

The First World War and the Homefront in Canada Broadening the Analysis

Bradley Shoebottom

Volume 50, numéro 1, printemps 2021

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085756ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (imprimé)

1712-7432 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cette note

Shoebottom, B. (2021). The First World War and the Homefront in Canada: Broadening the Analysis. *Acadiensis*, 50(1), 149–162.

The First World War and the Homefront in Canada: Broadening the Analysis

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, WHILE I WAS A GRADUATE STUDENT of Canadian military history, a faculty member mentioned that historians faced difficulties selecting which histories to write given a vast potential list of topics and gave the example of the hypothetical local and rural “History of the Post Office in Gagetown, NB.” At the time, I could not have agreed more – being more interested in national-level questions – and I was unable to fathom that there would be enough interest in the operations of a village post office. However, after completing a thesis about a local New Brunswick entrepreneur and after the passage of 25 years, I have come to appreciate that a post office was one of the key hubs of small villages and rural Canada, lower in importance than only the church and the general store. Local community or institutional history, despite its amateur roots, was and still is incredibly popular history. And local history, in a time of war, offers a bottom-up approach to military history that offers a different home front perspective than the typical top-down national narratives about war.

Local history – the study of social and cultural history in the local community – became more acceptable as an academic subject in the United Kingdom in the 1950s, when W.G. Hoskins made the case that the local perspective uncovers themes not always visible in a national narrative.¹ John Beckett explained more recently that national and local history are both valid and can co-exist so long as both use rigorous analysis of sources.² In Australia, Ian Willis argues that local history is a radical history as “local histories often look away from the histories of the elite to the experiences of the ordinary, the mundane, the intimate and the banal.”³ In the United States, Carol Kammen agreed with the broader history idea: “Local history is, despite its limited geographical focus, a broad field of inquiry: it is political, social, and economic

1 W.G. Hoskins, *Local History in England* (London: Longman, 1959), 3.

2 John Beckett. *Writing Local History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 3.

3 Ian Willis, “Local History: A View from the Bottom,” *History Workshop: The Practice of History*, 5 December 2016, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/local-history-a-view-from-the-bottom/>.

history of the community and it's religious and intellectual history too. . . . Local history is the study of who remained in a community and who left – and why.”⁴ In Canada, Robert Rutherford's *Hometown Horizon* (2002) noted that the local history approach provides a first-hand experience on various Great War themes such as social conflict about enemy aliens, volunteering, the role of women, conscription, and returning soldiers based on analysis of gender, ethnicity, class, and age.⁵ Local history therefore offers an alternative approach to the study of history and, in this case, the impact of the First World War on Canada.

Canadian military historians writing about the First World War spent much of the first 75 postwar years in a top-down, metanarrative approach debating three major questions: national unity, especially the impact of conscription on English and French relations and on urban and rural areas; the impact on national identity of the battlefield achievements of the Canadian Corps in France, especially the symbolism of the battle for Vimy Ridge in 1917 on the road to Canada's nationhood; and the impact of the war on the industrialization of Canada.⁶ These themes help to explore why the war was necessary or to bring more meaning to the war. A more recent trend places less emphasis on overseas events and a military history methodology and more emphasis on a social history methodology to discuss the home front, historical memory, and gender and race issues.⁷ This is a new military history or, as some call it “war and society” history as pioneered by John Herd Thompson's

4 Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 4-5.

5 Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada's Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), xiv.

6 See for example, Tim Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2017); Geoffrey Hayes, Michael Bechthold, and Andrew Iarocci, eds., *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007); Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989); Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 5th ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007); Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

7 Recent examples include Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, eds., *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012); Amy J. Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); Gordon L. Heath, ed., *Canadian Churches and the First World War* (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth, 2014); Nic Clarke, *Unwanted Warriors: Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); and Mark George McGowan, *The Imperial Irish: Canada's Irish Catholics Fight the Great War, 1914-18* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017).

The Harvests of War.⁸ As such, previously unheard voices have come to light. Typically, most locality-focused articles and books cover only a single subject like recruiting, conscription, women's war work, race, industrialization, labour relations, or a disaster like the influenza in Winnipeg or the Halifax Explosion. Most of these local studies almost exclusively focus on a large urban centre (as in Montreal, Toronto, or Regina), or provinces (such as Quebec, Nova Scotia, or Ontario), or a region (for example, the Prairies) – and not the rural areas, villages, or small towns. When historians do refer to rural Canada, the agricultural or forestry areas are often lumped into an amorphous grouping with little differentiation between southern and northern Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, or the interior of British Columbia. Most local accounts written for non-academic publishers often focus on local units going to war or on the commemoration of those that died from an area without exploring life in general during the entire war. There are few book-length discussions of how the Great War impacted villages, small towns, townships, or counties, with the New Brunswick Military History Project being a rare exception with its focus on local New Brunswick communities.⁹ The new “local military history” explores these themes using the methodology of social history. A largely unanswered question, though, remains: are conclusions about the national home front the same for a small town, township, or rural county?

This essay examines two recent local histories and a collection of essays about the First World War focusing on a single province that offer insights on questions of Canadian rural and local enthusiasm for the war, recruiting, conscription, the role of women, and continuity and change in daily life and local concerns. Each of these books highlights differences between the wartime experience in more rural areas compared to urban areas and the national experience. The books under review here are Gerald Hallowell's *As British as the King*, which explores Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia,¹⁰ Jonathan Vance's *A Township at War*, which examines East Flamborough Township,

8 John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978).

9 Queens County, New Brunswick, is one of the exceptions; see Curtis Mainville, *Till the Boys Come Home: Life on the Home Front, Queens County, NB, 1914-1918*, New Brunswick Military Heritage Series, vol. 22 (Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions and the Gregg Centre, 2015).

10 Gerald Hallowell, *As British as the King: Lunenburg County During the First World War* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing Limited, 2019).

in Wentworth County, Ontario,¹¹ and Adriana A. Davies and Jeff Keshen's edited volume *The Frontier of Patriotism*, which examines how the province of Alberta responded to the war.¹² The timing of these publications coincided with the First World War centenary, which attracted interest from academics, community heritage organizations, and publishers. The books under review, in particular those by Hallowell and Vance, differ from the typical community-based essay and book-length histories of the Great War, not only in that they have a longitudinal approach covering all the war years but also a wide breadth of themes. While the Keshen and Davies' tour de force does include urban case studies, it also offers rural Alberta viewpoints; this makes it valuable as an aggregate collection of many localities, both urban and rural, as it offers its own comparative framework.

In *As British as the King: Lunenburg County During the First World War*, Hallowell explores how Lunenburg residents' experiences of the First World War echoed the enthusiasm for the war effort found elsewhere in Canada. Hallowell is the editor of the *Oxford Companion to Canadian History*,¹³ and a 30-year resident of Lunenburg. This is a non-peer reviewed study written in a popular style that makes good use of secondary sources, academic studies, and local newspaper accounts in its contribution to the study of the home front. The only significant weakness in Hallowell's account is that he sometimes jumps back and forth in time, so the reader is at times left wondering about cause and effect. There are other places where it appears that the author lacked local sources, so he was forced to expand to a more national narrative without always tying it back into the experience of Lunenburg County.

Hallowell starts off by noting that Lunenburg County, because of the German heritage of its original settlers dating back to the 1750s and a few recent Central European immigrants who still held old country citizenship, faced stigmatization from the anglophone majority of Nova Scotia. Much like the accounts by W.R. Chadwick of the Germans of Berlin, Ontario, and Bohdan S. Kordan of the Ukrainians of the Prairies, Hallowell suggests "there was a suspicion, especially among the press, that some were not as loyal as they

11 Jonathan F. Vance, *A Township at War* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018).

12 Adriana A. Davies and Jeff Keshen, eds., *The Frontier of Patriotism: Alberta and the First World War* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016).

13 Gerald Hallowell, *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2004).

ought to be and that others were not doing their bit as they should” (8).¹⁴ Many Nova Scotians lumped these longtime residents and citizens together with recent immigrants. Newspapers reported on local pro-German talk and anti-British sentiment, suspicions about the fishing fleet, and the loyalty of local teachers (9). The *Halifax Herald* also noted in the fall of 1915 that recruiting on the South Shore was not as successful as the rest of Nova Scotia, attributing it to a preference of fishing over fighting due a lack of patriotism-based formal school education (33-4).

With regards to conscription, Lunenburg County went against mainstream pro-conscriptionist Nova Scotia and English-speaking Canada in the federal election of 1917 and voted against conscription by electing a Liberal candidate. As Patrice Dutil and David MacKenzie point out in *Embattled Nation*, Nova Scotian Liberals stayed true to their leader by voting against conscription, although they only captured 4 of 16 seats, and were only behind the Unionists by 1,800 votes province wide.¹⁵ Hallowell compares how the local newspapers and fishermen’s union supported conscription, while the many smaller communities in the county voted overwhelmingly Liberal and against conscription (97-109). Halifax newspapers attributed the voting pattern to the German background of many Lunenburg residents, thereby questioning their loyalty (109-11). This aversion to conscription included federal politicians, with the *Halifax Herald* and the *Bridgewater Progress-Union* newspapers accusing the Lunenburg MP of encouraging men not to respond to their call up (123-7). Hallowell describes a near riot on the Lunenburg wharf in June 1918, when the military police attempted to arrest military-age fishermen coming in with the fishing fleet (127-30). Hallowell concludes that “the men on the schooners were discovering, perhaps to their surprise and no doubt chagrin, that they were considered less valuable as fishermen, contributing to the food supply, and more useful as soldiers at the front. At the same time, their vessels were being threatened offshore by German submarines” (127). The fishermen of

14 See W.R. Chadwick, *The Battle for Berlin, Ontario: An Historical Drama* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992) or Bohdan S. Kordan, *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada during the Great War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002). For a general debate of English Canada versus other linguistic groups, see Brock Millman, *Polarity, Patriotism, and Dissent in Great War Canada, 1914-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016).

15 Antigonish-Guysborough and two Cape Breton ridings went Liberal (109). These ridings had a similar small town/rural composition to that of Lunenburg County; see Patrice Dutil and David MacKenzie, *Embattled Nation: Canada’s Wartime Election of 1917* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2017), 194.

Lunenburg faced the same stigmatization for being unpatriotic by continuing in their normal occupations as did the Roman Catholic seminary students at St. Stanislaus Novitate in Guelph, Ontario, for continuing their studies (as described in Edward Butts in *Wartime: The First World War in a Canadian Town*).¹⁶

Hallowell argues that Lunenburg's County home front contributions reflected national trends, but in terms of some women's issues he challenges the older historiography that middle-class women from the larger urban areas were the prime advocates of change in this period. Lunenburg women were also strong social reformers: "As it happens, two of the most powerful women in the provincial organization [for temperance] at the time were from Lunenburg. Ada Louise Powers . . . was a longtime president of the Nova Scotia Woman's Christian Temperance Union. . . . [And] Mary Chesley argued persuasively on behalf of women's suffrage over the years, and she was also a formidable advocate for peace" (44). Hallowell points out that Lunenburg women also pressed for voting rights and that the suffrage movement was not exclusive to women in the larger urban areas as historians had often concluded (73).

Hallowell illustrates an additional difference in that Lunenburg County faced actual military threats that the interior of Canada did not (131). He explains that the people of Lunenburg initially feared attack by German warships, but little was done to defend the town of Lunenburg early in the war. Many thought that the Germans would attack from the neutral United States much like the Fenians during the 1860s. This fear was similar to how Ontario feared US-based attacks by ethnic Germans against the Welland Canal or the early war threat of the German Pacific squadron against British Columbia. In fact, Lunenburg's concerns came true much later in the war, when German U-boats attacked the Lunenburg fishing fleet on the Grand Banks. In response, the Royal Canadian Navy militarized Lunenburg schooners, arming them with concealed guns for protection (131-51). These real threats meant that the South Shore of Nova Scotia was the first in Canada to experience community lighting blackouts. Few other counties in Canada faced similar real and direct threats.

Jonathan F. Vance, in *A Township at War*, argues that while the war forever affected those involved as well as their families, daily life, for the most part, continued as usual. Local institutions and structures continued as before, albeit with a war effort theme for their activities. He also argues that rural

16 Edward Butts, *Wartime: The First World War in a Canadian Town* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2017), 117-34.

enthusiasm for the war matched that of the urban areas. Vance is a prominent military historian from Western University who used a significant number of primary sources, including those from his own collection. He adds a very personal narrative as he weaves in the story of his birthplace and his family ancestry. Vance explained his subject location by saying “I chose to write about East Flamborough in the First World War partly because it means so much to me, but mostly because its experience was replicated countless times across rural Canada. Throughout English Canada were similar townships; the names were different, and the geography certainly varied, but there were fundamental commonalities in how the people interacted with other, the country, and the world. East Flamborough, and indeed almost any rural township, was, like Kentish Town, at once unique and archetypal” (5).¹⁷ Vance reminds us that even as Canada urbanized, most urban centres were small towns in rural areas and not large cities. Further, he reminds us that even though half of Canada lived in urban centers by 1921, half did not and that this makes a study of rural towns, villages, and townships worthwhile. Vance is cautious about making larger national generalizations, and cautions that his findings are only pertinent to English Canada and not reflective of rural Quebec.

Available historical evidence influenced Vance’s conclusions on how the East Flamborough case is both different from and similar to the Canadian national experience. Vance writes: “I have been guided first and foremost by the archival documents, rather than the history of the period as I know it and teach it. . . . I would like certainly to think that my ancestors in East Flamborough were wise enough and worldly enough to ponder things like the franchise, minority language rights, or social democracy, but I can find no evidence they did. The state of privies in Waterdown, the likelihood the Progreston Dam would survive another winter, the price of a train ticket to Hamilton – these were matters of real concern to locals” (x). Thus, Vance’s account of East Flamborough is much different than case studies of Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, or Regina, where issues like labour and unionism, working women, minority rights, voting rights, and conscription play a much larger role in the discussion.¹⁸ His account also excludes discussion of the vote for

17 When Vance refers to a Kentish town, he is referring to a British local history study that has become an archetype for local history; see, for example, Gillian Tindall, *The Fields Beneath: The History of One London Village* (London: Phoenix Press Publishing, 2002).

18 See Terry Copp, with Alexander Maavara, *Montreal at War, 1914–1918*, chap. IV (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, forthcoming); Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 106–34;

women, the relationship with Francophones, or labour relations because there is no evidence that these were a concern for East Flamborough residents.

While the war effort provided new impetus for volunteer organizations – such as the efforts made through the Canadian Patriotic Fund to support the wives of overseas soldiers, as described by Desmond Morton in *Fight or Pay* – Vance argues the cycle of annual events for these organizations was the same as during the prewar period, with its local celebrations, holidays, harvests, fairs, concerts, meetings, and baseball.¹⁹ Not only did this cycle continue into the postwar era, but at these events the same prewar women’s organizations such as the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire and the Women’s Institutes raised funds for the Patriotic Fund, Belgian relief funds, and the Red Cross (61-2). Meanwhile, the township council remained focused on the decrepit local school (95), and whether the town should buy a fire engine after a major business burned in May 1915 (87). In comparison to Lunenburg, East Flamborough was more enthusiastic and perhaps even patriotic. The community and the surrounding areas first contributed men to over a dozen battalions in 1914 and early 1915, before forming its own 129th (Wentworth) Battalion (97). Vance notes that later in the war the successful recruiters were those from the local area, where “personal relationships mattered more than anything, especially in rural communities where everyone knew everyone else” (107). Vance also recounts that as the war progressed and the pool of potential recruits dried up a greater effort was required to recruit in sparsely populated rural areas (109-10).

As the war entered its fourth year, it finally began to affect everyone’s daily life. Vance notes that, similar to what happened in the cities, the widespread impact of the 1918 coal and wood shortage in East Flamborough forced many schools to close that winter, caused heatless days in homes, forced the rescheduling of evening council meetings, and curtailed electricity use (179-80). Vance opined that “Viewed from a seat on the Waterdown-to-Hamilton train or from a pew in the Carlisle Methodist Church, 1918 wasn’t the last year of the war. It was just one more year of war” (180). One would think that by 1918 war weariness would have set in, but Vance argues that “in the placid rural mind, things were very much as they had always been” (182). He notes that

James M. Pitsula, *For All We Have and Are: Regina and the Experience of the Great War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 195-211; and Jim Blanchard, *Winnipeg’s Great War: A City Comes of Age* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010), 111-12, 212-13, 249-56.

19 Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers’ Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

send-offs for departing soldiers still showed enthusiasm with barely a nod to the slaughters that had happened at the battle of the Somme or Passchendaele. So, like the argument of Douglas McCalla in his essay “The Economic Impact of the Great War,” the war may have had less of an impact than previously advocated by Canadian national historians, who argued that the First World War was the birth of the Canadian nation.²⁰

Conscription also came to East Flamborough in 1918, and, once again, the township’s experience was at odds with the national perception that the Canadian public had negative attitudes towards conscripts as being less patriotic and poorly motivated in terms of the war effort (as recently detailed in Patrick M. Dennis’s *Reluctant Warriors*).²¹ Surviving letters from East Flamborough conscripts give no indication of different treatment towards conscripts compared to volunteers while in training (185). Vance also states there is no evidence that conscripted soldiers suffered the scorn of their neighbours. Even those applying for exemptions did not have that held against them. He concludes that in rural Canada “people there accepted, with a kind of resigned equanimity, that the war was a common affliction, a progenitor of many catastrophes, large and small” (189). Vance also goes further, pointing out that in cities people railed against shirkers because they largely did not know who they were. In the rural areas, he explains, everyone knew who was of military age and in good health, and what their family and business situation was. Familial and social ties were not upset because a person chose to apply for exemption. Vance concludes that “the community was too tightly knit for that” (190). He also notes East Flamborough, like the majority of English-speaking communities in 1917, voted for conscription based on the promise that farmers would have the exemption. The experience of East Flamborough suggests English-speaking rural Ontarians shared the same enthusiasm as English-speakers in urban centres during the war, as described in Dutil and MacKenzie’s *Embattled Nation*, but at the same time Vance adds nuances to the previous understanding of national conscription and how life in rural Canada largely continued as before. My only criticism is that Vance does not speak much of industry, in part because the only going concerns in the township were

20 Douglas McCalla, “The Economic Impact of the Great War,” in *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David MacKenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 138–53.

21 For a discussion of this myth, see Patrick M. Dennis, *Reluctant Warriors: Canadian Conscripts and the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017), 7.

a quarry, brickworks, and a sawmill. It would appear no documents survived to explain labour relations at those places.

In contrast to the single community approach offered by Hallowell and Vance, *The Frontier of Patriotism: Alberta and the First World War*, edited by Adriana A. Davies and Jeff Keshen, contains 40 essays organized into themes that demonstrate the complexity of the war's impact on the province and its communities. Davies is an Alberta-based heritage consultant and Keshen is the president of the University of Regina. Like the Lunenburg and East Flamborough accounts, these essays echo some similarities, such as enthusiasm for the war effort and continuity and change in daily life. Their findings, though, differ from previous national narratives and reinforce John Thompson's conclusions that Alberta was unhappy with Canada's national economic policies and that the war caused divisions especially between western farmers and ethnic minorities and central Canadian anglophones in urban and rural areas.²² The authors are a variety of academics, public historians, private researchers, and graduate students with interests in military, social, labour, industry, religion, ethnicities and immigration, and local history working on the home front as well as on Alberta's soldiers overseas in the Great War. These essays elaborate on the different experiences of Albertans on their home front as compared to the traditional understanding of the national home front. These essays, like many collected works, can sometimes be of uneven writing style and voice, documentation, and length, but all provide different perspectives on how different communities, classes, religions, ethnic groups, and individuals responded to the wartime challenges. An obvious gap is the neglect of the subject of agriculture; there is only one essay that examines this sector, with several paragraphs discussing wheat. There is also nothing on ranching for cattle production or the provision of horses (remounts) for the war effort. By comparison, there was four essays on the universities and colleges of Alberta, seven on larger urban centres, and three related to industry.

While the collection contains many accounts of urban settings, it also examines small towns and more localized communities and specific social and ethnic groups. Here the differences between the views of urban areas and more rural and local communities become clearer. The book, for instance, lends voice to the province's minority groups. L. James Dempsey's "Aboriginal Alberta and the First World War" notes that on the subject of registration and

²² Thompson, *Harvests of War*.

conscription “many Indians protested, saying they should be exempt on the basis that they were not citizens but, rather, wards of the state without the right to vote” (60). Despite this legal argument made by First Nations leaders, Davies and Keshen estimate the status First Nations participation rate in military service at 35 per cent, showing that individuals were not always of the same mindset as their leaders (xv). When it came time for conscription, the First Nations chiefs and councils in Alberta opposed it. On the immigrant front, the editors note that 47 per cent of Alberta’s population belonged to non-English ethnic groups of which the Germans were second in number to the British, followed by Scandinavians, French and Belgians, Ukrainians, and Russians. In another example, Kassandra Luciuk documents the confinement of 8,579 Ukrainian men, women, and children holding Austrian-Hungarian passports in a population of 170,000 immigrants in 24 camps across Canada, even though the Ukrainians also came from Russia (an ally) (459-74). However, in an omission, the anthology does not include an essay on the treatment of the larger German diaspora in Alberta. Amy J. Shaw does provide, though, a summary of her book *Crisis of Conscience* in which she discusses conscientious objectors – especially the Mennonites and Doukhobors, Plymouth Brethren (Quakers), Jehovah’s Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventist, and Christadelphians.²³ She concludes that “conscientious objectors in Alberta faced animosity from many of their compatriots” (481), reinforcing John Herd Thompson’s observation in the *Harvests of War* and Brock Millman’s observation in *Polarity, Patriotism, and Dissent in Great War Canada, 1914-1919* that “new Canadians” were viewed as unpatriotic by refusing to volunteer like other Canadians.²⁴ Juliette Champagne’s essay “The Effects of the First World War on the Franco-European Immigrants of Alberta” concludes smaller ethnic groups like the Franco-Belgians were more susceptible to the impact of the war on the family and their ethnic group and supportive of the war because most Franco-Belgian men in the province were of military age and were reservists. When they returned to Europe in 1914 to fight for their mother country, with many never to return, their communities were much less vibrant and without many family breadwinners.

Historians like John Herd Thompson, Jacob Remes, Sean Cadigan, and Esyllt Jones have argued that the Great War disrupted normal patterns

²³ Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience*.

²⁴ See Thompson, *Harvests of War*, and Millman, *Polarity, Patriotism, and Dissent in Great War Canada*.

of life and planted the seeds for a social regeneration in the 1920s based on progressive ideas for Canadian society.²⁵ In a similar vein, Hallowell notes how many Lunenburg County residents disliked the intemperance of the returning soldiers yet almost every house seemed to have alcohol hidden away to celebrate the end of the war (190). In fact Lunenburg is an excellent example of the contrast between the supporters of prohibition and the imbibers since its vessels played a pivotal role in the smuggling of rum during the 1920s, as E.R. Forbes and A.A. MacKenzie recount in the introduction to Clifford Rose's autobiography *Four Years With the Demon Rum 1925-1929*.²⁶ At the war's end, Lunenburg's volunteer organizations seemed to be at a loss as to what to do since the federal government was responsible for veteran rehabilitation and the Red Cross had shut down (199). Women in Nova Scotia had the vote, but this seemed to have little impact on politics during the interwar period. Economically, the province entered a postwar depression with low prices for fish, food, and timber that continued until 1939 (201). And, like the rest of Canada, communities in Lunenburg County built war memorials in almost every village that honoured the sacrifices made (206). However, the war finally broke the remaining vestiges of the German language with almost no one speaking it during the 1920s (215). Similarly, Vance describes how many soldiers, who also faced poor job prospects, found it difficult to return to normalcy or to even define it after years of military life (247). Like many other communities as described by Vance in *Death So Noble*, Waterdown found it difficult to memorialize the sacrifice of its locals in the war, finally settling on a memorial building that would solve several local problems at minimal cost to ratepayers by combining the town hall, library, hall, and a few stores (252).²⁷ In the Alberta anthology, two articles note the progressive ideas for reintegrating returning soldiers lacking money or job skills back into their communities. Donald G. Wetherell, in "Applying Modernity: Local Government and the 1919 Federal Housing Scheme," shows that despite a new federal housing scheme

25 See Thompson, *Harvests of War*; Jacob A.C. Remes, *Disaster Citizenship: Survivors, Solidarity, and Power in the Progressive Era* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015); Sean T. Cadigan, *Death on Two Fronts: National Tragedies and the Fate of Democracy in Newfoundland, 1914-34* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2013); Esyllt W. Jones, *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg*, Studies in Gender and History series, no. 31 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).

26 Nova Scotia was dry until 1929; see Clifford Rose, *Fours Years with the Demon Rum, 1925-1929* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1980).

27 Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 204-5.

no houses for veterans were built because Alberta municipalities refused to contribute financially (514). And Allan Rowe, in “Soldier Settlement in Alberta, 1917-1931,” recounts the perennial solution to demobilized soldiers – farming schemes to provide land, equipment, training, and seed to interested veterans. But low crop prices meant that only 34 per cent of soldier-settlers remained on the Alberta farms by 1931, which did not help Alberta’s goal of rural revitalization (523). With regards to the Spanish flu, Mark Osborne Humphries observes that Alberta quarantined whole towns and villages, the only province to do so, but even this intervention failed to stop the spread (491). He also mentions the shockingly high mortality rate for First Nations, which was more than nine times the provincial average. And Alberta public health officials, much like the municipal government of Winnipeg described in Esyllt Jones’s *Influenza 1918*, learned they needed to address the conditions of the poor to prevent outbreaks (501).²⁸

The three studies reviewed in this essay shed important light on how the experience of the First World War differed across Canada. The response to the conflict varied between urban and rural and even between different parts of the same township or county. It is increasingly difficult to argue that there is any single “national” narrative of the First World War. Another endeavour through which scholars and others have been adding to our knowledge of the range of wartime experiences is the Canadian Great War Project at the University of Victoria. This project provides more demographic knowledge about Canada’s 660,000 First World War soldiers by adding searchable demographic metadata to each soldier’s online First World War Personnel Record at Library and Archives Canada and cross-linking their file to their names in unit war diaries.²⁹ This permits more detailed and precise local demographic studies on such topics as occupations, marital status, nationality of birth, previous military experience, and hometown. Endeavours such as this project, and additional case studies of local communities, should no doubt help affirm the new findings presented in these three books while further deepening and diversifying our knowledge of wartime Canadian history.

BRAD SHOEBOTTOM

28 Jones, *Influenza 1918*.

29 See <https://cgwp.uvic.ca/>.

BRADLEY SHOEBOTTOM est présentement étudiant au doctorat à l'Université du Nouveau-Brunswick. Ses recherches portent sur les ingénieurs logistiques et militaires du Corps canadien durant la Première Guerre mondiale. Ancien officier de l'Armée canadienne, il est présentement responsable de la publication du livret d'information annuel de l'UNB pour le compte de son bureau d'analyse institutionnelle.

BRADLEY SHOEBOTTOM is currently a doctoral student at the University of New Brunswick researching logistics and military engineers in the Canadian Corps during the First World War. He is a former Canadian Army officer and is currently responsible for publishing the annual UNB Fact Book for its Office of Institutional Analysis.