

# Celebrating the Suppression of the North-West Resistance of 1885: The Toronto Press and the Militia Volunteers

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*This article examines the coverage that Toronto newspapers and illustrated press gave to the city's support in 1885 for the mobilization of Canada's citizen soldiers to suppress the resistance in the North-West. It argues that the Toronto press rhetorically constructed and directly fostered the massive public occupation of city streets when local boys left for the North-West and Volunteers returned to the city. The press presented a story about the vigorous suppression of rebels and re-establishment of law and order, as well as public admiration for the patriotism, order, discipline, and duty shown by Canada's part-time soldiers. Yet simultaneously the press made it a story of the militia myth in action, the people's power that lay behind the state and the military, and the strength and resolve of ordinary, local citizens who donned the uniforms of Volunteer militia regiments and risked their lives to keep their country safe.*

*Le présent article examine la couverture que les journaux et la presse illustrée de Toronto ont faite du soutien accordé par la ville à la mobilisation de soldats citoyens canadiens pour réprimer la résistance au Nord-Ouest en 1885. L'auteur postule que la presse torontoise a construit de façon rhétorique et a même directement favorisé la vaste occupation publique des rues de la ville au départ des jeunes hommes pour le Nord-Ouest et au retour des volontaires. La presse a diffusé le récit de la vigoureuse suppression des rebelles et du rétablissement de la loi et de l'ordre, en plus de vanter l'admiration publique du patriotisme, de l'ordre, de la discipline et du devoir exhibés par les soldats canadiens à temps partiel. Or, en même temps, elle en a fait l'histoire du mythe milicien en action, du pouvoir de la population à l'appui de l'État et de l'armée, ainsi que de la force et de la détermination des citoyens ordinaires prompts à porter l'uniforme des volontaires de la milice et à risquer leur vie pour défendre le pays.*

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“REBELLION: Louis Riel Again Heading an Insurrection,” screamed the Toronto *Globe* headline on Monday, March 23, 1885. For a few days the press speculated that a force of militia Volunteers would be sent at once to the North-West to quell the uprising. The situation was finally clarified on the Friday evening, when Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald announced in the House of Commons that troops would be called out and sent via the not-quite-completed Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) to the Saskatchewan country to re-establish order. Toronto newspaper offices received Macdonald’s announcement by telegraph, and the news “soon filtered into the streets and the word passed from mouth to mouth like flame.”<sup>1</sup> Late Friday evening Lieutenant Colonel William Otter, the commandant of “C Company” Infantry School in Toronto, provided details for reporters keen to learn about the city’s contribution to the force going to the Prairies. From Toronto he would be taking 250 men of the Queen’s Own Rifles (QOR), 250 men of the 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Grenadiers, and 80 men from the Infantry School. According to the *Mail*, when two dozen sergeants who had gathered that evening in their mess learned what Colonel Otter had said, “hats were thrown into the air and the cheering renewed again and again.”<sup>2</sup>

Overnight orderly sergeants from the companies of the QOR and the Royal Grenadiers in hired cabs rushed around town thumping on doors and rousing sleeping militiamen.<sup>3</sup> As early as midnight, said the reporter from the *Mail*, the streets resonated with the steps of men who already “marched with the tread of the military conqueror.” Perhaps contradictorily, hotel bar-rooms were said to be suddenly packed with men who were soon “gloriously merry.”<sup>4</sup> Well before sunrise on Saturday, scarlet-coated Grenadiers and soberly clad riflemen began congregating at the drill shed for the morning’s muster and the officers’ selection of local men for the North-West Force. “The men gathered with as much glee to any Queen’s Birthday outing,” reckoned the *Telegram* in an article headed “Eager to Smash Riel and the Rebels.”<sup>5</sup> Ordinary citizens were also afoot early that morning as news spread thanks to the new-fangled telephones, and soon crowds plugged the streets near the drill shed. “War fever had taken hold,” declared the *World*. “Everybody was talking about the squelching of Riel and his crowd of malcontents.” A lieutenant boasted that the Volunteers were “as good soldiers as you can get the world over.” When the interviewer pressed him about their lack of active service—probably a widespread concern—he replied in words possibly burnished by the reporter: “Well, have those infernal half-breeds ever seen active service? No, sir, never; and I tell you when they see about a thousand well-drilled men in front of them there will be a general skedaddle.”<sup>6</sup>

This article examines the coverage that Toronto’s daily newspapers and illustrated press gave to the mobilization of Canada’s citizen soldiers for the

1 *Mail*, March 28, 1885.

2 *Ibid.* On Otter, the Infantry School, and the Toronto militia, see Desmond Morton, *The Canadian General: Sir William Otter* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1974).

3 *Globe*, March 30, 1885.

4 *Mail*, March 28, 1885.

5 *Telegram*, March 29, 1885.

6 *World*, March 29, 1885.

North-West campaign of 1885, focusing on depictions of fervent demonstrations in Toronto of public support for the troops both during the early preparations and send-off from the city and when Toronto welcomed the Volunteers after their successful suppression of the resistance. While historians have extensively studied the 1885 campaign,<sup>7</sup> they have given little attention to the send-offs and receptions arranged in several cities from Winnipeg to Halifax.<sup>8</sup> Military send-offs and receptions have been most closely studied for Canadian cities in connection with the First World War, when in August 1914 the public enthusiasm for the war, the patriotic displays in the streets, and the jubilant crowds at the train pull-outs were impressive in Toronto and countless other centres in English Canada.<sup>9</sup> For 1885, Toronto provides a particularly good case study because of its several lively daily newspapers, the substantial mobilization of troops from the city, and the role it played as a national reception centre for the local boys and for militia battalions heading home through Toronto to rural Ontario, Quebec City, and Halifax.

I argue that, in covering the mobilization of militiamen for the North-West campaign, Toronto's daily newspapers and illustrated press rhetorically constructed and actually helped to foster the massive show of public support for the campaign, most vividly displayed in the send-off of the local militia going to the North-West and the celebrations welcoming Volunteers as they returned home. The city's press presented a story of the vigorous suppression of rebels and re-establishment of law and order, the triumph of state power rooted in empire, and public admiration for the values of patriotism, order, discipline, and duty shown so admirably by Canada's soldiers. Simultaneously journalists made it a story of the people's power that lay behind the state and the military, of the resolve of ordinary, local citizens who donned the uniforms of Volunteer militia regiments and risked their lives to keep their country safe. The press's handling of the 1885 mobilization provides a vivid illustration of Canada's militia myth in action: the people rallying behind the military because they had a popular faith in an active

- 7 See, for example, George F. C. Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada: A History of the Riel Rebellions*, reprint (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Bob Beal and Rod MacLeod, *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1984); Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum: The North West Campaign of 1885* (Toronto: Hakkert, 1972); Thomas Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); J. M. Bumsted, *Louis Riel v. Canada: The Making of a Rebel* (Winnipeg: Great Plains Publications 2001); Maggie Siggins, *Riel: A Life of Revolution* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994); George Woodcock, *Gabriel Dumont: The Metis Chief and His Lost World* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1975); Walter Hildebrandt, *The Battle of Batoche: British Small Warfare and the Entrenched Metis*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2012).
- 8 A brief synopsis of receptions in several cities appears in the *Canadian Militia Gazette*, July 28, 1885. For other short treatments, see George F. G. Stanley, "New Brunswick and Nova Scotia and the North-West Rebellion, 1885" in John E. Foster, ed., *The Developing West: Essays on Canadian History in Honor of Lewis H. Thomas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983), pp. 71-100; Sarah A. Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), pp. 95-102; Gillian Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture and Identity in Montreal, 1840-85* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), pp. 207-210.
- 9 Robert Rutherford, "Send-offs During Canada's Great War: Interpreting Hometown Rituals in Dispatching Home Front Volunteers," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 36, no. 72 (2003), pp 425-464; Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 15-19; Nathan Smith, "Comrades and Citizens: Great War Veterans in Toronto, 1915-1919" (PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2011).

citizenry as the country's best defence in a time of crisis. Equally vividly it shows how a moment of militarism could spark and flicker brilliantly for a few months in 1885, 20 years before the launching of much more concerted attempts to foster and sustain militarism in Canada.<sup>10</sup> In addition, this study points to the narrow range of certainties with which the Toronto press of 1885 viewed the resistance movement in the North-West, Louis Riel, and the Volunteers' campaign of suppression. In more recent years, such certainties have dissolved as more diverse viewpoints have made the situation in 1885 appear much more complex.<sup>11</sup> Some historians, for instance, now see the uprising as a resistance movement rather than a "rebellion" because the Metis and Aboriginal insurgents saw the land as theirs and had no sense that they were breaking away from a state they recognized as having sovereignty over them.<sup>12</sup> Much was at stake about the future of a vast region that was both a homeland of the Metis and First Nations and the focus of hope for so many Canadians outside the region who believed that their country's future well-being depended on the successful colonization and development of the North-West.

### Toronto Newspapers and the Metis

In 1885 popular journalism thrived in Toronto, where six dailies jostled for market share in Ontario's leading centre, which had a population topping 90,000.<sup>13</sup> The city's growing and increasingly literate population, expanding consumerism, and advances in printing and distribution technologies had recently made big-city, mass-circulation dailies a symbol of modernity. Each of the city's daily newspapers fostered a distinct reputation so as to attract readers, sell newspapers, and win advertising contracts. Differences among the papers were a matter of both political positioning and style, ranging from earnest party organs, the *Globe* (Liberal) and *Mail* (Conservative), to the new and brasher "people's journals," the *News*, the *Telegram*, and the *World*.<sup>14</sup> The party organs pitched political issues in highly partisan ways with no attempt at balance, and the other newspapers,

10 Desmond Morton dates Canada's "moment of militarism" to the campaign at the beginning of the twentieth century. See his "The Cadet Movement in the Moment of Canadian Militarism," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1978), pp. 56-68.

11 For varied perspectives on the causes and meaning of the resistance movements of 1869-1870 and 1885, see Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 220-231; Bumsted, *Louis Riel v. Canada*, chap. 11; Thomas Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983); Gerhard Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). For the view that no alliance existed between Metis and First Nations in the 1885 conflict, see Blair Stonechild and Bill Waiser, *Loyal Till Death: Indians and the North-West Rebellion* (Calgary: Fifth House Ltd., 1997).

12 Diane P. Payment, *The Free People – Li Gens Libres: A History of the Metis Community of Batoche, Saskatchewan* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), pp. 8-11; Alan McCullough, "Parks Canada and the 1885 Rebellion/Uprising/Resistance," *Prairie Forum*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Fall 2002), pp. 161-198.

13 George A. Nader, *Cities of Canada*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Macmillan 1976), p. 203.

14 Paul Rutherford, *A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982). Rutherford provides some reported circulation figures for Toronto dailies in 1880 (pp. 238-239): *Globe* 57,000; *Mail* 69,558; *Telegram* 14,000; *World* 11,500; and, in 1883, *News* 31,500. See P. F. W. Rutherford, "The People's Press: The Emergence of the New Journalism in Canada, 1869-99," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 56 (June 1975), p. 173.

though less consistently partisan, were no less spirited when taking positions on issues. Widely read religious weeklies published in Toronto also made their views on public issues forcefully known and commented briefly on the send-offs and receptions of the Volunteers.<sup>15</sup> The spectacular qualities of these patriotic displays highlighted by the rhetoric of the Toronto press were made even more apparent by the images of the weekly *Illustrated War News* rushed into print for the first time on April 4, 1885, by Grip Printing and Publishing Company of Toronto.<sup>16</sup> Etchings based on artists' sketches of Canadian military exploits in the North-West made up the bulk of the material, but images of home-front events appeared alongside them.

On various topics connected to the 1885 conflict Toronto newspapers differed sharply, but on the need for vigorous suppression of the resistance and the patriotism of the volunteers there was no dispute. Papers were in perfect agreement that once violence erupted it had to be suppressed by the Canadian military, and all of the dailies heaped praise on the Volunteers.<sup>17</sup> Toronto readers might have encountered an alternative point of view if they read *The Palladium of Labor*, a Hamilton labour-reform weekly that circulated modestly in Toronto. At the outbreak of resistance it reasoned that, given the government would have to negotiate eventually with the protesters, negotiations should begin immediately to avoid the bloodshed and other costs of a military campaign.<sup>18</sup> The dailies, however, ignored this pacifist intervention and insisted on the absolute necessity of responding aggressively to the illegal use of force. "The integrity of the dominion must be preserved," declared the *World*. "We cannot allow rebellion in any quarter to make headway." The *Globe* urged the government to respond with "the most prompt and energetic measures for its immediate suppression." In the view of the *Telegram*, "Those who have taken up arms against the Government have committed a serious offence, and it is the duty of the Government to bring them to their senses."<sup>19</sup> When describing the send-offs and receptions, all the dailies were also aligned, giving them extensive, enthusiastic, and even hyperbolic coverage. This human-interest type of reporting, with its exuberant tone and extravagant style, matched similar coverage of civic events such as state visits and commemorative celebrations.<sup>20</sup>

15 Such weeklies include *The Churchman* (Anglican), the *Christian Guardian* (Methodist), and the *Canadian Baptist*.

16 From May 16, 1885, the publication's title appeared as the *Canadian Pictorial and Illustrated War News*.

17 By contrast, in Halifax critics said that Nova Scotians had no enthusiasm for sending militiamen to a distant conflict that had nothing to do with them. Stanley attributes the hostility to "repealers" who still hoped Nova Scotia might withdraw from Confederation. See Stanley, "New Brunswick and Nova Scotia," pp. 7-8.

18 *Palladium of Labor*, May 16, 1885. On Phillips Thompson's *Palladium of Labor*, see Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Russell Hann, "Brainworkers and the Knights of Labor: E. E. Sheppard, Phillips Thompson and the *Toronto News*, 1883-1887" in Gregory S. Kealey and Peter Warrian, eds., *Essays in Canadian Working Class History* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1976), pp. 35-57.

19 *World*, March 28, 1885; *Globe*, March 30, 1885; *Telegram*, April 2, 1885.

20 Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); J. M. S. Careless, "The First Hurrah: Toronto's Semi-centennial of 1884" in Victor L. Russell, ed., *Forging a Consensus: Historical Essays on Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 141-154; Brooks McNamara, *Day of Jubilee: The Great Age of Public Celebrations in New York, 1788-1909* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

In the early weeks of the uprising, Toronto newspapers devoted most of their editorial comment to assessing who was to blame for the resistance, a matter on which partisan differences were especially stark. Upon the outbreak of conflict in the North-West, Toronto's two party organs, the *Globe* and the *Mail*, began an extended and intense partisan battle, each naming the other political party as the catalyst for the violence. Beginning on April 1 the *Globe* charged repeatedly in a long series of editorials that the resistance resulted from "the misdeeds of the blood-suckers [government officials] in the North-West; the utter and longstanding incompetency and indifference of the Minister of Interior; the culpable, nay criminal perversity of the Cabinet in Ottawa, and especially of the Premier, who refused to listen to all the warnings." Proper responses from Ottawa earlier would have enabled everyone to avoid the violence and its costs.<sup>21</sup> The *Mail*, by contrast, claimed that the outbreak had been sudden and unexpected, and that the government was taking "vigorous measures to meet the emergency" and prevent its becoming a general Indian war.<sup>22</sup> The *Mail* further insisted that the Macdonald government had properly dealt with all the legitimate claims of the Metis, but that the Opposition press and politicians had inflated every petty grievance into an instance of "oppression" and thus fomented a spirit of rebellion.<sup>23</sup> The *Mail* went so far as to say that Liberal leader Edward Blake, by harping on oppression, was the real traitor and cause of treasonous actions in the North-West. In addition the *Mail* wondered why, if the grievances were longstanding, the Liberal government of Alexander Mackenzie had not dealt properly with them when in office in the 1870s?<sup>24</sup> To which the *Globe* replied that the situation had become acute only in the past two years when the Tories had utterly failed to deal with it.<sup>25</sup> And so the bitterly partisan exchange continued.

Other Toronto dailies took less overtly partisan positions, but they all agreed the government had helped bring on the rebellion. The *Telegram*, which was usually kind to the Conservatives, in this instance said that the "half-breeds and Indians" had legitimate grievances that the government and particularly the Conservative appointees, including Lieutenant-Governor Edgar Dewdney, had failed to redress, and it maintained that ultimately the rebellion had been caused by "the bad management of the Government and its land-grabbing officials."<sup>26</sup> The *World* too placed most of the blame on Dewdney and officials in the North-West who had not dealt effectively with matters, wrapped up as they were with enriching themselves, and it added that the officials had failed to warn Ottawa of the seriousness of the disaffection.<sup>27</sup> The independent press criticized and mocked some of the more partisan claims made by the party organs, especially the *Mail*. "Twaddle about Treason" was the title of a *News* editorial on the *Mail*'s charge

21 *Globe*, April 1, 1885. The same point was made by the *Globe* in editorials nearly every day for two weeks.

22 *Mail*, March 28, 1885.

23 *Mail*, March 31, 1885.

24 *Mail*, March 30 and 31, 1885.

25 *Globe*, April 2, 1885.

26 *Telegram*, April 2, 1885.

27 *World*, March 30, 1885.

that Blake was a traitor who had caused the rebellion.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the *World* warned that, during such a crisis, partisanship should be kept in check; both the party organs, the *Globe* and the *Mail*, were increasing the tensions in the country.<sup>29</sup> Today most historical accounts find much fault with the Macdonald government's western policy.<sup>30</sup>

None of the Toronto newspapers, including those that maintained the Metis and others in the North-West had legitimate grievances and deserved sympathy, saw the violence as acceptable, and all presented Louis Riel as an outlaw whose presence provided the spark for the violence. From the start Toronto newspapers represented the resistance as "Riel's rebellion" and spoke of him as a notoriously familiar figure to Ontarians because of his previous leadership of a rebellion. In their view, back in 1869-1870, Riel, a Roman Catholic, francophone "half-breed," had led an uprising in the Red River community that threatened Canada's expansion into the North-West at the outset. His illegal, so-called provisional government had murdered Thomas Scott, a white, patriotic, Ontario-born Orangeman—one of the province's own. Now in 1885 Riel was at it again. Once more, the movement he led seriously threatened the prospects for Canadian development of the North-West, which had not been going nearly as well as hoped during the previous 15 years. The pro-government *Mail* declared, "[T]his disturbance will put a check to the growth of the country, will deter industrial activity in the country itself, and will prevent immigration this season, unless it is crushed at once."<sup>31</sup> The *World* charged that Macdonald's government had erred in handling Riel by failing to prevent his return to Canada from the United States.<sup>32</sup> The government should have anticipated that on his return Riel would lead a rebellion, given that the disaffected Metis had called on him to help them with their campaign and he had led a rebellion before. Ever defensive of the Conservative government, the *Mail* insisted that the real problem had been the amnesty granted Riel by the Liberal government of Mackenzie, which had allowed Riel to escape punishment.<sup>33</sup>

A range of opinion was also evident while the confrontation in the North-West unfolded, as historian Arthur Silver has shown in his examination of Ontario-wide public opinion.<sup>34</sup> Ontario newspapers differed in their evaluations of the extent to which francophone Quebeckers supported both the military campaign of suppression and the Metis in the North-West. On the one hand, papers, especially Conservative ones, praised the role of the French-Canadian minister of militia in organizing the campaign. All Ontario dailies lauded the raising of French-Canadian battalions and the Quebec's archbishops' ordering of special prayers for the troops. Throughout the campaign the party organs of Ontario frequently

28 *News*, March 31, 1885.

29 *World*, March 30, 1885.

30 Bumsted, *Louis Riel v. Canada*, chap. 11, incorporates much recent work critical of the government, and many government actions are defended in Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion*, chap. 2 and 3.

31 *Mail*, March 30, 1885.

32 *World*, March 30, 1885.

33 *Mail*, April 7, 1885.

34 A. I. Silver, "Ontario's Alleged Fanaticism in the Riel Affair," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 69, no. 1 (March 1988), pp. 21-50. Silver's companion piece on Quebec opinion in the Riel Affair is *The French-Canadian Idea of Confederation, 1864-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1982), chap. 8.

expressed admiration for the role of French-Canadian troops. It was, as Silver points out, in the interest of the parties to downplay ethnic tensions because of their need to build broad, Canada-wide support. On the other hand, the Ontario press also reported negatively on public open-air meetings in Montreal of French-Canadian nationalists who sympathized with the Metis resistance fighters and their tactics. The *Toronto News*, an independent unconcerned about building cross-cultural understanding, took an extreme position, accusing the Quebec battalions of refusing to do their duty out of sympathy with French-Canadian rebels in the Northwest. By the end of the campaign the *News* was going so far as to say that “the leading spirits among the French Canadians” had started the rebellion with the secret aim of “building up on the prairies a second Quebec” and achieving “the complete reconquest of Canada” with “French ascendancy throughout the Dominion.”<sup>35</sup> The newspaper debates would heat up even more during Riel’s treason trial and in the lead-up to his hanging.

In their unanimous praise of the Toronto Volunteers and the military campaign of suppression, Toronto’s journalists showed an awareness of their readership. Known as “the Queen’s City,” the Toronto of 1885 was nearly entirely English-speaking, 93 per cent British (including Irish) in origin, and nearly 85 per cent Protestant.<sup>36</sup> Historian J. M. S. Careless aptly describes Toronto as a “very British city in the 1880s, flag-waving imperialist though no less adamantly Canadian in national hope.”<sup>37</sup> Resentment of French Canadians ran deep in the city, nurtured in the mid-nineteenth century by Reform cries of “French domination” within the political sphere, by the popular Orange Order’s anti-Catholicism, and by the arrival of English, Scottish, and Ulster immigrants whose Britishness was deeply rooted in a suspicion of Catholics and France. After Confederation, political alliances at the federal level that crossed the Ontario/Quebec boundary were always fragile and susceptible to breakdown when flare-ups developed over issues of language, religion, and ethnicity. Because of this predominant viewpoint, sometimes Toronto newspapers depicted Riel in 1885 as one more instance of francophone Catholics asserting themselves inappropriately—in this case, violently and in a way that risked sparking a terrifying “Indian war.” According to the Anglican *Churchman*, the uprising would not have taken place had its “leaders been utterly without support from the Romish Church and the mad effort been sternly discountenanced by the priests, for the rebel leaders were all bigoted Romanists.”<sup>38</sup>

Along with Britishness came a firm conviction about the superiority of the British race, a late-Victorian perception that humankind was composed of a hierarchy of races with white, Protestant Britons at the top, and a deep suspicion

35 *News*, May 27, 1885, as cited by Silver, “Ontario’s Alleged Fanaticism,” p. 31.

36 J. M. S. Careless, *Toronto to 1918: An Illustrated History* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1984), chap. 4.

37 Careless, “The First Hurrah,” pp. 141-154. See also Victoria Freeman, “‘Toronto Has No History!’ Indigeneity, Settler Colonialism, and Historical Memory in Canada’s Largest City,” *Urban History Review*, vol. 38, no. 2 (Spring 2010), pp. 21-35; Todd Stubbs, “Patriotic Masculinity and Mutual Benefit Fraternalism in Urban English Canada: The Sons of England, 1874-1900,” *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 24, no. 89 (May 2012), pp. 25-49.

38 *Churchman*, August 6, 1885. In fact, Catholic clergy had broken with Riel, who at this time saw himself as a prophet. See Stanley, *The Birth of Western Canada*, pp. 316-317.



of inter-racial sexual relations that produced hybrid and possibly degenerate offspring.<sup>39</sup> In 1885 the Toronto press sometimes racialized the enemy in the North-West, representing the Metis as “Half-breeds” and “Indians” whose racial inferiority to whites partly explained their turning to violence when starving or when frustrated by inaction on rights claims. Negative stereotypes were associated with the terminology. The *Globe*, for instance, referred to the “Half-breeds” as having “a character ... composed of that of the child and of the savage.”<sup>40</sup> Such a depiction explained why the Metis were so easily misled into violence by the dastardly Riel, himself a Half-breed. The hybridity of the Metis enabled the Toronto press alternatively to highlight their French rather than their Aboriginal aspect. “The French half-breeds were in the hands of the French Jesuits,” opined the *Telegram*, “and could hardly therefore be expected to have much love for British law or British institutions.”<sup>41</sup> Newspapers depicted the “Indians” as mostly uncivilized, despite missionaries’ and government attempts to uplift them, and thus unreliable in general and terrifying when enemies, and they maintained that starvation in 1885 drove some to express their savagery as rebels. In addition to the racialized rhetoric, as Gillian Poulter has shown, many of the images in the *Illustrated War News* presented sharply racialized caricatures of Metis and their First Nations allies.<sup>42</sup> If the newspapers are to be believed, then Torontonians’ sense of the racial superiority of the white Volunteers on the one hand, and their confidence about the racial inferiority of the non-white rebels on the other, can only have reinforced the sense of mission that fired support for the troops and their campaign in the North-West.

Simultaneously, however, Toronto newspapers often depicted the enemy in non-racialized ways, as being “residents of the North-West” or even “Canadians” (who had turned to crime). “It was difficult to believe,” declared a *Globe* editorial shortly after the uprising broke out, “that by Canadians the blood of Canadians had been shed on Canadian soil.” Alternatively the *Week*, a highbrow Toronto journal of strong opinions, explained that “the Half-breeds were an isolated race[;] though annexed they had never become Canadians, and they were fighting for a territory which they regarded as their own.”<sup>43</sup> Here is a glimpse—though a rare one—that it was possible even in 1885 Toronto to perceive the confrontation in the North-West as something other than a rebellion against the crown. By contrast, the Anglican *Churchman*, which dismissed the Metis’ grievances as insignificant and believed in a united Canada under the crown, said the militants’ goal was the

39 On racial discourse in the period, see Douglas Lorimer, “From Victorian Values to White Virtues: Assimilation and exclusion in British Racial Discourse, c. 1870-1914” in Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), pp. 109-134; Paula Hastings, “‘Our Glorious Anglo-Saxon Race Shall Ever Fill Earth’s Highest Place’: The *Anglo-Saxon* and the Construction of Identity in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada” in Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, eds., *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), pp. 92-109.

40 *Globe*, April 7, 1885.

41 *Telegram*, May 30, 1885.

42 Poulter, *Becoming Native*, pp. 217-262.

43 *Globe*, March 30, 1885; *Week*, July 30, 1885, as cited by Poulter, *Becoming Native*, n. 91, p. 330.

establishment of “an independent Republic in the North-West. It was a rebellion against the sovereignty of Canada.”<sup>44</sup>

### Toronto’s Volunteers and the Militia Myth

When Toronto’s Volunteers responded to the call in 1885, they joined other Volunteers from across the country to reassert law and order in the North-West. Legally the force acted as an aid to the civil power in response to a request from Edgar Dewdney, lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories. It was the first real test of the Canadian militia as a battle force acting on its own. Originally designed to assist the professional soldiers of the British army garrisoned in Canada, the militia became Canada’s main defensive force in 1871 when a cost-cutting imperial government withdrew the last of its garrisons from the dominion. Canada’s tiny professional army could only provide training for the militiamen and some permanent officers. Canadians expressed pride and faith in their militia force even as taxpayers showed a marked reluctance to spend much money on training or equipping it. In 1885 Ottawa relied on local initiatives to cobble together a force placed under the command of Major-General Frederick Dobson Middleton of the British army.<sup>45</sup>

Organization and funding for the militia fell largely to locally prominent individuals able to provide leadership and afford substantial financial burdens in exchange for prestige, a system that worked best in the cities. With a club-like aura, militia companies recruited through personal contacts among those who had money for a uniform and the time for weekly drilling and parade, target-shooting, athletic events, occasional manoeuvres, and attending frequent social functions and public events.<sup>46</sup> Only some workingmen enjoyed such contacts, savings, leisure time, and either self-employment or the approval of employers for time off work. It appears that the militiamen were mostly young businessmen, professionals, and clerks in shops and offices. Such men were sometimes urged to join militia units on the grounds that their masculinity needed toughening because of the sedentary work they did.<sup>47</sup> General Middleton described them privately as being mostly “well-to-

44 Churchman, August 6, 1885.

45 Morton, *The Last War Drum*, pp. 6-49; Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), pp. 93-107; J. L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2002), pp. 28-32. Canada’s *Militia Act* required the force to be commanded by a senior officer in the British army.

46 James Wood, *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), pp. 29-31. See also Mike O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class, and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914,” *Labour / Le travail*, vol. 42 (1998) pp. 115-141; Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001); K. B. Wamsley, “Cultural Signification and National Ideologies: Rifle-Shooting in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada,” *Social History*, vol. 20 (1995), pp. 63-72. Desmond Morton notes that when William Otter first joined the Queen’s Own in 1861 his uniform cost him a month of his salary as a clerk with the Canada Company. See Desmond Morton, “OTTER, Sir WILLIAM DILLON,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 15, University of Toronto / Université Laval, 2003, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/otter\\_william\\_dillon\\_15E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/otter_william_dillon_15E.html) (accessed January 23, 2014).

47 In fact, there is no good study of the composition of the Canadian militia, but see O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth,” pp. 124-127; Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, chap. 3; Poulter, *Becoming Native*, p. 209; Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal and Kingston: Canadian War Museum and McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), pp. 58-60.

do tradesmen's sons or in business." Certainly the Canadian militia's composition set it apart from the British army, where foot soldiers had long been recruited from the bottom of society. In a private telegram to the Minister of Militia, General Middleton midway through the 1885 campaign praised the Canadian militiamen's gentlemanly conduct, referring to their "superior class and education compared with other armies."<sup>48</sup>

The North-West Field Force was recruited mainly from Toronto and rural Ontario east of the city, Halifax, Quebec City, and Montreal, as well as from Winnipeg and new settlements in the North-West where units were created on the fly. Macdonald's Conservative government ensured that the force for this popular campaign was a national one drawn from across the country and that the unity of Canada was thus on display. Politically French Canadians had had to be included, especially as Riel and many of the rebels were French-speaking; hence the Hon. Adolphe Caron, the minister of militia and Quebec County MP, called up his province's only two francophone city battalions, the 9<sup>th</sup> *Voltigeurs* from Quebec and the 65<sup>th</sup> *Carabiniers Mont-Royal* from Montreal. In the end a force of 6,000 men from across Canada was assembled, only 363 of them regulars from the dominion's professional army.

General Middleton had grave doubts about the effectiveness of the militia, and military historians since have shared his sense of its severe limitations in terms of training, but at the time the Toronto press brushed aside such talk, much preferring to reinforce popular faith in the militia myth. Central to the militia myth was confidence in the "citizen-soldier," a preference for the part-time military training of volunteers over professional armies remote from the people, and a conviction that good citizens ought to provide their own defence.<sup>49</sup> The idea gained popularity in the British world during the Crimean War (1853-1856) when British journalists and photographers for the first time covered a war up close, turning anonymous troops into soldiers with individual stories. Shortly afterwards in Britain, authorities strongly promoted the Volunteer movement, which drew young men into militia regiments and intensified pride in the militia myth.<sup>50</sup> The same was attempted in Canada, notably during the 1860 royal visit to Canada when imperial and colonial officials sought to popularize the Volunteer movement by praising the patriotism of colonial Volunteers and having the popular Prince of Wales inspect them.<sup>51</sup> The *Trent* affair, when Britain and the United States nearly went to war in 1861 soon after the outbreak of the American Civil War, also stimulated enlistments in Canada. In the mid-nineteenth century, pride in the citizen-soldier was reinforced by social memories of Canada's history of militia

48 General Middleton to Duke of Cambridge, May 6, 1885, Cambridge Papers, Royal Family Archives, Windsor, cited in Morton, *The Last War Drum*, p. 69; General Middleton to A. Caron, Minister of Militia, June 26, 1885, in Desmond Morton and Reginald H. Roy, eds., *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign 1885* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1972), p. 361.

49 Wood, *Militia Myths*, pp. 1-27.

50 Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815-1914* (London: Longman, 1980); I. F. W. Beckett, *Riflemen Form! A Study of the Rifle Volunteer Movement, 1859-1908* (Aldershot, UK: Ogilby Trusts, 1982); Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), pp. 115-116.

51 Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, pp. 140-148.

triumphs beginning in the days of early settlement in New France and the Thirteen Colonies and continuing in nineteenth-century crises, including the War of 1812, the rebellions of 1837-1838, and the Fenian raids of 1866. By 1885 the conviction was strong that Canada could be defended best (and cheaply) by vigilant citizen volunteers, not conscripts, prepared to don uniforms in crises such as the one sparked by Riel in the North-West.

Reinforcing the militia myth, the press in 1885 insisted that the Volunteers called to serve in the North-West acted exclusively from a deep sense of civic and national duty, such high-mindedness alone explaining their alacrity. The *Mail* quoted one Torontonians, a clergyman who declared to his congregation: "It was not from mere love of adventure; it was not from a desire to display muscular courage; it was not from a cowardly fear of reproach should they have remained at home, that our citizen soldiers hastened ... to the defence of their country." Rather, "these gallant men were moved by a patriotic feeling and by a noble desire to perform their duty for their country's good."<sup>52</sup> Readers of the *Mail* in 1885 might well have wondered whether adventure, a wish to show bravery, or a fear of criticism did not play some considerable part in the Volunteers' behaviour. Certainly we should today. At the time, however, such musings were not given room in Toronto's dailies. The "high diction" characteristic of the rhetoric surrounding service in the First World War was much in evidence in 1885.<sup>53</sup> Private sources hint at the naiveté of the Volunteers, unfamiliar as they were with battle and caught up in the general excitement. General Middleton, midway through the campaign, wrote to a friend expressing his dismay at the losses to his troops and saying bluntly that the Volunteers had "thought they were going on a picnic." Dick Cassels, a young Toronto Volunteer who kept a diary, expressed a similar view when he wrote on the day of his departure from the city: "I am very lucky to have a chance to go," adding that for him active service promised adventure and an opportunity to see the North-West for the first time.<sup>54</sup>

The Toronto newspapers' quick dismissal of concerns about the Volunteers' preparedness for military engagement thinly papered over legitimate worries that were probably widely shared throughout the city and especially by relatives concerned with the welfare of their family members. The journalists' bravado fit with the positive spin they gave to the militiamen's patriotic campaign in general. Perhaps, too, it was an attempt to reassure worried parents and others close to the soldiers. And Torontonians hoped—even expected—that the sheer size of the Volunteer force would quickly overpower the small force of Metis combatants, a view eventually borne out by events. From the start there were warnings that

52 *Mail*, July 27, 1885.

53 Parallels with the Great War are striking; see Alan R. Young, "'We throw the torch': Canadian Memorials of the Great War and the Mythology of Heroic Sacrifice," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 24 (1988-1989), pp. 5-28.

54 Cited by Desmond Morton, "MIDDLETON, Sir FREDERICK DOBSON," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 12, University of Toronto / Université Laval, 2003, [http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/middleton\\_frederick\\_dobson\\_12E.html](http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/middleton_frederick_dobson_12E.html) (accessed January 23, 2014); R. S. Cassels, "The Diary of R.S. Cassels," in R. C. Macleod, ed., *The Reminiscences of a Bungle: And Two Other Northwest Rebellion Diaries* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1983) p. 235.

the Metis had an advantage because they were fine horsemen and sharpshooters familiar with the country where the fighting would take place.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, such uneasy thoughts were overshadowed by robust expressions of confidence in the power of numbers and the advantage of disciplined troops.

**Mobilization and Send-off**

Daily newspapers judged the turnout for the call-up of Toronto Volunteers on the morning of Saturday, March 29, to be larger than expected given the short notice, and officers soon selected 500 men for active service. It was widely reported that 800 could easily have been found—possibly even 2,000—so keen were the city’s Volunteers to see action. Only a few militiamen were rejected for duty because their health was poor, and only a few more objected to going because they would probably lose their jobs. Some wives might have tried to persuade husbands to stay behind, but a sketch in the *Illustrated War News* (Figure 1) modelled the ideal behaviour of a wife: “Take your discharge?—Certainly not!” Victorian understandings of manly duty were much in evidence in the press’s depiction of the young men’s eagerness for active service. Because this generation of militiamen had never before had an opportunity to fight in a war, they were keen to be off—to get on with what could well be the chance of a lifetime. However, after discovering that the men’s clothing and equipment were woefully lacking, Colonel Otter delayed the battalions’ departure for a couple of days to enable women, city and military officials, and others to collect underclothes, boots, mufflers, and equipment suitable for the mission.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 1:** “Take your discharge?—Certainly Not!” *Illustrated War News*, April 4, 1885.

55 *Mail*, April 27, 1885.

56 Desmond Morton, *The Last War Drum*, p. 34.

The delay gave the city's reporters an opportunity during the weekend to roam the streets amid the swarms of residents who were out and about showing their community's interest in the Volunteers. On Saturday evening they described the streets near the armoury next to Osgoode Hall as thronged with people eager to admire the soldiers on parade, and on Sunday the interest only escalated. "There was nothing else talked of yesterday," observed the *World*, "either in the home circle, at church, or on the streets. War, war, war was the cry, and war it will be till Mr. Riel and his followers bite the dust." The crowds in the vicinity of the drill shed grew enormous when the officers obliged the public with a Sunday afternoon parade of the Volunteers. "It is to be feared," said the *Globe*, "that many a Sunday School class missed not only its scholars, but teachers as well, for at three o'clock it seemed as if the whole population of the city had turned out *en masse*."<sup>57</sup> Parades of local militia regiments had a strong popular appeal in ordinary times, but the Riel crisis magnified the public interest.<sup>58</sup> The military parade was such a familiar form of street celebration that an impromptu one could be easily arranged that weekend. Military officers did not need to negotiate with the city to gain approval to march; their authority went without question, and, of course, the risk of the parade sparking any trouble was minimal. Well-drilled militiamen knew what to wear and how to march, and their well-practised bands provided stirring music that set the tempo and appealed to the crowd.<sup>59</sup>

City newspapers reported on the many clergymen who referred to the troops during Sunday services, lending a clerical blessing to the mission. The *Globe* printed excerpts from several sermons, including one given by the Rev. Hugh Johnston at Metropolitan Methodist Church. He reminded listeners that, since the rebellion of 1869-1870, Riel had gone unpunished for "brutally" murdering "the patriotic young Canadian Thomas Scott." Now once again Riel had acted with "no justification." "Our duty is plain," he thundered. "The insurrection must be put down. The authority of the country must be sustained." And it would be, thanks to the Volunteers. "Patriotism is a part of our religion," he continued. "The Bible seeks everywhere to stimulate and increase our love of country." Being a loyal people, Canadians would not be found wanting. Canada needed "no other defence than her own brave sons, who will die for, but will not dishonour, the flag." A prayer appeared in the *Churchman*, the Anglican weekly published in Toronto, asking God "to preserve amid the perils and dangers to which they may be exposed, the young men of this and the other Provinces of the Dominion, who cheerfully [go] forth to deliver their country from the insurrection of wicked men." Some clerics, then, endorsed the predominant perspective of Toronto newspapers

57 *World*, March 29, 1885; *Globe*, March 30, 1885.

58 In Quebec City during the tercentenary celebrations, French Canadians appeared in large numbers to see local troops. See H. V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 203-206; Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 197-198.

59 Access to Toronto's public space for celebratory purposes is discussed in Peter G. Goheen, "Negotiating Access to Public Space in Mid-Nineteenth Century Toronto," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 20 (1994), pp. 430-449, and "The Assertion of Middle-Class Claims to Public Space in Late Victorian Toronto," *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 29 (2003), pp. 73-92.

on the military campaign and the militia myth, and they added a label of sinfulness to the actions of the rebels. In a pious city, such endorsements no doubt mattered to church-goers and many readers of the press.<sup>60</sup>

The climax of the mobilization came with the send-off of the city's force from Union Station.<sup>61</sup> "Toronto never before witnessed such a sight," the *World* exclaimed. "The departure of Volunteers to repel the Fenian invasion nineteen years ago was not a patch to it."<sup>62</sup> Neither was there any resemblance whatsoever to the quiet departures from Toronto of the force of several hundred Ontario militiamen who, with Colonel Garnet Wolseley's British regulars, went west in 1870 to the Red River settlement five months after the outbreak of Louis Riel's resistance there. On that occasion some of the militiamen had complained that even the regimental band failed to appear at the railway station.<sup>63</sup> Throughout both resistance movements, the Toronto newspapers were equally fired up about the dangers the trouble-makers posed to Canada's development of the North-West, the unconscionable behaviour of Riel, and the need for a military force to proceed to the region. Still, the send-offs could not have been more strikingly different. The circumstances surrounding the troops differed in 1869-1870 and 1885. In 1885 Torontonians, fearing that the violence would escalate, believed that troops should be dispatched immediately to nip the uprising in the bud; the CPR and spring conditions made doing so a practical if challenging proposition. The troops therefore departed within a few days of the outbreak of hostilities in the North-West, when public excitement, according to the newspapers, was at a fever pitch. In 1869-1870 the resistance erupted at the beginning of winter, and by springtime, when it became feasible to send a force up the Great Lakes and overland from Minnesota (without a railway) to the Red River settlement, Torontonians knew the violence had already subsided in the North-West. Judging by the May newspapers, they were more interested in news of the negotiations over the provisions of the *Manitoba Act*. Moreover, the composition of the military forces differed significantly in the two instances. In 1870 Wolseley's expedition was chiefly composed of British regulars with Canadian militiamen in only a supporting role. In 1885, apart from a few officers, the force was entirely Canadian and composed of Volunteers, characteristics that heightened Torontonians' sense of investment in the force's expedition and what has been called "Canada's First War."<sup>64</sup>

When covering the 1885 send-off, Toronto's daily newspapers featured the enormous crowds, general jubilation, and touching departures. The programme for the day—Monday, March 30—included a rendezvous at the drill shed, a parade through downtown streets, and final farewells at the station. According to the press, the public leapt at the opportunities for involvement. "All was orderly commotion," reported the *Telegram* in reference to the drill shed where officers had ordered the men to muster that morning. "Officers shouting orders in hoarse

60 *Globe*, March 30, 1885; *Churchman*, April 29, 1885.

61 This was the city's second of four Union Stations; it occupied part of the site of today's structure.

62 *World*, March 31, 1885.

63 *Leader*, May 16 and 17, 1870.

64 Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p. 28.

voice and the clank of bayonet and the thump of rifle butts on the pavement merged with the tramp of rushing orderlies." Once the men had been called to attention, Colonel Otter told them that they had been summoned to the North-West "to crush the rebellion," and he declared that they had but one motive and that was "to do their duty to their Queen and country." In addition, he took the opportunity to play father to his troops, saying that he knew some of the men had liquor in their water bottles. "I urge you to abstain from intoxicants and empty out any liquor you may have, for you are going on a mission that requires the possession of all your faculties."<sup>65</sup> The reports did not mention any immediate draining of water bottles!

The real story was not the colonel's address but the throngs of people who stood in the galleries of the drill shed, clogged nearby streets, and lined the flag-draped route of the parade. "At every window in every building a group of people were gathered, and every housetop was covered, and every verandah crowded," declared the *Mail*.<sup>66</sup> Those people who could afford it paid high prices for perches above the streets from which well-dressed women showered the marching men with flowers. "King Street was a cheering, handkerchief waving, three storied, mass of citizens of all classes," reported the *Telegram*.<sup>67</sup> From the *Globe* offices, King Street appeared to be "one living, moving mass of humanity ... [and] thousands took up most dangerous positions on the cornices of the roofs." As the force marched down Yonge Street, the Grenadier Band played "Auld Lang Syne," and the Queen's Own Band "trilled out 'The Girl I Left Behind Me'." "Wild with excitement," onlookers "shouted themselves hoarse."<sup>68</sup> The 24 men of "K" (University) Company that the QOR had drafted for service in the North-West were accompanied to Union Station by fellow students from the University of Toronto. Recognizing the public interest in the patriotic display, university authorities cancelled lectures for the day, and so more than half of the student body of 400<sup>69</sup> joined a march that extended over three miles and along a half-dozen streets.<sup>70</sup> A pair of etchings in the *Illustrated War News* underscored the public's full participation in the mustering of the city's soldiers. One image depicts the interior of the drill shed where well-ordered troops stand at attention, ladies and gentlemen watch with interest from the gallery, and agile lads clamber onto high windowsills to get a better view (Figure 2). The second image features a huge crowd outside the drill shed as the Volunteers depart in a neat procession (Figure 3).

According to some press accounts, the sight of the two regiments marching evoked a Canadian patriotism rooted in British traditions and a wide, imperial world. The *News* said that the Grenadiers in their red uniforms reminded older Torontonians of the British redcoats no longer seen in the city. "Straight, stalwart and resolute," the *News* reported, "the Grenadiers marched along as steady as a

65 *Telegram*, March 30, 1885.

66 *Mail*, March 31, 1885.

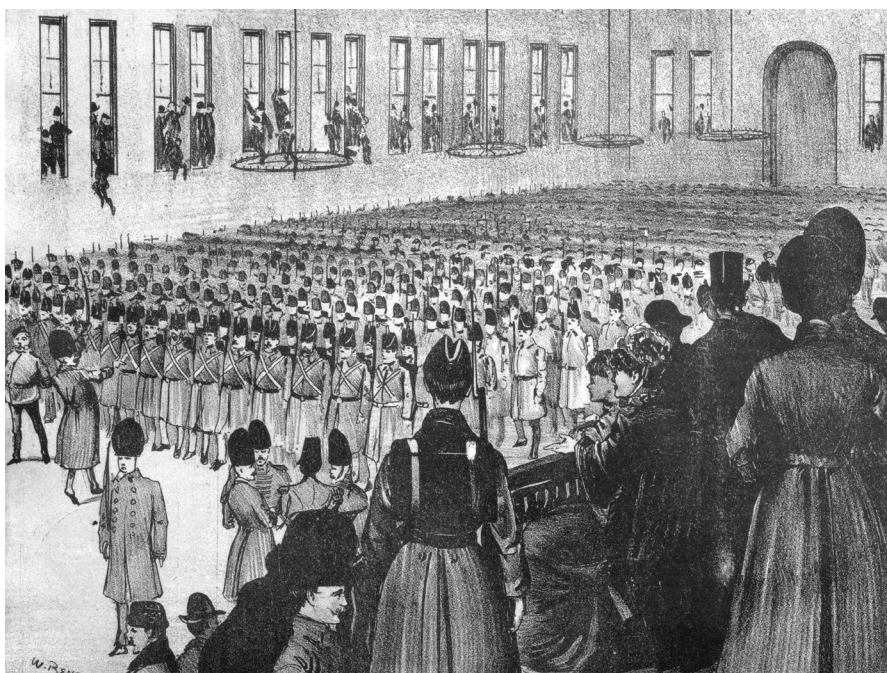
67 *Telegram*, March 30, 1885.

68 *Globe*, March 30, 1885.

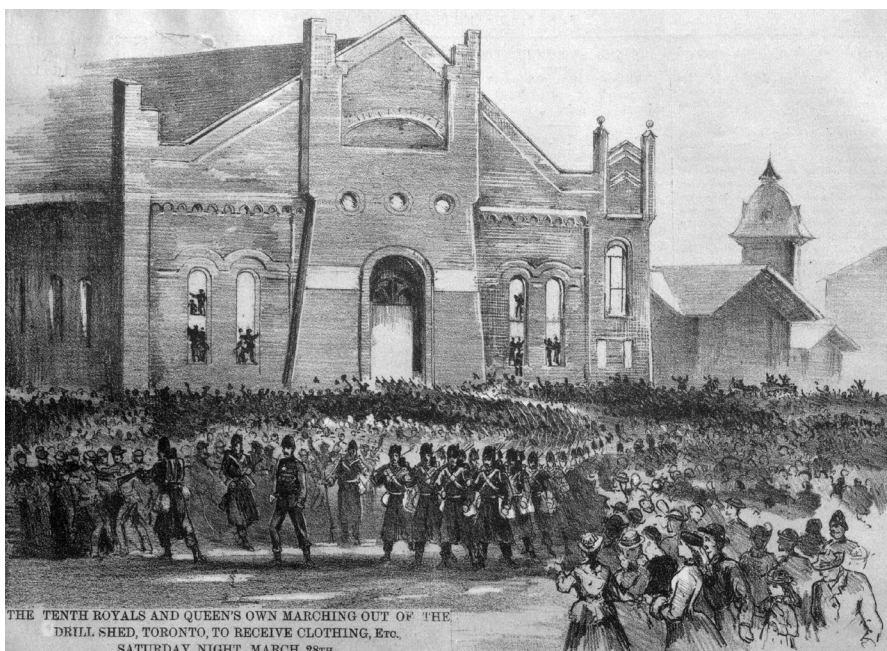
69 Donald B. Smith "Ordered to Winnipeg: Varsity Men Fought Louis Riel But One Served as His Secretary," *The Graduate*, November/December 1984, p. 5.

70 *The Varsity*, April 4, 1885.





**Figure 2:** "The Muster of the Tenth Royals and Queen's Own at the Drill Shed, Toronto, Saturday, March 28, 1885." *Illustrated War News*, April 4, 1885.



**Figure 3:** "The Tenth Royals and Queen's Own Marching Out of the Drill Shed, Toronto ... March 28, 1885." *Illustrated War News*, April 4, 1885

rock, and apparently undisturbed by the tumult around them.” These were “gallant young men” whose “moral courage and stamina showed that the military spirit which has characterized the progress of the English-speaking race the world over ... can manifest itself in no uncertain way when occasion demands.”<sup>71</sup> Local boys, Canadians, and British Empire patriots—it was all of a piece. “The spirit we see exhibited now,” said the *Mail*, “is the historic spirit of British, of Canadian, troops; it is the spirit which was exhibited when Arnold was forced from the walls of Quebec, when Brock fell at Queenston heights, when the marauders were driven back at Ridgeway.”<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the voice of Toronto’s Irish Catholic minority, the weekly *Irish Canadian*, gave equally firm support for the Volunteers’ mission, observing that the government’s call to arms had been “responded to with an enthusiasm that reflects honor on the patriotism of our Volunteers” and adding, “[I]n this free land there is no standing room for rebels.” Rebellion might be a legitimate response to oppression in Ireland, but the *Irish Canadian* saw no such justification for it in the North-West or anywhere in Canada.<sup>73</sup>

The city’s Protestant religious press added its voice to the chorus praising the military campaign and the enthusiastic support for the patriotic Volunteers. Notwithstanding its preference for peace, the *Christian Guardian*, the widely circulating Methodist weekly, endorsed military suppression out of concern for “the loyal people and settlements now in peril” and particularly the church’s own missionaries there. It remarked positively about the unusual militarism of the moment, saying: “Though we are a peace-loving people, there has been the greatest enthusiasm and readiness on the part of our Canadian volunteers in responding to the call of active duty in the North-West.” In tune with the dailies, the *Christian Guardian* thought the “sight of the detachments of the Queen’s Own and Grenadiers marching through the streets to the station, with bands of music playing, roused and thrilled the tens of thousands who gathered to witness the spectacle.”<sup>74</sup> Historian Gordon L. Heath has shown how Baptist journals (published in Toronto and elsewhere in Canada) similarly endorsed the military campaign and praised the patriotism, duty, manliness, and bravery of the Volunteers, even as Toronto’s *Canadian Baptist* expressed misgivings about the militarization of Canadian society.<sup>75</sup> After noting the “outburst of patriotic fire by the country,” the Anglican *Churchman* suggested that the uprising might never have happened “had the country in the past shown as much religious zeal as it has for suppressing the rebels.” Regrettably the Metis’ lack of proper religious instruction and their awareness of the sheer power of their opponent, the Canadian state, bred “a sense

71 *News*, March 30, 1885.

72 *Mail*, March 30 1885.

73 *Irish Canadian*, April 2, 1885. On the *Irish Canadian*, see Gerald J. Stortz, “The Irish Catholic Press in Toronto, 1874-1887,” Canadian Catholic Historical Association, *Study Sessions*, vol. 47 (1980); Mark C. McGowan *The Waning of the Green: Catholics, the Irish, and Identity in Toronto, 1887-1922* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), pp. 187-190.

74 *Christian Guardian*, April 8, 1885.

75 Gordon L. Heath, “Traitor, Half-Breeds, Savages and Heroes: Canadian Baptist Newspapers and Constructions of Riel and the Events of 1885,” in Gordon L. Heath and Paul R. Wilson, eds., *Baptists and Public Life in Canada* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications 2012) pp. 201-205.

of helplessness, which grows into despair, and from the hell of despair has issued the fiends, rebellion and murder.”<sup>76</sup>

Featured prominently in the daily newspaper coverage of the day were sentimental accounts of personal departures that closely followed gender codes. At many doorways, a mother, wife, sister, or sweetheart sobbed as a departing soldier tore himself away and “strode manfully along with a lump in his throat and a wild desire to rush back to get one more loving embrace.”<sup>77</sup> Visible tears belonged to women, not men. At the drill shed a Queen’s Own sergeant clasped hands with his “aged father” who “made brave effort to hide his emotion.”<sup>78</sup> Late in the day, the *World* reported, “sobbing females were frequently met, and in some cases men found handkerchiefs useful to hide red eyes or remedy a blurred sight.” According to the *Globe*, at the station police had to carry off women who had fainted because their “nerves had become unstrung at the thought of their husbands, fathers, and brothers leaving home for the frontier.”<sup>79</sup>

The climax of the day’s events came at Union Station when the Volunteers boarded two trains bound for the North-West. “Fully 10,000 people were gathered, probably the largest number ever assembled in one spot in Toronto,” reported the *Mail*, while the *World* declared the numbers were in “the tens of thousands” and the *News* put the crowd at 50,000. Even the station’s roof was “black with spectators,” and the whole place was “afire with patriotic enthusiasm.” Before the Volunteers arrived, University of Toronto students amused the crowd by singing Civil War songs in “doggerel parody”: “‘Tramp, Tramp, Tramp’ and ‘We’ll hang Louis Riel on a sour apple tree’.” (The *Globe* reporter sniffed that it was scarcely the time for the “clumsy antics of a lot of very callow youths trying hard to be funny.” In response, the university’s student newspaper, *The Varsity*, accused the *Globe* of “studento-phobia.”<sup>80</sup>) Once the troops appeared at the station, everyone surged forward and cheered. The lieutenant-governor made a public appearance, adding vice-regal dignity and authority to the occasion. A two-page spread in the *Illustrated War News* featured the enormous crowd near the CPR train, while close-ups showed the bustle of activity, final farewells, women drying their tears, and “the last glimpse” (Figure 4). As the first train pulled away, the two regimental bands joined together in playing “God Save the Queen.” *The Varsity* said that, as the students of “K” Company “silently uncovered to our cheer, we felt a thrill of fellowship such as we had never known before.” Soon the last train had disappeared and only smoke remained. Thousands of people scurried away amid driving sleet. The *Globe* remarked: “In little over 48 hours from the first summons, Toronto’s young men, deserting office and workshop, started on their three thousand mile journey.”<sup>81</sup>

76 *Churchman*, April 9, 1885.

77 *Mail*, March 31, 1885.

78 *Telegram*, March 30, 1885.

79 *World*, March 31, 1885; *Globe*, March 31, 1885.

80 *Mail*, March 31, 1885; *World*, March 31, 1885; *News*, March 31, 1885; *Globe*, March 30, 1885; *The Varsity*, April 4, 1885. The Civil War song popular among Northerners had “Jeff Davis,” president of the Confederacy, hanging from a sour apple tree.

81 *Varsity*, April 4, 1885; *Globe*, March 30, 1885.

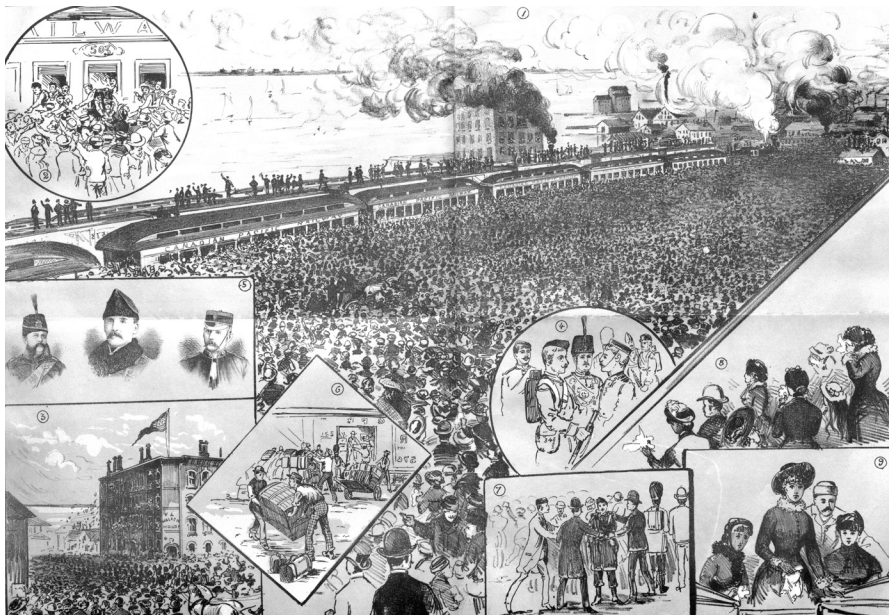


Figure 4: "Departure of the Queen's Own and Tenth Royals from Union Station, Toronto."  
*Illustrated War News*, April 4, 1885

Journalists thus interpreted the public's occupation of city streets as the community's solid endorsement of the campaign to suppress the resistance. Perhaps many who gathered to send off the Volunteers were simply curious or did not want to miss the excitement, but the dailies did not allow such a possibility. Still, community support for the event had to have been considerable. Organizing the departure had been rushed, and there was no opportunity for the top brass or other prominent figures to choreograph an elaborate send-off. It could reasonably be seen as a spontaneous effusion of ordinary people and thus all the more impressive a display of patriotism.<sup>82</sup> Jubilation carried the day, according to the press, and nothing marred the scene in the slightest. On display in city streets, the military was equally on display in the press. Military might and imperial state power were much admired, but the admiration was undergirded by awareness that local boys, citizen-soldiers, "our brave Volunteers," were the ones who embodied authority and militarism.

### Backing up the Boys

During the nearly four months between the Toronto send-off and the men's return, the city's dailies featured news items and opinion pieces that kept the Volunteers in the public eye. Front and centre were reports of engagements, especially

82 The spontaneity more closely resembled urban crowds reacting to news of the outbreak of war in 1914 rather than the carefully planned send-offs of the first contingent; see Robert Rutherford, "Canada's August Festival: Communitas, Liminality, and Social Memory," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 77 (June 1996), pp. 221-250, and "Send-offs During Canada's Great War."

involving Toronto's two regiments: the QOR at the battle of Cut Knife Hill and the Grenadiers at the battles of Fish Creek and Batoche. The press strongly played up the men's fighting abilities and reported victories where military historians have seen other results.<sup>83</sup> As historian Sarah Carter has shown, Canada's reading public was also made fully aware and then some of how the uprising endangered white womanhood in the North-West.<sup>84</sup> The *Telegram* and the *News*, unlike the other Toronto dailies, used the opportunity to stir up French-English tensions by taking swipes at French Canadians in Quebec and the North-West who openly sympathized with the rebels.<sup>85</sup> E. E. Sheppard, publisher of the *Toronto News*, printed a local Volunteer's unverified report that members of Montreal's francophone 65<sup>th</sup> Regiment had mutinied on their way to the North-West and then refused to fight—a report that eventually led to Sheppard's conviction for libel.<sup>86</sup> These well-known stories need not detain us here. Alongside them, however, were many others that kept public attention focused on the local Volunteers.

The dailies sent reporters “embedded” with the troops on the trains bound for the North-West. Typical of the coverage was a report in the *Mail* from “our special correspondent” who wrote from Peterborough within a couple of hours of the men's departure from Toronto. “The utmost enthusiasm prevails amongst all ranks,” he declared, “and the men are anxious for the field.” Those aboard the train were enjoying the tobacco the Canadian government had provided for them, filling every nook and corner with smoke. “I pity the non smokers from the bottom of my heart,” he added parenthetically. All of the men enjoyed singing Civil War songs—“John Brown's Body” and “Tenting on the Old Camp Ground”—and more patriotically they also sang “Rule Britannia” in “every imaginable key.”<sup>87</sup> Such reports were uniformly upbeat, evidently meant to lift the spirits of all who read them—Volunteers and civilians alike. Reporters even gave a cheerful spin to the gruelling and hazardous marches in the gaps of the rail line north of Lake Superior, when many men suffered from severe frost bite and snow blindness. Reports focused on the soldiers' pluck and stamina.<sup>88</sup>

Newspapers reported on the flood of offers to serve in the North-West. “The military spirit is rampant in our midst,” began a news item in the *Mail* only a few days after the first troops had departed. So many men volunteered for the QOR that the authorities could not process them all.<sup>89</sup> Press reports noted that Toronto's African Canadians showed their enthusiasm for active service. Being nearly all former slaves or the children of slaves, these men were, said the *News*, “anxious to show their appreciation and right to the title of freemen.”<sup>90</sup> Commentators usually

83 Granatstein, *Canada's Army*, p. 32; Morton, *The Last War Drum*, pp. 67-70, 73-95, 104-108.

84 Carter, *Capturing Women*, pp. 48-157.

85 *Telegram*, May 30 and April 18, 1885; *News*, April 22 and 17, May 19 and 21, 1885.

86 *News*, April 22, 1885; Silver, “Ontario's Alleged Fanaticism,” pp. 30-31.

87 *Mail*, March 31, 1885.

88 *Telegram*, April 25, 1885. Newspapers also contracted with militiamen (some from their own staffs) to send home stories from the front. See *La Patrie* [Montreal], April 2, 1885.

89 *Mail*, April 3, 1885.

90 *Mail*, April 1, 1885; *News*, April 17, 1885.

depicted the militia as being inclusive, and yet African Canadians served in a separate unit and it appears that none were called up for service in the North-West.

Calls for troops and their departures from the city kept interest in the Volunteers alive. On the night of March 31 buglers disturbed the sleep of residents on the city's outskirts to summon the York Rangers for active service, and three days later they made their departure, though there was less fanfare in the city because these troops came mainly from the countryside. The *Telegram* nevertheless reassured readers that "in the homes of the outward-bound companies the enthusiasm was up to war beat." A *Mail* reporter who boarded the train carrying the Rangers said that he "was greeted on all hands by the men from the rural districts with assurances that the yeomanry would sustain the honour of the country." One man proudly displaying a shiny rifle said in words possibly polished by the reporter: "Well mister ... you may call us the hayseed regiment if you like, but if ever I get them sights on Louis Riel he'll never know what struck him."<sup>91</sup>

Eagerness to see action in the North-West pervaded the ranks of militiamen still at home. This enthusiasm had to do in part with press reports that focused on the bravery of the men selected for active duty. Such reports cast everyone left at home in the same light: as spectators and supporters of the masculine virtues of the chosen. In a sense even militiamen eager to serve but not called up played this feminine role, their masculinity thus threatened. A hint of the consequences comes from a telegram sent to the Minister of Militia by a private in the QOR not chosen for service. He expressed his deep regret that his whole regiment had not been called up because "if the Regiment had gone we should have [all] had ... a chance to prove our courage."<sup>92</sup> The men's desire to serve was also reinforced by press reports about the rebels' capture in the North-West of white women who faced "torture, outrage, and death." White womanhood urgently needed protection. "I cannot describe to you the feelings of our men when these reports, fortunately untrue, reached them," one observer was quoted later as saying by the *Mail*. "I can realize the terrible indignation of the whole Dominion."<sup>93</sup>

Also in the news were stories about home-front activities in support of the troops. The Orange Order offered supportive words. At its June meeting the Grand Lodge of North America formally expressed "admiration of the loyal, patriotic spirit displayed by the members of the volunteer force shown as well by the alacrity with which they responded to the call to arms, and by the bravery displayed on the field of battle, and the hardships endured without a murmur."<sup>94</sup> Torontonians debated how best to support the hard-pressed families of some of the married Volunteers. In the end, military officers provided the names of soldiers with dependents in need, and, after a city hall committee investigated their situations,

91 *Telegram*, April 2, 1885; *Mail*, April 3, 1855.

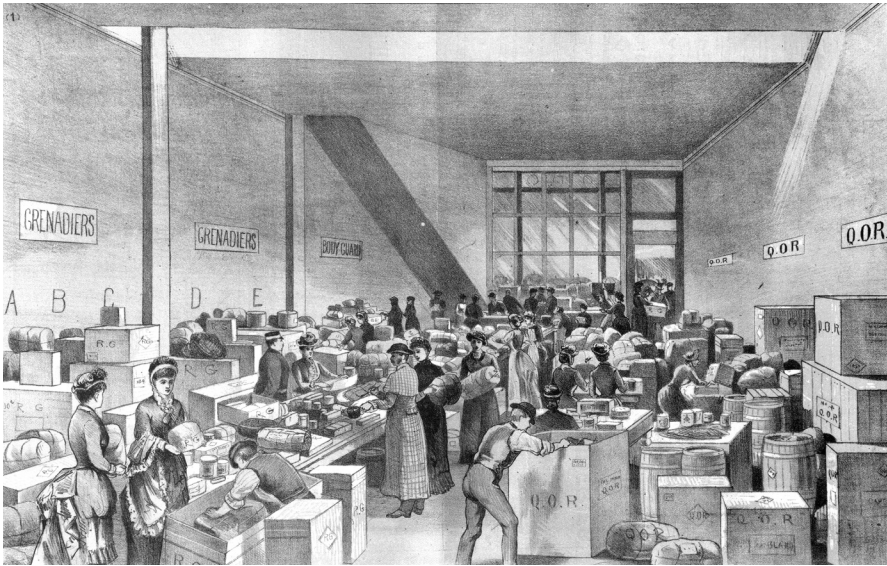
92 Pte. \_\_\_\_\_ to A. Caron, April 2, 1885, in Morton and Roy, eds., *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign*, pp. 89-90.

93 The Rev. C. Whitecome addressing the returned Grenadiers at St. Luke's Anglican Church, Toronto, *Mail*, July 27, 1885.

94 *The Sentinel and Orange and Protestant Advocate* [Toronto], March 25, 1888. Apart from passing this motion, the Orange Order did not take a public role in Toronto's celebrations of the militiamen.

it gave support to wives judged deserving.<sup>95</sup> Funds for the dependents of what turned out to be 66 soldiers came both from city coffers and from subscriptions and fund-raising efforts such as that of “The Harmony Club,” which donated the proceeds from their performance of the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta *Patience*.<sup>96</sup>

Women not only appeared in many newspaper stories cast in the role of dependents; they also appeared as highly active volunteers who prepared bandages, comforts, and such for the soldiers. Newspapers urged readers to respond generously to requests from the Ladies Volunteer Supply Committee. “The citizens of Toronto,” observed the *Mail*, “cannot better signify their appreciation of the fortitude with which [the Volunteers] are bearing up than by doing what they can to ensure their comfort in the performance of their duty.”<sup>97</sup> The CPR offered to transport the supplies at reduced rates to Winnipeg, and the federal government distributed them from there to the troops in the North-West. The dailies closely covered the work of these public-spirited local women, reporting for instance on a meeting in early May when the Ladies Volunteer Supply Committee resolved to send flannel smocks for all the Toronto men on active service and 100 nightshirts for the sick.<sup>98</sup> The *Illustrated War News* featured their work in a three-scene engraving entitled “Toronto Ladies Receiving and Packing Contributions for Volunteers at the Front” (Figure 5). In this image a few men are depicted doing



**Figure 5:** “Toronto Ladies Receiving and Packing Contributions of Volunteers at the Front.”  
*Illustrated War News*, May 9, 1885

95 *Globe*, April 3, 1885.

96 *Mail*, April 1, 1885; *Telegram*, March 31, 1885. The city of Toronto spent \$10,600 on boots and clothing for the men and the support of needy dependants; see *Minutes of Proceedings of the Council of the Corporation of the City of Toronto Commencing Monday, the 19<sup>th</sup> Day of January, 1885* (Toronto: E. F. Clark Printer, 1886) [hereafter *Toronto City Council Minutes for 1885*], p. 921.

97 *Mail*, April 25, 1885.

98 *News*, May 5, 1885.

the heavier tasks such as handling frightened horses, hammering shut the packing cases, and moving them on the warehouse floor. The more numerous women in fine dresses and elaborate hats sort items, fill the crates, and chat with one another presumably about the task at hand. In its context the image stands out amid the many others featuring males, especially soldiers. Coverage of this sort deliberately underscored the inclusiveness of the public that had mobilized behind the North-West campaign, a message the press was keen to convey.

City streets recently crammed for the spirited send-offs were soon packed with mourners for the two local casualties of the campaign. The bodies of Lieutenant William Charles Fitch, 26 years, and Private Thomas Moor, 18 years, both Grenadiers “who fell before the rifle-pits at Batoche,” were shipped home just four days apart for burial services at Mount Pleasant Cemetery.<sup>99</sup> Looking at the June 1 funeral procession of Private Moor, the *Globe* doubted “if ever before in Canada so many people assembled on such a mission” and said that “[i]t was apparent that the heart of the city was moved.”<sup>100</sup> In both cases relatives and friends gathered at the family home of the deceased, where the closed coffins were heaped with floral tributes. The city sent one bearing the motto “A Martyr to his Country,” while the regiment’s motto said “Ready, aye, Ready.”<sup>101</sup> Although this part of both funerals was accessible to the public only through the newspapers, Torontonians participated directly in the processions to the cemetery. The city councillors and more than three dozen organizations, including various military corps and bands, church groups, boys clubs, and trade unions, glumly accompanied the caskets through downtown streets before heading to the cemetery. At the graveside one of the ministers spoke of the soldier’s duty ““Not to reason why. But to do or die.”” Sympathizing with the parents in their loss, he reassured them that the “whole nation” knew that their loved ones had “nobly died in rescuing wives and sisters in the far North-West from death and outrage worse than death, and the land from desolation and anarchy.”<sup>102</sup> The messages of condolence that the city sent to the parents of the fallen heroes used similar language.<sup>103</sup> Although the sombre tone of the newspaper coverage of the funerals stood out amid all the jubilation elsewhere in the press, its focus on the Volunteers’ patriotism and the popular participation fit neatly with the rest.

### Planning the Reception

By late May the North-West Force had quashed the resistance and Riel, having surrendered, was awaiting trial for treason. Discussions began about welcoming the heroes home to Toronto. Planning the Volunteers’ reception consumed the energies of a considerable number of citizens whose debates and activities the press detailed. Public commentators and the newspapers underscored that the

99 Altogether the militia suffered 26 dead and 103 wounded (Granatstein, *Canada’s Army*, p. 32). Firm numbers of losses on the other side are unavailable.

100 *Globe*, June 2, 1885.

101 *Mail*, May 28 and July 20, 1885.

102 *Mail*, June 2, 1885.

103 Toronto City Council *Minutes* for 1885, May 29, 1885, pp. 129-130.



welcome would be from the people, arranged by grateful residents eager to honour the country's citizen-soldiers, especially the local boys.

The *News* took the lead in urging civic officials to plan a grand reception, publishing five editorials calling for action.<sup>104</sup> Mayor Alexander Manning eventually called a public meeting at city hall that established the Toronto Volunteers Reception Committee, a large body composed of citizens and aldermen, the people being thus represented in two ways. Sub-committees were also put in place: the barricade and route committee, the arch committee, the music and decorations committee, the luncheon committee, and the monument committee.<sup>105</sup> Advice on the programme for the reception flowed through the pages of the press with disputes inevitably developing as to how best to proceed, and readers were thus made to feel part of the process. Organizers quickly rejected the idea that there should be a banquet for all the Toronto men or any elaborate formalities and “tedious” ceremonials. The main objective was succinctly put in a *News* editorial: “that as many people as possible be able to see and cheer the returning heroes and that the latter should be able to return to their families and friends as soon as possible.”<sup>106</sup> Citizens and returning men alike would thus be accommodated—and happily there would be no danger that extended ceremonials would compel the city to pay the federal government for an extra day of the men's service. Organizers focused on arranging refreshments for the Volunteers while en route to the city and, on their arrival, processions through brilliantly decorated city streets, music, and an illumination and fireworks display in the evening.<sup>107</sup>

As the committee deliberated, offers poured in from people eager to enhance the celebrations. The mayor of St. Catharines, some 70 kilometres southwest of Toronto, declared that with 30 hours notice he could send 1,000 visitors to welcome the troops. For the day of the men's return, the chairman of Toronto's public school board offered a fine show of boys from the city's drill companies and a 600-voice girls' choir. Captain Ludgate of the Salvation Army—at the time a Christian revivalist movement in full first flower—wrote from Hamilton offering to send a contingent of Salvationists who would join “the paean of victory with their loud hosannas, atuned to harpsichord, psaltery and tambourine accompaniment.” Their presence would add “dignity and grace to the imposing pageant [and] remind the spectators of our victories as soldiers of the Cross over the hordes of Satan.”<sup>108</sup>

Finalizing the arrangements presented some modest challenges. The processional route, which was debated at several meetings of the reception committee, needed to be long enough for plenty of spectators to see the heroes, but not so long that it exhausted troops who deserved their rest. Did detraining at Parkdale Station in the west end mean a too tiring (three-and-a-half-hour) march into town? Was North Toronto Station a better choice for the procession's

104 *News*, May 21 and 27, June 1, 5, and 27, 1885.

105 *Globe*, June 26, 1885.

106 *News*, July 1, 1885.

107 Report of the meeting of the reception committee, *Mail*, June 30, 1885.

108 *Fire a Volley* reprinted in *Telegram*, July 17, 1885.

commencement? Opinions varied not least because each neighbourhood wanted to be at the centre of things. Because the CPR authorities preferred the North Toronto (Summerhill) Station, which they fully controlled, it became the focus of activities.<sup>109</sup> The thorny question of precedence also cropped up. The reception committee placed the stay-at-home members of QOR and Grenadiers at the end of the procession route, that is, in front of city hall where the brief formalities were to occur. Though the committee intended it as a compliment to the regiments, the stay-at-homes did not see it that way. They insisted they appear at the railway station so as to be among the first to welcome their fellow-Volunteers when they stepped down from the trains. As the procession moved off, the home boys said they would fall in at the rear.<sup>110</sup> In the end the barricade committee agreed to this plan. Militiamen from units not sent to the North-West were also assigned places in the procession, including Captain Carter's Colored Corps and band.<sup>111</sup> When showing appreciation for the heroes, everyone wanted to appear generous, but city officials, worried about budgets and criticism from ratepayers, pared down requests from the various committees.<sup>112</sup> At first the reception committee opted not to build an arch of welcome for the Volunteers, but, after it was pointed out that arches were always built for British troops returning from battle, the decision was reversed. In the end the city spent at least \$2,250 of public funds on the reception, a modest sum when compared to Toronto's budget of \$12,000 for welcoming the Prince of Wales in 1860.<sup>113</sup>

Decorating the town involved both the corporation and its citizenry. According to the *Mail*, city workers made "strenuous efforts ... to make the old City hall building look as well as possible, but it was a big job." The reception committee asked residents to decorate their homes and streets and owners of vacant lots on the procession route to build viewing platforms on them. A day or two before the arrival of the Toronto regiments, the *Mail* was reporting a brisk demand for evergreen boughs.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, "all classes of citizens" were "entering into the spirit of the thing with the same zeal and heartiness." A reporter poked fun at some of the results, however. A welcome banner raised on top of the usual signage on a storefront ended up reading "Welcome—Fresh Fish!"<sup>115</sup>

### Dress Rehearsals

Toronto welcomed three battalions of Volunteers before the city's own boys returned: the Midland battalion (men drawn from counties east of Toronto) and the 9<sup>th</sup> *Voltigeurs* (from Quebec City), both arriving on Sunday, July 19; and the Halifax provisional battalion, received two days later. The series of receptions

109 Report of the meeting of the reception committee, *Mail*, July 13, 1885. The station occupied the site of the 1916 station that is now an LCBO liquor store.

110 Report of the meeting of the reception committee, *Mail*, July 18, 1885.

111 *Mail*, July 28, 1885.

112 *News*, July 12, 1885.

113 *Mail*, June 26, 1885; Toronto City Council *Minutes* for 1885, "Report of the Reception Committee," p. 554; Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, p. 54.

114 *Mail*, July 20, 1885.

115 *Globe*, July 21, 1885.

gave citizens a chance to practise for the main event, the arrival of Toronto's own, and they built excitement in anticipation of the local lads' arrival. Moreover, Toronto's reputation for hospitality was at stake: the local press reported that newspaper readers across the country were watching to see how the city would welcome the visiting Volunteers. This sort of reflexivity within the national press community fed urban rivalries.

Early on the Sunday both the Midlanders and *Voltigeurs* arrived aboard the *Alberta* at Owen Sound where they left by train for Toronto. By two o'clock in the afternoon the streets around Toronto's Union Station were jammed with people, but when the train finally arrived at six o'clock half the crowd had given up and gone home for supper. Still the *Mail* said that the throng gave the Midlanders "a roar of welcome such as only can proceed from British lungs." As the train pulled in, a band struck up "See the Conquering Hero Come" and, reported the *News*, "Men, women and children rushed forward to greet the gallant heroes as the engine steamed up to the station." The grand scene was "beyond description, and the heartiness and earnestness of the welcome was shown in the moist eye and the quick, sobbing gasp that sometimes cut off the cheer."<sup>116</sup>

All the reports on the various arrivals highlighted the extraordinary appearance of the Volunteers. "Their faces were brown as berries," wrote a *News* reporter on first seeing the Midlanders, "their chins unshaven and hair unkempt; uniforms were faded and tattered, and in a good many instances the uniform had disappeared altogether, its place being filled by ... pants made out of flour sacks and forage caps out of canvas." In 1885 sunburned faces were an unusual sight in the city, it would seem, because every commentator remarked on the darkness of the Volunteers' faces and hands. The reporter for the *Telegram* joked that "had they only been 'fixed up' in buckskin and feathers, they could have been mistaken for Indians, the face of every hero being tanned a beautiful brown." The men's makeshift, mismatched, and torn clothing was represented as being a visible and stirring sign of the hardships that the men had endured on the frontier. Their Prairie experience was also signalled by the booty the men brought with them, including "Indian ponies, Indian dogs, buttons, pipes, clothes, belts, prairie dogs, medallions presented by the missionary priests, and other things."<sup>117</sup>

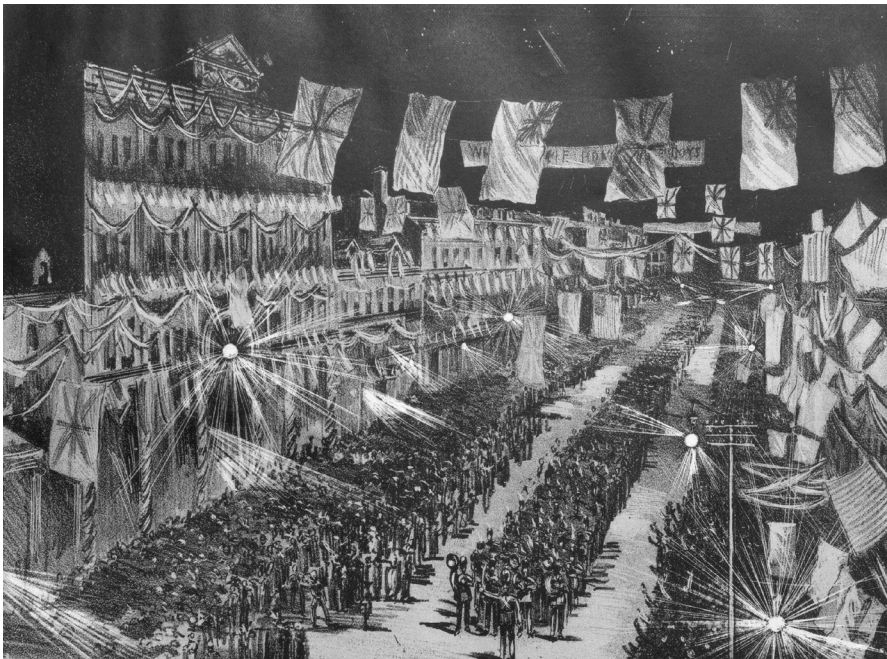
Ceremonies welcoming the Midlanders to Toronto were brief. Mayor Manning and a deputation from the reception committee greeted the men at Union Station and invited them to dinner at the nearby Albion Hotel. The Midlanders marched off in line, accompanied by three bands, cheering admirers, and ladies who "pressed bouquets into willing hands." According to the reporter from the *World*, the people were enthusiastic, none more so than the ladies who could be heard to say "They must have had a hard time of it," and "Don't they look tough." After a supper of

116 *Mail*, July 20, 1885; *News*, July 20, 1885.

117 *News*, July 20, 1885; *Telegram*, July 20, 1885; *Mail*, July 20, 1885. Souvenirs or loot from the North-West campaign became a politically sensitive matter; see Morton and Roy, eds., *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign*, pp. 342, 246.

“Chicken Pie à la Batoche,” the Midlanders paraded up Yonge Street to the North Toronto Station where they were given a rousing departure.<sup>118</sup>

The *Voltigeurs* arrived later that Sunday evening to a reception resembling the earlier one except that the march up Yonge Street took place “under the glare of electric light,” still a novelty in 1885 and featured along with electricity lines and pole in the dramatic image appearing in the *Illustrated War News* (Figure 6). Journalists underscored that Torontonians were just as warm and enthusiastic in welcoming the sons of Quebec as the sons of Ontario. At Union Station, the crowd yelled “Well done, Quebec” and “Three cheers for Quebec.”<sup>119</sup> A *World* reporter wrote that the “Quebeckers were universally admired” and that the regiment’s commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Guillaume Amyot, “makes a fine-looking colonel.” Even the *News* put aside its prejudices about French Canadians. The *Voltigeurs* were “very much like our Queen’s Own in appearance and composition,” declared the *News*. “A glance shows that they are a city battalion and the pets of the city too.” Indeed, the brief visit of the *Voltigeurs* became an opportunity for Toronto newspapers to make a show of nationalism by celebrating the pan-Canadian enterprise that had suppressed the resistance. Lieutenant-Colonel Amyot said to a wildly cheering crowd: “Such a reception proves that but one heart beats from one end of the dominion to the other... We see that we



**Figure 6:** “Voltigeurs de Québec, Yonge Street, July 19, 1885.” *Illustrated War News*, July 25, 1885.

118 *World*, July 20, 1885.

119 *Mail*, July 20, 1885.

are one country, one Confederation, under one great Queen.” Such a pleasingly patriotic statement by a French Canadian fit the mood perfectly.<sup>120</sup>

Another opportunity for building national feeling came with Toronto’s similarly enthusiastic reception of the Halifax men (the “Stalwart Sons of the Sea”) when they arrived after a detour to Niagara Falls. The visiting regiment’s commander, Lieutenant-Colonel J. J. Bremner, thanked the city for the handsome manner the regiment had been welcomed, adding that “his men had come to the city as strangers but they had been received as brothers.” In reply, Mayor Manning said it was a pleasure to extend the city’s hospitality to men “who had traveled 3,000 miles from their homes to quell the seditious men who had raised disturbances in the North-West.” The rebellion had “a silver lining” in that it “had enabled many of our young men to see what a noble country they were citizens of.” Moreover, “it demonstrated to them the unity of Canada and the necessity of attaining redress for grievances by proper constitutional means.... The laws were calculated to secure freedom, and as they were made by the people, could be framed to meet every occasion where liberty was endangered.”<sup>121</sup> However fine the patriotic and nationalist rhetoric, it was all preamble to the main event: the reception of Toronto’s own.

### **When the Boys Come Home**

“Never since Creation has there been such a home coming,” hyperbolized the *News* about July 23, 1885, the day the Toronto Volunteers returned. “Toronto fairly rocked with joy.... It was a most glorious, resplendent, brilliant, effulgent ending to a gallant national movement.” The *Telegram* declared: “Such a day never was seen in Toronto before. Possibly such a day will never be seen in Toronto again.” The *World* judged it equally: “Over one hundred thousand people yesterday joined in the warmest welcome that was ever given in this fair dominion to citizen soldiers who had served their country in suppressing armed rebellion. The oldest and youngest inhabitants agreed for once that it was the greatest day Toronto ever witnessed.”<sup>122</sup> In their detailed reports of the day, journalists stretched their descriptive powers to bring to life the patriotic display and the emotional reunions.

On the eve of the boys’ arrival the streets were clogged with residents and visitors “viewing and criticizing the decorations.” The *Irish Canadian* thought the city’s “gay appearance” resembled “the gala days” of Toronto’s 1884 semi-centennial “only the enthusiasm, if any thing, is greater.”<sup>123</sup> One of the several images in the *Illustrated War News* featuring the decorations shows residents admiring the elaborately and patriotically festooned offices of the *Globe*—both a reminder of the press’s importance to the campaign and an opportunity to publicize the *Globe*’s message: “WELL DONE BOYS.” Along the parade route had sprung up six temporary arches, festive structures appropriate for the city’s Volunteers

120 *World*, July 20, 1885; *News*, July 20, 1885; Col. Amyot as cited in *Mail*, July 20, 1885. On similar receptions for returning French-Canadian troops elsewhere in Ontario, see Silver, “Ontario’s Alleged Fanaticism,” p. 26.

121 *Mail*, July 22, 1885.

122 *News*, July 24, 1885; *Telegram*, July 24, 1885; *World*, July 24, 1885.

123 *Mail*, July 23, 1885; *Irish Canadian*, July 23, 1885.

who would pass through triumphal arches in the same way that victorious Roman legions had in classical times.<sup>124</sup> In its composite image of the Toronto reception, the *Illustrated War News* showed all six, each one dwarfing the individuals standing nearby but in turn dwarfed by the immense crowds participating in the reception (Figure 7). The *Mail* judged the arch at the intersection of King and Yonge Streets the “noblest structure of its kind which ever appeared in the streets of Toronto.” Crowned with a portrait of General Middleton, underneath it displayed representations of the colonels of the local battalions. Mottoes welcomed the troops home and referred by name to the battles recently fought.<sup>125</sup> The *IWN* chose this arch to feature in its tableau, placing it at the centre and making it the largest of the eight scenes. Moreover, this image is more richly detailed and depicts action: soldiers on horseback and in a carriage move towards the viewer.



Figure 7: “Toronto Reception, July 23, 1885.” *Illustrated War News*, July 25, 1885.

There was much more. Fire halls appeared elaborately adorned to resemble castles, demonstrating once again, said the *Mail*, the firemen’s “genius for decorating.” Main streets were thickly draped with streamers, shields, and banners, with mottoes welcoming the boys home.<sup>126</sup> Some decorations were elaborate. At his Yonge street home a citizen had erected a gallows-tree with a noose from which hanged an effigy of Louis Riel. The reporter for the *Mail* observed that

124 The significance of arches in public display is discussed in Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, pp. 58-69.

125 *Mail*, July 24, 1885.

126 *World*, July 23, 1885.

it was “evidently popular,” but that he found it “rather a ghastly spectacle.”<sup>127</sup> (French-Canadian commentators would have bitter words for this kind of display.<sup>128</sup>) In front of Randall’s news depot were red-and-white banners reading: “Long Marches, Hard Tack, Rough Camping, Lead to Victory and Triumph.” A. McGregor, a painter, had created a scene on his window that “represented a Grenadier with fixed bayonet charging at a redskin in war-paint, who was doing his best to make himself scarce.” The caption read: “This is the way Our Boys did it at Batoche.” Butchers working in St Lawrence market placed a banner at the building’s south entrance: “The knights of the cleaver salute the Cut Knife heroes, the Frog Lake butchers’ avengers, and the sharp steel chargers of Batoche.”<sup>129</sup> Aligning themselves with the popular patriotic campaign could have done nothing to hurt the commercial prospects of the businesses doing the advertising, and indeed several businesses placed display advertisements in the press associating their products and services with the popular campaign.<sup>130</sup>

Not only were the main streets much adorned, but side streets too were “flamboyant with flags and streamers, and redolent of the delicious resinous odour of the cedar [boughs].” The *Mail* emphasized that “the people” were “entering heart and soul into the matter.”<sup>131</sup> The *Globe* waxed sentimentally about “the outpouring of individual sympathy for the gallant fellows” shown in the modest decorations displayed outside unpretentious dwellings, such as a “little arch of evergreens over a small gateway.”<sup>132</sup> Popular participation was made evident in reports of a large group of women, amply supplied with flowers from the gardens of many residents, who made up 1,000 bouquets, each one mounted on a stick so that it could be stuck into the barrel of a soldier’s rifle.<sup>133</sup>

On the afternoon of the men’s arrival, the city was bursting both with residents enjoying the holiday declared by the mayor and with visitors who had streamed into town for the celebrations. The *Christian Guardian* said the crowd numbered 100,000 and formed “one dense mass of men and women excited to the highest pitch of enthusiasm.”<sup>134</sup> People gathered all along the parade route and especially near the North Toronto Railway Station. Admittance to the station was by ticket, members of the reception committees having thus insured that they and other local worthies would have privileged access to the heroes.<sup>135</sup> Just before five o’clock the first of the trains chugged into view carrying the QOR, and “in a moment all was confusion.” While the soldiers had to await orders to detrain, impatient civilians

127 *Ibid.*

128 See reports of the meetings called by the *Le Club National* in the *Montreal Gazette*, April 22 and June 9, 1885.

129 *Mail*, July 24, 1885.

130 See, for instance, ads in the *World*: P. Patterson and Son offering Volunteers revolvers at “less than cost” and P. Jamieson drawing attention to his war on clothing prices with the heading “War! War! War!” (April 6, 1885); W. McDowall’s pitch to Volunteers for leather belts and repeating rifles (April 7, 1885); P. Burns’ offer to families of Volunteers of special rates on fuel (April 11, 1885).

131 *Mail*, July 23, 1885.

132 *Globe*, July 24, 1885.

133 *Ibid.*

134 *Christian Guardian*, July 29, 1885, p. 9.

135 Newspapers took the trouble to name every individual who had a ticket of entry to the station. See, for example, *Mail*, July 24, 1885.

rushed up hugging and kissing their loved ones who reached out from the carriage windows. Meanwhile, the ladies of the Volunteer Supply Committee boarded the trains and presented each man with a nosegay consisting of “a shield covered with white flowers with the initials of the regiment in the centre and the words ‘Cut Knife Creek’ above and below.”<sup>136</sup> Once off the train, the men posed for a photograph (Figure 8) and listened to Mayor Manning welcoming them back: “You have proved yourselves no mere holiday soldiers, and we feel with just pride that our Volunteers in discipline, endurance, and steady bravery can favorably compare with any regular troops.”<sup>137</sup> Shortly afterwards the scene was repeated with the arrival of the Grenadiers and the mayor again invoking the militia myth.



Figure 8: “QOR Volunteers Arrived at North Toronto CPR Station, July 23, 1885.”  
Toronto Public Library.

When the bands struck up “When Johnnie Comes Marching Home,” the two battalions began their march down festooned Yonge Street past the cheering onlookers. It was a military display with civilian marchers limited to the civic officials who played host. No other groups, such as trade unions or fraternal orders, marched that day. The great mass of the population participated as spectators, cast in the role of admirers of the militiamen. The newspapers reported the exact order of marchers that organizers had carefully worked out ahead of time. City officials led the way, followed by the various regiments of mounted and marching soldiers. The wounded rode in carriages. A clear distinction was made between

136 *Globe*, 24 July 24, 1885.

137 *Ibid.*



the returning men and the militiamen who had stayed home, with the former taking precedence. Included prominently in the procession was Captain Howard, a soldier in the United States Army who had gone west to man the Gatling gun, a new and terrifying, though still often inaccurate, rapid-fire weapon.<sup>138</sup> At the head of the military procession rode Colonel George T. Denison, whose reminiscences confirm newspaper reports of the day. “What struck me was the extraordinary enthusiasm of the people,” he observed. “If we had been returning from a second Waterloo, concluding a long and anxious war, we could not have been received with greater warmth. I repeatedly saw both men and women cheering wildly, with the tears running down their cheeks with excitement. It was a most interesting study.”<sup>139</sup>

As the procession continued down Yonge Street, the crowds cheered endlessly. “Old men shouted themselves out of breath,” said the *Globe*; “young ladies cheer[ed] as they pelted bouquets of flowers at the veterans; mothers wept with joy, and the babes in their arms cooed and waved their stubby little hands as if by instinct.”<sup>140</sup> At city hall the girls’ choir “broke forth in patriotic and welcoming songs,” which the men acknowledged with “regulation campaign cheers.” The lads were in a jolly mood not only because they were home, but also because they had been supplied with well-iced kegs of beer donated by O’Keefe’s brewery and loaded onto the trains at Orangeville.<sup>141</sup>

The crowd was said to be moved by the appearance of the Volunteers who, declared the *Globe*, “looked like soldiers every inch, albeit much patched-up, sunbrowned, and dusty warriors.” Some who had been overweight on departure had trimmed down considerably. And their discipline was admirable. When called to attention, the entire battalion “stood erect, immovable, like bronzed statues.”<sup>142</sup> In its editorial, the *Mail* said that the troops had shown “all the soldierly qualities we expected of them” and “sustained the warlike traditions of their race.” Moreover, on that glorious day of the reception, they had “received the warm welcome which British subjects always give to British soldiers when the return from those services of danger which we have learned to consider invariably the occasion of victory.”<sup>143</sup> In parallel the Catholic *Irish Canadian* gave a special welcome home to Captain James Mason of the Grenadiers who had sustained a bullet injury: “He has nobly upheld the valor of our race and enabled us to say that in the North-West fight the Irish were in the van.”<sup>144</sup>

138 The Toronto dailies and the London *Times* lionized Howard, and Torontonians honoured him with a reception and banquet (*News*, July 24, 1885; *Mail*, July 25, 1885.) Howard’s contribution was doubted by General Middleton, however; see Morton and Roy, eds., *Telegrams of the North-West Campaign*, p. 361. The *Irish Canadian*, following the lead of the *Palladium of Labor*, insisted Howard was a mere mercenary (*Irish Canadian*, June 4, 1885).

139 George T. Denison, *Soldiering in Canada: Recollections and Experiences*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Toronto: G. N. Morang 1901), p. 839.

140 *Globe*, July 24, 1885.

141 *News*, July 24, 1885.

142 *Globe*, July 24, 1885.

143 *Mail*, July 24, 1885.

144 *Irish Canadian*, June 18, 1885.

People in the crowd that day were transported by the exhilaration of it all, or so it was said. The *Mail* reported that in a sermon the Rev. E. A. Stafford of Metropolitan Methodist Church spoke at length about a rare and valuable sense of oneness that the crowds experienced during the reception. “The whole people had their minds bent on one thought,” he mused, adding, “such enthusiasm lifts us out of the common-place and into the poetical—out of the little into the great.” Moreover, this feeling had prompted “an increased growth of national feeling.” Another publication described the “atmosphere of naturalness” that pervaded the city, when “differences in rank and position were for the moment forgotten.” The crowd’s “truth and spontaneity were so fully apparent, that the coldest temperament melted into geniality and good feeling.” Another editorial remarked: “Everybody was glad, everybody cheered and did various other things that in a colder blooded mood they would never have thought of doing.”<sup>145</sup> Such remarks confirm H. V. Nelles’ generalization about popular parades: “Colour, spectacle, a massing of bodies, ordered formations, and an impelling tempo, by inspiring awe and adulation, dissolve distinctions.”<sup>146</sup>

On the day of the men’s return, one of them, Dick Cassels, wrote in his private diary using language that echoed the public rhetoric of the press: “at the roar of welcome that greets us, our labors, our trials, our dangers, our hardships, are all forgotten and gratitude and enthusiasm alone remain.” For its part, the University of Toronto showed gratitude by excusing the returning student militiamen from sitting their exams, giving each of them automatic credit for the academic year.<sup>147</sup> To commemorate their experience, the “K” Company veterans posed in uniform on the steps of the front entrance to University College, the officers standing with hands resting on their upended rifles, and the students sitting in a relaxed manner, signifying that for the present their duties had concluded (Figure 9).

On the Monday following the reception, local newspapers printed summaries of Sunday sermons that focused on the citizen-soldiers who had done their country proud. The *Mail* provided accounts of seven church services and one at “the synagogue” (Holy Blossom) where the cantor, the Rev. Herman Phillips, welcomed the men of the congregation home from the North-West and “eulogized the troops for their prompt service at the call of duty, for the hardships undergone and blood shed in the cause of law and order.” For those attending service at Grace Anglican Church, the minister underscored that recent events had proven that “the people of Canada were united, not merely by an Act of Parliament, but by patriotic feelings, by pride for their wide domain, and by faith in the future.” The national feeling stimulated by news of the campaign was a theme of other preachers, too. At St. James Cathedral the QOR, which attended as a group, heard the Anglican chaplain declare that it was thanks to them that “the honor of our noble Queen had been maintained, while the integrity of the confederation, which, it was feared,

145 *Mail*, July 27, 1885; *The Trip Hammer* [a publication of the employees of Massey Manufacturing in Toronto], August 1885; *The Trader* [a Toronto publication for jewellers and hardware merchants], August 1885. Such feelings have been analysed as examples of *communitas* in the case of Toronto’s response to news of the outbreak of war in August 1914; see Rutherforddale, “August Festivals.”

146 Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, p. 199.

147 Cassels, “Diary,” pp. 234-235.



**Figure 9:** 'K' (University) Company, QOR, who served in the North-West at University College, University of Toronto, 1885. University of Toronto Archives.

would be shaken, had been made firmer.” He linked the men’s obligation to Canada to “their duty ever to guard the integrity of the British flag, remembering that it was always the ensign of right against might, and all that was good and true in men.” He also spoke of *Christian* duty: “The Christian man must always be ready to fight for his country and to take up arms in defence of a Christian government.” At St. Stephen’s Anglican Church, Professor Clark of Trinity College told the congregation that the struggle in which Canada had engaged “had been for law, order, and national life.” To clarify, he added that “in speaking of Canada’s national life, he was not forgetting the great Mother Country or the flag which we honor. Canadian history and customs could be preserved and honored without causing us to love the Mother Country the less.” Amid the national celebrations the imperial connection must not be forgotten. The campaign also built national unity: “Recent events had shown that when the honour of our country was assailed we sunk all differences, and whether Protestants or Roman Catholics, English or Scotch, Irish or French, were animated by but one desire, and that was to defend the country to which we belonged.... From Gaspé to beyond the Rocky mountains, this Canada was but one land.”<sup>148</sup> If these clerical commentaries reproduced widely in the press were not quite the strident endorsement of “Christian soldiers” later heard from

148 *Mail*, July 27, 1885. At the time in Toronto and English Canada more generally Canadian nationalism was infused with British imperialism; see Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970); Buckner and Francis, eds., *Canada and the British World*.

pulpits during the South African War and the First World War, they nevertheless made clear that religious authority blessed the Volunteers' campaign and that religious bodies played their part in reinforcing the pervasive public interpretation of it.<sup>149</sup>

In subsequent days, as the press carefully detailed, Torontonians feted the Volunteers at private functions and at occasions arranged by organizations. The St. George and Occident Masonic lodges united in a reception for their fellow members who returned from the expedition. No. 4 Company of the Grenadiers played host to the returning Grenadier officers at a dinner in their honour. Newspapers reporting on these occasions reproduced the by now familiar rhetoric. For instance, at a reception held by Elm Street Methodist Church, Mr. Warring Kennedy welcomed back the boys, declaring "the crushing of the rebellion" to have been "only second in importance to the historical capture of Quebec." He observed too that "all Toronto approved of their action as witness the reception of last Thursday, when 100,000 people turned out to welcome them home." Dr. Potts, pastor and chairman of the reception, observed that "the fact of our having an Imperial officer, General Middleton at the head of our Canadian soldiers showed plainly that we were knit strongly to the old Mother Land, whose flag had braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze."<sup>150</sup>

The city's permanent recognition of the Volunteers' campaign in the North-West saw the eventual unveiling of a monument in a prestigious location at Queen's Park commemorating those who had died suppressing the resistance. Well before the Volunteers returned home, Mayor Manning and others had formed a civic committee to undertake public collections for the construction of a monument that was estimated to cost \$15,000 to \$20,000. "It is to be emphatically a citizens' monument," reported the *Telegram*, "erected by the citizens without distinction of class, politics, colour, creed or nationality." The *News* called it "a memorial of patriotic heroism ... intended to be worthy alike of those who fell, and of the city which honors itself by erecting it." It proved difficult to find adequate support, however, once the moment of militarism began to fade, which happened noticeably soon. Eventually, however, the funds were found, and Walter Allward, a talented, young Toronto sculptor (and the designer much later of the Vimy Monument), won the commission to design and execute it. Reflecting a distance from the militarism of 1885, the sculpture unveiled in 1895 consists of a single female figure, Peace, standing on a tall, white marble base, and holding up an olive branch and with a sword sheathed at her side (Figure 10). The figure's base better reflects the spirit of 1885. On it are inscribed the names of the battles and a bronze plaque at the front reads: "Erected in memory of the officers and men who fell on the battlefields in the North-West in 1885. Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori."<sup>151</sup>

149 On the Baptist press in this regard, see Heath, "Traitor, Half-Breeds," p. 203. On the religious rhetoric associated with the South African War, see Gordon L. Heath, *A War with a Silver Lining: Canadian Protestant Churches and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009); on the First World War, see Vance, *Death so Noble*, chap. 2.

150 *World*, July 25, 1885; *Mail*, July 27 and 28, 1885.

151 *Telegram*, July 11, 1885; *News*, July 11, 1885; John Warkentin, *Creating Memory: A Guide to Outdoor*



Figure 10: Northwest Rebellion Monument, Queen's Park, Toronto.

### Conclusion

In 1885 Toronto journalists certainly outdid themselves in their lively, extensive, and sometimes over-the-top coverage of the Volunteers' campaign to suppress the Metis resistance fighters in the North-West. From the first news of the resistance's outbreak until the boys had been welcomed home with grand receptions, the city's dailies lavished attention on the people's support for the undertaking. Newspapers constructed a public composed of active citizens intensely involved in the events of the day and completely committed to the idea of the citizen-soldier as the country's best defence. According to journalists, popular convictions gave weight to the manly virtues said to be at the heart of the Volunteers' mobilization: patriotism, duty, and discipline. Military and civilian authorities called for the

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*Public Sculpture in Toronto* (Toronto: Becker Associates, 2010), p. 67; the inscription from Horace can be translated as "It is sweet and right to die for your country." Today the monument site has been appropriated by the organized Metis community, which, with an acute sense of irony, uses it as the gathering place for annual Riel Day ceremonies on November 16, the date Riel was executed in 1885. See <http://www.Metisnation.org/news-media/news/19th-annual-louis-riels-day-commemorative-ceremony> (accessed April 4, 2014).

vigorous suppression of resistance, and Toronto newspapers reinforced the call at every turn.

Historians are accustomed to discovering evidence of contention in public celebrations, such as the “civic wars” Mary P. Ryan locates at the heart of democratic public expression in American cities in the nineteenth century.<sup>152</sup> Disputes about Toronto’s 1885 send-offs and receptions, however, are noticeably lacking in the pages of Toronto’s dailies. Scenes of playful mockery that challenged hegemonic displays of welcome during Canada’s first royal visit or occasionally in Labour Day parades are similarly absent in the press’s depiction of Toronto and its soldiers during the summer of 1885.<sup>153</sup> Newspapers depicted the crowds as ceaselessly jubilant (except during the funeral processions for the fallen Volunteers), but never playful. The labour reform weekly newspaper from Hamilton, the *Palladium of Labor*, provides the only Ontario press evidence I have found of a critical perspective on the receptions. It condemned the campaign of the government and the Volunteers and in passing objected to the receptions on class lines, dismissing them as “plenty of cheap and showy displays of gratitude” got up for the common soldiers who were given no compensation “of a solid, substantial character.”<sup>154</sup>

Generally speaking, the position taken by Toronto’s dailies echoed across Canada as local journalists gave a vigorously positive spin to their communities’ patriotic celebrations in support of Volunteers.<sup>155</sup> In Montreal French and English newspapers alike fawned over the local men called to service and praised the huge public participation of both French and English Canadians in the celebrations surrounding the mission.<sup>156</sup> That city’s homecoming was spectacular. In Montreal, unlike in Toronto, however, newspapers acknowledged local dissent in connection with the troops. It was reported, for instance, that a few members of the 65<sup>th</sup> *Voltigeurs* had deserted before departure for the North-West.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, newspapers gave detailed coverage of the large, open-air meetings called by Montreal’s *Le Club National* where French-Canadian nationalists voiced support for the French-speaking Metis, denounced the government’s campaign of suppression, and railed at the remarks hostile to French Canadians published in the *Toronto News* and elsewhere.<sup>158</sup> Journalists in Montreal said the city’s opposition voice was that of only a small minority, but they abandoned such a stance once French-Canadian dissent ballooned during Riel’s treason trial and especially after his hanging. Until then, the scene in Montreal mostly resembled that of Toronto in its keen support for local militiamen going to the North-West.

152 Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

153 Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, pp. 123-127; Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, *Labour’s Festival: A History of Labour Day in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 45.

154 *Palladium of Labor*, August 8, 1885.

155 Stanley, “New Brunswick and Nova Scotia,” pp. 82-84; the *Globe* described receptions in Winnipeg (July 17, 1885), Montreal, and Ottawa (July 21, 1885).

156 *Gazette*, April 3 and July 21, 1885; *La Presse*, April 2 and 3, 1885, and “Extra” July 20, 21, and 24, 1885; *L’Étandard*, April 4, 1885, July 21 and 22, 1885.

157 *La Patrie*, April 6, 1885; *Gazette*, April 7, 1885.

158 *La Patrie*, April 21 and 23, 1885.

This article has focused on newspaper representations of Toronto's support for the Volunteers of 1885, but a legitimate concern is the accuracy of the press depictions. When the great bulk of historical evidence is in the form of newspaper accounts, assessing their accuracy is difficult, especially given the consensus among them in praising the military campaign and public support for it. Internal press evidence points to some inconsistencies. For instance, where one paper said the crowd at the train pull-out numbered 10,000, another said 50,000. It could not have been both, but what seems apparent is that the crowds at the send-off and receptions were very large. All the newspapers agreed and quoted statements from various individuals to that effect, and the few surviving private sources confirm it. We may legitimately doubt whether the public was really so uniform in its support for the troops. It is reasonable to assume that quite a few people in the crowds appeared in city streets out of curiosity or for a diversion, rather than to show patriotic support for the Volunteers, the preferred official and press interpretation of what was happening. Moreover, it is obvious that there was exaggeration and hyperbole in many accounts. For example, when mothers saw the returning heroes of Batoche, and "wept with joy," it is unlikely that literally "the babes in their arms cooed and waved their stubby little hands as if by instinct"<sup>159</sup> Such exaggerations would have been apparent to readers and the touch of humour helped make plain the crowd's approval.

At all times, Toronto journalists put the best spin possible on the troops, seeing skill and victories where limitations and disappointments are more apparent in retrospect. Upon the return of the troops, the *Mail* commented on the difference between the complete public approval of them and the situation at the outset of the campaign: "It can hardly be offensive now to say that the general public did not hold volunteering as a very useful pastime. Men of business grudged the time it occupied for some of their young men.... Cynics sneered sometimes at the parade that was made of volunteer uniforms."<sup>160</sup> Such an admission was in sharp contrast to the various newspapers' earlier depictions of the admiration Torontonians had for the militia. The press bent the truth to fit the needs of the hour, all the while telling a story of worthy Volunteers patriotically answering the nation's needs. Newspapers played a key role in both representing patriotism and encouraging displays of it. Virtually every quotation cited in the press reinforced the same interpretation of events. Military officers, the mayor, clergymen, and others made remarks journalists used to build a picture of determined support for the Volunteers' campaign to suppress resistance. No gap can be discerned between the message authorities wanted to convey and what city dailies said at every turn. The daily press reinforced the voices of power. It was essential to making hegemony work.

159 *Globe*, July 24, 1885.

160 *Mail*, July 25, 1885.