to those who died in the Second World War, one must improve the society which emerged in its wake. This is what veteran social programs did.

In a poll taken during the Second World War, two-thirds of the population thought that the federal government had a duty to provide better treatment to veterans of the Second World War than they had to veterans a generation earlier. The post-First World War Department of Soldiers’ Civil Reestablishment, designed to help former servicemen re-integrate into civil society, was plagued with problems: pensions were complicated and insufficient, employment services were under-resourced, and injured service members were

<sup>72</sup> Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, “Introduction,” in *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity*, ed. R. D. Francis and Phillip A. Buckner (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 1-3.

<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Vance, “Review of *Living with War: Twentieth-Century Conflict in Canadian and American History and Memory*, by Robert Teigrob,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 87, 3 (Summer 2018): 325-27.

inadequately taken care of.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, outside the Veterans Memorial Buildings on Wellington Street in Ottawa, there is a plaque erected by the National Capital Commission that explicitly links the social welfare programs to the societal act of remembering the Second World War.<sup>75</sup> With this argument in mind, it is difficult to accept the notion that Canadian's efforts during the Second World War went un-remembered.

If we compare commemoration and memorialisation directly to what was done after the First World War, the 1939-1945 conflict will seem woefully, and perhaps shamefully, forgotten. However, remembering the war dead is more than stone monuments and silent crowds. It is also the act of change and betterment of society. It was, in part, thanks to service members' activities during the Second World War that many of these social changes were developed and soon they were extended to non-veterans as part of promises to ensure the welfare of the whole Canadian population. Indeed, Alvin Finkel argues that "wartime sacrifices strengthened Canadians' convictions that their governments owed them guarantees of decent incomes, free medical care, and old age pension."<sup>76</sup> Of course, few political policies or issues respond to only one problem, but it is clear that from the sacrifices of the Second World War came a desire for a better world, one that would be provided, at least in part, by social programming, of which Canadians remain proud of well into the twenty-first century.

Tim Cook argues that Canadians have been derelict in their duty to commemorate the Second World War.<sup>77</sup> However, in problematising commemoration and memorialisation and suggesting a different way to consider how a society remembers its war dead, it is clear that the Canadian government was keen to pay tribute to those who died in the Second World War. It seems that the Canadian population also wanted to commemorate the conflict, but were concerned about the public expenditure of funds for a memorial which many saw as

<sup>74</sup> Jeff Keshen, "Getting It Right the Second Time Around: The Reintegration of Canadian Veterans of World War II," in *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, ed. J. L. Granatstein and Peter Neary (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 62-64.

<sup>75</sup> "Memorial Buildings and Arch," *Canadian Military Memorials Database*, Veterans Affairs Canada, 25 February 2022, <https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/national-inventory-canadian-memorials/details/q219>.

<sup>76</sup> Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 143.

<sup>77</sup> Cook, *The Fight for History*, 12-14.

duplicative. In response to public opinion, the federal government focused its postwar funds on social programs for veterans which were then expanded to the broader population. Canadians of the postwar period did not forget the Second World War or the people that died in it. Instead of building war memorials, they focused on building a society worth the deaths of the war. This more holistic approach is non-traditional, but it suggests that Canadians of the 1960s felt differently about memorialisation, commemoration and remembering war than their parents did. This is not a value judgement about which generation remembered war better. It is merely to suggest that when considered from a broader perspective, the commemorative approaches of the 1960s are due more consideration than they have been traditionally given.



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