

The Missing and the Missed of Lanark County, Ontario Great War Sacrifice and the Memorialization of Exclusion in “The Volunteer” Monument

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Article abstract

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THE MISSING AND THE MISSED OF LANARK COUNTY, ONTARIO

Great War Sacrifice
and the Memorialization
of Exclusion in “The
Volunteer” Monument

by Kelly Morrison

Three faded photographs tucked into a thin file folder at Archives Lanark are perhaps the only remaining visual records chronicling the dedication ceremony of *The Volunteer*—a modest but impressive monument, dedicated in 1923 to the memory of those local men of Almonte, Ontario, who died in the Great War. Raised on the banks of the Canadian Mississippi River in this Ottawa Valley region, the eight-foot bronze soldier keeps watch over a triangular patch of land facing Bridge Street, near

the centre of town. One of more than two hundred commemorative bronze and stone soldiers erected across Canada in the wake of the Great War,¹ this *Volunteer* sits atop a plinth of Indiana limestone and is surrounded on all sides by the names of Almonte’s war dead. In these original images, he is flanked on his right by the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway and William Thoburn’s Woolen Mills, and on his left by Almonte’s Old Town Hall. There is present in the photographs a large group of people—

¹ “National Inventory of Canadian Military Memorials,” *Government of Canada*, <https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/f62a5118-5f75-4166-9fd9-fff9b3f177>, as quoted in Alan Livingstone MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze and Stone: Canada’s Great War Memorial Statuary* (Vancouver: Heritage House Publishing Company Ltd., 2016), 18.

Abstract

In 1923, The Volunteer monument in Almonte, Ontario was erected and dedicated to the district's soldiers who fell in the Great War. It was designed by renowned sculptor and professor, R. Tait McKenzie, and modelled after the late Lt. Alexander George Rosamond, heir to Almonte's esteemed Rosamond family paper mills. The seemingly simple design of a pensive bronze soldier perched atop a stone plinth, flanked by the names of his fallen comrades, is anything but simplistic in its symbolism. This article details the background, conception and realization of The Volunteer, considering the ways in which it reflects the history of the peoples who settled the region, and the collective Great War experience of Almonte and greater Lanark County. Further, in as much as the monument was specifically raised to honour the lost men of Almonte and the Township of Ramsay, this article questions whether, and in what ways, it succeeds or falters in its purpose.

Résumé: *En 1923, le monument « The Volunteer » (le volontaire) fut érigé à Almonte, en Ontario, et dédié aux soldats du district tombés au combat au cours de la Grande Guerre. Il fut conçu par le sculpteur et professeur connu, R. Tait McKenzie, et inspiré par le regretté lieutenant Alexander George Rosamond, héritier des prestigieuses usines de papeteries de la famille Rosamond d'Almonte. La structure apparemment simple d'un soldat pensif en bronze perché au sommet d'un socle en pierre, flanqué des noms de ses camarades tombés au combat, est tout sauf simpliste dans sa symbolique. Dans cet article, nous allons examiner les origines, la conception et la réalisation de ce monument, tout en tenant compte de l'histoire des peuples qui se sont établis dans la région et de l'expérience collective de la Grande Guerre par les habitants d'Almonte et du comté de Lanark. De plus, dans la mesure où le monument fut spécifiquement érigé pour honorer les hommes perdus d'Almonte et du canton de Ramsey, cet article remet en question le succès du projet.*

“an impressive gathering” reported the *Almonte Gazette*²—but particularly notable is the mass of flowers that encircle *The Volunteer*. They are abundant in each corner and crevice, cascading from every surface, an overflowing adjunct to the monument’s simple epitaph: “To the men of Almonte who fell for freedom, 1914–1918.” Amongst the many organizations to place flowers that day were the Sons of England, the Sons of Scotland, the Pres-

byterian Church in Canada, Daughters of the Maids of the Empire, and the St. Andrew’s Society—organizations representative of the young country’s British parentage and evidence of the figurative “silken thread”³ knitting together the two nations. Local remembrances included those from St. Paul’s Church of Almonte, the Rosamond Woollen Company, the Girl Guides Association, Mayor Thoburn and many others.⁴

² “Almonte and Ramsay War Memorial Unveiled,” in *The Almonte Gazette*, 14 September 1923, Archives Lanark.

³ Jonathan F. Vance, *Maple Leaf Empire: Canada, Britain and Two World Wars* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2012), 220.

⁴ “Pics of the Past,” in *The Almonte Gazette*, 5 November 1986, Archives Lanark.



Fig. 1 - "War Memorial Dedication," 1923, photograph, Historic Photo Archive, <<http://almonte.com/our-history/historic-photo-archive/>>.

It is as though one hundred years of Almonte history converges within the camera's purview and is reflected in the details captured in these three small glimpses: the Mississippi River and the Canadian Pacific Railway—two primary modes of transportation within the county, facilitators of its growth and development; the woollen and grist mills established by several of the area's notable families, giving rise to Almonte's nickname as "The Woollen Town"⁵ and recalling the Scottish and Irish weavers who settled the area a century before; the Old Town Hall, founded in 1884, symbolic of official recognition and civic governance as Almonte grew administratively into itself; the Red Ensign flag,

symbolizing Canada's colonial status and fealty to Britain; and the mourning public—the Great War generation—gathered in collective remembrance of a devastating conflict and the men who were lost to it.

In its capacity as a war memorial, *The Volunteer* is singular in many aspects. It was designed and sculpted by Robert Tait McKenzie, a celebrated educator and sculptor whose busts, friezes, medallions and statuary are displayed in several countries across the globe, including Canada, the United States, Scotland, Sweden and England. It is remarkable that such a prestigious artist accepted a commission in the tiny town of Almonte, except that McKenzie is a son of

⁵ "The Volunteer," in *The Almonte Gazette*, 9 November 1977, Archives Lanark.

the place. He was born in Ramsay Township, Lanark County, the grandson of a clansman from Cromarty who emigrated in 1814 as part of that “Magna Scotia planted in Canada,”⁶ at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. He was happy to accept the commission when offered it in 1920, claiming it as “an excuse to return to the scenes of his childhood.”⁷ The chosen form of McKenzie’s monument—that of a solitary soldier, frozen in pensive posture, raised on a pedestal both symbolic and literal, surrounded by the names of his fallen brothers—is at first glance a familiar fashioning of memorial themes common in the interwar era. Indeed, an army of such soldiers have stood silent guard in town squares, church yards, legislative grounds and cemeteries across Canada since before the moment of ceasefire in November 1918.⁸ *The Volunteer* is particular, however, in that it was consigned by another son of Almonte who did not survive the war—Lieutenant Alexander George Rosamond, who served in the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry and died on 15 September 1916, in the Battle of Flers-Courcelette.⁹ In a moment of supposed premonition, this heir to the esteemed Rosamond family’s woollen mills made a stipulation in his will that, upon his

death, a permanent memorial be erected, “to all those who lost their lives in the [Great War] who were from the Town of Almonte, Township of Ramsay and surrounding district.”¹⁰ Thus, *The Volunteer*, often referred to in the early days as “The Rosamond Monument,” was raised in fulfilment of his bequest. Though the Rosamond family specifically requested that the bronze soldier not be a photographic likeness of their “Alec,” it nonetheless bears a startling resemblance.

As with much commemorative statuary, *The Volunteer* is more than a memorial to lives lost in war. Certainly, it is a testament to the dead. Without question, the memorial acknowledges their courage, sacrifice and commitment to duty. It recognizes the names of those who gave their lives to ignoble war in pursuit of princely peace. It is also, as Jay Winter argues of almost all war commemoration of this period, the result of a society’s “search for the meaning of the unprecedented slaughter of the Great War,”¹¹ and a way for the grieving community to “understand” its own experience, on both an individual and collective level. In this way, *The Volunteer* is an extension of the living—a reflection of those left behind, and the legacy of they who came before. It is the culmination of over a century

⁶ Christopher Hussey, *Tait McKenzie: A Sculptor of Youth* (London: Country Life Ltd., 1929), 1.

⁷ “McGill, Volunteer, Almonte,” Archives Lanark, RTM.B.4.1.2.

⁸ For examples see Alan Livingstone MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze*.

⁹ “Alexander Rosamond,” *Personnel Records of the First World War*, Library and Archives Canada, accessed 21 April 2017, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/personnel-records.aspx>.

¹⁰ “The Volunteer,” *Almonte Gazette*.

¹¹ Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

of human endeavour and intention—of foreign settlement to the region, of social strife and industrial development, of local incorporation and national confederation. In every aspect of *The Volunteer's* rendering a multitude of narratives are captured; their revelation is the reward granted to those who see beyond what some modern critics might dismiss as “traditional values” or reject as “patriotic appeals.”¹² Without question, those who gathered on the morning of 11 September 1923 to dedicate *The Volunteer*, also consecrated the incarnation of their own personal experience and over one hundred years of collective history.

War monuments, by their very nature, are imperfect tributes—particularly those that commemorate the Great War. Borne of illimitable suffering, they were raised to shoulder the burden of our human inability to express such depths of despair. *The Volunteer* is no different. For each name carved in stone, there are many accidentally missed—and some inexplicably missing. In the classically chiselled features of *The Volunteer's* junior officer is a lost opportunity to capture the reflection of the enlisted “everyman” whose sacrifice was no less profound. Further, there is an overt calm and obvious maturity embodied by the figure in bronze that is not necessarily representative of the Almonte demographic that eagerly volunteered in the early days of the war. Perhaps the most pertinent ques-

tion with regard to *The Volunteer*, is the degree to which the monument satisfies the bequest of its benefactor. Does it indeed pay tribute to the men of Almonte and Ramsay who died in the Great War? Further, given *The Volunteer's* relationship to its community and heritage, in what ways does its success or failure in this regard reflect upon the history, the people, and the prevailing perceptions of those who conspired to create it? I propose that ultimately, *The Volunteer*, still so beloved in his home town of Almonte, is a paradox—memorializing exclusion as much as he does inclusion—rendering him no less an accurate reflection of war-era values and perspectives in early twentieth-century rural Ontario.

“One of the Prettiest Towns in the Ottawa Valley”¹³: Settlement and Society in Almonte and Lanark County, Ontario

The Canadian Mississippi River is a defining feature of Lanark County. It meanders east/northeast for almost 200 kilometres, from its headwaters at Upper Mazinaw Lake to the Ottawa River, winding through the centre of this picturesque Ontario county and defining much of the historic industry and social development of the region. Lanark County is one of several in the Ottawa

¹² Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 2-3.

¹³ Jean McGill, *The Joy of Effort: A Biography of R. Tait McKenzie* (Oshawa, Ontario: The Alger Press Limited, 1980), 2.

Valley region, which spreads out over 7,645 square kilometres.¹⁴ At the time of the 1911 Census of Canada, the last taken before the Great War, Lanark County comprised a number of townships, including Bathurst, Beckwith, Dalhousie, Darling, Drummond, Lanark, Lavant, Montague, North Burgess, North/South Elmsley, North/South Sherbrooke, Pakenham, and Ramsay.¹⁵ Well-known towns in the County include Almonte, Carleton Place, Smiths Falls and Perth, which is the administrative seat of Lanark County and also the site of one of the first military settlements in the area.

The founder of Almonte is believed to be Daniel Shipman, an American Loyalist who first settled in the Brockville region.¹⁶ He moved to Lanark County in approximately 1821, and completed construction of the first saw and grist mills on the approximate spot where now stands the Old Town Hall. “Almonte” was adopted in 1859 as the village’s permanent name, under which it was incorporated in 1870.¹⁷ At that point, it boasted over thirty stores, approximately forty businesses and a population in excess of 2,000 people.¹⁸ The *Almonte Ga-*

zette was established in 1867 and the first commercial bank opened in 1869. By the time that Almonte was incorporated as a town in 1881, the textile mills had grown in abundance, eventually bestowing upon the community its reputation as, “The Manchester of North America.”¹⁹ The growth of Almonte’s woollen and textile mills was facilitated by the presence of Scottish and Irish weavers who had immigrated to the area, and also by the building, in the mid-1850s, of the Brockville & Ottawa Railway line. Power was drawn from the great waterfalls along the Mississippi River, around which the town was formed. At approximately this time was founded the Ramsay Woollen Cloth Manufacturing Company. The enterprise was shortly thereafter appropriated and expanded by an English immigrant named James Rosamond (grandfather of Lt. Alexander Rosamond), whose family was to figure prominently in Almonte’s development.

The immutability of the Mississippi River and the diversity of the Ontario landscape—dense forests and wetlands to the west, rolling hills and abundant farmland ripe for cultivation in the east—

¹⁴ Jackie Wallace, “Ottawa Valley Facts,” *Canadian Geographic Online*, 1 September 2005, accessed 14 May 2018, <https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/ottawa-valley-facts>.

¹⁵ “Electoral District of Lanark 1915,” *Electoral Atlas, 1915*, Map and Data Library, University of Toronto Libraries, accessed 2 May 2018, http://maps.library.utoronto.ca/datapub/digital/G_1116_F7_1915A/electoralatlas_1915042.tif.

¹⁶ Hal Kirkland, “The Founder of Our Town,” *The Almonte Gazette*, 30 July 1970, accessed 14 June 2018, <http://almonte.com/our-history/daniel-shipman/>.

¹⁷ William Bennett Moore, “The Naming of Almonte,” 1920, *The Almonte Gazette*, 30 July 1970. Accessed 14 June 2018. <http://almonte.com/our-history/general-almonte/>.

¹⁸ “Great Falls at Almonte Started Woollen Industry,” accessed 14 June 2018, <http://almonte.com/our-history/great-falls-at-almonte-started-woollen-industry/>.

¹⁹ “A Brief History of Almonte: Our Unlikely Name,” accessed 14 June 2018, <http://almonte.com/our-history/>.

in many ways reflects the personalities and ambitions of those who settled Lanark County in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Traditionally *Omamiwinini* (Algonquin) territory, and currently the focus of the largest land-claim to be negotiated in Ontario between the government and the area's Indigenous people,²⁰ the Ottawa Valley region was first settled by Europeans beginning in approximately 1815-1816. Motivated by a deepening economic depression at home and propelled by an urge to forge their own identities out from under the oppressive yoke of their farmer-class tenancies, earlier parties of immigrants actually began arriving in North America in the 1770s. Following Britain's defeat in the American War of Independence, many of these settlers, armed "with a dogged determination to succeed,"²¹ headed to Britain's northern, Loyalist colonies.

The influence of settlement to Lanark County, and indeed across the Canadas, cannot be overstated in its importance.

Between 1815 and 1850, during what has been termed "the great cycle of European emigration," over 2.5 million English, Welsh, Scots and Irish left their homelands to make a new life in North America.²² Between 1770 and 1815, 150,000 Scots emigrated to the new world. During the years of the "Scottish Clearances," from 1815-1870, a further 170,000 arrived.²³ Even more than the Scots came the Irish—almost half a million before the years of the Great Famine migrations, and over a million more between 1845 and 1851.²⁴ Tens of thousands settled in Upper Canada, including the Ottawa Valley region, where they toiled to carve roads and cultivate rich farmland out of the rough and forested terrain. In the first Canadian Census of Upper Canada taken in 1824, Lanark County listed a population of 7,928,²⁵ increasing to 27,317 by the time of the 1851 Census of Upper Canada and 33,909 in the 1881 Census of Canada.²⁶ Ultimately, these soldiers, farmers, weavers and tradesmen brought from the United Kingdom their lan-

²⁰ "The Algonquin Land Claim," *Ministry of Indigenous Affairs, Government of Ontario*, last updated 28 June 2018, first accessed 27 June 2017, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/algonquin-land-claim>.

²¹ Lucille H. Campey, "Canada's Appeal," *An Unstoppable Force: The Scottish Exodus to Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008), Kindle edition.

²² Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Emigrant Worlds and Transatlantic Communities: Migration to Upper Canada in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 2.

²³ "Scottish," *Library and Archives Canada*, last updated 19 June 2017, accessed 27 June 2018, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/history-ethnic-cultural/Pages/scottish.aspx>.

²⁴ Mark G. McGowan, *Death or Canada: The Irish Famine Migration to Toronto, 1847* (Toronto: Novalis, 2009), 5-6.

²⁵ "Census of Upper Canada, 1824," *Censuses of Canada, 1665-1871*, Queen's University Library, accessed 27 April 2018, <https://library.queensu.ca/data/census-1665-1871-uc/>.

²⁶ Canada Board of Registration and Statistics, "Census of the Canadas, 1851-2," M. Kelly Library, University of Toronto, accessed 27 March 2018, <https://archive.org/details/censusofcanadas01canauoft>; Department of Agriculture, "Census of Canada 1880-1881, V. 1," Statistics Canada, accessed 27 March 2018, <https://archive.org/details/1881981881FV11882engfra>.

guage, cultural traditions and religions. Particularly relevant was the Loyalist military heritage imparted by the Scottish, Irish and English soldier-settlers, many of whom were officers and veterans of disbanded companies granted Crown land in Upper Canada, and who established military depots at Perth, Richmond and Lanark. One of the most important British legacies in Canada, “rested in the militia regiments [originally] established to defend the country, and in the officers and men who staffed them.”²⁷ In Lanark County, The Glengarry Fencibles, the Canadian Fencibles and members of the 99th (the old 100th out of Dublin), and the 37th and 60th Regiments of Foot feature prominently.²⁸ This smattering of discharged soldiers made an important contribution to this Upper Canadian township through its ability to impart a military tradition that continued for well over a century. The growing influx of immigrants from the United Kingdom throughout the later decades of the nineteenth century, including a surge in the decades just before the Great War, culminated in Lanark County’s strong response to the First (and Second) World War.

The British Child Migrant Programme wielded a particularly compelling influence over the Lanark County region. This philanthropic effort of the late nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

turies, commonly known as the “Home Child” programme, sought to relocate orphaned and destitute British children to its colonies. The Lanark County Historical Society maintains that Almonte, Pakenham and Ramsay, in particular, were “shaped” by the presence of these children:²⁹

Many of the large farms in Lanark County and particularly Ramsay Township, became the adopted home and refuge for these young men. Farm Labour was a tough occupation. By the time WWI started, most of these young men had never had any money and saw war as an opportunity for advancement. By enlisting, they were guaranteed a steady income.³⁰

Indeed, there are indications of strong Home Child participation in the Lanark County war effort, as both Canadian and British recruits, since some made the choice to return “home” to enlist.

Britain had been shipping the poorest of its children to colonies around the world since the early seventeenth century,³¹ either to aid in the settlement of those regions or relieve the British State of the socio-economic burden of the most vulnerable and seemingly “expendable” of its citizens. Private and public support for migrant schemes increased in the mid-nineteenth century. Thus, for over one hundred years, between approximately 1839 to the 1960s, more than

²⁷ Vance, *Maple Leaf*, 11.

²⁸ Robert England, “Disbanded and Discharged Soldiers in Canada Prior to 1914,” *The Canadian Historical Review*, 27:1 (March 1946), 11.

²⁹ The North Lanark Historical Society and The Corporation of the Town of Mississippi Mills, *The Lost Generation of Mississippi Mills* (Smiths Falls: Impression Printing, 2014), Introduction.

³⁰ NLHS, *The Lost Generation*, Forward.

150,000 children from across the United Kingdom were relocated to urban and rural locations in the British colonies—primarily Canada, Australia and New Zealand.³² Some were welcomed as adopted members of the family but many were perceived as a source of cheap farm labour and domestic help. A general estimation of the casualty numbers on the Library and Archives Canada Database of Home Children Killed in the Great War, and the British Home Children Advocacy and Research Association, indicates that well over 1,300 British Home Children who fought with Canadian units died in the war, out of a total of approximately 10,000 who enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force.³³ Of that number, at least fifty of the dead enlisted in units based in the Ottawa Valley region—particularly the 38th and the 130th.

The North Lanark Historical Society, at the request of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 240, Almonte, recently compiled a detailed history of the 100 men from the region who were killed in the Great War, 49 of whom are named on the walls surrounding *The Volunteer*

monument.³⁴ Of the 49, seven are Home Children. Out of the full list of 100, twelve are Home Children. This indeed supports the contention of the Society that these adopted members of Lanark County contributed significantly to its war effort. As these “Home Children” matured into men, many felt an obligation to fight on behalf of their homeland, or were eager to head home to find their families. Still others who had been treated well wanted to “step up to the plate for Canada,”³⁵ like a multitude of others both newly-arrived and well-settled in the region. When Canada went to war in 1914, the country was “overwhelmingly rural,”³⁶ with 60% of the population congregated in Ontario and the West, where most Canadian Home Children were placed. Manual labourers pulled from the “factories, mills and workshops”³⁷ of industrial centres comprised the majority of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, though no less important was the contribution of soldiers hailing from smaller towns and farm fields, like that of Almonte and Lanark County; together, they formed approximately 73% of the CEF.³⁸

³¹ Philip Bean and Joy Melville, *Lost Children of the Empire: The Untold Story of Britain's Child Migrants* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 89.

³² “History Spotlight -- British Home Children,” *Canada's History*, accessed 10 July 2018, <http://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/settlement-immigration/history-spotlight-british-home-children>.

³³ Katie Daubs, “Impoverished Home Children Came to Canada from England in Drovers,” *The Toronto Star*, 15 August 2014, accessed 27 June 2018, https://www.thestar.com/news/world/ww1/2014/08/15/home_children.html.

³⁴ NLHS, *The Lost Generation*.

³⁵ Daubs, “Impoverished Home Children Came to Canada.”

³⁶ Vance, *Maple Leaf Empire*, 32.

³⁷ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 161.

³⁸ Tim Cook, “The Canadian Great War Soldier,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia Online*, 7 August 2014, accessed 12 August 2019, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/the-canadian-great-war-soldier>.

Though its officers were mostly Canadian-born, over 70% of enlisted men (particularly in the 1st and 2nd Contingents, until approximately mid-1915³⁹) were British-born subjects⁴⁰—more evidence of Canada’s strong military ties to its perceived “mother-country.” It is clear that British military traditions thus lived on in the Dominion,⁴¹ culminating in the Great War response of newly-arrived and

first-generation Canadian soldiers.

It is also apparent that deeply-ingrained British perspectives wielded socio-cultural influence when it came time to commemorate the sacrifice of Canada’s—and Almonte’s—lost soldiers. In the 1911 Census of Canada, 15,365 persons out of a total of 34,375 living in Lanark County were listed as being of Irish descent—roughly 44% of the County’s



Fig. 2 - “The Volunteer,” Almonte, Ontario, photograph, Kelly Morrison, 2017, property of the author.

³⁹ Vance, *Maple Leaf*, 69.

⁴⁰ Cook, “The Canadian Great War Soldier.”

⁴¹ Vance, *Maple Leaf*, 11.

population. A further 11,444 were listed as being of Scottish descent and 5,388 of English descent, which is 33% and 15% of the population, respectively.⁴² We shall see that many aspects of the memorial narrative embodied by *The Volunteer* served to place the Great War in a context that these citizens of Almonte and Lanark County could understand—a recognizable and comforting “commemorative language,”⁴³ as it were, reflective of a British Victorian or Edwardian world order. The memorial, like many of its kind erected in the interwar era, thus served to cushion the harsh blow of the town’s collective loss. It mitigated the devastation and ugly realities of the conflict, and rendered the experience of the Great War “more familiar and non-threatening,”⁴⁴ to the townspeople who bowed, racked and reverent, at its feet. More than this, *The Volunteer* served to speak as much for the community as it did to it, and by so doing revealed its collective history and “moral character,”⁴⁵ as the town grappled with the deep need to honour those taken from its midst by the most grievous of means. As James Mayo points out: “The

strengths and weaknesses of a society are demonstrated in war, and memorials to those wars often mirror those qualities.”⁴⁶

“For Every Deed Rewarded”⁴⁷: Great War Contribution and Commemoration in Almonte and Lanark County

The town of Almonte, Ontario, could best be described in that mythically golden summer of 1914—the last before the war changed everything forever—as “steady.” Known to travellers who passed through on the Canadian Pacific Railway as “The Woollen Town,” due to its proliferation of mills, it was perceived by those who populated the place as a “steady town of 2,200 people, spinners, weavers, dyers, loom-fixers, mill-wrights, carpenters, masons, stationary engineers, and all the rest...”⁴⁸ Mill owners hailing from Scottish and English immigrant families in turn sponsored skilled workers from their home countries.⁴⁹ Thus, millwork throughout the region became

⁴² Government of Canada, Census and Statistics Office, “Fifth Census of Canada, 1911—Religions, Origins, Birthplace, Citizenship, Literacy and Infirmities by Provinces, Districts and Sub-Districts, Volume II” (Ottawa: C.H. Parmalee, 1913), *University of California Libraries*, accessed 27 March 2018, <https://archive.org/details/fifthcensusofcan02cana>.

⁴³ Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble*, 19.

⁴⁴ L.R.H. Steward, “A Canadian Perspective: The Fictional and Historical Portrayal of World War I” (MA Thesis, University of Waterloo, 1983), as quoted in Vance, *Death So Noble*, 90.

⁴⁵ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 80.

⁴⁶ James M. Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape: The American Experience and Beyond* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 1.

⁴⁷ Frank Smith Brown, “Glory,” in NLHS, *The Lost Generation*, Forward.

⁴⁸ John Dunn, “The Volunteer,” in *The Almonte Gazette*, 9 November 1977, Archives Lanark.

⁴⁹ NLHS, *The Lost Generation*, Introduction.

a “family way of life,” and ensured job security for the labourers, tradesmen and craftsmen whose families arrived in Lanark County over the decades of the nineteenth century. That steadiness and security upon which settlers to the region staked their lives and livelihoods was forever altered on 6 August 1914—the day that war-time Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden authorized the raising of local militia units, two days after Great Britain’s formal declaration of war against Germany and its allies. Militia drills were hastily organized on the local Agricultural Society grounds. A recruitment office was established. Twelve local men enlisted within a week of Borden’s call to arms, and on 15 August they left by train for Camp Valcartier in Quebec, and active service in France and Belgium in the early months of 1915. Indeed, these early local recruits were part of a contingent of 31,200 Canadian soldiers who departed for England on 3 October 1914, as part of the “largest military force that had ever crossed the Atlantic as a unit.”⁵⁰ As reported in the *Almonte Gazette*: “There was a great crowd at the C.P.R. station on Saturday morning to give the recruits a royal send-off as they left for Perth. The 42nd band turned out, and added much to the éclat

of the occasion.”⁵¹

Over time, a strong sense of duty drove even more of these spinners, weavers and mill-wrights from their jobs in the mills to their posts in the field of battle. Local Lanark historian Brian Tackaberry estimates that recruit numbers were in the hundreds from the communities of Almonte, Pakenham and Ramsay, inclusive of farmers and older men. Some Canadian farmers sought exemptions from service, and the normal upper age of recruitment for men was 45.⁵² In spite of this, Tackaberry claims that many volunteered, in order “to do their patriotic part for King and Country.”⁵³ A quick glance down the list of the fallen from Almonte, Ramsay and Pakenham includes eight men between the ages of 40–44, as well as 27 men who are listed as farmers. Prominent settler names appear on the list of the first recruits and those memorialized on the walls surrounding *The Volunteer*, including Burgess, Dyson, Fairbairn, Fraser, Gemmill, Naismith, Rosamond, Sinclair and several others. Those first local men to volunteer joined the ranks of the 2nd Eastern Ontario Battalion, but many also joined the 42nd Lanark and Renfrew Scottish, the 21st out of Kingston, the 38th in Ottawa and the Princess Pa-

⁵⁰ G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1962), 29, as quoted in Chris Sharpe, “Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918: A Reevaluation,” *Canadian Military History* 24:1 (2015), 20, accessed 2 July 2018, <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1753&context=cmh>.

⁵¹ NLHS, *The Lost Generation*, Introduction.

⁵² Chris Sharpe, “Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918: A Reevaluation,” *Canadian Military History* 24:1 (2015), 26, accessed 2 July 2018, <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1753&context=cmh>.

⁵³ NLHS, *The Lost Generation*, Introduction.

tricia's Canadian Light Infantry—Alex Rosamond's unit, first formed out of Ottawa in August of 1914. After 1915, they joined the 130th Lanark and Renfrew Battalion based in Perth, and the 240th Lanark and Renfrew, which was established later in the war in an effort to recruit more men from the area. A particular favourite with men in the region was the 73rd Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada. Though it was based in Montreal, the man responsible for raising the company was Captain James McIntosh Bell, a prominent resident of Almonte. He held a series of recruitment rallies in Lanark and Almonte in August and September of 1915.⁵⁴ Instilled in the recruits of 1914 was a century-old military tradition that accompanied the original soldier-settlers to the area.

These farmers and soldier-recruits were not alone in their contribution to the war effort. Indeed, the entire region mobilized, everyone eager to show their loyalty and support to the British-led war effort, harbouring hope in those early days that the war would be a short-lived affair:

Within the communities of Almonte, Pakenham and Ramsay there was a strong desire to contribute. Starting in September 1914, local community groups were set up to support the troops heading overseas and to help the areas suffering under German occupation. The local church groups, Daughters of the Empire, and the Red Cross Society began raising funds and clothing

items by any means possible. They organized concerts, door-to-door drives and campaigns in the local factories and businesses. Community efforts supported the Belgian Relief Fund, assisted families of soldiers heading overseas and supported European refugees. The communities of Almonte, Pakenham and Ramsay also established Patriotic Fund Societies. In October, a major financial drive went on in the Town of Almonte with all contributors listed in the Gazette. An amazing \$10,000 was raised and donated by the staff and management of the Rosamond Woollen Mills.⁵⁵

Even school-aged boys in the region were encouraged to prepare for their turn to fight in the war, by serving in the local High School Cadet Corp or the Boy Scout Troop organized in Almonte. It was reported in the 23 July 1915 edition of the *Almonte Gazette*, that Corporal Leslie Owrid was appointed schoolmaster of the local troop.⁵⁶ Owrid was killed in action on Vimy Ridge in March of 1917 and his name is honoured on *The Volunteer* monument.

Several Home Children distinguished themselves as early recruits to the war effort. Arthur White and Robert Wicks were two of the original twelve Almonte men to receive a send-off in August of 1914. White was a Sergeant with the 73rd when he was killed at Bapaume in 1916, and Wicks served with 2nd Battalion until his death on 11 July 1917. Both are listed on the memorial benches that flank *The Volunteer*. Alfred

⁵⁴ NLHS, *The Lost Generation*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Berry also attested in 1914 and served with the 42nd until his death near Hill 70 in July of 1917. Patrick Fuller of the 42nd, James Wright of the 73rd and Frederick Parkin of the 32nd out of Smiths Falls, all enlisted in 1915. William Payton, Archie Williamson, John Clinton, John McWilliam, Roy Dickinson and Thomas Collier all volunteered in 1916. Berry, Collier, Dickinson, Parkin and Wright are also named on Almonte's war memorial. Home Children were relatively well-recognized within the Almonte community. However, almost all of these names are missing from the Database of Home Children Killed in the First World War on the Library and Archives website. This is simply an indication that much more detailed research is required before a full and complete picture can emerge of the Home Child contribution to the Lanark County (and national) war effort.

Four days after peace was announced on 11 November 1918, the Almonte Gazette summed up local feeling after a long and painful period of war:

Peace, so longingly and anxiously looked for has come at last, and the old world that a week ago was in the throes of cruel and bloody war, is today enjoying a cessation of the horrible experiences of the past four years... From one end to the other of these war-towns and blood-soaked nations joyous shouts of relief and gladness were given voice and during the entire day, from early morn

till late at night, the enthusiasm was kept alive, the people of the town being joined by many from the surrounding country in the celebration held here. The welcome message came at four o'clock in the morning, and in an incredibly short time...the bells and whistles rang out the joyful news...⁵⁷

Shortly after Mayor Thoburn's directive that those men who made the ultimate sacrifice "for the cause of truth, liberty and righteousness," should not be forgotten, an image of the Kaiser was burned in effigy in a torchlit parade. Now was the time to consider how, and by what means, Almonte might honour those who were killed in the war and, like most villages, towns, cities and countries across the globe, begin the process of collective healing.

There is very little information available in either the local *Gazette* or the minute book of the Almonte town council, between the years 1920-1922, that details the process by which *The Volunteer* came to be. This is most likely because its genesis was founded in the personal bequest of Alexander Rosamond, and for the most part, his family accepted the responsibility of fulfilling it. We know that in approximately 1920, the council approved the donation of land upon which the monument was erected.⁵⁸ Also in 1920, two representatives of the Almonte town council approached sculptor Robert Tait McKenzie at an exhibition of his work in London and offered him

⁵⁷ "Peace Declared," *The Almonte Gazette*, Friday, 15 November 1918, The Almonte Gazette Online, accessed 14 July 2018, <https://mvtm.ca/gazette2017/display-pdf?ref=1918-11-15-01>.

⁵⁸ R.J. France, Almonte Town Clerk, "Letter to Dianna Carlisle, Curator, Mill of Kintail," 16 June 1981, Archives Lanark, RTM.B.4.1.14.

a commission to design and build their memorial.⁵⁹ Many Canadian memorials were designed in the interwar period by “well-established” sculptors and artists—Walter Seymour Allward, Nicolas Pirotton and Alfred Howell amongst them.⁶⁰ McKenzie had last returned to Almonte in 1914, on the occasion of his mother’s funeral, and readily accepted the assignment. There are indications that the sculpting work was begun at his studio in Philadelphia, where he was a professor of Medicine and Physical Education at the University of Pennsylvania. The final stages were completed, however, in the garage at Pinehurst, the Rosamond family home on Union Street in Almonte.⁶¹

An undated clipping from the Archives Lanark files on *The Volunteer* confirms that the memorial was a gift of the Rosamond family and specifies the designer, location and a general description of the form that the monument will take.⁶² It is referred to in this clipping as “The Almonte and Ramsay War Memorial,” but will eventually be named, *The Volunteer*. The piece states that the bronze figure is expected to be in place “by next spring,” so we might surmise that the story was published circa 1922. Along with a general preview of the monument’s design, the article stipulates that the soldier will be surrounded by 26 names of “Almonte and Ramsay lads who gave their

lives during the Great War.” The benches into which their names will be carved are to be decorated with a soldier’s helmet covered in white pine leaves—recalling the species of tree at Pinehurst. It describes the bronze figure thus: “The seated soldier, tense with expectancy, ready on the instant to respond to the call, makes the heart beat faster.” The clipping praises McKenzie’s “strong natural affinity with the ancient Greeks, in a certain purity, sobriety and reticence.” It quotes McKenzie himself as describing his preferred model as: “The type on whom the future of England must depend... head well rounded, forehead slightly flat, the boss over the eyes large...the brows straight, nose not continuous with the brow as in the Greek; the mouth large and the lips not too full.”⁶³

McKenzie was both a physician and an artist of considerable renown at this point in his career, already having unveiled *The Homecoming*—a monument to the men of Cambridge, England who fought in the Great War. Shortly after unveiling *The Volunteer*, he produced *The Call*—the Scottish-American War Memorial located in the Princes Street Gardens, Edinburgh—the work for which he is perhaps best known. McKenzie was also a veteran of the Great War, having served as a Major in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Having received his

⁵⁹ McGill, *The Joy of Effort*, 108.

⁶⁰ MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze*, 95.

⁶¹ Gerry Wheatley, “Continuing the Story of ‘The Volunteer,’” *Almonte Gazette*, Archives Lanark.

⁶² All references in this paragraph to “Almonte War Memorial is Now Under Construction,” Archives Lanark, RTM.B.4.1.9.

⁶³ “The Volunteer,” Archives Lanark.

medical degree from Montreal's McGill University in 1892, he was responsible for the supervision of men either training for active service or receiving treatment following injury in battle. Indeed, his work in both areas is recognized as the basis for the development of the contemporary practice of physiotherapy.⁶⁴ Not surprisingly, McKenzie's anatomical training is deemed to have "influenced the directions he took as a sculptor,"⁶⁵ with a particular focus on "spirit, duty, youthfulness, determination, victory and bodily wholeness."⁶⁶ The male soldier-subjects of his three major war memorials without doubt embody these traditional characteristics, and each in its own way reflects McKenzie's well-documented affinity for the classical Greek form. Certainly, in *The Volunteer's* strong jaw and profile, his pensive posture, as well as the suggestion of flow or imminent movement, might be perceived many of the aspects that McKenzie describes as being desirable in his commemorative sculpture. In personal comments that reflect a seeming exultation of all things Empire, McKenzie said he attempted to capture in the Rosamond memorial, "the moment of dedication and determination to do one's duty," and described *The Volunteer's* chosen form as illustrating,

"the moment that magnetized a million spirits, freeing them for the minute from material preoccupations."⁶⁷ McKenzie was adamant however, that, as requested by the Rosamond family, he had attempted to portray *The Volunteer* as "a typical [soldier] from this part of Canada,"⁶⁸ with what any observer might believe was "a face that might be that of many a virile young Canadian who volunteered in the early days of the Great War..."⁶⁹ Despite these protestations, it is almost impossible not to perceive, in the face of *The Volunteer*, the aspect of Alexander Rosamond. The images are so strikingly similar as to quash all doubt. Indeed, McKenzie is said to have worked from photographs and descriptions from Rosamond's family and friends. Many stories abound of how Mrs. Rosamond, Alexander's mother, "was so startled by the speaking likeness to her lost son that she fainted away with the surprise and shock of his reincarnation before her."⁷⁰

Alan Livingstone MacLeod proposes, in his work on Great War statuary, that the duty of a war memorial, "is to evoke those who were lost with sufficient authenticity and conviction that we are moved to remember and honour them."⁷¹ This contention prompts one to ask: where, in the studied, mature pro-

⁶⁴ Fred Mason, "Sculpting Soldiers and Reclaiming the Maimed: R. Tait McKenzie's Work in the First World War Period," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, (October, 2010), 364.

⁶⁵ Fred Mason, "Sculpting Soldiers," 365.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 371-72.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁶⁸ D. Keddie, "The Volunteer," Archives Lanark, RTM.B.4.1.11.

⁶⁹ "The Volunteer," Archives Lanark.

⁷⁰ Keddie, "The Volunteer."

⁷¹ MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze*, 18

file of Almonte's English officer—who chose to return to England to first enlist—is reflected the Irish and Scottish settler-soldier or millwright; the farmer; the destitute young migrant; or, indeed, any hint of a burgeoning Canadian spirit that signalled, according to Tim Cook, the emergence of a new, “distinct country” in the wake of the Great War?⁷² Is *The Volunteer* perhaps recognizable as a rendering of what Jonathan Vance would describe as, “the Soldier as Canada,” and is it a product or a refutation of the Great War “mythology” he claims developed in the years after 1914? One could reflect on the Canadian maple leaves adorning the collars of the countless, slightly dishevelled, chubby-faced stone soldiers, from Foxwarren, Manitoba, to Cannington, Ontario and Canso, Nova Scotia; or the head-bandages of the young rifleman who stands guard in New Westminster, British Columbia; or the battle-weary yet jubilant soldier who waves aloft his helmet in Liverpool, Nova Scotia; and certainly, the countless lads clad in kilts—from Amherst, Digby, New Glasgow, Chester and Pugwash, Nova Scotia to the National War Memorial in Ottawa,⁷³ and perceive that a number of representative and allegorical features are missing—and decidedly missed—from McKenzie's soldier in bronze.

Alternatively, *The Volunteer* is in some ways a perfect representation of

certain socio-cultural attitudes that prevailed at war's end, and the commemorative impulses that flowed from them. In a compelling contemporary commentary, Jonathan Vance proposes that *The Volunteer* of Almonte is but one of many representations, replicated across Canada, of the common, simple man who demonstrated in answering war's call, “that he could reach beyond his own petty concerns when called to a greater task.”⁷⁴ If we can accept the conceit, Vance would be correct in his perception—to a point. Many aspects of *The Volunteer* are indeed illustrative of his complex construct of Canada's “Great War myth,” within which paradigm the “healthy and vigorous,” peace-loving Canadian soldier is exalted as a shining “personification” of the country itself, and whereby the “cult of the service roll transformed veterans into a breed apart.”⁷⁵ It must be proposed, however, that Vance's assessment of *The Volunteer* is weakened slightly by the fact that the memorial bears such a strong resemblance to Alexander Rosamond (Figs. 3 & 4). Indeed, one cannot help but grieve the loss of McKenzie's opportunity to produce a likeness that was not visually attributable to a specific person, no matter how admired and respected, in order that *The Volunteer* might achieve more successfully the figurative representation of the every-men of Lanark who were lost in the Great War. It is also obvi-

⁷² Tim Cook, *The Secret History of Soldiers: How Canadians Survived the Great War* (Canada: Penguin Random House, 2018), 358.

⁷³ For all these examples, see MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze*, 28-75.

⁷⁴ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 54-55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.



Fig. 3 - Alexander Rosamond, photo, Almonte Historic Photo Archive, accessed 28 July 2018, <http://almonte.com/our-history/historic-photo-archive/>

Fig. 4 - "The Volunteer," Almonte, Ontario, photograph, Kelly Morrison, 2017, property of the author.

ous that, in a slight deviation from McKenzie's preoccupation with the soldier-as-youth, *The Volunteer* is a mature man. As one reviewer noted: "You can see that this is an older man who has a family to give up and probably a business..."⁷⁶ Alex Rosamond was 42 years old at the time of his death, with a wife, children and responsibilities to the family mill. The

average age of the list of 100 fallen soldiers of the region—inclusive of the 49 listed on the memorial—was approximately 27. Thus, it seems that a chance to represent the younger demographic of Lanark County, an age-group that was most often sacrificed in the Great War, was also lost. As well, *The Volunteer* is obviously an officer—a Lieutenant, accord-

⁷⁶ National Sculpture Review, 1967, New York. Archives Lanark, RTM.B.4.1.8.

ing to the two “pips” on his sleeve and his holstered Webley revolver—though the majority of the fallen from Almonte and Ramsay died as privates and corporals. (He does wear puttees, however, rather than an officer’s boots—common practice in the trenches but a curious touch of incongruity in this instance.)

Also, at seemingly perpetual issue is the number of names listed on the “Honour Roll,” carved into the memorial benches on either side of *The Volunteer*. In a generally applicable commemorative sense, the functions of the service roll were many and varied, and the feature is often highlighted by many historians as a particularly compelling facet of many Great War memorials. Certainly, the desire of a given community to name the names of their dead reveals much, in the wake of the war, about the motivations of the mourning public. First, it literally carved in stone the living sacrifice of the soldier—and, by extension, that of the loved ones left to grieve—for all time and historical posterity. As well, the commemorative practice of listing all names together was a reflection of a broader, more political imperative in the wake of the war—one that championed the notion of sacrifice as the great social level-

ler, and the fallen as “equal in death.”⁷⁷ Indeed, Graham Oliver describes the collective attention paid in many countries to the proper listing of the dead in the years after the war, “striking.”⁷⁸ More profound than that, however, was the impulse of the collective community to “recognize the humanity of each soldier and preserve his identity as an individual.”⁷⁹ The particularly violent and destructive nature of warfare in the Western trenches often resulted in the complete disappearance of a soldier or front-line attendant, rendering an astounding 50% of British Great War dead, “Known Unto God.”⁸⁰ This grim reality, coupled with the British policy of non-repatriation, often left families with nothing more tangible to grieve, and honour, than the name of their dead.

The act of formally “naming” the dead and missing allowed the individual, perhaps even more than the collective, to figuratively reclaim some small part of their lost loved one. In the *Gazette* clipping quoted earlier, it states that an intended 26 names were initially to surround *The Volunteer*, but concedes that, “some might be missing.” In an undated but later clipping, it is reported that 46 names were carved into the base of the

⁷⁷Jim Zucchero, “The Canadian National War Memorial: Metaphor for the Birth of the Nation,” in *Mnographia Canadensis: Essays on Memory, Community, and Environment in Canada, with Particular Reference to London, Ontario, Volume 2, Remember and Sea*, ed. D.M.R. Bentley (London: Canadian Poetry Press, 1999) 143.

⁷⁸Graham Oliver, “Naming the Dead, Writing the Individual: Classical Traditions and Commemorative Practices in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” in *Cultures of Commemoration: War Memorials Ancient and Modern*, ed. Polly Low, Graham Oliver and P.J. Rhodes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 129.

⁷⁹Vance, *Death So Noble*, 142.

⁸⁰Commonwealth War Graves Commission, 2009, <https://www.cwgc.org>, accessed 27 August 2016.

monument. In the 1923 coverage of the unveiling provided by the *Almonte Gazette*, it is confirmed that 48 names were listed.⁸¹ At present, there are a total of 49 names of Great War dead carved into the base upon which sits *The Volunteer*. The criteria for inclusion onto the list are difficult to determine but it must be taken into account that the availability of biographical information in the early 1920s was almost impossible to confirm. Hence, a great deal likely depended on connections through veterans' associations, family, friends, work, clubs, newspapers and word of mouth. As well, some names on the monument unfortunately are misspelled or incorrectly transcribed. Thus, a project was undertaken in 2010 by the local Legion branch and the North Lanark Historical Society to recover "the forgotten men of Mississippi Mills," and investigate the true number of local fallen that are currently "missing" from the monument.

In all its paradoxical complexity, *The Volunteer* was, according to the *Almonte Gazette*, movingly and poignantly unveiled on 11 September 1923. Alexander Rosamond's mother pulled back the Red Ensign flag that covered the bronze statue, and it was instantly lauded as Almonte and Ramsay's official War Memorial—though the moment of revelation was symbolic beyond the simple act of Mrs. Rosamond's unveiling. Mothers

were lauded (particularly by Western war-time propagandist machines) for the "significant role" they played in the lives of their soldier-sons; thus, they were often "singled out for special consideration when it came to memorializing the dead," and usually seated in pride of place at dedication ceremonies.⁸² Indeed, the immutability of this parent-child bond was greatly exploited and widely exported to the masses during the Great War years, as a soothing salve upon their consciences at a time when many a combatant nation struggled to reconcile itself to mass death on a scale theretofore unimagined. So much so, that in Canada, a figurative extension of this mother-son dichotomy paralleling that of the "nation [child's] relationship to 'Mother Britain,'"⁸³ was featured prominently in state-sponsored propaganda, commemorative narratives and war mythology. On a more personal level, observers in many communities often noted that, "mothers of the fallen exerted a disproportionate influence in discussions about what form a memorial should take."⁸⁴ This is an interesting detail that might go some way towards explaining why the citizens of Almonte and Ramsay had their war memorial thrust upon them, with no real collective consensus upon its means or manner. There is even carved on the front of the pedestal upon which *The Volunteer* sits an apparent confirmation of this conten-

⁸¹ "The Volunteer," Archives Lanark.

⁸² Vance, *Death So Noble*, 149.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

tion: “Erected to Carry out a Bequest of Alexander George Rosamond, Lieutenant, P.P.C.L.I., Killed at Courcellette, 1916.” Of course, it must also be considered that the Rosamonds were wealthy and one of the most influential, respected families in Almonte. There are other such examples, in the years shortly after the war ended, of leading community figures with financial means usurping the will of the collective during the commemorative process, erecting effigies to their lost sons and husbands under the guise of a community memorial.⁸⁵

Conclusion

Despite the agonies and adversities of the years during and immediately following the Great War, there seemed to be little widespread desire amongst the majority of Canadians to consign their experiences “to the realm of the unspeakable.”⁸⁶ In the words of Jonathan Vance, who surely echoes the thoughts of historians the world over, “the war was simply too big to be swept under the carpet.”⁸⁷ In particular, questions of how best to express profound depths of grief, loss, disillusionment and shock, as well as gratitude and hope for the future, must have seemed unanswerable, unknowable in the wake of the Great War. Hence, a reckoning was required, and individuals across this country—in villages, towns,

cities and provinces—wrestled both personally and collectively to consign their torments, as satisfactorily as such things are possible, to manifest memory. As a result, over 7,500⁸⁸ commemorations currently dot the Canadian landscape—to the extent that Pierre Burton once described Canada as, “a nation of Great War memorials.”⁸⁹ Each one takes a unique shape and form, and comprises elements of a proprietary figurative and literal language; but all are open to discovery, interpretation and, to a great extent, can be successfully read—“like a text.”⁹⁰

Ultimately, there is much reflected in *The Volunteer’s* commemorative narrative that undoubtedly provided comfort in 1923 to the mournful crowds of Lanark County, in spite of whatever problems or shortcomings we might question in the present: a strong, familiar and authoritative male figure about to stand and do his duty, appealing to the crowd’s in-bred sense of patriotism and reflecting all that they had sacrificed over four long years of war; the soldier’s holstered weapon, signifying a desire for peace that had been cultivated during all their hardships, but also a readiness for combat that signified a military tradition still honoured and retained in their Country and their County; the safety and security telegraphed to them in the form of the British officer, recalling their

⁸⁵ MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze*, 75.

⁸⁶ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 74.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ MacLeod, *Remembered in Bronze*, 17.

⁸⁹ As quoted in Zuccherro, “The Canadian National War Memorial,” *Mnemographia Canadensis*, 143.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145.

ancestral homeland, its perceived moral victory in what they hoped was the last of all latest wars, and a sense of social superiority very reminiscent of the Victorian era, into which many in the crowd were born; and finally, the list of names carved into the stone on either side of *The Volunteer*, conferring on the memorial its status as a cenotaph—a place erected in memory of the dead, whose bodies do not rest there. Those lists of names, in particular, represented the town’s missing, and its missed—the sons of Almonte who forever disappeared, destined to rest in a foreign land. To the multitudes in the crowd, *The Volunteer*, in so many ways, reflected back to them important facets of their history, their heritage, their traditions and values, and ultimately allowed the community the opportunity not only to memorialize their experience of the Great War years, but to “assuage [their] grief and provide meaning for the losses suffered.”⁹¹ Though they had no part in the incarnation of their *Volunteer*, the people of Almonte were nonetheless soothed by

his presence, and proud of his message. They remain so to this day.

The Volunteer

*He watches—in a little northern town,
Through winter cold and parching summer
heat,
Where quiet folk go simply up and down,
O'er stony bridge and narrow crooked street.
He guards—alone—alert, with clenched hand,
In readiness with his young manhood's might,
To spring to action at a word's command,
Uphold his honour and defend his right.*

*He watches—while the children leave their play
To lay their garlands clustered at his feet,
Zinnias and asters from home gardens gay,
In little hands held close and warm and
sweet.
He smiles—he leans—and every winsome maid
Feels in her heart this joyous chivalry,
And lads look starry-eyed and unafraid
To grow to manhood strong and brave as he.*

*He watches. Oh, ye men with him who fell!
Mighty of valour, bold, unflinching, free!
Here, in this place, your spirits seem to dwell,
Drawn to the home of your mortality.
He waits! Nor shall his vigil be in vain,
Men like to him shall ever pay the price;
Shun all dishonour, scorn the thought of pain,
And make the great immortal sacrifice!⁹²*

⁹¹ Cecilia Morgan, *Commemoration Canada: History, Heritage and Memory, 1850s-1990s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 75.

⁹² Ethel McKenzie, “The Volunteer,” in Christopher Hussey, *Tait McKenzie: A Sculptor of Youth* (London: Country Life Ltd., 1929), 6.