

Memory and Memorialization:
How War Memorials Shape Historical Narratives of Canada's Role in
Military Conflict

by

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Introduction

War memorials exist in the town squares, church courtyards, and legislature lawns of cities across Canada. They are prominent features of most Canadian towns, serving as sites for grand ceremonies of public commemoration, such as Remembrance Day, as well as spaces for the private reflection of those passing by.¹ They commemorate battles won, the sacrifices of brave men and women, and the history of a nation in arms. These war memorials are important because they tell a story about the subjects and the event they are meant to be commemorating, and, in that sense, memorials are important because the stories they tell continue to influence us today.² As a result, these memorials have become inherently irreversibly intertwined with our conceptions of the past.³ In his book, *Remembered in Bronze and Stone: Canada's Great War Memorial Statuary*, Alan Livingstone MacLeod argues "War memorials are significant in direct proportion to the extent that people still care about them and, more to the point, still care about the fallen soldiers they are meant to honour."⁴ This has led me to wonder about the influence these memorials have on our understanding of military conflict, and indeed whether these memorials convince us to continue to care and remember.

War memorials are reflective of the times in which they were built and thus enshrine the collective memories and understandings of the people who built them. War memorials can serve as excellent primary sources because they tell us about the values, practices, ideas, and attitudes

¹ Robert Shipley, *To Mark Our Place: A History of Canadian War Memorials* (Toronto: NC Press Limited, 1987), 9.

² Alan Livingstone MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze and Stone: Canada's Great War Memorial Statuary* (Heritage House Publishing Ltd., 2016), 9.

³ Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 169.

⁴ Macleod, *Remembered in Bronze and Stone*, 179.

regarding war, bravery, and death that are prevalent in society at a particular time.⁵ Jonathan Vance argues in his book, *Death So Noble*, that the reason a mythic narrative and collective memory of Canada's involvement in the First World War was embraced so widely was because it fulfilled certain 'needs' of citizens: the need to provide justification, consolation, and nationalism.⁶ According to Vance, the main purpose of this myth was "recalling the war as having positive outcomes, making a usable past out of the war."⁷ Therefore, to understand how Canadian war memorials construct historical narratives about the First World War and the messages these memorials convey, we must ask: what explanation do these memorials give for Canada's involvement in military conflict? How do these memorials provide consolation for citizens? And finally, how did these memorials attempt to contribute to the nation-building project at the time in which they were built, and how do they continue to contribute to Canadian nationalism today?

This project seeks to understand how Canadian war memorials construct historical narratives about Canada's involvement in the First World War through providing a justification for the war, consolation for citizens, and contributing to nationalism. I have focused on two war memorials, the Calgary Cenotaph and the Victoria Cenotaph, both of which were built in the 1920s to honour the Canadians who served in the First World War. I have chosen to look at the two memorials in order to examine the differences and similarities between how they were built, the narratives they portray, and how they provide justification, consolation, and nationalism.

The first chapter traces the history of memorialization from ancient times to the First World War, explaining how modern-day memorialization emerged out of the brutality and global

⁵ Colin McIntyre, *Monuments of War: How to Read a War Memorial* (London: Robert Hale, 1990), 10.

⁶ Jonathan F Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 9.

⁷ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 9.

impact of the Great War. I then explain the history of cenotaph memorials and their symbolism in modern contexts. The chapter will also outline the historiography of memory which has shifted the study of history to accept that historical narratives are inherently constructed and value-laden. Finally, I will trace the history of Canada, Victoria and Calgary in the First World War and the 1920s, as well as the process by which the cenotaphs were built, to show how these cenotaphs are different and how they are similar.

The second chapter outlines how these particular cenotaphs construct certain historical narratives of the war that are representative of the values of the time in which they were built and the views of the people who built them, through providing a justification of the war, consolation of citizens, and helping to construct Canadian nationalism. These cenotaphs justify the war by establishing a narrative of a 'just war,' whereby it was a battle of good versus evil. The memorials provide consolation for citizens by portraying the soldiers as sacrificing their lives to save their fellow Canadians, by encouraging citizens to preserve the memory of the fallen soldiers, and by allowing citizens to become directly involved in the planning and fundraising for the memorials. Finally, these memorials contribute to nationalism by appealing to patriotism and through constructing a narrative of the war as a nation-building experience for Canada.

The fact that these memorials enshrine these collective memories, serving as a permanent reminder of the brave soldiers who served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) and entrenching these narratives in Canadian history, means that it is important to understand where this myth comes from. It also must be understood that these memorials are useful to the study of history not as objective sources that can fully explain the course of the First World War but, rather, as illustrations of the narratives of the war that emerged in the 1920s and the people who built them, the values they held and how they attempted to make sense of the Great War.

Chapter 1: The Historiography of Memory and Memorialization

Introduction

Memorialization can be traced throughout history, from the Ancient Greeks, to the shell-shocked citizens of the First World War, to the war memorials and Remembrance Day ceremonies of today. Tracing this history allows us to find trends and hidden meanings in Canadian war memorials as well as identify the collective memories of the First World War that are reflected in these memorials. It is also important to ground this study in the historiographical trends of the 20th century, particularly the interplay between collective memory and public history. Finally, tracing the history of both Calgary and Victoria, as well as the history of their respective cenotaphs, allows us to better understand how their memorializations of the First World War are different and how they are similar. The collective historical memory of the Great War established in the postwar era is deeply entrenched in these cenotaphs and ultimately influences how we conceive of the past.

Memory and Memorialization from the Ancient World to the Twentieth Century

The foundations of modern day memorialization practices and the use of cenotaphs as a memorial to the missing dead can be traced back to ancient times. Memorialization began in the ancient world, as is seen in the memorial practices following battle and the use of cenotaphs as memorials. Before battle, warriors would each place a single stone in a pile before the battle began and then retrieve a stone after the battle had ended.⁸ The stones that remained were left as

⁸ William Kidd and Brian Murdoch, eds., *Memory and Memorials: The Commemorative Century* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), 4.

reminders of the fighters that did not survive.⁹ This practice of commemoration is also depicted in the book of Joshua in the Old Testament when a pile of stones was made as “a memorial unto the Children of Israel for ever [sic]” after the Israelites had finally reached the Promised Land.¹⁰ The concept of a cenotaph memorial is also rooted in ancient Greek and Roman burial practices. Cenotaphs are first seen in Greek literature as early as the eighth century BCE, and the Greek word for cenotaph, *kenotapheion*, means ‘empty tomb.’¹¹ Cenotaphs existed in two forms: the first was a tomb built in the homeland of a person whose body was lost; the second was a large mound of earth that served as a permanent memorial to someone whose body was buried elsewhere.¹² According to Greek cultural and spiritual understandings surrounding death and burial rites, cenotaphs were necessary to “trap” the soul of a person who died, particularly in a violent or untimely manner, whose body was lost or unburied.¹³ Ancient Greeks believed that the soul of an unburied person could gain magical powers that might be put to improper use, and so the soul needed to be contained by a cenotaph.¹⁴ Cenotaphs were most widely used as shrines for heroes and as mass burial sites of soldiers who died in battle.¹⁵ In Rome, cenotaphs were used as memorials for important figures and soldiers who died, and were particularly important places for politicians and soldiers to give their respects to those who died to prove their loyalty to Rome.¹⁶ Early Christians also used them as commemoration sites for revered saints.¹⁷ They were also seen in the Islamic world where they were large, ornately-decorated, box-like

⁹ Kidd and Murdoch, eds., *Memory and Memorials*, 4.

¹⁰ Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 104.

¹¹ “Cenotaph,” The Grove Encyclopedia of Classical Art and Architecture, ed. Gordon Campbell, 2007, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780195300826.001.0001/acref-9780195300826-e-0229> (accessed 5 November 2017).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ “Cenotaph,” The Grove Encyclopedia of Classical Art and Architecture.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

structures that were placed over top of grave sites, primarily to serve as a grave-marker.¹⁸ In the modern world, a cenotaph is defined as a war memorial that honours fallen soldiers whose bodies lie elsewhere and are not buried in their homeland, thereby serving as a symbolic tomb.¹⁹

Modern-day memorials and commemoration practices emerged out of the First World War due to the global impact of the war, and the immense brutality which resulted in millions of death, the repercussions of which were felt by all of Canadian society. William Kidd and Brian Murdoch argue in their book, *Memory and Memorials: The Commemorative Century* (2004), that out of the First World War emerged “the collective imperative to grieve and to remember – not to forget – that marked the 20th century and remains familiar today.”²⁰ This is because of the unbelievable destruction of life and land which was a result of the mechanization of warfare and developments in military technology which meant that the Great War incurred great losses of life around the world.²¹ The fact that it was a total war meant that the entire Canadian society was impacted by the war.²² Canadians at home dealt with rationing of food and fuel, as seen in the infamous ‘meatless Mondays’ and blackouts, in addition to the constant fear for their loved ones fighting in Europe.²³

The majority of Canada’s war memorials were built in the 1920s and 1930s both at home and overseas, including plaques, granite markers, memorial fountains, statues, memorial towers, and cenotaphs, which were built by governments and private citizens alike.²⁴ In the post-war era,

¹⁸ “Cenotaph,” *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art and Architecture*, ed. Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair, 2009, <http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/10.1093/acref/9780195309911.001.0001/acref-9780195309911-e-214> (accessed 5 November 2017).

¹⁹ Cenotaph,” *The Grove Encyclopedia of Classical Art and Architecture*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Nigel C. Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 180.

²² Kidd and Murdoch, eds., *Memory and Memorials*, 4.

²³ Alan Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before: Canada After the Great War* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2014), 22.

²⁴ Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 9.

the Canadian government erected four national memorials across the country, as well as numerous monuments.²⁵ The importance of memorialization in the post-war period is also seen in the creation of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1918 and the Canadian War Memorials Commission in 1920, which were jointly put in charge of the burial and commemoration of fallen soldiers at home and abroad, and which oversaw the creation of eight Canadian war memorials in Belgium and France in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ Moreover, the decision of the Imperial War Graves Commission in 1918 not to repatriate any of the bodies of the men who died on the front brought cenotaphs to the forefront of Canadian memorial practices.²⁷ Since the bodies of Canadian soldiers would not be brought back to their homeland, a cenotaph became an important memorial due to its symbolism as a tomb or grave site in Canada for soldiers whose bodies remained in Europe. As a result, cenotaphs were erected in major cities across Canada including Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Hamilton, and of course, Calgary and Victoria.²⁸ These cenotaphs contributed to modern-day commemorative practices and, therefore, have shaped how we as a society remember the First World War.

The Historiography of Memory in the Twentieth Century

The history of memory that is popular today, and which inspired this research, is entrenched in the historiographical trends seen throughout the last century. A new type of historiography emerged in the early 20th century, particularly among French historians, and

²⁵ Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 63.

²⁶ Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 63; Vance, *Death So Noble*, 60.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 63.

gained increasing popularity in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁹ The pioneers of this new approach were part of the French Annales School of Historical Study who, borrowing from French sociologists Maurice Halbwachs and Emile Durkheim, tried to create a “total history” with the recognition that history is value-laden and interpretative, not simply an objective gathering of empirical evidence.³⁰ These “new historians” argued that history must be the story of the masses, not of the elites.³¹ It transformed the discipline in shifting historical focus from the individual to the collective, and from strictly “monocausal” political history to social history that required multidimensional explanations and analysis.³²

With this innovative historiography emerged a new understanding of the relationship between history and memory. Collective memory is inherently a Durkheimian concept. He believed that “there is a strong need within people to have rituals, a series of fixed behaviours that are agreed by people in society and that represent, in terms of commemoration, a formal way in which we remember something of the past.”³³ Durkheim argued that these rituals and memories created a sense of historical continuity which ultimately leads to a united and cohesive society.³⁴ Halbwachs further developed these theories of collective memory in the 1920s with the idea that all memory is social – constructed and developed in a social environment which ensures those memories and customs continue to exist well into the future.³⁵ He also attempted to differentiate between the concepts of public history and collective memory, whereby public

²⁹ Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora, eds., *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1.

³⁰ Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal’s Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011), 4.

³¹ Gordon, *Making Publics Past*, 4.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Misztal, “Durkheim on Collective Memory,” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 3, no. 2 (2003): 123-124, <http://journals.sagepub.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/abs/10.1177/1468795X030032002>.

³⁵ Gordon, *Making Publics Past*, 4-5; Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 106.

history was a record of events continuously compiled and expanded in order to create an accurate depiction of the past.³⁶ Collective memory on the other hand was the creation of an “official” collective past that is created through competing interests in the attempts to preserve a historical narrative.³⁷ Historian Pierre Nora also furthered this understanding of memory and history, arguing that this shift in historiography actually emerged in the 19th century as history began to use collective memories to create a unified past for all citizens that would ultimately forge a common national consciousness.³⁸ In this shift, there is little room for particular or personal memory that deviates from the collective memory of the nation. The historical narrative created as a result is inherently “myth-history” and, according to Nora, can be best studied through its most significant manifestations: monuments and memorials.³⁹

This understanding of “myth-history” is evident in the work of Vance, who states “It was average Canadians who were responsible for the myth. The memory of the war was not simply a creation of Anglo-Canadian intellectuals, political leaders, social elites, and renowned members of the literati.”⁴⁰ Vance argues that the collective memory which emerged out of the First World War was created and perpetuated not by political elites, but rather by ordinary citizens looking to find justification for the war, consolation for their losses, and meaning in the suffering they endured.⁴¹ In order to understand the narrative of Canada in the First World War, it is important to understand the memories of average Canadians that built this myth-history. Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, philosopher, and anthropologist argues that works of art, just like historical

³⁶ Gordon, *Making Publics Past*, 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 101.

³⁹ Gordon, *Making Publics Past*, 7.

⁴⁰ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 7.

⁴¹ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 7.

monuments, are products of their time.⁴² In order to fully comprehend the ideas and values these cenotaphs symbolize, they cannot be separated from the people who built them or the time in which they were built.⁴³ This historical methodology contends that historical memory is a constructed narrative embedded with normative values; therefore, in order to truly understand the history of the First World War, we must first understand how that historical memory was created and the normative values it represents.

Canada, Victoria, and Calgary After the War

To understand the preoccupations behind the building of these cenotaphs, and the historical narratives they represent, it is important to look at the history of the First World War in Canada, the role these cities played in the war effort, and the setting of the time when these cenotaphs were built. The horrific conditions of trench-warfare, the immense destruction of land and life as a result of increased mechanization of military technology, and the death of more than 66 000 Canadians on the front, with another 172 000 left wounded, shook society to its core.⁴⁴ The reverberations of the war were felt by the entire Canadian society. The 600 000 men that made up the Canadian Expeditionary Force was truly an army of citizen soldiers.⁴⁵ While the end of the war brought great relief, Canadians were left feeling exhausted and confused as they tried to make sense of what they had just experienced.⁴⁶ However, things would not get easier just yet.

⁴² Gordon, *Making Publics Past*, 9-10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁴ Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before*, 66; “10 Quick Facts on... The First World War,” Veterans Affairs Canada, <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/information-for/educators/quick-facts/first-world-war> (accessed 14 February 2018).

⁴⁵ Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before*, 66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

The 'age of optimism' did not reach Canada until the mid-1920s, setting the stage for the building of many Canadian war memorials. Immediately after the end of hostilities in 1918, Canadians were faced with another series of hardships: the Influenza outbreak of 1918-1919 resulted in up to 50 000 Canadian deaths, veterans returned home suffering from shell-shock and physical impairments, facing unemployment as a result of post-war inflation, and crashing wheat prices plunged North America into economic recession.⁴⁷ Moreover, labour strikes broke out across the country, most prominently in British Columbia, Alberta and Cape Breton particularly amongst coal workers.⁴⁸ However, by 1925 the Canadian economy started to bounce back as a result of an artificial boom in real estate and the stock market.⁴⁹ This economic boom was further driven by an expansion in new consumer industries such as entertainment and tourism.⁵⁰ Canadians starting buying more houses, spending more money on consumer goods, and borrowing money from banks to fund said spending.⁵¹ Along with this economic boom, the 1920s saw a rise in romanticist and escapist literature, with over 750 Canadian novels published from 1920 to 1940, the majority of which were historical romances, crime or adventure books.⁵² Many Canadians, particularly veterans, continued to write novels, paint pictures, and compose poems depicting the experiences of Canadians on the front, many in this romanticist style.⁵³ It was against this background of shock and horror after the Great War, the exhaustion of the immediate post-war years, and the optimism of the late 1920s that Canadian war memorials and commemorative practices began to emerge.

⁴⁷ John Herd Thompson, *Forging the Prairie West: The Illustrated History of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 113; Peter Grant, *Victoria: A History in Photographs* ((Vancouver: Altitude Publishing, 1995), 35.

⁴⁸ Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2014), 226.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 267.

⁵³ Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada*, 271.

Victoria began as a British colony and eventually emerged as a small bustling city founded on the British values of its initial colonial population. In 1843 the City of Victoria was founded by the Hudson's Bay Company as a trading post and fort.⁵⁴ By 1852, the population was approximately 230 men, women and children, whose lives primarily centred on the fur trade and the business of the Hudson's Bay Company.⁵⁵ However, miners and adventurers soon began to flock to Victoria once gold was discovered in mainland BC in 1858, making the small community into a major commercial centre and growing to a population of 700.⁵⁶ The population at the time was described by passing coal miners as being primarily Scottish, creating a community of closely-knit neighbours who shared similar British habits and values.⁵⁷ By the turn of the century, Victoria's population continued to grow, reaching approximately 21 000 in 1901, and kept growing until reaching a population of approximately 39 000 by 1921, with 32 000 descending from England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.⁵⁸ Victoria's British ancestry and foundation as a primarily British society continued on through the war and into the 1920s.

The city contributed greatly to the First World War, reflecting a general support for the war effort amongst its population, and it recovered better from the aftermath of the war than the rest of Canada. British Columbia had the most enlistment of soldiers per capita of any other province with 55 570 BC residents serving in the CEF, over 6 000 of whom died in the war.⁵⁹ In terms of Victoria itself, 6 235 Victorians served in the CEF, and thus Victoria had the 5th highest

⁵⁴ Royal BC Museum, "Fort Victoria (1843-1862)". Victoria, BC, 10 February 2018.

⁵⁵ Grant, *Victoria*, 6.

⁵⁶ Royal BC Museum. "Fort Victoria (1843-1862)."

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921: Volume I – Population* (Ottawa: F. A. Acland Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, 1924), 381, http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2017/statcan/CS98-1921-1-1924.pdf.

⁵⁹ "Legislative Assembly Outdoor Walking Tour," The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, March 2017, <https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/Learning-Resources/Legislative-Assembly-Outdoor-Walking-Tour-English.pdf>.

enlistment rate among Canadian cities.⁶⁰ British Columbia also contributed materially to the war effort including lumber, tinned fish, submarines, equipment and other raw material.⁶¹ After the end of hostilities, Victoria suffered alongside the rest of Canada with the post-war recession, influenza outbreaks, and unemployment. However, the Victorian economy began to experience a major boom. As a result of the growing popularity of the automobile, car ferries began making regular trips to Vancouver Island, turning Victoria into a major Canadian tourist destination.⁶² As well, BC began to benefit from new trade routes by the early 1920s after the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914.⁶³ As a result of this increased prosperity, Victoria and the rest of the province entered into this ‘age of optimism’ earlier than the rest of Canada.

In contrast, Calgary began as a primarily rural community centred on ranching and cattle, but soon became a thriving cosmopolitan city with a booming economy. The area today known as Calgary was land traditionally favoured by the Black Foot People.⁶⁴ European settlers had settled in the area in the late 18th century as the fur trade continuously moved westward and as American bison hunters began to move in, in the late 1860s.⁶⁵ Fort Calgary was eventually established by the Northwest Mounted Police in September 1875 to combat the illegal activities of the whiskey traders in the area.⁶⁶ By 1885, Calgary was a burgeoning railway town, which finally became a city in 1894.⁶⁷ The economic activity in Calgary in the late 19th and early 20th

⁶⁰ “Enlistments/Attestations by City,” Canadian Great War Project, <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/Stats/Attestations.asp> (accessed 20 February 2018).

⁶¹ “The Legislative Assembly Remembers the First World War: 1914-1918,” The Legislative Assembly, Province of British Columbia, 2017, <https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/Learning-Resources/BC-Legislative-Assembly-Vimy-Ridge-Display-Panels-1-2-English.pdf>, (accessed 10 January 2018).

⁶² Royal BC Museum, “Hope and Disappointment,” Victoria, BC, 10 February 2018.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ A.W. Rasporich and Henry Klassen, eds., *Frontier Calgary: Town, City, and Region 1875-1914* (Calgary: University of Calgary, 1975), 6.

⁶⁵ Rasporich and Klassen, *Frontier Calgary*, 7.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Mark and Janice Kozub, *A Calgary Album: Glimpses of the Way We Were* (Toronto: Hounslow Book, 2001), 34; Rasporich and Klassen, *Frontier Calgary*, 124.

centuries largely surrounded the cattle and ranching industry, as well as the city's position as a major Albertan transportation centre.⁶⁸ Calgary began to boom with the introduction of cash crop farming in the early 19th century, increasing its population 1000% between 1901 and 1911 from 8000 citizens to over 40 000.⁶⁹ The Calgary economy continued to expand with the discovery of oil, first at Turner Valley in 1914, then again in 1924 and 1936.⁷⁰ Alberta's first oil refinery was built in Calgary in 1923, establishing the city's pre-eminence in the oil industry and transforming the city into a cosmopolitan and prosperous city-centre.⁷¹ Over the course of half a century, the small prairie town transformed into the "commercial metropolis of Western Canada," transforming it into a cosmopolitan city.⁷²

It is generally thought, particularly amongst Calgarians themselves, that Calgary made the greatest contribution in all of Canada to the war effort, even though Alberta was hit the hardest by the post-war recession. Ten thousand, five hundred and sixty-nine Calgarians served in the war, making it the city with the highest enlistment levels in the country.⁷³ The Western Prairies were also seen as the "bulwark of Canada's war effort," providing disproportionately high numbers of soldiers, as well as wheat and horses.⁷⁴ In the immediate years following the end of the war, however, Albertans were suffering. The collapse of the international wheat market in 1921 and droughts across the Prairies proved that the 1920s would not be as prosperous for many Calgarians, particularly those living in rural areas.⁷⁵ As the drought and wheat market progressively worsened, credit began to dry up by 1925, and the economic effects

⁶⁸ Rasporich and Klassen, *Frontier Calgary*, 16, 124.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 124

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 16.

⁷³ "Enlistments/Attestations by City," Canadian Great War Project.

⁷⁴ Thompson, *Forging the Prairie West*, 113.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Forging the Prairie West*, 113.

spilled over into many Albertan towns.⁷⁶ While most of Canada began to recover by the mid-1920s, the drought worsened and wheat prices continued to drop so most of Alberta never completely experienced the economic boom of the 1920s.⁷⁷ In spite of these issues, the population of Calgary continued to grow. The 1921 census puts the population of Calgary at approximately 83 000, a fair bit larger than Victoria.⁷⁸ And the vast majority of these citizens were of British descent, ensuring that Calgary was dominated by British citizens, British attitudes, and British values.⁷⁹ It was in this context of support for the war effort, to post-war economic recession, and continuous population growth, that the Calgary Cenotaph was built between 1927 and 1928.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*, 201.

⁷⁹ *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*, 201; Donald B. Smith, *Calgary's Grand Story: The Making of a Prairie Metropolis from the Viewpoint of Two Heritage Buildings* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 16.

Victoria's Cenotaph:



Figure 1. 1: The Victoria Cenotaph, Rebecca Powell, February 2018.

The Cenotaph in Victoria was a citizens' memorial, built with funds raised by Victorians themselves to honour the men and women from their city who gave their lives on the European front during the Great War. It sits on the lawn outside of the BC Legislature buildings in downtown Victoria, along the inner harbour of the city. It was unveiled on 12 July 1925.⁸⁰ The

⁸⁰ British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, Archivers' notes.

⁸⁰ Calgary Corporate Records Archive (hereafter CCRA), City Clerk's Office Fonds, Admin History Bio.

plans and fundraising were carried by the War Memorial Committee, a citizens' organization created by F. B. Pemberton who served as Treasurer of the Committee and was a prominent Victorian realtor and founder of the real-estate company that is today known as Pemberton Holmes.⁸¹ In total, the War Memorial Committee was able to raise almost \$13 000 in three months between October and December in 1924.⁸²

The Cenotaph was designed and built by the famed English sculptor Sydney March, with help from his brother Vernon, who was known for the multiple memorials he had built across Europe and Canada, and who eventually went on to build the National War Memorial in Ottawa.⁸³ Sydney and Vernon designed and built the bronze figure of the soldier, the two bronze wreaths, and the memorial plaque in their home of Farnborough, England, then shipped them to Victoria by boat. The base was made locally by John Mortimer & Son out of Nelson Island Granite, which is the same stone as used in the Legislature Building, and cost approximately \$6 000.⁸⁴ The Cenotaph in total cost Victorians around \$12 000.⁸⁵ The Cenotaph has a bronze statue of a soldier, rifle in hand and ready for battle which was meant to symbolize the "unknown soldier".⁸⁶ There are two bronze wreaths, and a bronze memorial plaque which reads.

TO OUR
GLORIOUS
DEAD
1914-1919
1939-1945

⁸¹ Victoria Municipal Archive (hereafter VMA), Monuments- Cenotaphs File, *Islander* Newspaper Article titled "Thank Pemberton for Cenotaph", 11 February 1990.

⁸² BCA, Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, ledger book, September to December 1924.

⁸³ VMA, Monuments- Cenotaphs File, *Islander* Newspaper Article titled "Thank Pemberton for Cenotaph", 11 February 1990.

⁸⁴ "Legislative Assembly Outdoor Walking Tour." The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

⁸⁵ BCA, Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, Archivers' notes.

⁸⁶ "Canada on Guard," *Daily Colonist*; "Legislative Assembly Outdoor Walking Tour." The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

‘THEY DIED THE NOBLEST DEATH A MAN MAY DIE, FIGHTING FOR GOD, AND RIGHT AND LIBERTY, AND SUCH A DEATH IS IMMORTALITY’

The original memorial plaque was updated to include the Second World War, and there are two further plaques underneath reading “KOREA 1950-1953” and “AFGHANISTAN 2001-2014” that were added in recent years.⁸⁷



Figure 1. 2: The Victoria Cenotaph Front Plaque, Rebecca Powell, January 2018.

As well, inside the Cenotaph is a scroll with the names of the builders, plus coins, public records, and newspapers,⁸⁸ allowing it to serve as time capsule. The Cenotaph is still included in memorialization practices today, serving as a centrepiece for Victoria’s Remembrance Day ceremony.

⁸⁷ “Legislative Assembly Outdoor Walking Tour.” The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

⁸⁸ BCA, Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, Archivers’ notes.

Calgary's Cenotaph:



Figure 2. 1: The Calgary Cenotaph, Rebecca Powell, September 2017.

The Cenotaph in Calgary was built through the work of Calgary's municipal council which ordered its creation, and Calgarians of all walks of life who helped with the fundraising and the plans for building. The Cenotaph was unveiled on 11 November 1928 in Central Memorial Park, in downtown Calgary, which at the time was known simply as "Central Park."⁸⁹ It was also erected through the public subscription of the citizens of Calgary themselves. The Calgary Cenotaph Committee, which was responsible for the fundraising, planning and design of the memorial, was a citizens' committee created by the city council in December 1927 and

⁸⁹ CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, Admin History Bio.

chaired by Calgary Mayor Frederick Ernst Osbourne.⁹⁰ The fundraising and building of the Cenotaph was a much more bureaucratic process than was the case with the Cenotaph in Victoria, as most of the correspondence and organizing was done through the mayor's office. The Calgary Cenotaph Committee raised \$17 359 from 1927 to 1928, well above the proposed budget of \$15 000.⁹¹ Clearly the Cenotaph received the support of many Calgarians. It was also clearly a citizens' memorial in the way the designer was chosen: Calgary held a nation-wide competition, open to any British subject, and offered cash prizes.⁹² Each submission needed to include a proposal, along with a small model of their design, for a memorial that would cost no more than \$15 000.⁹³ The winner was to be chosen by the Cenotaph Committee and a prominent architecture professor from the University of Alberta.⁹⁴ The first place winner was A. H. Eadie, an architect from Toronto, who won \$250 and the chance to have his memorial enshrined in stone.⁹⁵ The Calgary Cenotaph is a large rectangular column made of stone, with inscriptions and various scrolls, wreaths, and crown carvings. The inscription reads:

THOSE
WHO
DIED
1914-1918

⁹⁰ CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, Written Correspondence of the Calgary Cenotaph Committee, 16 October 1927.

⁹¹ CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, Written Correspondence of the Calgary Cenotaph Committee from the Chairman, 5 March 1928; CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1300, Letter from J. H. Woods, Chairman of the Calgary Cenotaph Committee, to J. M. Miller, 17 March 1928.

⁹² CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1300, Typed Announcement of War Memorial Competition by John H. Miller, 1927.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1300, Letter from Arthur H. Eadie to Mr. John M. Miller, Secretary, City War Memorial Committee, 4 October 1927.

⁹⁵ CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1300, Typed Announcement of War Memorial Competition by John H. Miller, 1927.

Below is another recently added inscription that reads “AND 1939-1945” as well as a small brass plaque that reads “KOREA 1950-1953” which was added several years after its creation.



Figure 2. 2: The Calgary Cenotaph Front Inscription, Rebecca Powell, September 2017.

On one side of the Cenotaph is another inscription that reads:

THEY
SHALL NOT
DIE WHILE
MEMORY
FULFILLS
ITS TASK OF
GRATITUDE

THIS MEMORIAL
ERECTED IN 1928
BY THE CITIZENS
OF CALGARY AND
DISTRICT



Figure 2. 3: The Calgary Cenotaph Side Inscription, Rebecca Powell, September 2017.

Flanking the Cenotaph are two stone memorial benches with inscriptions that read “PASS NOT IN SORROW BUT WITH PRIDE” and “MAY WE LIVE AS NOBLY AS THEY DIED”.



Figure 2. 4: The Calgary Cenotaph Bench "Pass Not in Sorrow but with Pride", Rebecca Powell, September 2017.



Figure 2. 5: The Calgary Cenotaph Bench "May We Live as Nobly as They Died", Rebecca Powell, September 2017.

The Calgary Cenotaph is also the site of Calgary's Remembrance Day ceremony and it plays a large role in the entrenchment of historical narratives surrounding Canada's involvement in the First World War.

Conclusion

The emergence of cenotaphs and memorial practices in the Ancient world helps us to contextualize the representation and meaning of Calgary and Victoria's Cenotaphs as symbolic tombs for the Canadian soldiers who fought and died in Europe and whose bodies were never returned home. As well, the modern origins of memorialization practices after the First World War shows how greatly the war affected Canadian citizens, creating a collective need to honour and remember the sacrifices of those who died. For the first time in their national history, Canadian citizens played a direct role in the memorialization of their fallen soldiers, and these memorials continue to serve as focal points for Remembrance Day ceremonies. Tracing the historiographical trends of memory shows the interplay between collective memory and public histories. It is important to understand the memory of war in order to understand the context in which these memorials were built, and the historical narratives they enshrine. Finally, the history of Calgary and Victoria as cities, and how they established their places in the world of the 1920s, allows us to further investigate how their cenotaphs and memorial practices differ, how they are similar, and how they are reflective of the times in which they were built.

Chapter 2: Justification, Consolation, and Nationalism in the Aftermath of the Great War

Introduction

Memorials served to fulfill the needs of citizens after the collective trauma of the First World War. In particular they provided an explanation or justification of the war, they consoled bereaved and shocked citizens, and they contributed to a burgeoning Canadian nationalism. As a result, these cenotaphs constructed a particular historical narrative of the First World War, one that is reflective of the popular attitudes and understandings of the time in which they were built. In providing justification for the war, the Calgary and Victoria Cenotaphs convey the idea that the Great War was a “just war” fought in the name of Western values, against an oppressive and evil enemy. To provide consolation for citizens, the Cenotaphs use religious symbolism to show that the soldiers earned everlasting life in suffering and sacrificing their lives just as Jesus had. They also use the language of remembrance which encourages citizens not to mourn, but to ensure the memory of the soldiers is not forgotten. Calgarians and Victorians also were consoled by being able to directly contribute to the memorials. Finally, these Cenotaphs contribute to nationalism by enshrining the narrative that Canada ‘came of age’ in the First World War through its military victories, which ultimately attempted to create a greater sense of belonging and patriotism. The Calgary and Victoria Cenotaphs not only serve as memorials to the brave Canadians who fought in the war, they also serve as excellent sources of information about the understandings of the Great War that were widely held by Canadians in the post-war era

Justification for the War

Providing a justification for the war was necessary in the post-war period due to the impact the war had on the entire Canadian society, both the soldiers that served at the front and the citizens at home.⁹⁶ Citizens needed to understand why and how this had happened to them and war memorials attempted to provide answers to a key question asked by these citizens: what did these soldiers die for?⁹⁷ While each memorial provides slightly different answers in different ways, the explanation they usually give is that the First World War was inherently a just war, fought for Canada and humanity.

The just war myth emerged out of the confusion and shock felt all around the globe, as people tried to come to terms with what they had just experienced. Historians have found that the complex nature of the underlying causes of the conflict meant that citizens and soldiers on all sides of the war believed themselves to be defending their nation against a malevolent enemy, working to protect the peace of the world.⁹⁸ It can also be argued that in the chaos of the post-war years, when it became clear that the war had done little to change life at home for most Canadians, nostalgia may have started to play a role in the minds of Canadian veterans and citizens when looking back at the war years.⁹⁹ This is evident in the number of light-hearted books that were published in the years after the war, which vastly outnumbered the books depicting the horrors of the war.¹⁰⁰ The vast majority of this post-war literature captured the spirit of the age, with tales of chivalry, honour, heroism, and bravery in defence of Canadian

⁹⁶ Hunt, *Memory, War and Trauma*, 180.

⁹⁷ Macleod, *Remembered in Bronze and Stone*, 179.

⁹⁸ Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *The Vimy Trap: Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 18.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

freedom and values.¹⁰¹ In this narrative, there was little room to remember the war as the mass slaughter of mechanized warfare.¹⁰² When Canadians “remember” the First World War, in many ways what we are remembering is not so much the actual conflict in Europe, but an imagined “Great War,” one in which gallant soldiers performed great deeds for a noble cause.¹⁰³ The Empire’s soldiers are depicted as struggling against a despotic enemy, and those who sacrificed their lives on Flanders Fields have become foundational for Canadians.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the explanations and justifications for the war that were common in the post-war years, specifically one of a moral war fought for intrinsic Canadian and Western values, are enshrined in these memorials and Canadian history.¹⁰⁵ These types of declarations about the justness of the cause, and why the soldiers died, are common on war memorials, specifically because they serve to provide an explanation of and justification for the war.¹⁰⁶ In the end, these memorials rationalize the suffering in a way that makes it seem worthwhile and meaningful to the people they represent.

Through the just war narrative, war memorials attempt to provide justification for the war by explaining it as a war in defence of Western values and Christianity against German militarism. This narrative claims that the Great War was a fight of good against evil, justice against tyranny, and kindness against cruelty.¹⁰⁷ Germans were depicted throughout the war as the barbaric “Hun,” threatening the peace and liberty of the entire world with its deplorable militarism, despotism, and general uncivilized nature.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, in many cases, the war was

¹⁰¹ Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012), 101-102.

¹⁰² McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 102

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 100.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 106.

¹⁰⁶ McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 101.

¹⁰⁷ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 16-17.

¹⁰⁸ McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 100; Vance, *Death So Noble*, 12.

considered to be a crusade for the protection of democracy and humanity, with military intervention as the only way of achieving lasting peace – it was “the war to end all wars.”¹⁰⁹ This explanation and justification of the war carried well into the post-war period as Germany was vilified after the war as well, carrying the sole blame for causing the war and destroying France and Belgium.¹¹⁰ Stories such as the Crucified Canadian, a rumour that German troops had captured and “crucified” a Canadian soldier using their bayonets, allowing him to die slowly, flourished as examples of supposed German vileness, despite the fact that the story was proved to be false.¹¹¹ As a result, the notion that Canada fought in the war in defence of Western values and peace became enshrined in memorial practices and historical narratives through the use of language describing the soldiers who “gave their lives for liberty.”¹¹² This is symbolized in carved depictions of fasces on the benches flanking the Cenotaph. Fasces are bundles of rods tied together, sometimes around an axe, meant to be a Roman symbol of executive or legal power.¹¹³ In the case of the Calgary Cenotaph the fasces do not have an axe, which means they symbolize democratic power because the weapon for the ruler to execute or punish his subjects is absent.¹¹⁴ Therefore, Canada is depicted as a righteous liberal democracy, fighting for liberty and freedom against a German tyrant.

The historical narrative that emerged out of the First World War not only depicted Canadians as fighting for Western democratic values, but also for Christianity. The Allied soldiers were depicted as God’s warriors against the “Eastern pagans.”¹¹⁵ For example, some

¹⁰⁹ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 12; McKay and Swift, *Vimy Trap*, 100.

¹¹⁰ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 23.

¹¹¹ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 122; Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 150.

¹¹² McKay and Swift, *Vimy Trap*, 5-6.

¹¹³ Anthony J. Marshall, “Symbols and Showmanship in Roman Public Life: The Fasces,” *Phoenix* 32, no. 2 (1984): 120-141, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/stable/1088896>.

¹¹⁴ Marshall, “Symbols and Showmanship in Roman Public Life,” 135-136.

¹¹⁵ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 35.

priests preached in their masses that while a war between civilized nations is wicked and immoral according to the bible, such principles did not apply to the war against Germany since it was an uncivilized nation.¹¹⁶ This historical narrative of Canadian soldiers fighting for Western values and Christianity is evident in the inscription on the Victoria Cenotaph which claimed that Canadian soldiers “DIED THE NOBLEST DEATH A MAN MAY DIE, FIGHTING FOR GOD AND RIGHT AND LIBERTY.” The notion of a just war is also evident in the language of commemoration surrounding the First World War. For example, it became known across the country, and across the Western world, as the “Great” War, not the “World War” or even the “European War,” inherently implying importance and “great”ness.¹¹⁷ Heroism is also represented in how the Victoria Cenotaph refers to Canadian soldiers who died on the front as “OUR GLORIOUS DEAD.”¹¹⁸ As well, one of the benches flanking the Calgary Cenotaph also conveys the message of the soldiers as heroes and the war as an honourable cause with an inscription that reads: “MAY WE LIVE AS NOBLY AS THEY DIED”. This emphasis on the bravery and greatness of Canadians was a result of realizing what the consequences might have been if the Allies had lost to Germany. It was a commonly held belief, and fear, that if Britain fell, Canada would be next.¹¹⁹ Canada’s historical narrative of the conflict had little room in the historical narrative for the costs of war, because the war was seen as a necessary evil to protect Canada and the civilized world from German aggression.¹²⁰ Therefore, the Calgary and Victoria Cenotaphs are representative of the popular attitudes of the time in which they were built.

¹¹⁶ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 22.

¹¹⁷ McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 105.

¹¹⁸ David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 89.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Consolation of Citizens

The horror and confusion of the First World War experienced across the globe meant that Canadians living in the post-war era, many of whom had lost loved ones or served on the front, needed consolation. The role of modern monuments or war memorials is to “consolidate and express the national trauma at the same time that it permits and provides for private contemplation and grief.”¹²¹ They are meant to serve as a sacred place to honour and mourn the dead, while also symbolizing the grief and trauma of an entire nation. Canadian memorials became especially important in the years following the war as a way to stem the feelings of guilt of the men who returned home without their comrades.¹²² Many veterans suffered from psychological trauma, with close to 10% of returned soldiers treated for “shell-shock,” though it is likely that many more were suffering from post-traumatic stress as a result of their experience in the trenches.¹²³ The grief of the nation continued to grow as the narrative and collective memory surrounding the Great War began to merge into a national myth of sacrifice, heroism, and bravery.¹²⁴ Out of this myth emerged the great importance to preserve the sacredness and memory of the sacrifice.¹²⁵ This myth became so important to Canadian historical understandings of the war that, according to Vance, “No truth was so important to discover, no fiction so important to puncture, that it could justify calling into question the sacrifices of the dead. In this regard, we must take care not to underestimate the profound grief occasioned by the war.”¹²⁶ The Calgary and Victoria Cenotaphs provided consolation through religious

¹²¹ Mark A. R. Facknitz, “Kitsch, Commemoration, and Mourning in the Aftermath of the Great War,” in *The Great War: From Memory to History*, ed. Kellen Kurschinski, Steve Marti, Alicia Robinet, Matt Symes, and Jonathan Vance (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2015), 362.

¹²² McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 19.

¹²³ Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, 51; Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before*, 69.

¹²⁴ McKay and Swift, *Vimy Trap*, 135.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 266.

symbolism, language of remembrance, and through allowing citizens to take part in the building of the Cenotaphs. Religious symbolism in memorials conveys the notion that soldiers suffered alongside Jesus. Through memorials fulfilling the need to console citizens, they both represent and give shape to the collective memories of the people who built them.

Cenotaphs, and war memorials in general, provide consolation for civilians and veterans alike through their religious symbolism which establishes itself as a sacred monument associated with the spirits of the fallen and equates the suffering and death of soldiers with that of Jesus Christ. It is through this symbolism that war memorials convey a specific narrative of the First World War as a crusade for Christian values, fought by Canadians who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Religious symbolism was inherently consolatory in the post-war years because Christianity and Christian values were at the foundation of the lives of many Canadians.¹²⁷ Protestants made up the majority population in both Calgary and Victoria in the 1920s.¹²⁸ The dominance of Christianity in Canada is also evident in the fact that 33.7% of soldiers in the CEF were members of the Church of England, 25.4% were Presbyterian, 14.7% were Roman Catholic, and 12.5% Methodist.¹²⁹ Only 0.3% of the troops were Jewish and 5.3% were deemed “other.”¹³⁰ So Christian religious imagery and language would have been a popular form of consolation.

However, the immense suffering and death of the First World War began to shake these Christian foundations, as people began to question how God could subject them to the horror of

¹²⁷ Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before*, 118.

¹²⁸ *Sixth Census of Canada, 1921*, 754-755; Smith, *Calgary's Grand Story*, 16.

¹²⁹ “Soldiers By Religion,” Canadian Great War Project, <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/Stats/statReligion.asp?selType=0> (accessed 20 February 2018).

¹³⁰ “Soldiers By Religion,” Canadian Great War Project.

mechanized trench warfare.¹³¹ The response of the church was to associate the plight and suffering of the soldiers with the suffering of Jesus on the cross.¹³² The fallen soldiers were portrayed as knowingly sacrificing their lives on the European front in order to save the souls of the Canadian nation, just as Jesus had to save the souls of mankind, giving them eternal life.¹³³ These narratives of supreme sacrifice in the image of Jesus were evident throughout the war, with priests and church-goers alike referring to the men fighting as “the lamb of God.”¹³⁴

The religious symbolism of the Great War also continued into the post-war years. Language surrounding memorialization frequently included notions of sacrifice in the name of Christianity.¹³⁵ For example, the plaque on the Victoria Cenotaph states that the soldiers died nobly “FIGHTING FOR GOD... AND SUCH A DEATH IS IMMORTALITY”. This is also illustrated in a speech given by the Chancellor of Victoria University in Toronto in 1919 on the war effort, during which he stated that “all fine and good things which lie in the heart of Christianity were at stake,” expressing a general consensus that the men on the front suffering alongside Christ was central to Canadian collective memory of the Great War.¹³⁶ This religious narrative of sacrifice was important because it provided both an explanation and consolation for families of soldiers who died and the veterans who served on the front through establishing a meaning and purpose for the war and their death – to fight for Christianity and save the souls of Canadians.¹³⁷ As well, the families of the soldiers who died can be consoled in knowing that in sacrificing their lives, they earned eternal life just as Jesus had. This religious symbolism, and

¹³¹ J. Guy Lalande, “On Suffering and Consolation in Times of War,” *Social History* 47, no. 95 (2014): 798, <https://doi.org/10.1353/his.2014.0056>.

¹³² Lalande, “On Suffering and Consolation in Times of War,” 798.

¹³³ Lalande, “On Suffering and Consolation in Times of War,” 798; McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 51.

¹³⁴ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 40.

¹³⁵ McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 111.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 36, 73.

the notion of memorials as a sacred place, is evident in the unveiling ceremonies of the Victoria and Calgary Cenotaphs. The *Daily Colonist* reported at the time that “the ceremony in connection with the unveiling of the War Memorial on Parliament Buildings Square is religious and consecratory, and it is a happy thought that Sunday should be chosen for the event.”¹³⁸

Similarly, the *Calgary Herald* reported that the “service will be [in] a joint religious, military and civil character”.¹³⁹ Therefore, the religious symbolism enshrined in these memorials ultimately contributed to the historical narrative of the Great War as a crusade for Christian values and consoled citizens by giving meaning to the suffering and sacrifices of the soldiers who died in the war.

The spiritual symbolism of cenotaph memorials themselves also served a consolatory role in the post-war era due to their role as symbolic tombs for the soldiers who died in Europe.¹⁴⁰ Cenotaphs are sacred places for commemoration practices because they illustrate the “human cost of war and the pain people felt at that cost,” therefore, they served as memorials to both the souls and memories of the fallen soldiers.¹⁴¹ This symbolism of a cenotaph was especially important since the Imperial War Graves Commission did not repatriate any bodies of the soldiers who died abroad and, therefore, Canadians who could not afford to travel to the grave sites or battlefields in Europe could use the cenotaph as a site of personal grief just as a grave would.

Canadian war memorials claim that we should not feel sad for the fallen soldiers, for they gave their lives for us as a sacrifice, and we can only fulfill our debt to them by remembering their sacrifice.¹⁴² The notions of remembrance and commemoration surrounding war memorials

¹³⁸ *Daily Colonist*, “Unveiling Ceremony,” 11 July 1925.

¹³⁹ “Memorial Park Cenotaph Dedication,” *Calgary Herald*, 10 November 1928.

¹⁴⁰ Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism*, 50.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁴² Vance, *Death So Noble*, 76-77.

encouraged Canadians not to grieve for the fallen, but to honour them by preserving their memory. For example, the armistice at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918 brought about a tradition of holding two minutes of silence to commemorate the lives of the fallen Canadian soldiers.¹⁴³ As a result, memorials tend to focus on the duty of citizens to remember.¹⁴⁴ This is evident in an inscription on the side of the Calgary Cenotaph which reads “THEY SHALL NOT DIE WHILE MEMORY FULFILLS ITS TASK OF GRATITUDE.” The Calgary Cenotaph Committee also declared that the memorial would serve as “a perpetual reminder to present and future generations of what they owe to those who died for their country”.¹⁴⁵ In Victoria, the Cenotaph was “to be Victoria’s perpetual monument or shrine to the memory of the dead who fell in the greatest of wars.”¹⁴⁶ The most important role that these memorials played in Canadian society was ensuring that the lives and sacrifices of these soldiers would always be remembered. This remembrance would provide consolation to those grieving the loss of the loved ones, the guilt of survivors, and the trauma of the nation by telling them that their sacrifice could be worth it as long as their memory remained enshrined in history through these Cenotaphs. This would give meaning to their death because they would be remembered by each following generation who would be able to learn for what these soldiers sacrificed themselves. Therefore, the narrative represented by these memorials may not be completely reflective of the experiences of Canadians in the Great War, but it is reflective of a society attempting to move on after four years of total war.

¹⁴³ McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 203.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴⁵ CCRA, City Clerk’s Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, Written Correspondence of the Calgary Cenotaph Committee from the Chairman, 5 March 1928.

¹⁴⁶ *Daily Colonist*, “Unveiling Ceremony.”

Finally, citizens are also able to be consoled through taking part in building a cenotaph in their communities to commemorate their fellow citizens who fought and lost their lives in the Great War. The majority of war memorials built in the 1920s were erected not by governments, but rather by local citizens through local fundraising.¹⁴⁷ Citizens were consoled by donating to their local war memorial fund, or by actively taking part in the planning because it gave them an outlet for their grief and guilt. This is because studies have shown that psychological benefit is a key influence in encouraging people to take part in philanthropy or give charitable donations.¹⁴⁸ As well, people are more likely to contribute if they recognize there is an inherent need in society that must be fulfilled, if they believe it will make the world a better place, or if there are religious undertones which foster a sense of moral obligation.¹⁴⁹ In the case of the Cenotaphs in Calgary and Victoria, contributing to these memorials provides consolation in allowing people to make donations in honour of their loved ones.

Taking part in commemorative practices as a means of consolation was evident in both Calgary and Victoria. This is because many people in the post-war era had a personal stake in the commemoration of the soldiers and the construction of memorials because they had lost a loved one.¹⁵⁰ Pemberton and his wife lost two sons in the Great War and the War Memorial Committee was comprised of many Victorians who also suffered personal losses, such as Beaumont Boggs whose son, Herbert, was the first Canadian officer to be killed overseas in the

¹⁴⁷ McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Rene Beckers and Pamala Wiepking, "A Literature Review of Empirical Studies of Philanthropy: Eight Mechanisms That Drive Charitable Giving," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 40, no. 5 (2011): 927, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1177/0899764010380927>.

¹⁴⁹ Beckers and Wiepking, "A Literature Review of Empirical Studies of Philanthropy," 941; Shirley Tillotson, *Contributing Citizens: Modern Charitable Fundraising and the Making of the Welfare State, 1920-66* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 53.

¹⁵⁰ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 86.

Great War.¹⁵¹ The role that commemoration played in consoling citizens is also seen in the amount of financial support the Victoria Cenotaph received. The fundraising campaign for the Victoria Cenotaph, which began on 25 September 1924 and ran until 15 November, received a vast amount of support from the community. The ledger book of the War Memorial Committee shows individual donations that ranged from 50 cents to 100 dollars.¹⁵² Fundraisers were held in schools and churches, co-workers banded together to raise money, and a charity ball held by the Victoria Union Club raised \$771.¹⁵³ All levels of Victorian society contributed to the cause, including the Lieutenant Governor, W.C. Nichol, who contributed \$5000 to kick off the campaign, and then an additional \$500 at the end.¹⁵⁴ Another notable donor was Arthur Currie, who sent in a cheque of \$35 dollars all the way from Montreal.¹⁵⁵ The Manager of the Hudson's Bay Company in downtown Victoria wrote a letter enclosing \$111.25 raised by his employees, as well as his personal donation of \$100.¹⁵⁶ Numerous letters were written to the committee donating in honour of loved ones, and wishing they could give more. One letter dated 17 November 1924, reads "Enclosed please ten dollars for war memorial [sic] in memory of Henry J. Dunn."¹⁵⁷ Another undated and unsigned letter reads "I am very pleased to make a small contribution, regretting that I cannot afford to send more."¹⁵⁸ At the end of the fundraising campaign, the War Memorial Committee had managed to raise over \$12 500. However, by

¹⁵¹ VMA, Monuments- Cenotaphs File, *Islander* Newspaper Article titled "Thank Pemberton for Cenotaph", 11 February 1990.

¹⁵² Vance, *Death So Noble*, 161-162.

¹⁵³ BCA, Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, Ledger Book, September to December 1924; Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 74.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ VMA, Monuments- Cenotaphs File, *Islander* Newspaper Article titled "Thank Pemberton for Cenotaph", 11 February 1990.

¹⁵⁶ BCA, Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, Letter from Manager of Hudson's

¹⁵⁷ BCA, Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, Letter to War Memorial Committee from Mrs. Dunn, 17 November 1924.

¹⁵⁸ BCA, Associations, community service, charities, Pemberton Holmes Ltd., MS-3001, Box 48, File 13, Letter to War Memorial Committee.

April, that number had jumped to over \$15 000 when the BC Chamber of Commerce agreed to donate \$2500 to the cause.¹⁵⁹ The immense generosity of Victorians is evident. In the early to mid-1920s, a good monthly wage was \$125, the average rent was \$25 a month, and a woman's sweater "of fine quality" sold for \$1.73 at the Hudson's Bay.¹⁶⁰ Many Victorians gave quite generously and above their means.

There was also immense support for the fundraising and building of the Cenotaph in Calgary, with \$17 359 raised by March 1928. The Cenotaph Committee released a statement expressing their surprise and profound gratitude at the generosity of Calgarians towards their cause:

Possibly never before in the history of Calgary, has there been such a genuine and heart-felt response from all classes of the people to a special appeal, as that given towards the erection of the Cenotaph to commemorate those who abandoned all for their country in the great war [sic]. While the utmost thanks are due to each and every subscriber, from the little boy or girl who brought their mite, "in memory of daddy," to those who were able and willing to give larger amounts...¹⁶¹

The Calgary Cenotaph Committee also illustrates the direct role that citizens were able to play in building the memorial. It was composed of Calgarians from all walks of life, including bankers, Schoolboard members, bureaucrats from city hall, city clerks, the Editor of the *Calgary Herald*, the Lieutenant Governor William Egbert, and members of various public service, community service and patriotic organizations, as well as regular citizens.¹⁶² Therefore, it was truly a community effort that transcended economic and political boundaries and in which many Calgarians were eager to participate. While a number of Calgarians wrote to the Committee

¹⁵⁹ VMA, Monuments- Cenotaphs File, *Islander* Newspaper Article titled "Thank Pemberton for Cenotaph", 11 February 1990.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, Written Correspondence of the Calgary Cenotaph Committee from the Chairman, 5 March 1928.

¹⁶² CCRA, City Clerk's Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, Written Correspondence of the Calgary Cenotaph Committee from the Chairman, 18 February 1928.

expressing their excitement and opinions about what the memorial should look like and where it should reside, there was almost no clear opposition to the erection of a war memorial. However, one concerned citizen wrote in to express her worry that the choice of location in Central Park would create “terrible automobile traffic” and that the park would not be big enough for Armistice Day ceremonies around the Cenotaph.¹⁶³ It was clear that the Cenotaph Committee was eager to get started on the memorial, as they wrote letters to many cities across Canada asking if and how they had built their own war memorials, sometimes writing these cities several times.¹⁶⁴ Excitement and pride was felt by all Calgarians that they would finally have a memorial to honour their fallen soldiers. The *Herald* wrote that the unveiling ceremony on 11 November was sure to draw “one of the greatest crowds in the history of the city,” and that “in the spring the parks department will lay out a flower bed arrangement which will transform the park into one of the beauty spots of Western Canada.”¹⁶⁵ The *City of Calgary Parks Department Annual Report 1928* also depicted the excitement felt by Calgarians in helping to erect the city’s Cenotaph. The report states:

One of the outstanding events of the year was the erection and unveiling of the Cenotaph placed in this park to memorialize those of our citizens who made the supreme sacrifice in the Great War. Much work devolved on the Department in preparing the site for its erection, also in preparation for the unveiling ceremony which took place on November 11, (Armistice Day) before a concourse of some 10 000 people.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ CCRA, City Clerk’s Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, unsigned letter to Mayor Osbourne, 6 June 1927.

¹⁶⁴ CCRA, City Clerk’s Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, Letters from City of Toronto, Regina and Victoria, to Calgary Cenotaph Committee, 1927.

¹⁶⁵ The *Herald*, “Memorial Park Cenotaph Dedication,” 1928.

¹⁶⁶ *City of Calgary Parks Department Annual Report 1928* (The City of Calgary, Corporate Records Archives Parks and Recreation Department fonds), 144, <http://www.calgary.ca/CA/city-clerks/Documents/Corporate-records/Archives/Parks-Department-Annual-Reports/Annual-Report-1928.pdf>.

The enthusiasm and generosity of Calgarians in the erection of their war memorial illustrates how being able to donate and get involved in the process of building the memorial was a form of consolation.

Through religious symbolism, remembrance, and the involvement of citizens, memorials served as a catharsis for the grief of citizens. The Cenotaphs in Victoria and Calgary became a sacred space for both public and private grief, helped to forgive the guilt of surviving veterans and citizens, and created an enduring physical reminder of those who lost their lives in the Great War.¹⁶⁷ In this sense, these war memorials reflect the attitudes and preoccupations of the people that built them. The Cenotaphs represent the historical narratives and collective memories of Victorians and Calgarians in the post-war years in their depiction of the war as a fight for Christian values and the soldiers as sacred warriors who sacrificed their lives for Canada. They also depict a collective desire to commemorate their sacrifices and to preserve the memory of the fallen soldiers for generations to come.

Contributions to Canadian Nationalism

The Cenotaphs in Victoria and Calgary ultimately contributed to nationalism through fostering patriotism and a sense of belonging to a unified Canadian nation. According to Benedict Anderson, “No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers...yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings.”¹⁶⁸ In the study of nationalism, theorists make a distinction between nationalism and patriotism.

¹⁶⁷ McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 20.

¹⁶⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), 9.

Nationalism, according to Benedict Anderson, is a sense of belonging that unites an entire population in the common bonds of an “imagined political community.”¹⁶⁹ This feeling of belonging to an imagined national community is different than patriotism which, according to Hans Kohn, is the pride in and love of one’s homeland.¹⁷⁰ Both the cultivation of a common sense of belonging and patriotism contributed to the development of Canadian nationalism and are evident in the Cenotaphs in Calgary and Victoria. Cenotaphs and other war memorials are inherently nationalistic because they utilize patriotic symbols of victory and heroism while also constructing a founding national narrative which attempts to unify Canada.

The Great War provided an opportunity to create a national consciousness that would unite a deeply divided nation under a single Canadian identity with a single collective national history. Ernest Gellner argues that “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it *invents* nations where they do not exist.”¹⁷¹ Canada in the years following the war was no more united than it was before, with deeply entrenched cultural, linguistic, and regional differences between East and West, Francophone and Anglophone, First-Nations and settlers. In many cases, the war had exacerbated these tensions as Aboriginal men who fought in the war continued to be denied basic citizenship rights, Western farmers felt exploited by the war effort, and Quebecois felt betrayed by the implementation of conscription.¹⁷² The First World War provided an opportunity to finally unite this deeply divided nation.

The historical narrative of the war which helped to construct Canadian nationalism and unify Canadians was a coming-of-age story for the young nation.¹⁷³ This nation-building

¹⁶⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

¹⁷⁰ Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 5-6.

¹⁷¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6

¹⁷² McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 32; McKay and Swift, *Vimy Trap*, 2.

¹⁷³ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 10.

narrative claims that Canadian nationalism emerged through the creation of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, its steady accomplishments in the front, and finally its first battle fighting together as one nation at Vimy in April 1917 which resulted in a great Allied victory and ultimately fostered national pride and unity.¹⁷⁴ In the post-war years, Vimy is regarded as a turning point in both the war effort and Canadian national history. A.E. Ross, a Canadian Brigadier-General who fought in the Battle of Vimy Ridge, claimed “in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation.”¹⁷⁵ And this narrative began to take hold since by the mid-1920s, the imagery and rhetoric of nationalism began to replace the religious symbolism that characterized the collective memory of the Great War.¹⁷⁶ This historical narrative continues to exist today. For example, on 10 June 2016, Justin Trudeau claimed that “the reason the world pays heed to Canada is because we fought like lions in the trenches of World War I, on the beaches of World War II, and in theatres and conflicts scattered around the globe.”¹⁷⁷ As well, during the 100th anniversary celebrations for the Battle of Vimy Ridge, the BC Legislature released a pamphlet on the history of Vimy, which states that “the great achievements of Canadian soldiers at Vimy Ridge fostered a sense of national pride and confidence that Canada could stand on its own, at home and around the world.”¹⁷⁸ This historical narrative of a distinctly Canadian nation which emerged out of the conflict is depicted in these memorials. For example, the *Daily Colonist* wrote an article on the Victoria Cenotaph titled “Canada on Guard,” explaining that the memorial was a tribute to the Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres who “held on and saved the situation” for the Allies and to Canada’s “greatest and best who made the

¹⁷⁴ “The Legislative Assembly Remembers the First World War: 1914-1918,” The Legislative Assembly, Province of British Columbia; McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 32.

¹⁷⁵ McKay and Swift, *Vimy Trap*, 2.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁷⁸ “The Legislative Assembly Remembers the First World War: 1914-1918,” The Legislative Assembly, Province of British Columbia.

supreme sacrifice for Canada.” As well, the Calgary Cenotaph Committee claimed that the memorial served as a lesson on what it meant to be Canadian, and that these soldiers who gave their lives challenged us to “take up the torch fallen from their hands and carry it forwards to a higher type of Canadian citizenship.”¹⁷⁹ These memorials attempted to enshrine a distinctly Canadian identity of the soldiers that emerged out of the battle and transcended into Canadian society.

However, national identity is not static, but constantly evolving to respond to new experiences, interests, and needs that could bring about national unity.¹⁸⁰ These memorials have adapted over the years to fit these changing understandings, and therefore continue to play a role in constructing a unifying narrative of Canadian citizenship. Both Cenotaphs have been altered to include more recent wars in the national narrative, such as World War II, the Korean War, and the Afghan War. An additional plaque on the back of the Victoria Cenotaph has also been added in order to accommodate new understandings of Canadians as peacekeepers. It reads:

IN RECOGNITION OF THE
SACRIFICES OF THE
CANADIAN FORCES AND
CANADIAN CITIZENS
IN THE SERVICE OF PEACE

¹⁷⁹ CCRA, City Clerk’s Department Fonds, G81-2A, Box 175, Folder 1189, Written Correspondence of the Calgary Cenotaph Committee from the Chairman, 5 March 1928.

¹⁸⁰ Karen D. Shelby, *Flemish Nationalism and the Great War: The Politics of Memory, Visual Culture and Commemoration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 9.



Figure 1. 3: The Victoria Cenotaph Rear Plaque, Rebecca Powell, January 2018.

The Cenotaphs also contributed to Canadian nationalism through the construction of a narrative of the war of which Canada could be proud. This is enshrined in the Victoria and Calgary Cenotaphs through the patriotic symbols of heroism and the allusions to military victory. While both Cenotaphs are meant to be memorials to honour the dead, they ultimately convey that Canada emerged from the war as a victor. This symbolism is seen in the carvings of laurel wreaths on the Calgary Cenotaph:



Figure 2. 6: The Calgary Cenotaph - Laurel Wreath, Rebecca Powell, September 2017.

As well as a bronze laurel wreath on the Victoria Cenotaph:



Figure 1. 4: The Victoria Cenotaph - Laurel Wreath, Rebecca Powell, January 2018.

Laurel wreaths symbolize honour and victory, and were often given to Ancient Roman athletes or military generals; therefore, they are often depicted in war memorials or monuments meant to commemorate heroes or victorious battles.¹⁸¹ As well, there is a direct call to patriotism in the

¹⁸¹ Shelby, *Flemish Nationalism and the Great War*, 162; Shipley, *To Mark Our Place*, 148.

benches flanking the Cenotaph in Calgary with its inscription that reads “PASS NOT IN SORROW BUT WITH PRIDE.”

The soldier statue on the Victoria Cenotaph also depicts a patriotic interpretation of Canada’s involvement in the war. Soldiers that are depicted in mourning are typically standing, sometimes with their heads bowed, and with their rifles resting on their boot.¹⁸² The Victoria Cenotaph’s soldier statue instead depicts a soldier in battle, slightly crouching down with his rifle at the ready. In letters written to Pemberton, designer Sidney March stated that “the attitude of the soldier is one of engaging the enemy in a bayonet fight.”¹⁸³ At the time it was being unveiled in 1925, the *Daily Colonist* reported that the statue depicts a Canadian soldier fighting in the Second Battle of Ypres, during which the Allies were hit with poisonous gas, forcing them to fall back to Canadian lines.¹⁸⁴ The message that is transmitted through these memorials is not one of solely grief, but also the idea that Canadian soldiers achieved great success, which is ultimately a cause for pride.

This depiction of the heroic Canadian soldier who laid down his life in the fight for his nation is representative of the pride most Canadians felt for the men who fought with the CEF. Arthur Currie described the Canadian soldier as “vigorous, clean-minded, good-humoured, unselfish, intelligent and thorough.”¹⁸⁵ Even though 70% of the First Contingent of the CEF was comprised of British-born Canadians, and less than half of the total forces that served were actually born in Canada, these soldiers depicted and commemorated by these war memorials were conceived as being distinctly Canadian.¹⁸⁶ This nationalist narrative of the First World War

¹⁸² McIntyre, *Monuments of War*, 199.

¹⁸³ VMA, Monuments- Cenotaphs File, *Islander* Newspaper Article titled “Thank Pemberton for Cenotaph”, 11 February 1990.

¹⁸⁴ *Daily Colonist*, 12 July 1925, p. 4, “Canada on Guard”

¹⁸⁵ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 146.

¹⁸⁶ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 161-162.

ultimately creates a sense of purpose and meaning for the human cost of war, while also giving a sense of purpose to the Canadian nation in the future.¹⁸⁷ Creating a founding myth out of the collective memory of the war serves as a way to unite an increasingly diverse Canadian nation, while also making the sacrifice of the soldiers appear worthwhile, establishing an understanding of Canada and the war which is transmitted into the future through these memorials.

Conclusion

In providing justification for the war, consolation for citizens, and evoking nationalist sentiments, the Calgary and Victoria Cenotaphs provide certain historical narratives about the First World War that are representative of the collective memory that emerged in the post-war period. The explanation of the Great War as a just war is reflective of the desire of many Canadians to understand what these soldiers had died for. The symbolism and language of the war fought in the name of God, freedom, liberty, and democracy, against a despotic and tyrannical Germany is reflective of the understanding of the war that was popular in the 1920s. As well, the religious symbolism of the plight of soldiers being comparable to Jesus Christ shows how Canada was still a deeply Christian society that was consoled by religion that gave meaning to the suffering and sacrifice of Canadian soldiers. The language of remembrance and the incorporation of citizens into the fundraising and building of the memorials shows how important creating a memorial to permanently enshrine the memory of these heroes was to Calgarians and Victorians. Finally, the nationalistic symbolism of victory and heroism illustrate the nation-building myth that emerged out of the First World War that depicted Canada as coming of age through military engagement. Therefore, these memorials are useful to study

¹⁸⁷ Brad West, *Re-Enchanting Nationalisms: Rituals and Remembrances in a Postmodern Age* (New York: Springer New York, 2015) 141.

because they construct certain historical narratives about Canada's involvement in military conflict and which are reflective of the preoccupations and collective memories that emerged in the post-war era.

Concluding Remarks: Remembering and Forgetting

The historical narratives enshrined by the Calgary and Victoria Cenotaphs depict the First World War as a honourable war, fought in defence of peace, democracy, and freedom, a Christian crusade fought by soldiers who sacrificed their lives and were in turn granted eternal life, and a battle for Canada, out of which the Canadian nation finally emerged.

However, it must be recognized that these historical narratives are just that – a narrative, a collective memory, a national myth. This understanding of the war inherently involves both remembering and forgetting, as well as exclusion and inclusion.¹⁸⁸ While these memorials remember Canadian soldiers as heroic and brave, fighting in the name of Canada and the intrinsic values of democracy and freedom, they also require us to forget that much of this war was a technological endeavour of machines, guns, tanks, and weapons, resulting in mass destruction of death around the world.¹⁸⁹ It also excludes some of the criticism of the war: the brutality of having to kill the enemy, the terrible conditions, and the idea that it was a war fought amongst Empires in search of greater spheres of influence, not democracy or peace or freedom.¹⁹⁰ The myth necessarily involves excluding certain parts of Canadian society, particularly dissenters of the war effort, including Quebecois, First Nations, pacifists, and even farmers in Alberta, many of whom were either opposed to conscription or to the war in general.¹⁹¹ This narrative of the war is so exclusive because it was inherently assimilationist, based on British beliefs and values, supporting a war fought in the name of Britain, and it was a

¹⁸⁸ McKay and Swift, *The Vimy Trap*, 4.

¹⁸⁹ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 260.

¹⁹⁰ McKay and Swift, *The Vimy Trap*, 38; McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 100.

¹⁹¹ McKay and Swift, *The Vimy Trap*, 138.

myth that asked every citizen to embrace it in order for Canada to reinvent its own identity.¹⁹²

However, the biggest problem with this idea of a single collective myth is that most importantly, many veterans who fought in the Great War did not ascribe to it.¹⁹³ Therefore, it must be recognized that this collective memory may not have been so collective after all.

Indeed, there was not resounding support across the country for the erection of memorials themselves, despite what these historical narratives claim. In April 1924 after the unveiling of the cenotaph in Vancouver, veterans groups in Vancouver began to claim that they did not want war memorials at all because they did not need the daily reminder of their experiences on the front, or the men they left behind.¹⁹⁴ Throughout the post-war period, members of the House of Commons began to point out that perhaps the money being spent on war memorials should instead be given directly to the veterans themselves, arguing that there was no practical purpose in “spending money on the dead who do not want it, rather than on the living who need it.”¹⁹⁵

However, perhaps the power of this myth is that in spite of the resistance from different areas of society, the myth prevailed and is still prevalent in Canadian society today. Many memorials were raised by communities across Canada in the inter-war period,¹⁹⁶ and the practices of memorialization that emerged after the First World War have continued on through each generation. The myth carries on and the historical narrative continues through Remembrance Day, where the memory of soldiers is commemorated, their sacrifices honoured, and their deaths grieved.¹⁹⁷ These historical narratives continue to matter even though there is no

¹⁹² Vance, *Death So Noble*, 260.

¹⁹³ McKay and Swift, *The Vimy Trap*, 138.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

one left living to tell their story. Memorials make sure people still care and that Canadians still remember the Great War, because they give the war meaning. As argued by Vance:

People like this embraced the myth, not because their social betters drilled it into their minds by sheer repetition, but because it answered a need, explained the past, or offered the promise of a better future. But they did more than simply embrace the myth: they helped to create it. By their very actions, each of these people played a role in nurturing the nation's memory of the war and giving it life within their consciousness as Canadians. That memory was not conferred on them from above; it sprouted from the grief, the hope, and the search for meaning of a thousand Canadian communities.¹⁹⁸

War memorials, collective memory, and public history of the First World War reinforce and shape each other, evolving certain historical narratives while perpetuating others into the future. As long as war memorials continue to give meaning to the war, to give a justification for why it happened, console citizens for the suffering that was once endured, and express sentiments of Canadian unity and nationalism, the historical narratives they enshrine will continue to exist and be passed on from generation to generation.

¹⁹⁸ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 267.

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