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# The List of the Nation's Heroes

## Voluntary Enlistment in Chatham, Ontario 1914-1916

MATT BAKER

*Abstract: This paper examines patterns of recruiting and enlistment during the most intense period of mobilisation in a small regional centre of 12,000 in the heart of rural southwestern Ontario. It studies the effects of recruiting efforts within a specific, but typically Canadian, local culture, isolating targeted men within the catchment area and then considering who joined and who did not. It argues that recruiters struggled to appeal to Canadian-born citizens, and resorted to increasingly coercive methods when pure voluntarism could not fill the ranks.*

**I**N EARLY 1915, the city of Chatham, Ontario was in the midst of a nineteen day campaign to find 200 men to join the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) overseas. One Tuesday late that month, Achille Pattiyn emerged from the imposing red brick armoury in Tecumseh Park, a newly enlisted member of the 33rd Battalion. Pattiyn was one of three men who passed the medical examination that day, but his trip to the recruiters' office started three days earlier with a fistfight.

Pattiyn was a Belgian citizen living and working in Chatham. At a hotel the previous Saturday, a local took exception to the presence of a Belgian in Chatham while men from the city were fighting in defence of his country. "It is understood," reported the *Chatham Daily Planet*, "that he was accused by a certain Chathamite of lacking sufficient nerve to fly to the defence of his country. Pattiyn claimed that business interests held him here, but that he wanted to reach the front. Arguments waxed warm with the inevitable result."

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A fight broke out, and “the Chathamite was worsted in the fistic encounter.”<sup>1</sup> Far from lamenting the local man’s defeat, the *Daily Planet* relished Pattiyn’s commitment to doing his bit in the Great War underway in Europe. As soon as he paid his fine in police court, the feisty Belgian went straight to the recruiter’s office and joined up.

The controversy over how Canada filled the ranks of its overseas forces during the First World War raged long after hostilities ended in 1918. In conjunction with the CEF’s achievements on the battlefield, recruiting and the conscription crisis have come to characterise Canada’s Great War. From 1917 to war’s end, the conscription crisis cast a long shadow over voluntary enlistment. Discussion has centred on the failure of the voluntary system and the controversies that followed, examined through the prism of Anglo-French relations. For decades afterwards historical inquiry into recruiting served largely to demonstrate why voluntary recruiting failed gradually in English Canada and entirely in French Canada.<sup>2</sup> More recent studies have examined recruiting in Ontario as a local and cultural phenomenon largely removed from the national experience. In that province, recruiters’ organisation and propaganda were “extensions of the social, intellectual, and cultural norms of prewar society,” and governed by the “recruiting establishment,” informal groups consisting of prominent members of the professional middle class and their associated organisations.<sup>3</sup> These men were aided by civilian recruiting agencies, municipal and provincial governments,

<sup>1</sup> “Recruits Being Accepted at the Armoury,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 27 January 1915.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Desmond Morton, *Canada and War: A Military and Political History* (Toronto: Butterworth and Co., 1981); Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992); Jack Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977). Other investigations blamed the decentralised system adopted by Ottawa or cast the ‘failure’ of voluntary recruiting as the perception of a particular set of Canadians. See Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896–1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974); Matthew R. Bray, “‘Fighting as an Ally’: The English-Canadian Patriotic Response to the Great War,” *Canadian Historical Review* 61, no. 2 (June 1980).

<sup>3</sup> See Ian Hugh MacLean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Paul Maroney, “The Great Adventure: The Context and Ideology of Recruiting in Ontario, 1914–17,” *Canadian Historical Review* 77, no.1 (March 1996); this article based upon his MA thesis, Paul J. Maroney, “Recruiting the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Ontario,” MA Thesis, Queen’s University, 1991.

patriotic speakers, and even the recruits themselves.<sup>4</sup> Other research has endeavoured to refine the statistics of enlistment to account for eligibility, rejection of recruits, and distinguish between where a man lived and where he enlisted.<sup>5</sup> The convention is to assume that these methods worked in urban, English-speaking parts of Canada but not in rural or French-speaking parts of the country.

Despite significant interest in these issues, several questions remain unanswered about the actual mechanics of recruiting: what methods did the recruiters use and did they change over time? Who did they most appeal to? Is it appropriate to make distinctions between the success of recruiting in urban and rural areas when so many people in Canada lived in small communities that existed in the space between two extremes? This paper examines patterns of recruiting and enlistment during the most intense period of mobilisation from 1914–16 in Chatham, Ontario, a small regional centre of 12,000 situated in the heart of rural southwestern Ontario. A case study on Chatham provides the opportunity to study the effects of particular recruiting efforts within a specific, but typically Canadian local culture, isolating targeted men within the catchment area and then considering who joined and who did not.<sup>6</sup>

Recruiting began in the form of short campaigns to fill limited quotas. In cities across Ontario, recruiting efforts were dictated by

<sup>4</sup> Maroney, "The Great Adventure," 63–66.

<sup>5</sup> See C.A. Sharpe, "Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914–1918: A Regional Analysis," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18, no. 4 (Winter 1983–84); C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies Volume I: 1867–1921* (Toronto: Macmillan Company of Canada, 1997); and Jonathan F. Vance, "Provincial Patterns of Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Military History* 17, no. 2 (Spring 2008). Sharpe refined provincial eligibility and enlistment figures found in Duguid's and Stacey's works by using the 1911 Census to eliminate those men who were not British subjects and therefore ineligible for service according to the Militia Act of 1904. For this study, Sharpe's method of utilizing the 1911 Census was adapted to Chatham, then adjusted based on updated population data for the city in 1914.

<sup>6</sup> Authorities did not actually record a volunteer's place of residence on their attestation paper until sometime in 1915, after 200,000 men were already in uniform. Not surprisingly, the government did not compile statistics on the topic and historians have substituted place of enlistment for place of residence ever since. Distinguishing which volunteers were *from* an area and which simply *enlisted* there is possible for this study thanks to an exhaustive, unpublished list compiled from newspaper, church, and attestation records by Chatham historian Jerry Hind. J.R. Hind, "Chatham Soldier Boys to the Front," (List compiled for Ontario Genealogical Society, 2004), J.R. Hind, "Great War Enlistments," (List compiled for author, 2011).

the needs of the Department of Militia and Defence and conducted accordingly. When Ottawa called for men, districts responded in kind and to the best of recruiters' abilities. From the outbreak of war to early 1915, Chatham contributed men in brief, limited campaigns. After a six month lull, consistent recruiting efforts for a variety of units recommenced in the fall of 1915.

The language of patriotism, duty, and sacrifice which framed recruiting efforts represented strong convictions that allowed for only one answer to the 'plain facts:' prompt enlistment. Recruiters insisted that men were entitled to make their own decision, but only once the seriousness of Britain's situation was explained to them. In practice, such claims were hopelessly insincere, and as recruiting efforts in Chatham reached a fever pitch in April and May 1916, recruiters adopted increasingly belligerent and invasive methods of presenting their case.

In the eyes of Chatham's recruiting establishment, talk of educating men until they 'came to their senses' and enlisted was sincere and without malice. Convinced that patriotism was the only motive for enlistment, recruiters could only increase the severity and frequency of their message until Chatham's 'slackers' realised that enlistment was the only appropriate way of fulfilling their patriotic duty. Any man who reached a different conclusion in the face of the 'plain facts' had no place on "The List of the Nation's Heroes," and condemned himself to eternal disgrace in the community as one who would not "dare to defend the right."<sup>7</sup>

The result of this single-mindedness was that recruiters quickly reached the limit of voluntarism and turned to coercion, applying intense pressure on men to conform to their idea of patriotism. In Chatham, recruiters only *really* appealed to Britons and a small number of Canadians, leading them to conclude by late 1916 that compulsion was necessary to fill the ranks.

## **VOLUNTARISM**

In 1914 Chatham was the commercial and urban centre of Kent County, a largely rural area dominated by agriculture. Chatham's

<sup>7</sup> "Editorial: The List of the Nation's Heroes," *Chatham Daily News*, 27 May 1916.

population in 1914 was 12,039,<sup>8</sup> a quarter of Kent County's 49,391.<sup>9</sup> Like much of early twentieth-century Ontario, Chatham's citizens were overwhelmingly European settler-Christians, eighty-two percent Protestant and seventeen percent Roman Catholic.<sup>10</sup> Once known as the last stop on the Underground Railroad, African-Canadians accounted for less than five percent of the population by 1911 and though Kent County was home to a significant Franco-Ontarian population, only eight percent of city residents were of French origin, and even fewer were bilingual.<sup>11</sup> Nearly eighty percent of the population were born in Canada, with people born in the British Isles coming in a distant second at only fourteen percent. Windsor and London, nearby cities that recruited the same units as Chatham, had populations of similar origin, all in line with the provincial average.<sup>12</sup>

Chatham had public, separate, and professional schools, a typical array of clubs and bands, four theatres, an opera house, and large downtown market.<sup>13</sup> Along the Thames River lay Tecumseh Park, home to the new armoury and Lieutenant-Colonel Herbert D. Smith's 24th Kent Regiment. Smith and his adjutants Major O.L. Lewis and Captain Neil Smith played an important role in recruiting throughout the war.

Although providing commercial and transportation services to agriculture continued to dominate the local economy, Chatham was in the midst of the same industrial transformation that had been

<sup>8</sup> The best tool for constructing a demographic picture of Chatham and Kent during the years of voluntary enlistment is the Fifth Census of Canada conducted in 1911, adjusted to account for civic figures of 1914.

<sup>9</sup> *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911 Volume II* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelle, 1913), Kent's population from 1901-21: 1901: 49,673; 1911: 49,391; 1921: 52,139; less the population of Chatham, the difference in Kent's population in 1901 and 1921 was two.

<sup>10</sup> *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911 Volume II* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelle, 1913), 56-57.

<sup>11</sup> *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911 Volume II* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelle, 1913), 222-223. Nineteen percent of Kent County residents were of French origin in 1911, 7.5 percent whom lived in the City of Chatham. For nearby comparison, some twenty-three percent of Windsor residents reported French origin, compared to only one percent in London.

<sup>12</sup> *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911 Volume II* (Ottawa: C.H. Parmelle, 1913), 427-435. In 1911 Windsor residents were seventy-eight percent Canadian and eleven percent British-born, while Londoners were seventy-six percent Canadian and nineteen percent British-born. As a whole, Ontario residents were 79.8 percent Canadian-born and 18.4 percent British-born.

<sup>13</sup> Kent County Publicity and Improvement Association, *Why You Should Come to Kent*, 24-25.



Officers of the 24th Kent Regiment, summer 1914. [Chatham-Kent Museum 1986.23.26]

reshaping the Canadian economy for the better part of two generations with lumber and flour mills, foundries, and carriage manufacturing providing new wage-labouring jobs.<sup>14</sup>

During the pre-war years, rail links, cheap natural gas, and a board of trade eager to bring American companies to Canada drove economic growth. No less than six rail lines connected Chatham to various points including Detroit. Industrial freight facilities helped promote the development of heavy industry including steel production, and Michigan's booming auto sector spilled into Chatham; in 1916, for example, Chatham firm William Gray-Sons Campbell, Ltd. began the production of its own automobile in conjunction with the Dort Motor Company of Flint, Michigan, providing some 800 jobs.<sup>15</sup>

The recession of 1913–14 is often listed as a major contributor to the rush of volunteers across Canada for the First Contingent, but the area does not appear to have been significantly affected by the

<sup>14</sup> John Rhodes, *Centennial Chatham: One Hundred Years of the Maple City* (Wallaceburg: Standard Press, 1977), 88.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Kent County Publicity and Improvement Association, *Why You Should Come to Kent*, 22–25; Victor Lauriston, *Romantic Kent: More Than Three Centuries of History 1626–1952* (Chatham: Chatham Printing Co. Limited, 1952), 670–71, 738, 741; “Biggest Little City,” *Chatham Daily Planet Outlook Edition*, October 1914; “Chatham Board of Trade,” *Chatham Daily Planet Outlook Edition*, October 1914.

larger downturn.<sup>16</sup> In fact, recruiters struggled against a reasonably strong job market which only improved as the war continued into 1916.<sup>17</sup>

Chatham's military officials were assisted in their efforts by a number of other organisations. The Kent Citizen's Patriotic Fund, which later amalgamated with the national Canadian Patriotic Fund, raised money for soldiers' families while their breadwinner was at the front.<sup>18</sup> The 24th Kent Regiment chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) augmented recruits' kit as they left for the front, sent packages overseas, provided financial and moral support to the families of the dead, and raised enormous amounts of money for patriotic charities. By 1918, this chapter was the top IODE fundraiser nationally.<sup>19</sup> Along with the Recruiting League, these people and organisations comprised Chatham's recruiting establishment.

In Chatham, recruiting for the First Contingent began on 6 August 1914. During the first day thirty-seven men volunteered before Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. Smith even made the medical standards and quota public.<sup>20</sup> These he explained during a rally the next evening where city bands, officials, and citizens paraded to the bandstand. The local newspaper, the *Daily Planet*, approved of the flags, banners and torches that lined the parade route, but its editor worried that "hand clapping is not a very stirring way of expressing the feelings of people who are entering on the greatest struggle in the world's history with every good omen and confidence of success."<sup>21</sup>

Despite initial concerns that citizens were not matching martial sentiment with action, in only a few days recruiters at the armoury had enlisted seventy-two men, practically filling all 100 spaces

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting the C.E.F. 1914-1918," *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire* 54 (1982), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Neither the *Labour Gazette* nor Chatham's newspapers recorded any substantial negative economic news for the area during this time.

<sup>18</sup> Philip H. Morris, ed. *The Canadian Patriotic Fund: A Record of its Activities from 1914 to 1919* (Ottawa: s.n.), 168-9.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly Shiobhan O'Mara, "Unto the Last Ditch," MA Major Research Paper, 2005, 5-6.

<sup>20</sup> "Many Volunteer for Service in Local Regiment," *Chatham Daily News*, 7 August 1915; "Lieut. Col. H.D. Smith Offers a Complete Company of Soldiers to Fight the Battles of the Empire," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 7 August 1914.

<sup>21</sup> "Big Military Parade Marks the Enthusiasm of the Chatham People," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 8 August 1914.



allotted to the Kent Regiment by Sir Sam Hughes.<sup>22</sup> By 18 August, 101 men were in uniform, plus five 24th Regiment sergeants.<sup>23</sup> Strict rules governed who was eligible for service with the First Contingent as men had to be between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, stand at least five feet three inches tall, and possess a chest measurement of no less than 33.5 inches. Preference was given to unmarried men, then married men without families, and finally married men with families.<sup>24</sup> Chatham's recruiters had no trouble filling these requirements. As was the case nationally, most of the initial recruits were British-born, and seventy of the 100 enlisted men who departed for Valcartier in August 1914 had previous military experience. Twenty of them were combat veterans. Interestingly, while the men were primarily British-born, their officers were Canadian. Seventy-nine were single men, and only nine of those who were married had children. Colonel Smith assured the *Daily News* that he had written approval from each of their wives.<sup>25</sup>

But finding enough men to fill quotas was not the only concern that recruiters and patriotic citizens had to contend with. What was to be done with the dependents of those who went overseas? For example, Englishman Harry Ridgers, a member of the British Territorial Army, had recently arrived in Chatham with his family to take over his ailing father's draying business. Harry's father passed away on 16 August and the next day he received a summons from the War Office, ordering him to report for duty. At a stroke Harry's wife, their four children, and his widowed mother lost two breadwinners. The *Daily News* and *Daily Planet* both published an appeal for someone to manage the business in Harry's absence. The *Planet* presented the case as an example of how those who did not go to the front could still offer valuable service to the cause—service “just as praiseworthy and important as if they shouldered a rifle and joined

<sup>22</sup> “Seventy-Two Have Joined From Chatham,” *Chatham Daily News*, 11 August 1914.

<sup>23</sup> “One Hundred and Twenty-Five,” *Chatham Daily News*, 11 August 1914; “Volunteers Are Still Signing On,” *Chatham Daily News*, 18 August 1914; “Five Sergeants,” *Chatham Daily News*, 18 August 1914.

<sup>24</sup> Telegram from Militia Department to Col. H.D. Smith as printed in, “Lieut. Col. H.D. Smith Offers a Complete Company of Soldiers to Fight the Battles of the Empire,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 7 August 1914; “Full Instructions for Local Volunteers are Received,” *Chatham Daily News*, 7 August 1914.

<sup>25</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 278; “The Roll of Honor,” *Chatham Daily News*, 22 August 1914; “Volunteers are Still Signing On,” *Chatham Daily News*, 18 August 1914.



John Garret Murdock says goodbye to his daughter before leaving with the First Contingent for Valcartier in August 1914. [Chatham-Kent Museum, IODE Books of Remembrance]

the fighters on the firing line.”<sup>26</sup> At this early stage of the war, notions of appropriate forms of duty and service had not hardened to say that all able men not in uniform were shirkers or cowards. Chatham’s press embraced the more nuanced idea that each person should offer their services according to their personal situation and abilities.

Less than twenty days after the declaration of war, three officers and 100 enlisted men gathered at the armoury. Seventy-two of the enlisted men were from Chatham, the rest largely being drawn from elsewhere in Kent County.<sup>27</sup> Mayor McCorvie addressed the men, expressing his pride and thanks and ruminating on the meaning of duty. “It is fitting,” he said, “that some should go and that others should stay behind to keep the homes together and the business of the city and country going. There is a duty to the flag and the country just as much in staying at home as in going. You are doing your duty in offering active service and we will do ours in the daily grind at

<sup>26</sup> “An Opportunity for Service,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 17 August 1914; “Young Man Called to War as his Father Lies on Bier,” *Chatham Daily News*, 17 August 1914.

<sup>27</sup> “The Roll of Honor,” *Chatham Daily News*, 22 August 1914.

home.”<sup>28</sup> McCorvie’s statement reflects the prevailing sentiment also evident in the papers that service could and should take many forms with military service being only one way to express patriotism.

The Chatham men who departed with the First Contingent formed a part of the 1st Battalion, drawn from across Military District Number 1, which was headquartered in London. The same recruiting process applied to recruits for the Second Contingent who joined the 18th Battalion, formed in London under the command of Colonel E.S. Wigle of Windsor. On 22 October Lieutenant-Colonel Smith received word that he was responsible for raising another seventy-five men by 4 November, scarcely two weeks away. Requirements changed little from the First Contingent, and prospective recruits reported to the orderly room at the Armoury where a medical officer and clerks saw to the necessary examinations and paperwork.<sup>29</sup> A 24th Regiment officer expressed confidence that a city the size of Chatham should have no trouble raising those men, but only five men reported during the first day of recruiting, all of them Englishmen.<sup>30</sup> However, publicity had been scant as news of the new quota had arrived late, and Lieutenant-Colonel Smith formed plans to distribute posters throughout the county, appointing recruiting officers in neighbouring towns to spread the word that the drive for men was once again underway.<sup>31</sup>

Second Contingent recruits departed in batches for training in London beginning with twenty-six men on 27 October 1914. The *Daily News* noted that the Canadian-born officers were disappointed to find that again, almost none of the men were native-born Canadians. Although many were Chatham residents, some of the men had come from as far as New York or Chicago, many labourers out of work due to “weather or other conditions.”<sup>32</sup> Thirteen men followed four days later, bringing Chatham’s total to thirty-nine, not including six

<sup>28</sup> “Cheers and Sobs Rent the Air as Chatham Boys Entrained for Valcartier,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 22 August 1914.

<sup>29</sup> “Enlisting for Second Force of Canadians,” *Chatham Daily News*, 22 October 1914.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> “Several Enlist,” *Chatham Daily News*, 23 October 1914.

<sup>32</sup> “Twenty-Six Men Leave for London Enroute to Front,” *Chatham Daily News*, 27 October 1914. This is one of the only times the Chatham press mentioned recruits joining because they were unemployed. Since Chatham recruiters could not fill their quota of seventy-five in Kent County, it is likely that most of the unemployed recruits were also those who came from the United States.

officers.<sup>33</sup> The final group of twenty-one left the day recruiting closed, bringing Chatham's total to sixty, augmented by twenty men from Windsor. A number of men turned up at the armoury the day of departure and were turned away, possibly indecisive about joining or late in putting their affairs in order.<sup>34</sup>

Already in Chatham and elsewhere recruits were becoming scarcer than authorities hoped. As the deadline for filling the 18th Battalion loomed, Military District Number 1 Headquarters reported that the unit was still short some 300 men. Officers in London stated that men in western Ontario did not appreciate the "life and death struggle" which faced Canada and the Empire. Voluntarism might require the added push provided by advertising and public speakers if sufficient enthusiasm was not apparent in time for the next contingent.<sup>35</sup>

As early as the end of 1914, then, it was clear that notions of patriotism were not monolithic, with some prominent local officials and papers asking citizens to only do what they could while military officials, pressured to obtain troops, increasingly took the view that all able-bodied young men had to serve. To this point, recruiting officials had trusted that ordinary Canadians shared their more restricted idea of patriotic duty, one that would inevitably carry them voluntarily to the recruiter's office and into khaki. For military authorities, the need for advertisements or public speakers to inspire enthusiasm for service indicated that young men either did not understand the gravity of Britain's (and Canada's) situation, or that they lacked sufficient patriotic spirit. Naturally, they preferred to think that the former was true and that once the need for service was made clear, a man's sense of duty would propel him to the colours. This would necessarily involve efforts to gradually re-educate the population in 'proper' notions of masculine duty.

In general, young Canadian-born citizens from the local elite proved more willing to serve than their working-class counterparts, suggesting that notions of duty were at least partially a function of class socialisation. For example, Lieutenant Stewart McKeough, a Kent Regiment officer who departed with the Second Contingent, needed little coercion. Stewart belonged to a prominent Chatham

<sup>33</sup> "More Men Leave Chatham for London Enroute to the Front," *Chatham Daily News*, 31 October 1914.

<sup>34</sup> "Twenty-One Men Leave for London," *Chatham Daily News*, 4 November 1914.

<sup>35</sup> "Canadians Do Not Realize Gravity of War," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 2 November 1914.

family. His father William was an established lawyer who had served as mayor, city alderman, and chairman of the board of education. He and his wife Mabel had two surviving children, Stewart and Grant.<sup>36</sup> The family had strong social and professional ties to Chatham's recruiting establishment—Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. Smith was a good friend, and William worked with Recruiting League President J.G. Kerr, whose son served with Stewart McKeough in France.<sup>37</sup> During the war, William and Mabel were active in a number of local political and patriotic organisations, including the school board, hospital board, and patriotic association.<sup>38</sup> William and Stewart's papers offer a glimpse of how the war affected Chatham's social elite. As war approached William wrote, "It seems ridiculous that the assassination of the Crown Prince of Austria by a fanatic Serbian student should involve all the nations of Europe, including Great Britain and her colonies in a war the likes of which the world has never before seen. ... Should Canada be called to assist Great Britain our beloved son Stewart will no doubt be desirous of joining his regiment to fight for Britain's honour [and] glory. May the great God prevent this awful War and great sacrifice of millions of men."<sup>39</sup> William was right; by mid-September 1914 Stewart had made up his mind to join the Second Contingent and his parents reluctantly gave their consent. "I had hoped he would not have felt the call to go," wrote Edward, "but the since it has come all we can do is to pray that the Great God of War will protect him. ... It has been the hardest day of my life."<sup>40</sup> While older elite Canadians certainly would have shared many values with their children, Stewart and others of his generation had been raised in the martial fervour of the Edwardian Age when, as Mark Moss argues, young middle- and upper-class Ontario men were taught that military service was an essential masculine duty. Two months later Stewart was stationed in London, Ontario and on 17 April 1915 his unit departed Halifax for England.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> S. Anne Carruthers and W. Darcy McKeough, eds., *McKeough Letters* (Chatham: Privately Printed, 2006), 9, 135, 145.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 118, nn, 166.

<sup>38</sup> W.E. McKeough, "*My Life:*" *The Diary of William Edward McKeough* (London, On.: The London Publishing Company, 1979), 671.

<sup>39</sup> Carruthers and McKeough, eds., *McKeough Letters*, 159.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

Recruiting of Chatham's 300-man quota for the Third Contingent began on 11 January 1914.<sup>42</sup> Prospective recruits reported to the armoury for medical examination, and those accepted were billeted there until concentration camps in Guelph and London were ready.<sup>43</sup> Regulations favouring unmarried over married men remained in force, as well as the directive on parental or spousal consent for men under twenty-one. Men discharged from previously raised contingents were not eligible for the third.<sup>44</sup> As in the past, the campaign would be short, from 11–26 January.<sup>45</sup> As recruiting began, the *Daily Planet* cautioned that medical requirements and the large number of Chathamites already enlisted would make this campaign more difficult than earlier drives.<sup>46</sup>

Initially, such concerns were unwarranted. Thirty men joined the ranks on the first day alone, with the first fifteen applicants all accepted—an unusual occurrence as it was customary for recruiters to turn down a third of potential recruits for one reason or another.<sup>47</sup> Later in the campaign a British veteran with a Distinguished Service Medal was turned down on account of his varicose veins after making his way from Cincinnati by foot and freight train.<sup>48</sup> In a letter published by the *Planet*, Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. Smith urged men to enlist and reminded the citizens of Chatham and Kent how well filling the quota would reflect on the area.<sup>49</sup> By 14 January forty-seven men had applied and only eight were rejected; by 19 January, ninety men had applied with sixty-six accepted, but then the pace slowed. Four days later only seventy-five men had been accepted, and with one day left in the campaign Colonel Smith had only eighty-three of the 200 men he sought.<sup>50</sup>

Officials decided to extend the campaign and over five days an additional twenty men enlisted. As of 30 January the *Planet* reported

<sup>42</sup> "Recruiting Commences," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 28 December 1914.

<sup>43</sup> "The Third Contingent Has Been Ordered," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 5 January 1915.

<sup>44</sup> "Recruiting Will be Started Monday Morning," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 9 January 1915.

<sup>45</sup> "Now is the Time to Enlist for Service," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 14 January 1915.

<sup>46</sup> "Recruiting Commenced," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 11 January 1915.

<sup>47</sup> "Recruits are Signing Up in Large Numbers," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 12 January 1915.

<sup>48</sup> "He Came a Long Way to Enlist," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 14 January 1915.

<sup>49</sup> "Now is the Time to Enlist for Service," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 14 January 1915.

<sup>50</sup> "Recruits Now Number Nearly Seventy Strong," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 19 January 1915; "Four More Recruits Have Signed Up," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 23 January 1915; "Eighty-Three Recruits Have Now Enlisted," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 25 January 1915.

that 135 men had applied, a rejection rate of only fourteen percent.<sup>51</sup> Since earlier reports indicated that one-third of volunteers were customarily rejected, it is possible that Captain Bell quietly lowered his standards during the latter stages of the campaign; certainly the rejection rate in Chatham was low over the course of the war. The *Planet* reported the departure of 107 men for training in London on 1 February, when four or five hundred well-wishers braved drizzle and five inches of slush to see the recruits off in a gloomy farewell.<sup>52</sup>

Tension ran high during the Third Contingent campaign, and the strain of finding 200 volunteers in only nineteen days offered a bitter taste of things to come. Already, the sight of a Belgian not in uniform was upsetting to some members of the community. Besides Achille Pattiyn's 'fistic' altercation in a Chatham hotel, Belgian Henri Scheenaker enlisted after accepting a judge's offer to let him off on the charge of being drunk and disorderly—on the condition that he enlist at once.<sup>53</sup>

The use of recruiting posters produced mixed reactions with some feeling that coercion was contrary to the spirit of voluntarism. While not specifically opposed to their use, the *Planet* gave special praise to those who enlisted before the posters went up. "The [thirty] men who attached their names to the service rolls yesterday were not influenced in any way through advertising," it wrote. "The 'Do Your Duty' posters had not been distributed and they had no opportunity to see them. The offering of their services was purely voluntary."<sup>54</sup> This statement echoed the sentiments of the Military District Number 1 officials who threatened an advertising campaign as recruiting for the Second Contingent wrapped up. The notion that certain men enlisted out of a more pure form of voluntarism carried clear implications for eligible civilians: the best men did not require coercion to see their patriotic duty and act on it.

This idea hardened in subsequent campaigns. Since recruiters never wavered in their conviction that men joined based on their

<sup>51</sup> "The Number is Steadily Increasing," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 29 January 1915; "Big Send-Off is Planned," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 30 January 1915; "The Recruits Leave Chatham Monday Morning," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 29 January 1915.

<sup>52</sup> "The Maple City Gives a Rousing Farewell to her Brave Sons Who Are Leaving to Fight for the Motherland," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 1 February 1915.

<sup>53</sup> "The Recruits Leave Chatham Monday Morning," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 29 January 1915.

<sup>54</sup> "Recruits Are Signing Up in Large Numbers," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 12 January 1915.

sense of patriotic duty, they began to use language that placed eligible men in a hierarchy based on how much coercion was required to make them realise their duty and act on it. At the top were men who instantly answered the call, the most virtuous and those who knew instinctively 'what to do'. The bottom was populated with 'slackers' who would not join until the government forced them. By the war's first winter, fears were mounting that Canada's population was more pear-shaped than previously believed.

In January 1915, the language surrounding this emerging hierarchy was not yet bitter. Achille Pattiy's story was reported with a note of vindication—he upheld his honour by physically besting his accuser, paid his dues, and promptly made good on his word to go to the front. Henri Scheenaker's arrest and subsequent enlistment contained a lesson in sobriety, with the promise of personal redemption through service. After all, contemporary notions of the soldier held him up as the perfect example of proud, healthy, and robust manhood—a stark contrast to the drunk appearing meekly in police court.<sup>55</sup> However, this benign atmosphere did not last. When recruiting became constant in the fall of 1915, recruiters increasingly used this language to threaten the conscience, character, and manhood of eligible men while maintaining a veil of civility.

Six months passed before Chatham saw another recruiting campaign and in the meantime the war dragged on in a bloody stalemate. Chathamites were more informed about the realities of trench warfare and the terrible losses incurred by all sides than is sometimes imagined.<sup>56</sup> The *Daily News* published letters from Private Clayton Lamarsh, a local baseball star serving in a support unit. At times he spoke frankly of being near the front lines and his fear of coming under attack. "The strain on the nerves is terrible," he wrote in August 1915. "Hundreds have had their nerves shattered and been compelled to go to rest camps, etc. My own nerves are in such a bad state that the very whistle of a shell causes the most painful nervous anguish."<sup>57</sup> Nell Young, a nurse at an American hospital in France, wrote to her brother in Chatham describing the Marne

<sup>55</sup> Maroney, "The Great Adventure," 92-95.

<sup>56</sup> Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During the Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), xii.

<sup>57</sup> "We Do Not Know How Long the War Will Last, Nor if We Will Last as Long as the War Does," *Chatham Daily News*, 24 August 1915.



battlefield. Besides the destruction of buildings, what struck her most were the black and white crosses which dotted the landscape, white for Frenchmen, black for Germans. "It really is a graveyard for miles. The men were buried where they fell, sometimes one in a grave, oftener several. ... It took them three days working day and night to bury the dead."<sup>58</sup>

The first major shock to the city came on 15 June 1915. Ten Chatham and Kent men with the 1st Battalion were reported killed at Givenchy including Major George J.L. Smith, commander of Chatham's First Contingent.<sup>59</sup> By July men invalided home from the front were beginning to provide first-hand, personal accounts of life in the trenches. Don Douglas described the scene in *No Man's Land* to the *Planet*: "At one place our trench was within [thirty] yards of the German breast work. The ground was strewn with bodies and the stench was just terrible. A mile away, the odor from the trenches is plainly noticeable."<sup>60</sup> While civilians could hardly be expected to understand the full scale of the fighting and the horror of life at the front, stories from those who served certainly worked against official claims that service remained honourable and exciting.

When recruiting resumed in September 1915 the war was over a year old, and these same reports from the front also lent some credence to recruiters' rhetoric on the scale of the war, if not the stakes. War news had the power to sway those on the fence about joining, and patriotic individuals might be convinced that their service really was required, though reports of unending carnage likely convinced others that they wanted nothing to do with the affair. On top of this, Chatham's economy was booming and eligible men did not have to look far to find alternatives to employment with the CEF. Not only did August–September mark the beginning of harvest, but several new industrial ventures were underway. That fall the American Well Works Company and Dominion Sugar Company both began work, and officials estimated the arrival of

<sup>58</sup> "Scene of Battle of the Marne Now is Really a Graveyard for Miles," *Chatham Daily News*, 4 August 1915.

<sup>59</sup> Rhodes, *Centennial Chatham*, 96.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

the Dominion plant alone would inject some \$1 million into the local economy and create a large number of secondary jobs.<sup>61</sup>

## COERCION

During the lull between January and September, a populist Recruiting League was created, an organisation made up of members who had considerable social, civic, and business connections.<sup>62</sup> Lawyer (and mayor by 1917) J.G. Kerr was president for the duration of the war, while Harry Collins served as both secretary of the Recruiting League and treasurer of Chatham's Canadian Patriotic Fund (CPF) branch. The finance committee included former mayor William Anderson, whose wife was involved with the 24th Kent IODE and in 1917 the first woman elected to Chatham city council. The league's publicity committee included three former mayors, as well as the owners of the *Chatham Daily News* and *Daily Planet*.<sup>63</sup> Woodward was also involved with the board of trade later in the war, and his wife was founder of the 24th Regiment IODE. Additionally, the Meetings Committee had at its disposal the talents and connections of the Honourable Captain Reverend R.S.W. Howard, chaplain of the 24th Kent Regiment and Rector of Christ Church, as well as A.B. McCoig, Member of Parliament and George Sulman, Member of Provincial Parliament.<sup>64</sup>

The first unit recruited with their help was the 70th Battalion. Chatham recruiters were responsible for a company of 200 men, and they hoped that lower chest, height, and dental requirements would help.<sup>65</sup> However, enlistment got off to a late start compared to London and Windsor, and the *Daily News* complained that recruiters

<sup>61</sup> Rhodes, *Centennial Chatham*, 97-98; O'Mara, "Unto the Last Ditch," 29.

<sup>62</sup> This organisation went by several names, including Chatham Citizen's Recruiting League and Kent Country Recruiting League, but the membership remained unchanged. It is not clear when the league was created, but by October 1915 the organisation's activities had begun to appear in Chatham's press. "Recruiting League is to Begin Campaign for Volunteers in Kent," *Chatham Daily News*, 3 October 1915.

<sup>63</sup> G.W. Cowan, 1905; Charles Austin, 1910; Arthur J. Dunn, 1913.

<sup>64</sup> Lauriston, *Romantic Kent*, 732-735; O'Mara, "Unto the Last Ditch," 69; "Recruiting Commences," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 28 December 1914, Carruthers and McKeough, eds., *McKeough Letters*, 167; "Recruiting League is to Begin Campaign for Volunteers in Kent," *Chatham Daily News*, 3 October 1915.

<sup>65</sup> "More Men are Sent to London," *Chatham Daily News*, 13 September 1915.

in Chatham might have netted as many as fifty unemployed men in the city had they started earlier.<sup>66</sup> For most of September recruiting continued slowly. Late in the month fifty-nine men had departed Chatham, and officials hoped that the pace would increase as the agricultural season drew to a close.<sup>67</sup>

In the midst of this effort came word of a supposedly great British victory at Loos, and the city erupted into celebration—one that proved premature and illustrated the size of the gap which existed between the reality of life at the front and the news people at home were able to read. Late on 26 September the McKeoughs received a phone call with the news, and before long the entire family and their dinner guests were celebrating in the streets. “We got our cars decorated and joined in the procession,” William wrote. “[The bands played, there were torch lights, there was great shouting and cheering, the Mayor and Archie McCoig made speeches, which nobody heard, we sang patriotic songs and were all greatly excited,” he wrote. In addition to convincing other nations to join the Allied cause, William was sure “the recruiting of our men would be much stimulated” by the victory.<sup>68</sup>

Recruiting officials shared this hope, especially when celebrations spilled over into a second night, but they were disappointed.<sup>69</sup> Two days later the *Daily News* reported that “of the hundreds of unmarried men who shouted themselves hoarse and who could easily qualify it is remarkable that not a single one has enlisted.” Since the demonstrations, the only recruits were from the outlying communities of Wallaceburg and Thamesville.<sup>70</sup>

At first, the *Daily News* reported the celebrations as vindication for the city, whose patriotic reputation was allegedly tarnished in the London press by visiting 33rd Battalion soldiers.<sup>71</sup> However, when the celebrations failed to produce recruits, it promptly declared the outburst “valueless,” and ran the tagline “Young Men Shout And

<sup>66</sup> These men were most likely labourers waiting for the start of harvest. “Recruits Come Slowly at the Call to Colors,” *Chatham Daily News*, 15 September 1915.

<sup>67</sup> “Seven More Recruits to London Camp,” *Chatham Daily News*, 23 September 1915; “Recruits Are Likely to be Kept at Home,” *Chatham Daily News*, 27 September 1915.

<sup>68</sup> McKeough, “*My Life*,” 673.

<sup>69</sup> “Second Night of Celebration of British-French Victory is Featured by Big Parade,” *Chatham Daily News*, 28 September 1915.

<sup>70</sup> “Patriotic Outbursts Valueless,” *Chatham Daily News*, 29 September 1915.

<sup>71</sup> “Second Night of Celebration of British-French Victory is Featured by Big Parade,” *Chatham Daily News*, 28 September 1915.

Sing But Fail When Time Comes To Join Colors, Reputation Of City Is Injured.”<sup>72</sup> For the author and other patriotic individuals, it was difficult to understand how such enthusiastic demonstrations of patriotism could fail to lead a man into khaki.

Three weeks later this sentiment was repeated at a large recruiting rally. Minister of Trade and Commerce Sir George E. Foster told eligible Chathamites that he was merely placing the facts in front of them, but warned them that they were determining their character in their reaction to the war crisis and they must be man enough not to dodge the question of service. In other words, any man who decided not to enlist was not giving the facts due attention.<sup>73</sup> This time, recruiters triumphantly announced that the patriotism expressed in the rally resulted in the enlistment of eight men.<sup>74</sup>

One thing that recruiters in Chatham never fully grasped was that enlistment was a complex decision. Despite efforts to attract men by emphasising provisions for the care of family dependants and a policy that ensured friends they could join, train and serve together, patriotism clearly remained the recruiting establishment's overwhelming focus. However, there was more for a man to consider than his patriotic duty, and the McKeough family is an excellent example. Although fraught with worry for his son's safety, William McKeough could hardly contain his pride for Stewart. A staunch imperialist, William lamented the passing of Lord Roberts in November 1914, remembering fondly when the McKeoughs were guests of the Field Marshall before the war.<sup>75</sup> He wrote glowingly of his uniformed son, and publically heaped praise on Stewart's fellow officers and men.<sup>76</sup> William's younger son Grant would be eligible for service in January 1916, and though he was determined to join, his parents opposed it.

So did Stewart, whose views on Grant enlisting hardened after some time at the front. While still in England with the 18th Battalion, Stewart assured Grant, “I am here [and] will do my best to play a double part for you [and] myself and it is up to you to remain where you are. ... Play your part of the game right at home and for your

<sup>72</sup> “Patriotic Outbursts Valueless,” *Chatham Daily News*, 29 September 1915.

<sup>73</sup> “British Empire Now Facing Crisis and Men are Needed for Loyal Valiant Service,” *Chatham Daily News*, 21 October 1915.

<sup>74</sup> “Impetus Has Been Given Recruiting,” *Chatham Daily News*, 22 October 1915.

<sup>75</sup> Carruthers and McKeough, eds., *McKeough Letters*, 166.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 181, see also 168, 170-171.

family.” Stewart conceded that the navy might be acceptable, but was very clear that “the army is no place for you.”<sup>77</sup>

Stewart’s unit departed for France in mid-September 1915. By late October he had more than a month’s experience in the line, and instructed his family not to suggest the infantry to anyone.<sup>78</sup> To counteract the intense pressure Grant felt at home, he enlisted the help of his fellow officers overseas to steer him away from service or at the very least away from the infantry. As serving officers, Stewart and his friends represented the height of patriotic duty but were at odds with the officials who revered them at home, and Grant was left to reconcile their advice with recruiters’ expectations for a man his age.

Grant’s parents hoped that he would spend a year at university and go into business, but the war proved such a distraction to his studies that in June 1915 he took a bank job instead. Stewart sensed that his brother would enlist regardless of his parent’s wishes, so he began stressing the relative safety of an artillery unit. He also came around to the idea of his brother in uniform and accepted that it was important that Grant contribute meaningfully to the war effort. “I realize how hard it is on you but above all Mother [and] Daddy do not allow him to drift about [and] merely make a faint show as so many have been doing in Chatham [and] all other places. ... You need not worry a bit. I am getting along fine and so will [Grant] in some artillery unit.”<sup>79</sup>

Stewart was right; Grant was determined to join, and join the infantry at that. After dinner with some officers of the 71st Battalion in November he was keen to apply for a Lieutenancy at the Training School for Officers in London, and not even a personal appeal by Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. Smith could change his mind. Furious, he told his parents that if they would not consent to that, he would enlist as a private come his eighteenth birthday.<sup>80</sup> Keeping soldiers about town to engage eligible men was a common recruiting tactic, and one that impressed Grant. So did talk of volunteering freely rather than waiting for compulsion: “We tried to talk him out of the idea,” wrote his father, “but he is very persistent, his wish is to go now with some ‘good fellows’ rather than to wait till he is older and be made to go

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 446–447. McKeough, “*My Life*,” 684.

with the slackers....He has been getting on so well in the bank that we thought he had given up the idea of going to war and we were glad of it, but he thinks his 'call' has come and we cannot alter his decision."<sup>81</sup>

Recruiting for the 70th wrapped up in early November, with 124 recruits sent to join the unit in London.<sup>82</sup> Of these, fifty-four were Chatham residents. Almost at once, efforts commenced for another unit, the 91st Battalion, and the Recruiting League lost no time generating enthusiasm. A mere two days into the new campaign eighteen men had reported to the Chatham Armoury, setting an ambitious pace that recruiters sustained into the winter of 1915-16.<sup>83</sup>

During this time, the Recruiting League was instrumental in focusing the message of recruiting first towards Kent's small towns and then in the city of Chatham.<sup>84</sup> Recruiters published letters from local boys in uniform with headlines like "Chatham Soldiers Are Disappointed With the Failure in Recruiting," and "Young Men Fail To Realize Fighting Is For Canada Says Soldier Now On Firing Line," even if the writer dwelled primarily on other things.<sup>85</sup> The Recruiting League also began working closely with the Canadian Patriotic Fund to convince prospective recruits that their dependents would be looked after, one of the few examples of Chatham's recruiters tackling a practical obstacle to enlistment.<sup>86</sup>

Recruiters benefited from a small influx of farm labourers at the end of harvest, but jobs remained plentiful. In December the city could not even find twelve men for a public works project, and before long Chatham's company for the 91st was well over strength.<sup>87</sup> More Canadian-born men were applying than ever, an indication that recruiters' methods were resonating with a somewhat wider audience than before, though men born in the British Isles still kept pace.

<sup>81</sup> Carruthers and McKeough, eds., *McKeough Letters*, 447.

<sup>82</sup> "Total Number of Recruits Encouraging," *Chatham Daily News*, 27 October 1915; "More Recruits," *Chatham Daily News*, 1 November 1915; "Two More Recruits," *Chatham Daily News*, 2 November 1915.

<sup>83</sup> "Eighteen Men Have Joined Ninety-First," *Chatham Daily News*, 5 November 1915.

<sup>84</sup> "Plan to Secure Recruits Here," *Chatham Daily News*, 7 December 1915.

<sup>85</sup> "Chatham Soldiers are Disappointed with the Failure in Recruiting," *Chatham Daily News*, 15 October 1915, "Young Men Fail to Realize Fighting is for Canada Says Soldier Now on Firing Line," *Chatham Daily News*, 11 November 1915.

<sup>86</sup> "Facts for Canadians Who Enlist for Overseas Service," *Chatham Daily News*, 18 November 1915, "Families of Soldiers are Looked After," *Chatham Daily News*, 18 November 1915.

<sup>87</sup> "More Recruits Sign," *Chatham Daily News*, 18 November 1915, "Men Should Not Be Out of Work," *Chatham Daily News*, 8 December 1915.

In total, Chatham sent 254 men to join the 91st in St. Thomas, eighty-five of which were residents of the Maple City.<sup>88</sup> Coercion was garnering recruits where pure voluntarism had failed, but the new methods were about to face their biggest challenge yet.

Starting in February 1916, Chatham raised its own unit. The 186th Overseas Battalion was formed around the 91st's over strength Kent Company, which transferred to Chatham from St. Thomas to assist with recruiting. An additional 800 men were required for the unit to depart for overseas service intact, and Chatham's recruiting establishment was determined that the area would not fail this supreme test of patriotic duty.

Twenty-four men enlisted on the first day of recruiting, and recruiters sustained a reasonable pace into the spring, with 242 new recruits signed by the end of February. Enlistments continued at a moderate pace into March, but fell short of expectations.<sup>89</sup> With the goal of 800 in mind, the Recruiting League and militia authorities increased their coercive efforts in the form of a 'Whirlwind Campaign,' warning the city that forthcoming methods were the unfortunate result of lacklustre turnout among eligible men, even though recruiting in Chatham had never been better.<sup>90</sup> The campaign's slogan was "600 Men in Three Weeks," and it aimed to fill the 186th's ranks in one fell swoop.<sup>91</sup>

The campaign was blunt, antagonistic and condescending, and designed to create a *de facto* register of local manpower, a common tactic elsewhere in Ontario.<sup>92</sup> The *Daily Planet* stated that "The time has finally arrived when recruiting is going to be regarded as a resinous and important proposition in Chatham. The young men of Chatham have been given long enough to come forward of their own free will and accord, to join the colors. Now a little pressure is going to be brought to bear upon them, to try to induce them to regard

<sup>88</sup> "Nine Recruits Go to Camp So Far This Week," *Chatham Daily News*, 26 January 1916.

<sup>89</sup> "Kent Boys Welcome Chance to Serve King and Country in an All Kent Battalion," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 8 February 1916; "Strength of the 'Kents' Now Five Sixty Nine," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 25 March 1916.

<sup>90</sup> "A Whirlwind Campaign for Recruits Soon," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 30 March 1916.

<sup>91</sup> "Six Hundred Men in Three Weeks Slogan of Recruiting League," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 1 April 1916.

<sup>92</sup> Bray, "'Fighting as an Ally,'" 154-155.

the matter in the proper light.”<sup>93</sup> The object of the campaign was to bring the message of service to every young man in Chatham and to persist until they gave in or produced an acceptable reason to remain a civilian. Specially picked men of the 186th were broken into three committees, each consisting of several squads overseen by an officer “responsible in seeing that nothing ungentlemanly occur[ed].”<sup>94</sup>

The Factory Committee held short recruiting meetings at factories during work hours. After a short speech, recruiting sergeants mingled amongst the workers, writing down their names and reasons for not enlisting. Men could join then and there or schedule a home meeting in order to talk the matter over with their wife or family. The key to this approach was persistence. Factory meetings continued at regular intervals and the answers of every man “followed up until the man who is solicited gives his final answer.”<sup>95</sup> Employers’ tacit endorsement of the idea made workers a captive audience, which allowed recruiters to play on peer pressure and workplace reputations, and to confront employment-related excuses head on. Even if a man was critically important to that business and his employer reluctant to see him go, the question of a man’s worth in the recruiter’s eyes was not one of value to the business but value to the Empire; it was up to recruiters to decide whether that man was doing better service to his country in uniform or on the shop floor.

The Street Committee roamed Chatham’s streets, shops, pool rooms, and other gathering places for eligible men, while the House Committee performed the same task door-to-door. It also distributed cards for citizens to report the names and particulars of eligible men to recruiters, and both committees revisited declining men during the course of the campaign.

In the first five days of the ‘Whirlwind Campaign’ recruiters received ninety applications, and seventy were accepted for service.<sup>96</sup> Applications dropped sharply in week two, when only thirty-five men applied, and as the campaign neared its end the 186th was still some 500 men short of its goal.<sup>97</sup> Planners knew they risked

<sup>93</sup> “Six Hundred Men in Three Weeks Slogan of Recruiting League,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 1 April 1916.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> “Expect Over Hundred in First Week,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 8 April 1916.

<sup>97</sup> “Hundred and Twenty-Five Have Applied,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 14 April 1916 and “Strength of Kents Reaches Seven Hundred,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 22 April 1916.





Citizens march through Chatham in support of the 186th Battalion, October 1916. [Chatham-Kent Museum, Kostuk Collection]

alienating the public, and dispatched a speaker to every public event from moving pictures to church services to explain the objects and methods of the campaign, “and thus secure the moral support of the citizens.”<sup>98</sup> In doing so, recruiters spread their ideas of patriotic duty, and injected public discourse with the appropriate language. By convincing the public that they held the moral high ground and therefore had the best interests of prospective recruits, Chatham, Canada, and the Empire at heart, recruiters expanded the sources of coercion on eligible men to include practically the entire city. Though dissenting views surely existed, recruiters were careful to encourage the appearance of consensus on the issue, and therefore retain their monopoly on acceptable forms of patriotic duty.

Recruiters also retained public support by insisting that their agents were civil even as they invaded every aspect of a man’s life. By extending their idea of patriotic duty to the public at large, recruiters pre-emptively absolved themselves of misconduct through the virtue of their cause and claimed the right to present their case to every man. Anyone who objected risked being branded unpatriotic,

<sup>98</sup> “Six Hundred Men in Three Weeks Slogan of Recruiting League,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 1 April 1916.

a shirker who refused to *really* examine the dire situation Britain and Canada faced. Resisting or protesting a recruiter's efforts only justified their continuation and escalation, while public support insulated them from blame for any adverse consequences. Thanks to the publicity campaign, everyone in Chatham knew that recruiters only approached a man in order to help him find his manhood and realise his patriotic duty; it was up to the civilian to prove otherwise, and doing so was very difficult indeed.

Coercive methods were one thing, but coercion in the form of conscription was quite another. According to recruiters, service was inevitable for fit young men, and if conscription arrived, it would be because too many would not see their duty. They exploited this threat by promising instant redemption to those who volunteered—no matter how late or how aggressively coerced by campaigns. “There is a long struggle ahead, and men of military age are beginning to realise that they will have to go sooner or later,” wrote the *Planet* in April 1916. “The sooner they go the sooner the war will end. They might as well go first as last, for in the end they will have to go anyway. If they do not come forward voluntarily, then there is no doubt that pressure of some kind will have to be brought upon them to make them see their duty.”<sup>99</sup> The threat of conscription allowed the idea of a hierarchy of motive among volunteers to act as both a threat and its own mitigating factor. Whatever difference existed between a new volunteer and the man already in khaki was instantly erased by the enormous gulf between the volunteer and the ‘slackers’ he left behind. Forced service did not offer the same redemption.

When the Whirlwind Campaign failed to bring the 186th up to strength, the *Daily Planet* warned, “Those who come in before conscription comes into force will deserve credit for giving their services willingly. Those who wait for conscription will be known as men who had to be forced into the fight. When the war is over a broad line of distinction will be drawn between these two classes of recruits, in the estimation of the public, so that the men who wish to hold the respect of their fellows had better get into the fight right away.”<sup>100</sup> Chatham recruiters did not seem bothered that their

<sup>99</sup> “Young Men Must Realize that the Call of Country is of First Importance,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 14 February 1916.

<sup>100</sup> “Campaign Will End When Ranks of Kent Filled,” *Chatham Daily Planet*, 22 April 1916.

coercive efforts substantially undermined how 'willing' a volunteer might be, or that recruits with 'the respect of their fellows' might be vastly outnumbered after the war by those without it.

After three weeks of furious campaigning the 186th Battalion was barely 700 strong, including the original complement from the 91st. With the owners of both newspapers active members of the Recruiting League, dissent and opposition to recruiting did not appear in the pages of either publication. There is evidence that tension ran high over the issue, and Grant McKeough's struggle with conflicting messages from recruiters in Chatham and his respected older brother is a prime example.

With his parents' reluctant approval, Grant departed for officer's training in London on 12 December 1915 and was soon attached to the 186th Battalion. He lost no time ordering his officer's uniform and was thrilled "at the thought of his anticipated participation in the Great War."<sup>101</sup> Thereafter, Stewart intensified his efforts to see his brother leave the 186th for the artillery, despite the great push underway in Chatham. Grant's resistance to his brother's appeals are testament to the pressure he felt in Chatham, even as someone already in uniform. Beginning in December 1915, Stewart wrote home no less than ten times urging Grant to join an artillery unit. He did his best to downplay the bureaucratic and even equine—artillery officers were required to exhibit proficiency on horseback—obstacles to becoming an artillery officer, and dismiss pressure to stay in the infantry. Stewart even had his fellow officers write Grant to help him.<sup>102</sup>

In other correspondence, he urged his father to use his connections with the militia, Military District Number 1 headquarters, and the Army Medical Corps to get Grant an artillery commission.<sup>103</sup> Stewart knew very well this was not where officials wanted a young lieutenant: "The big call is of course for infantrymen," he conceded, "but each division of infantry must have a complement of artillery and if he goes after the guns hard enough he can get in."<sup>104</sup> From Stewart's letters it is clear that others had Grant's ear too, and Stewart urged him to quietly take advantage of his family connections rather than

<sup>101</sup> McKeough, *My Life*, 668.

<sup>102</sup> Carruthers and McKeough, eds., *McKeough Letters*, 320.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 322, see also 312.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.



Lieutenant Stewart McKeough (left) with fellow officers. [Chatham-Kent Museum, Kostuk Collection]

simply follow his friends.<sup>105</sup> “They have no ambition to get in a senior branch of the service,” he wrote to his parents. “Merely [being] in this game is rough enough for them but have him step out [and] go after the best [and] show them up.”<sup>106</sup>

Stewart spent the first months of 1916 in the trenches growing ever more frustrated with his brother's refusal to get in with an artillery unit. “Put Grant on six legs into the artillery,” he wrote in February.<sup>107</sup> When Grant still had not budged nearly three weeks later, Stewart wrote home furiously “I do regret Grant's backwardness and disinclination to make a real move or decision in favour of the artillery. ... Once in the infantry it's a devil of a hard job to get out of it.”<sup>108</sup> But his efforts were in vain, and by mid-March Stewart had nearly given up, briefly urging his brother to join a machine gun unit if he had to be in the infantry.<sup>109</sup>

Grant clearly felt that his duty lay with the 186th, which was some small consolation to Stewart. Stewart thought the entire effort

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 363.

too ambitious, and expected manpower shortages to keep his brother out of the trenches a while longer. "The 186th might just as well be the battalion [for Grant] unless Kent amazes the whole countryside," he said. "Before a battalion is trained it will have taken close on 2000 men to keep it up to strength with the numerous totals of discharges, misfits, sick transfers, etc. etc."<sup>110</sup> Stewart's views on the 186th's commander are another indication of the charged atmosphere surrounding recruiting in Chatham: "I understand that while Neil Smith goes about the country making recruiting speeches he absolutely refuses to allow his younger brother to enlist."<sup>111</sup>

There are further hints of tension in Chatham in a series of front page editorials run by the *Chatham Daily News* in the weeks before the 186th departed for summer camp. Between them, they offered a complete summary of every explicit or implied argument for enlistment made by Chatham recruiters since the war began. The editorials accused women of keeping men from the ranks, blatantly questioned the masculinity of every man in the city, and dismissed those who opposed the campaign.



One told mothers that if they prevented their sons from enlisting, their honour and his manhood stood for nothing. The article invoked images of motherly love, nurturing, and self-sacrifice and applied them to the war effort. "Mothers should be careful that they do not lose their sons by saving them," it warned. "They say they love the son too much to have him give his life in battle or to suffer wounds, but how much more dangerous will it be to have the son lose his respect for mother because she did not encourage him to do his duty, or to have him lose his character because she kept him at home when his patriotic spirit urged that he join his fellows in upholding the cause of justice and freedom."<sup>112</sup> According to the editorial, the ultimate expression of a mother's love was to see her son attain his full measure of manhood, which meant sending him to the recruiter's office without delay: "Mothers who have the true love of their sons will not stand between them and duty at this time, but will be ready to urge that the youth of the country play the part of the 'man' and go forth to protect the home."<sup>113</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>112</sup> "Editorial: The Mother Love for the Son," *Chatham Daily News*, 26 May 1916.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



# Only One Week Left

To raise 600 men for the 186th Kent Batt. The whirlwind campaign to fill up the ranks of the Kents is meeting with some success, but about 500 men are still needed to accomplish the aim of raising 600 men in three weeks.

## What Has This City Done Since the Three Weeks' Campaign Started?

Has this community been depleted of all its fighting men? We venture to say that there are still hundreds of young men in Chatham who are in a position to go. Why are they still in civilian clothes, while their country is calling loudly for their services? They still have one week in which to redeem themselves, and also redeem the County of Kent. Now is the accepted time. Let there be no delay in answering the call.



## The Kent Battalion Cannot be Filled without More Men From the Rural Districts

The Militia Department will allow all recruits from the country to stay on the farms until the seeding is over, and will also allow them to return to the farms for the harvest, so there is no excuse for the farmers refusing to join the colors.

## The Call for Men was Never so Urgent as it is at the Present Time

Don't be a slacker, and don't wait for conscription. Be a willing soldier, and offer your services voluntarily to fight for the cause of freedom and justice. The Kent Battalion will have to be filled if German Prussianism and infamy is to be banished from the world.

**Apply at the Armouries, Chatham**  
Headquarters of the 186th Kents.



The *Chatham Daily News*, 4 May 1916. [Chatham Daily News]

According to the editors of the *Daily News*, the greatest cost of a man's failure to enlist was his manhood. "Real manhood fails to attain its fullest development when the men of any community or any country fail to live up to the full extent of their privileges and duty," the paper insisted.<sup>114</sup> Only by enlisting could a man prove his right to enjoy the Dominion others were fighting for.<sup>115</sup> Picking up on this idea, the next day's editorial concluded that "If this is not done then the 'male human beings' of the community will have a colossal

<sup>114</sup> "Editorial: When Manhood Fails," *Chatham Daily News*, 19 May 1916.

<sup>115</sup> "Editorial: Should Canadians Enlist?," *Chatham Daily News*, 18 May 1916.

task proving their right to be classed as 'men.'<sup>116</sup> The editorials also threatened a man's future as a father, assuring men that no child would respect a father who could have served but did not. It asked: "Can any father who has the spark of manhood in him, take the risk of such a condition arising?"<sup>117</sup> These techniques were not unique to Chatham. Recruiting propaganda across the province used idealised Victorian gender roles to appeal to men and women. When speaking about manhood, recruiters cast the soldier as the archetypical male and compared him to effeminate, cowardly shirkers. This placed men not in uniform in the same category as conscientious objectors, who were derided nationally as childlike and mentally ill.<sup>118</sup>

The most blatant signs of friction over recruitment came when the *Daily News* confronted those who criticised soldiers' behaviour. "One intoxicated man, wearing the uniform, is more talked of than a dozen men in civilian clothes," it read "...If those who criticize would endeavor to assist rather than condemn, then there could be and would be an improvement."<sup>119</sup> As the unit left for summer camp, the *News* reminded readers that "The name of Kent should not be sullied by any failure to furnish all the men needed. There may be differences of opinion regarding some of the detail of the management of affairs, but such differences can be settled after this first duty, the winning of the war, has been disposed of."<sup>120</sup> In other words, any objection to recruiters' conduct was detrimental to the war effort and did not warrant consideration until after the war was over and such objections were irrelevant.

The 186th continued to accept recruits after it returned from summer camp, and lingered in Chatham until the spring of 1917. In February 1917 officers from across Military District Number 1 met in London to discuss recruiting efforts in light of new proposals from Militia Headquarters. Weary of incessant recruiting drives, the officers discussed the expansion of militia regiments to free up CEF men in Canada for service overseas, and feeding CEF battalions through transfers from the Militia to the Expeditionary Force.

<sup>116</sup> "Editorial: When Manhood Fails," *Chatham Daily News*, 19 May 1916.

<sup>117</sup> "Editorial: Questions Hard to Answer," *Chatham Daily News*, 20 May 1916.

<sup>118</sup> Maroney, "The Great Adventure," 92-95; Amy J. Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada During the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 122-126.

<sup>119</sup> "Editorial: The Soldier as a Man," *Chatham Daily News*, 15 May 1916.

<sup>120</sup> "Editorial: 'God-Speed and a Safe Return,'" *Chatham Daily News*, 31 May 1916.

**WHICH SIDE**

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**Are You Going to be on when the 186th  
Battalion Leaves for London?**

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Are you going to be among the able bodied young men wishing the boys in khaki God-speed or will you as a true and loyal Canadian be in the service uniform of the King?

Haven't you as much right; are you not as able to fight as any of these men who are going? Then, by what right do you sit back and let others go in your place?

The 186th battalion is going to camp under strength because young men of the City of Chatham and County of Kent **WILL NOT** see their duty.

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**Does This Mean You?**

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**REPORT AT ARMOURIES OR CITY RECRUITING OFFICE AT ONCE BEFORE  
BATTALION LEAVES.**

The *Chatham Daily News*, 29 May 1916. [Chatham Daily News]

Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis of the 24th Kent Regiment squarely opposed implementing the proposal for several reasons. First was the ongoing trouble of filling the 186th. "We have been recruiting for two years and a half, and it does not seem to me we are going to have much encouragement to recruiting from a secondary source when you cannot recruit with every man's time on the job," he said.<sup>121</sup> Second was the problem of resources. The 24th had only two officers available locally, hardly enough to mount its own recruiting

<sup>121</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 4258, File 21-1-10 Vol. 1, "Proceedings of a Conference of Commanding Officers, Cavalry and Infantry Units, Military District No. 1," 12 February 1917, 2.



campaign. Finally, Lewis was unconvinced that recruits would view joining the militia differently than joining the CEF. "If you cannot through the present means encourage, or induce, or persuade men to go into active service for overseas service, how can you expect to do the same thing through the Militia, with a knowledge they are going to gain the same end?" he asked.<sup>122</sup>

Colonel Shannon's reply illustrates the confusion that existed in the recruiting establishment in Chatham and the rest of Military District Number 1. None too enthusiastically, he stated that one of the ideas of the new proposal was that men might be more eager to sign up through the militia if they thought that drafts from their Militia Regiment would depart quickly for overseas service, rather than lingering in Canada for six months to a year. Someone replied that there were "two classes of men left—the fellow who is yellow, or does not intend to go, and the young man who to go must make very great sacrifices," but conceded that there was little attractive about barrack life in the winter. The promise of a swift departure might just work for some men.<sup>123</sup>

Although this view represents at least an effort to distinguish between those who 'could not' go and those who 'would not' go, the thought that some men 'would not' because they had too much *élan* to waste time training in Canada before getting a crack at the Hun is absurd. However, it is entirely consistent with the belief that only patriotic duty motivated men to go, and the recruiting establishment's faith that each man possessed that sense of duty. When recruiters placed pressure on the 'yellow' portions of society, they nearly always did so through more appeals designed to awaken 'slackers' sense of patriotic duty. This mindset allowed recruiters to convince themselves that some Canadians still in civilian dress understood their duty to enlist and would act upon it were it not for some silly detail, in this case the delay between enlistment and engagement, when the real reasons were much more complex.

Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis did not buy the idea that more men would enlist if they knew their journey to the front would be expedited. Instead he reiterated his confusion at why patriotism was no longer producing volunteers in Chatham. "We have as many loyal subjects in Kent and the City of Chatham as anywhere else," he said,

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

“but I would like to have my hand on the Militia Act at them.”<sup>124</sup> If Chathamites really understood patriotism the way Lieutenant-Colonel Lewis and his fellow recruiters did, why did he need the Militia Act to get them into khaki?

Stewart McKeough was killed in action at Courcellette on 15 September 1916 and his family received word six days later via telegram. Nearly a month passed before William McKeough returned to his diary, where he revealed that Grant had finally transferred to the artillery. “The dear boy held out against transferring for some time as he thought his men would think him a “slacker” to leave them,” wrote his father. Even in the wake of Stewart’s death, Grant required the assurances of Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. Smith and Colonel Shannon that he would be placed in a Western Ontario Battery before he signed the necessary papers.<sup>125</sup>

Steeped in an atmosphere that narrowly identified patriotic duty with service in the 186th, Grant was miserable despite the satisfaction his transfer to the artillery gave his parents. When the 186th received notice that it would soon head overseas Grant was at home on leave from artillery school in Kingston, and his father wrote that it took “a considerable argument, or rather many arguments” to convince him to return. A week later he told his parents that he was coming home. He did not like the course, the percentage needed to pass was too high, and he preferred to do his bit at home.<sup>126</sup>

When the 186th finally departed for Europe in March 1917, Grant tried desperately to rejoin the ranks. First he tried to be reinstated as a subaltern, but the unit was overflowing with junior officers. Then he attempted to reenlist as a private, but was turned down again. “He was disconsolate,” wrote William. “Poor boy, he wants to go overseas and do his ‘bit’ badly, but I am well pleased that matters have turned out the way they have.”<sup>127</sup> Although his social connections made it possible, William did not intervene to keep his remaining son at home; a number of other lieutenants were left behind as well.

The story of Grant’s enlistment stretched from August 1915 to December 1917, when he finally departed for England. Stewart’s

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>125</sup> McKeough, “*My Life*,” 751–752.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 764–765.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 771.

appeals to Grant climaxed during the winter of 1915–1916, a period of intense recruiting activity in Chatham. It illustrates both the intense pressure on young men to conform to the recruiting establishment's ideas of patriotic duty as well as the complexity of the decision to enlist. Grant's largest obstacle was his family's concern for his safety, but for eligible men with dependants the stakes were higher. Grant came from a family with deep patriotic convictions that accepted the recruiting establishment's view of duty, but the loss of a family member proved enough to get Grant out of the infantry. For others, the loss of a father, brother, or close friend might easily be enough to dissuade them from ever entering the ranks, no matter what recruiters did to coerce them.

## **CONCLUSION**

Recruiters in Chatham consistently struggled to adapt their message and make it resonate with those not born in the British Isles. Pure voluntarism failed to bring units up to strength, and no level of coercion seemed enough to meet recruiters' expectations. However, many did answer the call. When was recruiters' message most successful, and who did it most appeal to? The pace of enlistment in Chatham matched national trends almost exactly.<sup>128</sup> Chatham enlistments consistently corresponded to the intensity of recruiters' efforts—even if they did not satisfy their expectations—with the exception of May 1916, when eligible Chathamites simply stopped responding to the recruiting establishment's patriotic appeals.

When voluntary enlistment ended and conscription came into effect in September 1917, 511 Chatham residents had enlisted there. Judging by newspaper reports on rejected volunteers, a reasonable estimate of the rejection rate is twenty-two percent, meaning some 655 Chatham men likely volunteered for service there from August

<sup>128</sup> See Figures I & II, located in the Appendix at the end of the article.

1914 to August 1917.<sup>129</sup> Eligibility in Chatham, based on the 1911 Census multiplied to reflect its 1914 population, was 2,826. Therefore, only twenty-three percent of eligible Chatham men volunteered for service. Ian Miller used similar methods to determine that more than two-thirds of Toronto's eligible men volunteered for service.<sup>130</sup> At first glance, recruiting in Chatham seems a miserable failure by comparison. What can account for such an extreme difference between the two locations?

Certainly, Toronto's recruiters had more wealth and resources available to them, and Chatham recruiters were comparatively late in mounting a big push for volunteers—this only began in earnest late in 1915 with the 70th Battalion. However, the best explanation lies in the demographics of Chatham's volunteers.<sup>131</sup>

Two-hundred fifty-two were born in the British Isles and 216 in Canada, with notable contributions from the United States and Belgium. Men born in the British Isles enlisted in strikingly disproportionate numbers, accounting for fully half of Chatham's volunteers even though only sixteen percent of Chatham men were British-born in 1911.<sup>132</sup> Adjusted to 1914 figures, fifty-five percent of the 460 eligible British-born Chatham residents were accepted for service. Given the established rejection rate, it is likely that some 307 or sixty-seven percent volunteered, a figure that exceeds the overall enlistment rate in Toronto, where British-born males represented thirty percent of the wartime population.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>129</sup> See, for example, "Big Send-Off is Planned," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 30 January 1915; "Recruits are Answering to Call to Arms," *Chatham Daily News*, 28 September 1915. (Fifty accepted, seventeen rejected, twenty-five percent rejection); "Kent Record Not as High as Expected," *Chatham Daily News*, 6 October 1915. (Over 100 applied, over twenty rejected, twenty percent rejection); "Century Mark is Passed in Enlistments," *Chatham Daily News*, 14 October 1915. (123 applied, twenty-seven rejected, twenty-two percent rejection); "Many Officers are Offering Their Services," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 14 January 1915. (Forty-seven applied, eight rejected, seventeen percent rejection); "Expect Over Hundred in First Week," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 8 April 1916. (Ninety applied, twenty rejected, twenty-two percent rejection); "Recruiting is Continued," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 26 January 1915. (120 applied, eighty-six accepted, twenty-eight percent rejection); "The Recruits Leave Chatham Monday Morning," *Chatham Daily Planet*, 29 January 1915. (135 applied, 102 accepted, twenty-four percent rejection).

<sup>130</sup> Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief*, 104-105.

<sup>131</sup> See Figures III & IV, located in the Appendix at the end of the article.

<sup>132</sup> *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911 Volume II*, 434-435.

<sup>133</sup> This figure is based on average from 1911 and 1921 Censuses.

By contrast, only twelve percent of eligible Canadian-born males in Chatham volunteered for the colours. Even foreign-born men were almost twice as likely to volunteer as Canadians.<sup>134</sup> Belgian enlistment is easily explained through the origins of the war, and anecdotal evidence indicates that sympathetic Americans joined in large numbers.<sup>135</sup> There is no evidence of men leaving a particular workplace *en masse*; places of employment appear among volunteers in proportion to their size and during times of the greatest recruiting activity. Fourteen percent more single men enlisted than married men, but given the married man's extra responsibilities at home and recruiters' initial preference for unattached men, this is hardly surprising. Similarly, no discrepancies arise among volunteer's religious affiliations. Anglicans and Methodists predictably ranked first due to the large number of native Britons who enlisted, while other denominations enlisted in proportion to their congregation size.<sup>136</sup>

Therefore, place of birth represents by far the greatest discrepancy among Chatham enlistments. Canadian enlistment did not keep pace until well into the period of sustained recruiting, and Canadians never outnumbered Britons by more than a few men in a given month.<sup>137</sup> Why were Canadian-born men so reluctant to volunteer in Chatham? Plentiful employment and the war economy can account for the slowing pace of volunteers as the war dragged on, but it cannot explain the discrepancy in their origins. Given the relentless pro-British patriotism displayed by Chatham's recruiting establishment, it is clear that Chatham's Canadian-born men did not see military service as the only acceptable form of patriotic duty. This is telling because Chatham's demographics are so similar to the rest of the province at the time, indicating that its experience is a fair representation of a great many parts of Ontario.

The halting system of limited quotas also did not help recruiters. Very little active campaigning was done for the First and Second Contingents, when 24th Regiment authorities simply posted their requirements and waited for men to apply. The press kept a tally and published their own appeals to patriotism and service. Advertising

<sup>134</sup> Sharpe, "Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," 120.

<sup>135</sup> Vance, "Provincial Patterns of Enlistment," 77.

<sup>136</sup> *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911 Volume II*, 57.

<sup>137</sup> See Figure 2.

posters did not appear until the Third Contingent drive, when recruiters still relied on a single office away from the city's main thoroughfares.

The period of inactivity from February to July 1915 was especially damaging. Stalemate set in on the Western Front, and Canadian units sustained casualties. While Chatham men came to terms with the Great War, no one asked them to enlist; for six months they watched the slaughter without being asked to contribute their bodies to it. During this time recruiters' views of the war hardened. Britain was in a more terrible situation than anyone in 1914 dared imagine, and they believed that every man who enjoyed what she stood for would leap immediately to her defence. How could a patriotic individual take any other course of action?

For a substantial number of Chathamites, the stakes were sufficiently raised and they joined by the hundreds. It would be a mistake to characterise recruiting efforts of September 1915 to April 1916 as a failure simply because the 186th left Chatham under strength. Across Ontario the patriotic expectations of English Canada were extraordinarily high. Furthermore, the city of Chatham produced thirty-eight percent of all the volunteers that its recruiters signed to April 1916.<sup>138</sup> Even if all of the of the remaining recruits came from Kent County—and that is certainly not the case—Chatham still found more volunteers per capita than the surrounding towns and fields.

Still, the fact remains that recruiters only appealed in earnest to a small portion of Chatham's population—those born in the British Isles. When recruiting returned to Chatham in September 1915, eligible men knew the grim truth of an infantryman's fate. Despite patriotic rhetoric about the 'great game' underway in Europe and the robust, healthy life of the soldier, twelve months of horrendous casualties on all sides indicated that in this war, infantrymen existed primarily as fodder for enemy artillery. In the words of Siegfried Sassoon, "The war had become undisguisedly mechanical and inhuman. What in earlier days had been drafts of volunteers were now droves of victims."<sup>139</sup>

<sup>138</sup> The nature of recruiting for the 186th Battalion after this time makes it difficult to determine the ratio after this date. This calculation represents the vast majority of recruiting in Chatham, which was comparatively negligible from May 1916–August 1917 (see Figure 2).

<sup>139</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, (New York: Coward, McCann Inc., 1930), 147.

Canadian-born Chathamites were not unpatriotic. The spontaneous celebration of Allied victories, heartfelt support of men in uniform, and impressive donations to war charities indicate that they were intensely proud of the British war effort and Canada's place in it. However, they did not respond well to the single vision of patriotic duty that recruiters relied upon. When frustrated recruiters could think of nothing else than to intensify their message and discredit all those who did not heed it, they inevitably reached the last of the eligible men who agreed with them. "Are you doing your share to fill the ranks of the 186th or are you besmirching the honor and record of Chatham and Kent?" the *Daily News* raged as recruiting collapsed in May 1916.<sup>140</sup> By then, such statements could only further alienate those eligible men still in Chatham. Either alienated by attacks on their character or satisfied that they were not in fact besmirching their honour through their own forms of patriotic service at home, Chatham men stopped volunteering in significant numbers, leaving the puzzled recruiting establishment to begin the clamour for conscription.



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Matt Baker** is a Research Associate at the Laurier Centre for Military, Strategic and Disarmament Studies. Matt is a Chatham native who completed his MA at Wilfrid Laurier University in 2011, and this article is adapted from his major research paper.

<sup>140</sup> "Editorial: Proof of Good Citizenship," *Chatham Daily News*, 12 May 1916.

The author would like to thank Jerry Hind and Mike Pelletier for their generous help researching this topic.

**APPENDIX**

Figure I: CEF Enlistments by Month

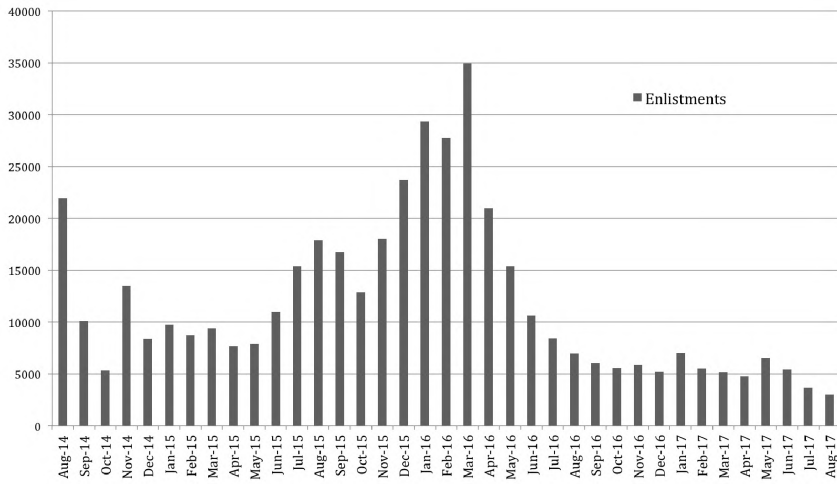


Figure II: Chatham Enlistments by Month

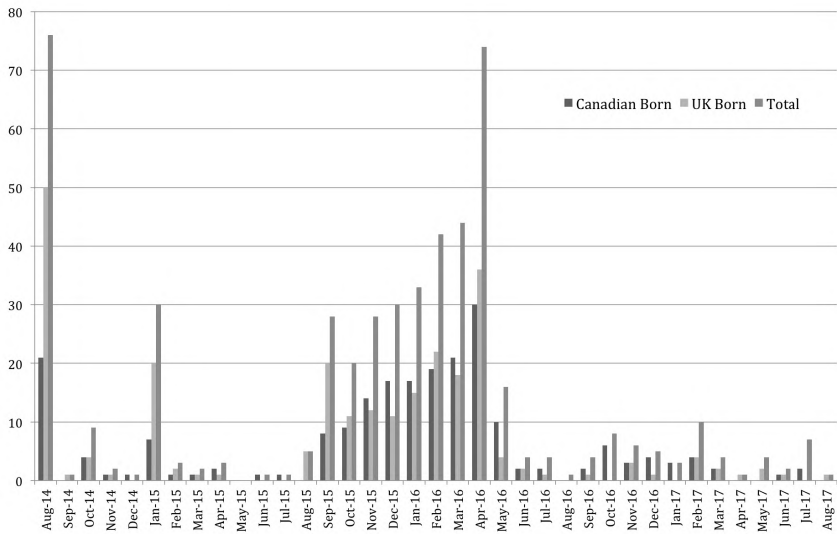




Figure III: Chatham Males by Place of Birth (1911 Census)

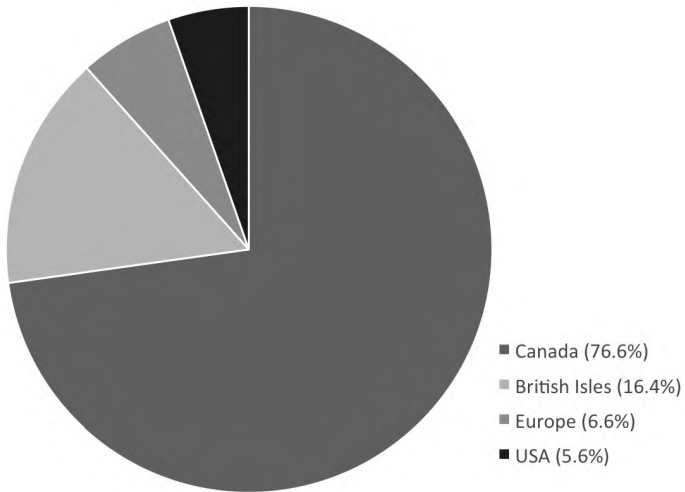
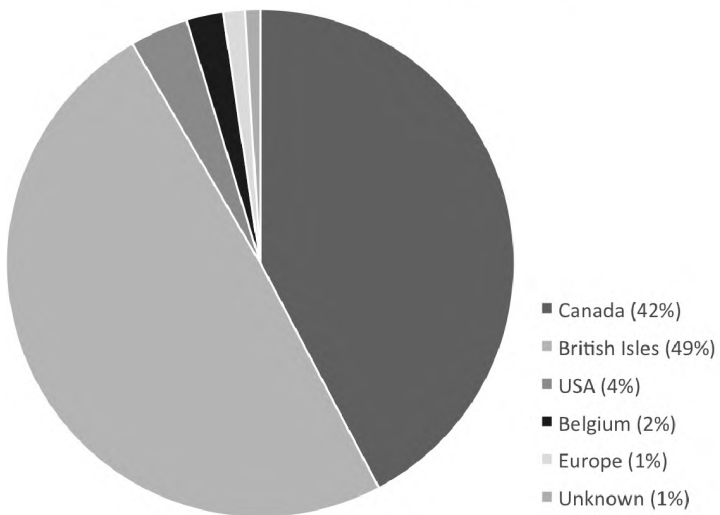


Figure IV: Resident Chatham Volunteers, by Place of Birth



THE SECOND BATTLE OF YPRES:  
MYTH AND MEMORY

