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The War Against Public Forgetfulness: Commemorating 1812 in Canada

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Abstract

In October 2011, the Government of Canada began a two-year, nation-wide celebration of the bicentenary of the War of 1812. The widely-criticized initiative returned the public eye to a traditional 'interpretive tableau' of war heroes, namely Isaac Brock, Tecumseh, Charles de Salaberry and Laura Secord. While the scope and expense of the federal government's efforts have been unprecedented, the political battle to maintain certain memories of the War is one that is not new. A struggle against the forgetfulness of Canadians, and particularly young Canadians, has animated commemorations of the War for almost two centuries. Looking at a selection of past commemorative efforts this essay explores how the inertia of a traditional tableau of heroes has tended to overshadow other narratives and newer interpretations. Yet all is not lost. Using the example of the author's exhibition, Faces of 1812, it is suggested that publicly-constructed histories can be employed as a useful departure point for the public historian and provide a foundation from which the public can obtain a broader, more critical perspective on both the commemorated events and history writ large.

'Lest we forget, more like lest we remember … there is no better way of forgetting something than by commemorating it.'[1]

The cynical observations of Tom Irwin, the fictional history teacher in Alan Bennett's *The History Boys,* too often ring true when the past is commemorated publicly. Historical memory can be an uneven mix of pedagogy and politics serving as a means of collective forgetfulness. Bennett's words, crafted for the stage and the silver screen, are nonetheless prescient when applied to the way in which the War

of 1812 has been commemorated in Canada,[2] where both collective memory and forgetfulness have been integral parts of the legacy of the War of 1812. For almost 200 years the story of the War has been written, publicly commemorated, taught in the classrooms and then forgotten. Marking the centenary of Sir Isaac Brock's death in 1912, John Stewart Carstairs wrote that 'Brock's fame and Brock's name will never die in our history.' He praised both the efforts of Isaac Brock and John Macdonell who both died at the Battle of Queenston Heights and were later interred there. Yet Carstairs also reflected upon Brock's lesser-known victory at Detroit, lamenting the foibles of memory that even the general's legacy could not avoid. In spite of the public's erratic memory, Carstairs was optimistic for the historical interpretations of future generations, writing that 'so much of our historical perspective has been settled during the past hundred years. Perhaps, in another hundred years,' he speculated, 'when other generations come together to commemorate the efforts of these men that with Brock and Macdonell strove to seek and find and do and not to yield, the skirmish at Queenston may be viewed in a different light.'[3]

Instead of the perceived expansion in public understanding that Carstairs foretold, there has been a curious inertia in the retelling of the War. When the public is pressed to remember the conflict, they are offered the same historical set piece, trumpeting colonies preserved, the coming together of disparate peoples unified under the British flag, and the fostering of a sense of shared purpose against a common foe that would eventually lead to the creation of the Canadian nation. Along with these narrative lines can also be found an interpretive tableau of heroes, the brave Sir Isaac Brock, his Shawnee ally Tecumseh, the upright, Loyalist wife Laura Secord, and the daring French-Canadian commander Lieutenant-Colonel Charles-Michel de Salaberry. All four have been, and continue to be, framed as Canadian icons, although only de Salaberry was born within the boundaries of what is modern Canada. Together, the four form a *dramatis personae* that is returned to and publicly reiterated when deemed necessary. One wonders if this tableau has served the public and promoted a better understanding of the era, or whether it is an historical lowest common denominator that oversimplifies a complex series of past events. As one columnist with the *Vancouver Sun* recently wrote, 'I learned about Tecumseh in elementary school, then promptly forgot about him for half a century. Stephen Harper wants me [now] to brush up on my War of 1812 facts. . . .'[4] This essay will look into the peculiar retelling of the story of 1812 and the continuing war against public forgetfulness. It will also offer an insider's

view, a behind-the-scenes look at the creation of the exhibition, *Faces of 1812,* and address the challenges that face public historians who have to balance the expectations of the public, scholars and government policy in what has become a politically-charged milieu.

A Phalanx Against Forgetfulness: Creating the Interpretive Tableau of Heroes

One common thread that has linked past commemorative efforts with those of today has been an underlying fear of the public's forgetfulness. Collective forgetting is, of course, a natural and even necessary process. David Lowenthal, whose expertise transcends the disciplinary bounds of history, film studies and memory, writes that 'the artfully selective oblivion is necessary to all societies. Collective well-being requires sanitizing what time renders unspeakable, unpalatable, even just inconveniently outdated.'[5] It is this purposeful manipulation of the past that concerns contemporary writers such as Ian McKay and Jamie Swift. They would see the inertia in the interpretation of the War of 1812 as further evidence of the influence of the 'new warriors,' those individuals who 'yearn for a return to the simple stories that youngsters like Lower and Innis had been told before heading off to Harvard and the University of Chicago.' For those early Canadian historians, McKay and Swift argue, 'soldiers forged the Canada that we know and love.'[6] The efforts of the current federal government, McKay and Swift believe, to actively promote Canada's warrior past are just one facet of a much larger political ideology that fosters a 'culture of anxiety.' In such an environment public opinion is easily shifted and bolstered, as they argue, with a new, militaristic sense of Canadian identity. Newspaper columnist Jane Taber agrees that the way Canadians see themselves is shifting. The federal government, she contends, 'is working to recast the Canadian identity, undoing 40 years of a Liberal narrative and instead creating a new patriotism viewed through a Canadian lens.'[7] Museum professionals, archivists, and other types of public historians know quite well the political environment that exists, and has always existed, behind the public expression of the past. Admittedly, these professionals are often too preoccupied with the business of communicating historical messages, than voicing the multivalent contexts behind their production. The bicentennial of the War of 1812, then, offers an important opportunity to remind the public to question both the message and the messenger. It also gives pause for the public to

remember that the memory of the War was a hotbed of contestation long before the era of Arthur Lower and Harold Innis and question if there ever was an era of 'simple stories.'

Parts of the collective narrative can be lost, not because of a concerted effort to encourage forgetfulness, but rather as a result of apathy or disinterest in certain aspects of the story. It is this second kind of forgetfulness against which the early Canadian historians of the War of 1812 fought. These individuals, many of whom were veterans of the War, were less worried about information being purposely dropped from the narrative of the War than the narrative being corrupted by external influences, particularly those emanating from the United States. For them, the war over remembrance was an important one that needed fighting. It was also one that they feared the Americans were winning. Indeed, for early American writers, like Benson J. Lossing in his meticulously illustrated history of the conflict, the War of 1812 was a second War of Independence, an affirmation (along with the nation's survival through the Civil War) of the 'vitality and power' of republican institutions.[8]

At stake, early Canadian authors argued, were the patriotic hearts of Canadian youth who were easily corruptible by messages emanating from south of the border. David Thompson's history of the War provides one early example of this fear of forgetfulness and susceptibility to alternative historical interpretations.[9] In the preface of the work Thompson, a school teacher and veteran of the War, lamented that 'although many books have been circulated throughout the continent of America, purporting to be histories of the late war between Great Britain and the United States, it must be acknowledged that none has yet appeared, in the British North American Colonies, which could be considered as generally authentic....[10] Thompson argued that this lack of authenticity, or this biased interpretation — as we would observe today — would have serious consequences particularly on British American youth, 'whose minds have been endangered by the poisoned shafts of designing malevolence which have been everywhere discharged through the country, by the erroneous accounts of the late war with the causes which led to it that have been hitherto published.' By publishing his *correct* account, what he called 'a true statement of those events,' Thompson predicted that students would 'catch that patriotic flame which glowed with an unequalled resplendence in the bosoms of their fathers, and animated to action that noble few who stepped forward to oppose a relentless enemy invading their hitherto peaceful fire sides ... in defence of their King, their laws and their country.'[11] A

decade later, Major John Richardson, another veteran of the conflict,[12] reiterated these fears in the preface to his history the *War of 1812*. 'It is a humiliating, yet undeniable fact,' Richardson observed, 'that there are few young men of the present generation who are at all aware,' of the conflict, its 'brilliant feats of arms' and 'sterling loyalty displayed.' If they had read of such activities, Richardson lamented, 'their information has been derived through the corrupt channel of American party publications bearing on the subject, all of which have a tendency to pervert facts … and weaken energies of national character.'[13] Thus, for the early veterans *cum* historians, a battle still raged years after the Treaty of Ghent had officially ended the War. This battle was one against the loss of memory, and while youth were the target of the assault, the primary opponent was once again the Americans and their 'perverted' perspective on the past.

The eventual passing of these early historians who had fought in the War did not diminish fears of collective forgetfulness. In 1864 William Coffin, who had been a boy during the War, published *1812: The War and Its Moral* which was designed to be a truly Canadian version of the conflict. In the vein of earlier War authors, Coffin believed that Canadians were too quick to forget their history, citing in particular how Canadian histories of the War quickly went out of print, only to have their place 'usurped' by a 'flood of American publications.' In response, he set pen to paper to create an unapologetically patriotic version of events that would resonate with the Canadian public. 'It will be the endeavor of this narration,' Coffin explained, 'to invest the story told as far as possible with a Canadian character to present the war in Canada in a Canadian point of view and while giving all honor to those to whom honor is justly due still to impart as far as can be rightly done a Canadian individuality to this Canadian Chronicle of the War.'[14] The oft-repeated template of players can be seen in Coffin's work: Brock, Tecumseh, de Salaberry and Secord. Curiously, Laura Secord is identified as 'Mary Secord' throughout Coffin's account, underscoring the fogginess that surrounded her memory at the time.[15] Nonetheless, as historian Desmond Morton observed of Coffin, 'the heroism of Sir Isaac Brock, Tecumseh, Laura Secord and the Canadian militia is presented with enough fervour to contribute significantly to a mythology known to a century of English Canadian schoolchildren.'[16]

By the 1880s, another wave of interest in the War and fear of public forgetfulness took root. Nationalistic poets such as Charles Mair waxed romantic about Tecumseh, appropriating and defining his aboriginal values as Canadian in opposition to the values of the

American nation.[17] Sarah Anne Curzon popularized Laura Secord's actions in verse in order 'to rescue from oblivion the name of a brave woman' and this work, in concert with that of historian Emma Currie,[18] elevated Secord to the status of a *bone fide* Canadian heroine. One of the reasons for the interest in Secord, at this time, was her Loyalist origins. Indeed, there was a rapid of growth of United Empire Loyalist associations in the late nineteenth century, particularly in Ontario, and they were instrumental in promoting a renewed interest in the War of 1812.[19] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there was also a growing enthusiasm in English Canada to play an enhanced role in the Empire, including participation in the South African War, and it was seen as important to remind Canadians that this was not the first time they had gone to war in defence of the British Empire.

In the province of Ontario, in particular, the educational curriculum of the early twentieth century also embodied this fear of youth not being in touch with their history, and thus their (Upper) Canadian identity. History textbooks took on two basic forms during this time. Secondary students were provided with larger tomes that offered more detailed accounts of historical events, battles and key agents. Elementary students, where historical instruction was first offered, were generally given compendiums, or readers of historical vignettes which offered short, dramatic, biographically-based historical narratives. These types of texts included, for example, the Copp, Clark Company's *Britannia History Reader,* first published in 1909, and the later and more famous W. Stewart Wallace's *A First Book of Canadian History,* first published in 1928. As space was limited, these texts would use one or two biographies to contextualize an entire historical era. In the case of the *Britannia History Reader,* Brock, Secord and Tecumseh were chosen as the key figures to illustrate the War of 1812.[20] W. Stewart Wallace, who incorporated the now iconic art of C.W. Jefferys throughout, used Brock, 'the hero of Upper Canada,' as the sole point of reference to the events of the War.[21] Cecilia Morgan, delving into how text books of the era addressed the particular story of Laura Secord, has observed a key difference between antebellum and post-First World War texts. Before the Great War textbooks used an authoritarian voice. After the war, texts 'invited the readers to imagine themselves as part of the narrative.'[22] It is interesting to note that while pedagogical approach did indeed change, the interpretive tableau of heroes from the War of 1812 remained and flourished, as did the attempt to craft a national identity through a study of Canada's military and political history.

Fears over the historical and civic education of Canadian youth have thus been part of the war on forgetfulness since the earliest histories on 1812. Indeed, the present government's emphasis on the War of 1812 both repeats this traditional interpretive tableau and shares a similar pedagogical epistemology that addresses the failings in the civic education of Canadian youth. Canadian Heritage Minister James Moore, quoted in the *Globe and Mail,* lamented that in only four of Canada's provinces are students required to take history in secondary school and mused that 'I think that's a sadly low number so I want to work on improving that.' His ministry, he continued, could be instrumental in the solution and added that 'we've been very, very clear within the department that we want to make sure that those organizations that have a clear agenda for promoting Canadian history or Canadian identity are things that we'd like to see get supported.'[23] In November 2012, school boards across Canada were sent special packages from the Department of Canadian Heritage. 'The War of 1812,' the cover letter addressed to social science and history teachers read, 'provides an opportunity to acknowledge and promote the contributions of people of diverse backgrounds and various regions that came together to defend their land, ensuring the independent destiny of our country in North America.' The package included a bilingual poster, a pamphlet providing an overview of the War, links to educational resources on the Department of Canadian Heritage website and a free mobile phone application inspired by the *Loxleys and the War of 1812* comic book.[24]

The Federal Government's Memory of the War

The current federal government's nation-wide focus on the War of 1812 is unprecedented. Previous federal governments and their colonial predecessors were not as preoccupied with promoting the public memory of the War of 1812 as early Canadian authors and poets had been. In March 1814, the legislature of Upper Canada did vote £500 'for the purpose of erecting a monument on the heights of Queenston near the spot where he fell.'[25] This amount was doubled the next year and, with the eventual approbation of Brock's family, a first monument was constructed and opened on 13 October 1824. In April 1840, in what is a little-known act today, an Irish-Canadian terrorist blew up that first monument. Three months later, over 8,000 people reportedly attended a public meeting at Queenston Heights, where the valour of Brock was reaffirmed and it was decided that a private committee would be set

up to reconstruct the monument. In spite an auspicious committee consisting of prominent Tories and led by Sir Allan Napier MacNab, the second monument did not receive public funding and was built entirely by private donation.[26]

This disjointed approach to the government commemoration of the War can be partly explained by the fact that there was no bureaucratic home for such a function. Before the First World War, the federal government only had two departments that could be considered to be dedicated to historical pursuits. The first, the Geological Survey of Canada [GSC] founded in 1842, was focused on measuring and collecting the natural history of the country.[27] In 1856, the GSC set up a public museum in Montreal. By 1881, it had moved to Ottawa and by the end of the nineteenth century it was receiving over 20,000 visitors a year.[28] The second history-oriented department, the Dominion Archives Branch, was formed in 1872 as a part of the Department of Agriculture. The Archives Branch not only collected the records of government, but pursued an aggressive policy of finding and transcribing documents from both the French and British colonial regimes. As the centennial of the War of 1812 approached, Arthur Doughty, the director of the Canadian Archives, had prominent military historian Lieutenant-Colonel (later Brigadier-General) Ernest Cruickshank start an index of the massive 'C' Series of British military documents (a project that was not completed until 1916).[29] The Archives also published a collection of documents on the War, again edited by Cruickshank, in 1912. In spite of these efforts, the contributions of the Canadian Archives towards the centenary of the War were modest. The relative lack of federal interest in the War of 1812 can also be seen in the absence of participation by the Dominion government at various centennial celebrations in the Niagara Region, the veritable hotbed of commemoration for the War. It was reported that the ceremonies marking the centenary of the Battle of Queenston Heights in October 2012 were attended by 2,000 people and scores of dignitaries, including relatives of Brock and Macdonell, militia officers and the local Member of Parliament and Member of Provincial Parliament. While the local turnout was impressive, the long list of federal and provincial regrets is equally telling. The Prime Minister, the Minister of the Militia, the Premier of Ontario, the Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario and several high-ranking regular force generals were unable to attend.[30] Two years later, the committee to celebrate the centenary of the Battle of Lundy's Lane in 1914 wrote that: 'invitations were sent to the H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, Governor-General of Canada; Sir Robert Borden, Prime Minister; the Minister of the Militia; Sir Wilfrid

Laurier; Sir James Whitney, Premier of Ontario.'[31] All of them sent letters of regret that they could not attend.[32]

Timothy Forest has recently observed, in the spirit of historians such as C.P. Stacey and Donald Hickey, that from the War of 1812, 'both Canada and the U.S. constructed divergent histories to serve particular local and national interests.'[33] In the Niagara Region of Ontario, for example, the memory of the conflict has always been important; yet across the border in Niagara County and Erie County, New York, the memory of the war is downplayed. On the other hand, the War is very differently remembered and commemorated in Maryland and New Orleans. For the first century after the conflict, neither the government of Upper Canada nor new federal government attached any great national significance to the War of 1812. Commemorations were focused on the Niagara Region of Ontario and were left to be organized by local historical societies, the United Empire Loyalists and other imperialist organisations. Contributions from the Canadian Archives towards the memory of the War were therefore understandably modest.

This would change with the First World War, which saw increased public interest in the military heritage of Canada. The militia regiments that served as the base from which the Canadian Expeditionary Force was drawn had deep roots in their respective communities, and those roots, in the minds of some, reached beyond Confederation to some of the fencible and militia regiments that had served in the War of 1812.[34] During the First World War old militia depots and forts that had been long neglected saw both renewed and extended use. Several sites, such as Fort Wellington and Fort Henry in Ontario, Fort Edward in Nova Scotia and Fort Lennox in Quebec, served as arms depots, mustering points, and — in the case of Fort Henry — a prison for the Department of the Militia. In the decade following the Great War, the newly-founded Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC), with General Ernest Alexander Cruikshank at its helm, declared several of these outdated fortifications as national historic sites.[35] Former military properties were then transferred from the cash-strapped Department of the Militia to the Parks Branch or local historical authorities. Commemorative designations were then crafted by the HSMBC detailing the structures' relevance to the War of 1812 and other conflicts such as the Rebellions of 1837–38.[36] This transfer of military properties and the creation of historic designations from the newly-formed HSMBC marked the first significant and sustained federal commemoration of the War of 1812. Yves Yvon Pelletier argues that Ontario-based Cruikshank, who served for two decades at the

head of the HSMBC can be credited for the commemorative emphasis on the War[37] and that the vast majority of the existing War of 1812 designations were made during his tenure. As of 2011, approximately 76 of Canada's approximately 2,021 national historic sites, events, and people address the memory of the War of 1812.[38] It was during Cruikshank's tenure that the majority of designations for War of 1812 were created. Indeed, during the decade of the 1920s alone more sites, events and people were commemorated than in the subsequent 90 years.[39] After the initial commemoration of forts and military sites came recognition of the interpretive tableau of heroes celebrated in late-Victorian and Edwardian histories, poems and textbooks; namely, Brock, Tecumseh, Secord and de Salaberry. Over the next century, each individual would eventually become recognized nationally in addition to their associative contributions to other historic sites. Of the four heroes that form this tableau, Tecumseh holds the inauspicious honour of being the least-commemorated by the HSMBC. He was designated a National Historic Person in 1931 (just at the end of the decade that saw the highest concentration of 1812-related commemorations) and a plaque bearing witness to his actions was erected near Thamesville, Ontario.[40] On the other hand, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles-Michel de Salaberry is commemorated directly on three federal plaques. The Battle of Châteauguay National Historic Site (designated in 1920) was the first national commemoration of the Lieutenant-Colonel who, in the words of the plaque text, 'thwarted the most ambitious enemy invasion of the War of 1812 and saved the province.'[41] He was made a national historic person in 1934, and his home (constructed in 1815) was made a national historic site in 1968. A fourth plaque, unrelated to the War — though named in honour of the leader of the Voltigeurs — designated the Salaberry Armoury in Gatineau, Quebec a national historic site in 1993.[42]

Like de Salaberry, Laura Secord has been commemorated directly three times by the HSMBC. She is first mentioned in the 1921 commemoration of the Battle of Beaver Dams where the original plaque read: 'Warning of the approach of the Americans was given by the heroic Laura Secord as well as by an Indian.'[43] This original plaque was removed in the 1980s and the statement on Laura Secord rewritten as: 'Warned of their approach by an Indian scout and by Laura Secord' — a statement undoubtedly crafted to offer the anonymous 'Indian' more agency and reduce the veneration of Secord. Those who are steadfast believers in the legend of Ms Secord may be upset at the rewriting of the Beaver Dams' plaque that tempers her heroic actions. However, they

should take comfort in the fact that her deeds are officially commemorated elsewhere. For example, at the Queenston Heights National Historic Site there is a memorial to Secord, erected by the federal government in 1910, not far from the monument that honours Brock and Macdonnell who actually saw action, were killed, and are buried there. As Secord's laudatory biographer Ruth Mackenzie has observed, Secord shares publicly, 'Queenston Heights with the hero she revered.'[44] The 1968 designation of Queenston Heights as a national historic site is extended to the Laura Secord memorial and underscores its importance to the historical landscape.[45] In 2002, Secord was finally designated a national historic person. In the plaque, which can be found at Niagara-on-the-Lake, her tale of heroism is told once again (this time without any First Nations references) as is her legacy which includes inspiring 'a first generation of women historians [who] championed Secord's courageous deed with the goal of uncovering and popularizing women's contributions to the history of Canada.'[46]

It may not come as a surprise that Sir Isaac Brock is the most commemorated of the four. The actions of Brock are directly acknowledged six times in plaques approved by the HSMBC. The Battle of Detroit commemoration is one of the most elaborate and resulted in the creation of three plaques with separate texts at Windsor, Port Dover and Sandwich, Ontario. The initial commemoration was made in 1923 and the original text on the Port Dover plaque read:

> War of 1812 Major General Isaac Brock with 40 men of His Majesty's 41st Regiment and 260 of the York, Lincoln, Oxford and Norfolk militia, set out from Port Dover on the 8th August, 1812, to relieve the invaded western frontier. His brilliant capture of Hull's army at Detroit with a much smaller force saved this province to the Empire and made Brock, 'THE HERO OF UPPER CANADA.'

In the 1980s, this plaque was removed and replaced with a text that downplayed the specific local militia contribution and gave a greater political context, in particular in regard to British-First Nation relations:

> To counter the American invasion of the Detroit frontier, Major General Isaac Brock mustered a force of about 50 regulars and 250 militia here at Port Dover. They embarked on 8 August 1812 and, proceeding along the north shore of the lake in open boats, arrived at Amherstburg five days later. The enemy had already withdrawn

> across the Detroit River, so on 16 August Brock made a daring and successful assault on Detroit. This important victory raised the spirits of the Canadians and ensured the continuing support of Britain's Indian allies.

Brock is also commemorated in the Fort George National Historic Site and Fort Malden National Historic Site designations (1921), in the text for the Queenston Heights National Historic Site (approved in 1968), and in the text for the Brock Monument National Historic Building, written in 1990. What might be surprising to many is that the acknowledgement of Brock as a national historic person is a relatively new addition to the corpus of federal commemorations. Brock was designated in 2010 and a plaque was unveiled on the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Queenston Heights.[47] In the newly-minted plaque the phrase 'the hero of Upper Canada' (removed from the Battle of Detroit text) returns and a specific reference is made to Brock's relationship with Tecumseh and the 'forging of a crucial alliance with Shawnee Chief.'[48] Thus, the hero status of the general from the Island of Guernsey is perpetuated for the public that makes 'the hero of Upper Canada' and 'Canadian hero' synonymous.

It is interesting to note the slight changes to interpretation that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s. While the tableau of characters that the public expected remained the same, new material was introduced that particularly underscored First Nations' participation in regard to Secord and Brock. Historian and past Historic Sites and Monuments Board member Veronica Strong-Boag notes that Parks Canada and the Board were not immune to the influence of social history. Increased recognition of women, ethnic minorities and First Nations indeed occurred over the past three decades, as the rewritten War of 1812 designations also attest. In the end, however, as Strong-Boag points our, such steps were tempered by the inherent shortfalls of the national commemorative process.[49] The return to more traditional commemorations for Secord and Brock in their recent designations indeed illustrates that public commemorations, such as NHSBC designations, are inherently conservative. Their purpose is to provide the key *facts* that will both inform and meet the approval of the public within the physical limitations of the space on a plaque. With little room for alternative interpretations, commemorative texts offer snapshots of the type of history that is believed to resonate with the public or communicate a shared point of identity at a given time. Alterations to public commemorations occur, but these changes are often small

in nature and tend to reflect perceived changes in public taste. Again, one has only to look to the recent designations of Secord and Brock as national historic persons to see the effect of the inertia surrounding the commemoration of the War of 1812.

Until 2012, official designations from the HSMBC constituted the majority of the federal government's commemorative legacy for the War of 1812. It should be noted, however, that this legacy has not been a relatively robust one. Currently, less than four percent of all national historic sites, persons or events pertain to the War of 1812. Even in the 1920s, a veritable apex of national commemoration for the War, only 18 percent of all HSMBC designations addressed the conflict. Since the Second World War, there have been barely 20 designations pertaining to people, events or sites of the War of 1812. Other federal departments have, on occasion, also evoked the memory of the War and in so doing not strayed far from the standard interpretive tableau of heroes. On the 200th anniversary of his birth, the Post Office Department issued a 6-cent Sir Isaac Brock stamp.[50] Ten years later, Canada Post released a 17-cent Charles-Michel de Saliberry stamp.[51] In 1992, in the Legendary Patriots/Héros, *Héroines Legendaires* series, Laura Secord was featured on a 42-cent stamp.[52] Intriguingly, Tecumseh has never adorned any official postage in Canada. This may be because the Shawnee leader was never a British subject, or because he traditionally has been seen as inherently linked with Brock. Indeed, the explanatory notes published with the issuance of the Brock stamp underscored Brock's greatness through his ability to reach out to First Nations' peoples: 'Upon the outbreak of war with the United States of America in 1812 Brock had some 1450 British regulars under his command; organizing militia units to bolster his strength, he sought and won [the] cooperation of the native people, particularly the Six Nations Indians on the Grand River.' The document went on to praise Tecumseh who demonstrated an 'immediate reciprocation of respect [and] consequently the famed Indian leader led his people in cooperating.'[53] In 2003, it was decided by the federal government that a Valiants Memorial be erected on the Sappers and Miners Bridge in downtown Ottawa.[54] This installation would eventually consist of nine bronze busts and five statues that depicted key figures from Canada's military past. Two artists, Marlene Hilton Moore and John McEwen, were commissioned to research and sculpt the works. The memorial was officially opened by the Governor-General in November 2006.[55] As with the commemorative postage stamps, Tecumseh was again left out of the memorial for the period of 1812 where 'Canadian' valiants such as Brock, de Salaberry and Secord

are highlighted instead. A Shawnee chief, a New England loyalist, a Briton and a French Canadian seem odd companions to share the mantle of Canadian heroism. Nonetheless, the roots of their *Canadianization* run deep forming an interpretive tableau that is repeatedly visited publicly. Unlike Brock, Secord and de Salaberry, Tecumseh, however, is the one individual who has proven a difficult character to Canadianize

Until the current bicentennial, federal efforts to commemorate the War of 1812 have been relatively modest and, with the exception of the issue of the occasional postage stamp, quite regional in scope. For example, historic plaques sanctioned by the HSMBC were erected primarily in the province of Ontario (with a handful of designations in Quebec and Nova Scotia). The Valiants Memorial depicting Canada's heroes and heroines in bronze is in central Ottawa. Whether standing in the regions or in the capital, these federal designations elevated local events and people to national status. That is to say, those who happened upon the commemorations were encouraged to find national significance from their immediate location. The current federal bicentennial celebration goes one step further, asking Canadians, from every region, regardless of their location, to turn their gaze to the early struggles in the Canadas and Nova Scotia. More controversially, the current federal campaign emphasizes a unifying role played by the Canadian military, and links the actions of the original combatants and their battle honours with the current traditions of the Canadian Forces across the country. Front and centre of it all is the traditional tableau of heroes who, in spite of their ethnic and regional differences, continue to be held up as four *bone fide* Canadian heroes from the War.

Celebrating the Bicentenary of the War

In October 2011, the Government of Canada announced that $28 million would be allocated for the bicentenary of the War of 1812 and a secretariat set up in the Department of Canadian Heritage would administer the program.[56] In the months following the announcement, Canadian journalists were inspired to write hundreds of column inches of opinion. The initially enthusiastic public dialogue over the federal government's initiative became increasingly critical. The millions that have been federally earmarked have been seen, at best, as heritage-oriented civic boosterism and, at worst, a hallmark of a militaristic government with a not-so-hidden neo-liberal agenda. Why would the government prefer to celebrate a 200-year-old war in 2012, some

queried, when the anniversary of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was quietly forgotten?[57] Others have questioned, if the government was truly concerned about the state of history in Canada, why so much has been spent on bicentennial celebrations at the same time as both Parks Canada and Library and Archives Canada [LAC] have undergone crippling cuts in both staff and services.[58] Indeed, the commemoration of the War of 1812 has drawn new battle lines prompting accusations of government manipulation and the rewriting of history for political purposes.

The key messages that the Government of Canada is promoting in the bicentenary of the War, along with education resources, travel-tourism suggestions and applications for funding, are found on a website produced by the Department of Canadian Heritage's War of 1812 Secretariat at the address www.1812.gc.ca. The original website (launched in October 2011) prominently featured historical portraits of Brock, Tecumseh, Secord and de Salaberry as the key heroes of the conflict. In a second version of the website (which appeared online less than a year after the initial launch) the historical portraits had been replaced with images of modern actors. No information has been provided that addresses the changes that occurred. It may have been simply to reformat the site in accordance to newer federal web design standards. The changes may have also been effected to provide consistency in the depiction of the heroes. The new heroic images display the modern actors who were in the Government of Canada's official television commercial, 'The Fight for Canada.' On the other hand, the changes may also have had something to do with the ahistorical nature of the historical portraits that were originally featured. Indeed, the only portrait that had a contemporary sitter was that of Charles de Salaberry. Both the portraits of Isaac Brock and Tecumseh were painted after their deaths and the portrait used of a young Laura Secord was a modern commission.[59]

Regardless of the changes in design, the official message has remained the same. On the 'About the Commemoration' page, under the bolded heading, 'the War of 1812 was a defining chapter in Canada's history as a nation,' it is stated that 'Canada would not exist had the American invasion of 1812–15 been successful. For that reason, the War of 1812 was a defining chapter in our history.' Expanding upon this counter-factual premise, it is argued that 'the end of the War laid the foundation for Confederation, and Canada's ultimate emergence as an independent nation in North America. It also ushered in what has become two centuries of peaceful relations, mutual respect, close

cooperation and the strongest of friendship between Canada and the United States.' Under another bolded title, 'A key event in shaping our identity as Canadians,' it is made very clear that the government believes that the War is important to how Canadians *should* see themselves today. 'Had the War ended different,' it posits, 'Quebec's French-speaking identity would not exist, and the history of Canada's Aboriginal peoples would have been profoundly altered.' From an exploration of what could have been, the message then returns to tracing the roots of the modern Canada, and in particular the Canadian military:

> The War, which saw militias in Upper and Lower Canada as well as from the Atlantic region fighting together in a common cause, was instrumental in creating Canada's military; some of our current reserve regiments in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada trace their origins back to this time.
>
> It took the combined efforts of the British army and navy, English- and French-speaking militia volunteers, and First Nations allies to succeed in defeating the American invasion.

In conclusion, the statement returns to the initial sentiment that the War helped to forge Canada's unique identity and brought about 200 years of peace with the United States:

> These heroic efforts tell the story of the origins of the Canada we know today: an independent and free country united under the Crown with a strong respect for diversity. The signing of the Treaty of Ghent and other treaties that followed confirmed the border between Canada and the United States, which is now the world's longest undefended border, providing an example of nations coexisting peacefully side by side.[60]

On the surface, the federal government's interpretation of the War of 1812 is simple, straightforward and conservative. The points presented fall along the traditional boiler-plate questions that have been found in countless high school and university history exams. The drawing together of French- and English-speaking colonists along with First Nations against a common foe, ordinary people engaging in heroic deeds, and years of peaceful co-existence have all been a part of the public historical narrative for generations. Furthermore, like most public appeals to the past, the wider message is one firmly

rooted in the present. It is also a message that is shared. For example, the Historica Canada, a national charitable foundation 'dedicated to Canadian history, identity and citizenship'[61] offers a similar message in its educational guide on the 200th Anniversary of the War, as has the Ontario Heritage Trust.[62] For both the Historica Canada and the Ontario Heritage Trust, the bicentenary underscores the importance of reflecting on pivotal historical events for a better understanding of modern Canada. Sharing many parallels with the message projected by the federal government, the bicentennial of the War offers for other prominent heritage organisations an opportunity to revisit past events, and explore the origins of our present selves, our resourcefulness, our ability to work together and our shared values. Intriguingly, despite the similarities that this message has with that of the federal government, neither the Historica-Dominion Institute nor the Ontario Heritage Trust have been subject to the same level of public scrutiny.

The popular controversies that have arisen concerning the federal government's position in commemorating the War of 1812 must, then, have caught some bureaucrats by surprise. How could marking the 200th anniversary of a conflict that brought together the uneasy bedfellows of French Canadians, British Americans and First Nations against an aggressive American neighbour prove problematic? As Peter Shawn Taylor writes, in the Canadian news magazine *Maclean's,* the War of 1812 is the perfect conflict for the twenty-first century politician. Instead of offering an historical narrative where the two founding nations were at odds, each with legions of First Nations allies, the War of 1812 instead reveals the political triumph of unity.[63] Nonetheless, the commemoration engendered its fair share of criticism, due partly to the triumphant and oversimplified narrative that had been crafted, partly to the simultaneous erosion of funding to federal heritage institutions, and partly to a fear of ulterior motives on the part of the government.

Paradoxically, the twentieth-century repetition of the interpretive tableau of 1812 has occurred at the same time that the historical profession began to question the received memory of the War. In the 1920s, W. Stewart Wallace took on the memory of Laura Secord. While acknowledging the heroism of her efforts, Wallace raised doubts over the ultimate importance of the information that she related.[64] In the 1950s and 1960s, historians such as C.P Stacey and G.F.G Stanley challenged the 'militia myth,' the idea that it was everyday Upper Canadians who defended and ultimately saved the province from American invasion.[65] More recently, historians such as George Sheppard, Jane Errington and Alan Taylor have questioned the identity

and loyalties of British Americans before, during and after the War.[66] The interpretive tableau that is at the foundations of the bicentenary message of the federal government, however, sidesteps the historical revisionists of the twentieth century and papers over several other historical cracks such as the continuing tensions with First Nations and with the United States.

Not far below the initial message of the heritage organizations and the federal government are lesson plans and interpretive productions (comics, exhibitions, web-based applications) that explore the larger picture and consequences of the War. However, the initial targeting of the public purposely focused on a handful of simple and, what were hoped to be, familiar messages. Selection — both of historical facts and the narrative messages — in the creation of a straightforward message is not a foreign process in making history public, nor is it necessarily new. Nonetheless, what has upset scholars and journalists alike is that, by commemorating certain aspects of the War — such as its role in forging modern Canada or the affinity amongst certain groups against a common enemy — other parts are downplayed or even overlooked.

Mediation is the Message: Being a Public Historian of the War in the Current Environment

Underlying both past and present desires to remember the War of 1812 has been a fear of forgetfulness, particularly of the younger generation, or even worse the fear of this generation imbibing the *wrong* history. Indeed, from the earliest authors on the War through the United Empire Loyalists boosters and the HSMBC members, previous supporters of the War's commemoration were proud of Canada's military heritage and believed strongly in the value of defending both the Canadian nation and the British Empire. While the debates surrounding current federal support for commemorating the War of 1812 has politicized the bicentennial, it should be remembered that all commemorations, museum exhibitions and other expressions of public history are necessarily constructed, mediating various contemporary interests in response to predominately contemporary issues.[67] The expression of any national narrative is an unavoidably political act and the inclusion or exclusion of any aspect of the past is open to great scrutiny.[68] Just below the swirl of politics and public opinion can be found public historians, like myself, who research and write plaque texts, create popular histories or curate the exhibitions. For public historians, an entirely different

(though unavoidably connected) world also exists of internal politics and personalities, time and funding constraints. Our job is to engage the public in with the past, while mediating various, and frequently conflicting, views, directives, and opinions. As a specific case in point this chapter draws on the personal experiences of its author who, as an independent public historian, developed an exhibition for Library and Archives Canada [LAC]. Entitled *Faces of 1812,* the exhibition was hosted at the Canadian War Museum [CWM] from 13 June 2012 to 6 January 2013.[69] It was intended that it would complement the exhibition *1812,* the CWM's expansive exploration of American, British, Canadian and First Nations' perspectives of the War.

Faces of 1812 was developed in concert with staff from LAC's Portrait Program and the initial plan was to develop an exhibition entirely of portraiture from the era. The Portrait Program represented the remnants of what was once the Portrait Gallery of Canada.[70] Indeed, in early conversations, specific parameters were discussed that meshed with the Portrait Program's pre-existing mandate to develop an exhibition with portraits of 'everyday Canadians' from the War of 1812. The directive, although well-intentioned and rooted in the Portrait Gallery's original vision of focusing 'on portraits of people from all walks of life who have contributed to the development of Canada,' was nonetheless difficult to follow.[71] In the early nineteenth century, few 'everyday' people had portraits done. Secondly, the idea that a specific, or widely-held, 'Canadian' identity existed during the War of 1812 has been contested. In response to the challenging nature of the Portrait Gallery's mandate, I suggested that the exhibition should be expanded to be more historical in nature, including works of documentary art, maps, globes and other elements of material culture. It was hoped that these artifacts and documents would flesh out the story, illustrate more stories and 'faces' of the War than the portraiture collection contained. I also saw the exhibition as an unique opportunity to showcase the breadth of LAC's holdings to the public at a time that the institution was experiencing great angst over its role in Canadian society.[72]

From the first day of the project, I was wary of the continuing legacy of the interpretive tableau and wanted to push beyond the four heroes of the War. It should be noted that at the beginning of the *Faces of 1812* exhibition, the Department of Canadian Heritage's War of 1812 Secretariat had not finalized the official messages it wanted to convey. There was no indication that Brock, Secord, Tecumseh or de Saliberry would be chosen (once again) to act as the public touchstones for the upcoming bicentennial commemoration.

Furthermore, funding for *Faces of 1812* came entirely from Portrait Gallery funds and not from the much-touted $28 million budget earmarked for commemorative activities. After initial selection of items had taken place for the exhibition, the official War of 1812 objectives came down from Canadian Heritage obligating the institution to follow, in some measure, the new communication strategy. The relationship between LAC and CWM, the exhibition's host, was amicable. However, the CWM, as a Crown Corporation, prides itself on its arms-length status from government. LAC, on the other hand, does not enjoy this separation and is expected to follow government policy as communicated through the Department of Canadian Heritage. The CWM vetted every item selected as well as every word of text written, to ensure a consistency of message and quality with their exhibition. What could have been a flash point of contention between the two institutions did not materialize.

The government's official commemorative message, instead, was helpful in offering a public frame of reference that could either be incorporated or act as a point of interpretive departure. Visitors to *Faces of 1812* were greeted with an introductory text that generally followed the official government narrative for the bicentennial to which some additional contextual elements were added:

> The War of 1812 changed forever the face of British North America. It brought together French Canadians, First Nations, British American colonists and Britons — diverse and sometimes uneasy colonial neighbours — against a common foe. The social and political confidence gained through conflict would lay the foundations for a new Canadian nation.

The next interpretive paragraph then departed from the official message, offering more layers of subtlety and specifically framing the content of the exhibition:

> The War of 1812 also changed forever the faces of British North America. It was not just a conflict of armies and ideologies, but also of individuals. Depicted here are some of these individuals; men and women, combatants and civilians who had the joys of everyday colonial life suddenly shattered by the horrors of war. These are the faces of joy, sadness, bravery, hope, and resilience. These are the faces who 200 years ago witnessed a great turning point in Canadian history that we still commemorate today.

In press releases, *Faces of 1812* was officially billed as highlighting 'some of the men and women, both combatants and civilians, who experienced the War of 1812. It likewise highlights the conflict as a rich and continuing source of artistic inspiration, commemoration, and reflection.'[73] It should be noted that none of these elements, nor many issues highlighted in the exhibition, were directly related to the communication points outlined by Canadian Heritage, nor were Canadian Heritage officials concerned about this departure.

It has been argued elsewhere that scholars who engage in public history are often misunderstood by others in the academy.[74] One frequent argument is that being directly paid to produce an exhibition reduces the scholarly integrity of that work.[75] It is indeed a criticism that most public historians, including myself, have experienced. However, in the current climate, there is little patience for talk of moderation, or change from the inside. Critics of all political stripes have taken a page from the neoliberal philosophy, believing if you are not against the current government, you must be for it. One journalist, who in conversation admitted he did not have to time to see *Faces of 1812,* nonetheless wrote how the exhibition and its curator wholeheartedly supported the War of 1812 message of the federal government. Conveniently left out from the article was the larger discussion that was had over the importance of mediating conflicting political and professional interests in the hope of striking a balance palatable to scholars and the greater public alike.[76] Another journalist, taking the original critique at face value, wrote that I had 'apparently abandoned any pretense of scholarly independence' in developing the exhibition.[77] The great challenge that faces public historians is that they have to mediate between different, and sometimes contradictory, interests. This is done in the hope that public awareness can be fostered and dialogue encouraged over the past. Some outsiders believe that they are the only ones who can see the greater political realities of the day. Public historians, archivists and other heritage professionals not only know the political realities of their jobs; they continually search for innovative and meaningful ways to work within systems that they cannot change.

Like any public exhibition, the selection for *Faces of 1812* was directed as much by practical concerns originating from the condition and availability of the collection as by institutional mandates or government directives. Creating an exhibition, or any other manifestation of public history, is not a solitary endeavor and employs legions of heritage professionals. Thus, *Faces of 1812* was a collaborative effort involving conversation and consensus with graphic designers,

conservation experts, vault managers and other professionals. These efforts succeed only through shared vision. Acts of public history are also framed by physical constraints as well as by any interpretive vision. Commemorative plaques, for example, are finite in size and have strict word limits, as do exhibition texts. In the particular case of an exhibition, the selection of items is further mediated by physical condition. How much conservation is required for a particular item to go on display? Is there the time or funds to effect the necessary work? The most illustrative item might have to be substituted for one of lesser merit, but of better physical condition. Specifically for *Faces of 1812,* certain documents from the era were already spoken for, having been loaned previously to other institutions wishing to use them during the bicentennial. Other items were too fragile to be displayed for any extended period of time. Only items that could be conserved in time and within the budget were factored into the final selection. Even the amount of wall space and available display cabinets, decisions that were not settled until several months into the project, affected the design of the exhibition and its content selection. In the end, a wide variety of historically-significant items was selected to augment the portraiture of the era. These items included such things as a printed pamphlet of a sermon given in memory of Sir Isaac Brock, delivered in the newly-named village of Brockville, that demonstrated the widely-held grief experienced across the Canadas.[78] A map initially penned by Brock was also included, that illustrates the central theatre of conflict, while a globe from 1818 was placed on display to demonstrate how British North Americans may have envisaged their world after the War: a colonial existence of nominal peace, yet with several political boundaries the subject of continuing debate.[79] These are all very real concerns that require mitigation. They lead to choices that can result in fundamental changes in the nature of the exhibition and its interpretive story; changes that have no bearing on alleged political interference or public pressure. It could be argued that because of the mediation of both external influences and internal interests, public history is an inherently conservative act. Once the discussion of history leaves the academy towards a more public audience, a greater need for narrative and a distilling of historical messages are required.

Clearly, creating an interpretive exhibition for the public is a challenging and multifaceted task. Of course, *the public* is not a homogenous group and finding ways to engage an audience of various interests, backgrounds and attention-spans is a challenge. Freeman Tilden, a pioneer in public interpretation, argued in his first rule of

interpretation that any communication with a visitor that did not fall 'within the personality or experience of the visitor' would be sterile and ineffective.[80] That is to say, visitors seek out what is familiar; they crave a point of reference from which they can make a personal connection. The importance of the 'familiar' has been underscored by Gene Allen who was the Director of Research for the Canadian Broadcast Corporation [CBC]'s epic historical series *Canada: A People's History*. Allen writes that the production received over 2,400 e-mails, many of which dealt with the familiarity of the subject matter.[81] For episode five of the series that dealt with the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the production featured the traditional interpretive tableau of heroes save one, Laura Secord.[82] In response, Allen received several bewildered and angry emails asking why such an important figure was left out of the episode. He does not offer specific reasons why the CBC departed from the interpretive tableau surrounding the War, but rather observes that it is was an example of 'testing new material against what is already familiar.'[83] On the other hand, journalist Mark Starowicz, executive producer of the series, felt that the omission can be considered as a part of the documentary film process. As Starowicz observes, the director wanted to include some lesser known stories from the War and had a clear story arc that included the Battle of Lundy's Lane. There was not enough time, he argued, to add Secord, properly tell her story and then relate the story that the director also wanted. 'To pick up a character like Laura Secord for two or three minutes,' Starowicz observed, 'would be bad documentary structure.'[84] He concluded that the episode already had, 'a dramatic structure. It followed dramatic arcs. We didn't want to have a gridlock of stories….' Allen, philosophical over the controversy, saw it as an example of how the public receives history. The authors of the e-mails questioning the omission of Secord clearly knew her story, and were watching the series not only to find out new information, but to see the history they already knew validated. Citing the work of film historians Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, Allen observes that individuals develop an 'intensely personal' relationship with public constructions of the past and part of the process of authenticating a new history experience is the ability of the public to connect with what they already know, or believe they know, of the era.[85] Thus, offering audiences familiar elements is not just a courtesy, but an essential part in the creation of public history. Whether a television documentary, historic plaque, or museum exhibition, engaging the public is essential.

The interpretive tableau focusing on the four heroes of the War has simplified and overshadowed important historical aspects of the

War of 1812. Yet, it also provides a ready-made public entry to the conflict. For those who have previously learned about the War, the tableau feeds the sense of a familiar narrative, offering critical points of public remembrance. Indeed, the federal government's focus on the four heroes of the War made the challenge to engage the public with the familiar an easier task. In the case of *Faces of 1812,* the use of Sir Isaac Brock's portrait or images of Laura Second was, indeed expected, both by the government, and by the visitors. The challenge that then emerged was how to present these images in their proper historical context. For example, no known portrait of Laura Secord exists, only a much-copied daguerreotype taken in her last days.[86] The paintings of a young woman that many associate with her today were created years after her death. James Dennis' composite painting (and later print) of the Battle of Queenston Heights[87] and William Emmons's 'Battle of the Thames'[88] that depicts the death of Tecumseh were all mass reproduced as souvenirs decades after the War. Around a century after the War commercial artists such as C.W. Jefferys (1869–1951) and Lorne K. Smith (1880–1966) created a large oeuvre of commemorative paintings and sketches, many of which were subsequently used in textbooks. Much like period-inspired films today, these images of the War tapped into the public's historical imagination, their romance of the past. The fact that the collections of the LAC contain more depictions later inspired by the War than by its contemporaries is illuminating. Indeed, there is no greater testament to the longevity and power of the interpretive tableau than the fact that the most iconic images of the War of 1812 were not created until long after the conflict. In the case of *Faces of 1812,* the interpretive tableau was used not merely as a government-sponsored historical pneumonic for the public, but as a means to open up the larger issues surrounding the public memory of the War.

Freeman Tilden observed not only that a connection is required with the public, but that any exhibition or interpretation should be seen as 'provocation' rather than as instruction.[89] To make an experience memorable, it should provoke further inquiry or action. However, a fine line has to be walked. The level of provocation is relative to the nature of the exhibition patron, the space where the exhibition is seen and the audience that is seeing it. Failing to connect with the public, in particular, can have undesirable results. One renowned example of this in Canada is the controversy that surrounded the Royal Ontario Museum's exhibition *Into the Heart of Africa*[90] Designed as a scholarly, post-colonial critique, the irony was lost on many members of the public who interpreted literally the often disturbing artefacts and images

as racist and insulting.[91] Another, more recent, example is the public campaign that was taken to change the Canadian War Museum's interpretation of Bomber Command in the Second World War. In the fall of 2006, agitation began over a text panel that was seen to criticize the actions of Canadian veterans. In 2007, in light of a vociferous public lobbying campaign and the deliberation of a Senate sub-committee the Canadian War Museum changed the interpretive text.[92] Thus, curators have to strike a careful balance that, while engaging the public with new and enlightening material, is respectful of the audience and mindful of the boundaries of public space. Provocation must be a measured activity that carefully weights several factors including the limitation of the viewing space and the nature and prejudices of the intended audience.

For *Faces of 1812,* items that were selected to be provocative included portraits of Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Battersby,[93] Bishop Alexander Macdonnell,[94] the fur-trader brothers William and Simon McGillivray,[95] and the reform politician Louis-Joseph Papineau as an old statesman.[96] As being provocative in public history is a relative term, visitors were not confronted with images and ideas that were shocking, but with historical realities that may have been unfamiliar or that did not coincide with their historical memory or imagination. In the portrait of Battersby, for example, the commander of the Glengarry Light Infantry is depicted as wearing a green military uniform. This visual cue gave the opportunity to question the public's conception of the British redcoat and inform them that the early nineteenth-century British Army had coats of many different colours to distinguish the infantry (red), from the artillery (blue), and the light infantry and rifles companies (green).[97] Similarly, the inclusion of the portrait of Bishop Macdonnell who was instrumental in creating the Glengarry Light Infantry highlights a relationship between the military and religious leaders that some members of the public may not have realized existed: men of the cloth could also be military men. William McGillivray, portrayed in a gentleman's dress, was the commander of the little-known Corps of Voyageurs, a company of fur traders that helped for a brief time to secure the western frontier.[98] The inclusion of his portrait provided an opportunity to talk about the Western frontier in a War that the public traditionally associates with the Saint Lawrence River and Great Lakes. The portrait of his brother Simon McGillivray in full Masonic regalia represents those who could not serve militarily. Crippled, Simon stayed in Montreal and looked after the accounts of the North West Company during the War. In this role, he experienced first-hand the toll the conflict had on the civilian population and played a prominent roll

in the financial and social reconstruction of the colonies after the War.[99] Although few visitors would have been familiar with such individuals before the exhibition, more iconic figures also acted as provocateurs. Louis-Joseph Papineau's portrait, for example, appears here in a less familiar context. Public school students are taught to associate the name of Papineau with the 92 Resolutions and the Lower Canada rebellion, not as an officer with the Judge Advocate General during the War of 1812. It was hoped that the dissonance created by his inclusion, under the title 'Captain Louis-Joseph Papineau,' would lead visitors to reflect and learn more about both aspects of the politician's life. It should be mentioned that Charles de Salaberry was the only individual from the government's tableau of heroes with several contemporary portraits existing in the holdings of LAC. In another *provocative* twist, his relatively well-known face was purposefully left out of the exhibition to make space for lesser-known French Canadians such as Captain Louis-Christophe-Hilarion Fromenteau.[100]

The government's official bicentennial message underscores the War's role in the creation of modern Canada. While some of the individuals featured in *Faces of 1812,* such as Papineau, did see the reconstruction of the colonies and were active participants in this rebuilding, this official message was not the focus of the exhibition. However, the patriotic government messages, as with the interpretive tableau, are valuable as they can offer a known public foil for a greater story. Alongside the items that depict those who met with success after the War can also be found the images and artifacts of those who met with failure, or who faded into obscurity. A gold field medal awarded to Felix Troughton at the Battle of Detroit, for example, was displayed in this regard.[101] Troughton successfully commanded British field guns in the battle and survived the War, only to die unceremoniously on a transport ship back to Britain in 1815. Captain Francis Spilsbury and his wife Frances, whose portraits appear in the exhibition, also fall into this category. After the War, Spilsbury would become involved in an elaborate land settlement scheme in Upper Canada that would ultimately fail, leaving him near bankruptcy. Upon his death, the widowed Mrs. Spilsbury was forced to become a school mistress to make ends meet.[102] The inclusion of these items and their stories offered balance and avoided a solely laudatory interpretation of the War. The events of 1812–1815 did profoundly change the lives of those who experienced them, but their struggles did not end with the Treaty of Ghent and the success of a future Canada was clearly not assured in 1815.

Conclusion

The current tribute to the War of 1812 in Canada can be seen as another battle of what has been a continuing war against public forgetfulness. Commemorative salvos designed to perpetuate the memory of the conflict have focused on certain heroes and narratives resulting in the damaging collateral loss of other, equally significant, stories. As we have seen, historical messages for the public tend to be conservative, long-lasting and resist changes in interpretation. Early authors and poets who wrote of the War of 1812 engaged in a fight against forgetfulness. They particularly targeted young Canadians who, it was feared, did not know their history and were thus at risk of losing their identity. The federal government initially left the promotion of a shared past and a sense of collective belonging to private individuals and groups. Over the course of the twentieth century, however, it increasingly became involved in perpetuating the memory of the War and, in so doing, has reiterated core public touchstones of the War. This continuing return to a pantheon of heroes and patriotic messages casts some doubt upon the hope, articulated by John Stewart Carstairs a century ago, that future generations would shine a 'different light' upon the conflict.

The current federal celebration of the bicentenary of the War represents unprecedented government involvement in both budget and outreach. Indeed, the effort has struck a strong, though perhaps unintended, chord with the public fostering a great debate in newspapers, magazines, radio talk shows and the internet over the inherent politics of public commemoration. However, the myriad newspaper editorials, commemorative web sites, historical exhibitions, as with the impact of the three-year federal financial largesse, will have a limited public shelf life and be forgotten. The interpretive tableau will be retired, perhaps to be dusted off again in the future. Yet, more worrisome than the nation once again forgetting about the War of 1812 is the risk of it forgetting how to access and understand its past. In an era where short-term celebrations are favoured over sustained cultural funding, commemorative moments need to be used, not only to mark specific events, but to communicate the importance of history writ large. On a modest scale, the *Faces of 1812* exhibition reveals how commemorative opportunities can allow historians to both build upon and break away from the interpretive tableau that has long framed the War of 1812. *Faces of 1812* offered the public both a familiar and a new way to look at the past and how we remember it. Even a limited tableau of heroes and patriotic messages can serve as a bridge, a means of bringing the

greater importance of historical study to a larger audience. At this juncture of slashed budgets and reduced heritage services, historians need to continue to take the reductionist and political aspects of public commemoration and turn them on their head. By doing so the public can be encouraged to investigate the past for themselves. Thus, members of the public will not only view history in a 'different light,' they can be encouraged to view it in their own light, drawing their own conclusions and gaining a fuller understanding of past issues. When the fog surrounding the bicentennial of the War of 1812 dissipates the best outcome one could hope for is a victory for critical thinking of the present and the creation of a new generation of advocates for the past.

Notes

1 Tom Irwin in the film *The History Boys* (2006).
2 This collective forgetfulness is not just symptomatic of the Canadian situation. See Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Reflecting on his observations a decade later, Hickey believed that interest had increased but 'there are still plenty of opportunities for those interested in pursuing research into the 'forgotten conflict'.' See Donald Hickey, 'The War of 1812: Still a Forgotten Conflict,' *Journal of Military History* 65,3 (2001): 769.
3 John Stewart Carstairs, 'Introduction: Brock and Queenston,' in *Brock Centenary: 1812–1912, Account of the Celebration at Queenston Heights, Ontario on the 12th October, 1912,* ed. Alexander Fraser (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913), 9.
4 Barbara Yaffee, 'Spending on 1812 Anniversary Odd in an Era of Cuts,' *Vancouver Sun,* 5 December 2012, http://www.vancouversun.com/life/Spending+1812+anniversary+cuts/7653138/story.html.
5 David Lowenthal in *The Art of Forgetting,* ed. Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler (Oxford: Berg, 1999), xii.
6 Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2012), 7.
7 Jane Taber, 'Harper Spins a New Brand of Patriotism,' *The Globe and Mail,* 19 August 2011, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-notebook/harper-spins-a-new-brand-of-patriotism/article618385
8 Benson J. Lossing, *The Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1869), 1069.
9 Born in Scotland, Thompson was a veteran of the War of 1812 and later became a school teacher in Upper Canada. See R.D. Gidney, 'David Thompson,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography,* www.biographi.ca.
10 David Thompson, *History of the Late War Between Great Britain and the United States of America: With a Retrospective View of the Causes From Whence It Originated* (Niagara, U.C.: T. Sewell, 1832), v.
11 Ibid., vi.
12 At 15 Richardson enlisted and as a member of the 41st Regiment of foot served with forces led by Tecumseh. See the article on Richardson in this volume by Cecilia Morgan.
13 John Richardson, *War of 1812, First Series, Containing a Full and Detailed Narrative of the Operations of the Right Division, of the Canadian Army* (Brockville[?]: New Era Press[?], 1842), 1.
14 William F. Coffin, *1812: The War and Its Moral, A Canadian Chronicle* (Montreal: John Lowell, 1864), 18, 19.
15 Ibid., 147–54
16 Desmond Morton, 'William Foster Coffin,' *Dictionary of Canadian Biography,* www.biographi.ca.

17 Charles Mair, *Tecumseh: A Drama* (Toronto: Hunter, Rose and Company, 1886).
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