The Nile Voyageurs
Recognition of Canada's Role in the Empire, 1884-1885

by
Anthony P. Michel
M.A., B.A., B.Ed.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs
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Dominique Marshall
Chair of the Department of History

Norman Hillmer, Thesis Supervisor

Adele Perry, University of Manitoba
External Examiner

Department of History

Carleton University

16 May 2012

Abstract

In the late summer of 1884, Canada's Governor General received a request from the War Office to engage several hundred "Voyageurs" for service with the British army in the Sudan. The voyageurs from Canada were required to pilot boats through the cataracts of the Nile, so that General Garnet Wolseley's relief expedition could reach General Charles Gordon, who was besieged in Khartoum, by a self-proclaimed prophet called the Mahdi. Newspapers and documents reveal that many in Canada considered this request to be a great compliment to the country. It was the first time that Britain had requested a body of Canadians for an imperial expedition. Some Canadians thought the expedition would be an opportunity for Canada to play a bigger role in the empire. Others in Canada expressed ambivalence towards this particular group of men as their representatives on an imperial campaign. The Nile Voyageurs were civilian, mostly working class men, with a proportional over-representation of Aboriginal and francophone men. The largest group of men was from Ottawa, many of whom were shantymen who worked in the timber trade.

This study introduces and examines a large body of letters written by the Nile Voyageurs on the expedition, as well as a range of other newspaper items and manuscript documents. The study is a labour history, a history of settler-aboriginal relations, an imperial history, a history of Canadian identities, a study of the militia, a series of regional histories and a study of politics, society and culture in the 1880s. This episode provides a glimpse of colonial Canada before the Northwest rebellion and the full implementation of the Indian act. It explores Canada's imperial identity on the eve of the Imperial Federation movement, the Congo Conference and Britain's new expanded empire. The project introduces a critical discourse method based on the theory of recognition articulated by Axel Honneth. Honneth's theory of recognition will be used as the basis for the textual analysis, it will inform a critique of the cultural struggles in various social situations and it will also serve as the basis for an understanding of public memory as intersubjective recognition across time.

Acknowledgements

Fifteen years ago, I stumbled across a plaque, by the Ottawa River, that had been erected by the Archeological and Historical Sites Board of Ontario. It briefly outlined the story of the Nile Voyageurs. Intrigued by such an unusual story, I set out in search of the many books that I presumed must have been written on this topic. The more I searched, the more I was struck with two realizations: first, that this was a really remarkable story and second, I found it astonishing how little had been written on the topic. My research and study of the Nile Voyageurs since that time has occurred in fits and starts and I have many people to thank for helping me to bring this study to a successful completion.

At the start of my journey back to university, I was fortunate to have the support and encouragement of my OSSTF colleagues in District 25, especially my fellow history teacher, Larry Capstick. I would also like to express my gratitude for the financial assistance received from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada during the first four years of my doctorate. My period of graduate studies at Carleton University's History Department was a very stimulating period of my life and I want to thank my fellow grad students and the faculty members for creating a vibrant learning environment. In particular I owe a debt of gratitude to the professional efforts of two of my professors, Kerry Abel and Robert Goheen, both of whom were generous guides in my intellectual explorations.

My comparative native history minor with Kerry not only gave me a deeper (and transnational) understanding of developments in the native-settler historiography, but it was an opportunity to view these subjects in light of the exciting developments in cultural history taking place at the end of the 20th century. I can clearly trace several lines in my analysis and findings in my thesis to the excellent discussions that flowed out of the well-crafted reading list that Kerry designed for that course. It was of enormous help to the current study.

I was also profoundly influenced by my experience in Robert Goheen's theory and method course. Robert is an excellent teacher who takes seriously his deep responsibility to challenge new historians to seize the opportunities that contemporary social philosophy sets before our discipline. Robert always had time to discuss these subjects further and the more we talked, the more he steered me towards Habermas and, eventually, he reached up on his bookshelf and pulled down Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition*. It was exactly the book I needed to help find my spot in contemporary critical theory. I will be forever grateful to Robert for our discussions that first allowed me to articulate the ideas underpinning the method I have put forward in this project.

In the research and writing phase I would like to thank the librarians and archivists at Library and Archives Canada, the Toronto Reference Library, the Ontario Archives, the Ottawa archives, la Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec and the Kahnawake Cultural Centre. Thank you as well to the many skilled baristas at key Bridgehead locations across Ottawa, where good portions of this thesis were written.

Thank you to all of my friends and relatives for their ongoing encouragement. My director Janette Mark has been more than accommodating in the final year of this project as my deadlines have too frequently impinged on my day job. Having the use of Tom and Sal's cottage at a crucial point last fall was invaluable. Thanks too for the support from my brother and my parents, especially my Dad for helping with the proof-reading while the thesis was with the committee.

Writing this acknowledgements page after my defence allows me to express my deep gratitude to my external examiner Adele Perry and the other members of my examination board including Stephen Azzi, Dominique Marshall and Danielle Kinsey. The stimulating discussion and thoughtful written comments will help me moving forward with this research. For helping me throughout my entire time at Carleton and especially preparing the thesis at the end, an enormous thanks to Joan White, our patient graduate secretary.

Through the long period of time that I have been toiling away at this, my greatest supporter and mentor has been my supervisor Norman Hillmer. It is difficult to fully express my appreciation of the many ways he has helped me succeed, ranging from our countless stimulating discussions to the practical organisational advice in the writing process and his ongoing feedback as writing has been submitted. Over the past decade his unflagging faith in me and this project has often been what has kept me going. Perhaps more than anyone else, he has been able to see both the pressing need to keep moving ahead, tempered with an appreciation of the challenges of balancing writing, family life and a full-time job outside of the academy. Thank you Norman for being so good.

The acknowledgements and expressions of gratitude which are the most difficult are those reserved for the ones I love the most, my dear family. Everyone else has been able to support me by offering me ideas, suggestions, books or coffee. When one is consumed with a thesis, what one takes from family is the time that could have been family time and which has been instead poured into this rather strange story. So many hours and days and years! To my dear Jane and to my fantastic kids Jasmine, Ben and Hannah, thank you for letting me write this thesis. I have written it with you all in mind as readers and I hope you will enjoy it, at some point. For now it might make you most happy to not read it and just be grateful that I am indeed finally done.

Two of the Manitoba boatmen explained their feelings to a reporter on the first day they were back in Winnipeg. The trip was very interesting, they said, and they did "not regret going at all," but nonetheless, one of them said, "by Judas, we are glad to get home."

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INTRODUCTION

On September 15th 1884, a large crowd of dignitaries gathered in Quebec city to bid farewell to 386 men from Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec who were preparing to leave Canada for Egypt and the Sudan. These men had responded to an unprecedented request from the British War Office for a group of "voyageurs" from Canada to navigate boats up the cataracts of the Nile. The boatmen were engaged to support the imperial army in its mission to rescue General Charles Gordon, besieged in Khartoum by the forces of the Mahdi, seen by his northern Sudanese followers as a prophet of Islam and national liberator from Egyptian attempts to colonize the Sudan. General Garnet Wolseley, commander of the expedition, had specifically sent for Canadians, believing that they would be the best at navigating the cataracts of the Nile. This contingent of "Nile Voyageurs" as they were soon called in the press, included almost one hundred aboriginal men, including Mohawks from Kahnawake as well as Métis, Saulteaux Ojibway and Swampy Cree from St. Peter's reserve, near Selkirk. Approximately half of the remainder of the contingent were anglophones and the other half were francophones. A majority of the men worked in the lumber industry. For several weeks, Canadian newspapers gave extensive coverage to the recruitment and departure of these men from recruiting centres in Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Peterborough, Ottawa, Kahnawake and Trois-Rivières. The recruitment inspired editorials, letters from readers and many interviews with the men as they were engaging. Across the country, thousands gathered to see the men off in private parties, public banquets and parades. Addressing the men in Quebec City before they began their journey across the Atlantic, Governor General Lord Lansdowne said that he was pleased that Canada would be "represented" on the Khartoum Relief Expedition. He reminded the assembled boatmen that they carried "the reputation of your own country."¹

¹ *Quebec Chronicle*, 16 September 1884

But from the very beginning, a range of opinions were expressed as to whether or not these men were acceptable representatives of Canada. Even some of the voyageurs seemed ambivalent about certain of their members. One Ottawa boatman, soon after leaving Quebec, wrote in a letter to the *Ottawa Citizen* that

We have on board all sort and conditions of men, as respects nationality, creed, character, and usual occupation, and a student of human behaviour would here have an abundant field of labour. We have English, French Canadians, half-breeds and some Englishmen in the Winnipeg detachment who had not been long in Canada. The body comprises bank clerks, store clerks, mechanics, and labourers, and of apparent cut-throats and professional drunkards we have a few.²

Throughout the time that the men travelled to the Sudan, letters from the voyageurs were printed prominently in the press, and reprinted from paper to paper across the country, demonstrating a popular and ongoing interest in the progress of the contingent. When the men started to work in the Sudan, voyageur correspondence was supplemented with commentary from the British journalists travelling with the campaign, many of whom were fascinated with the Canadians. For the most part, this press coverage was positive and praised the work done by the Canadians, although their time abroad was not without certain controversies. When they returned to Canada six months later, in March of 1885, enormous crowds turned out to greet them. The expedition was a complete failure, with Gordon dead at the hands of the Mahdi, Wolseley's force retreating from Khartoum and the British Prime Minister Gladstone handing in his resignation to Queen Victoria. Yet in Canada, the voyageurs were welcomed with banquets and torchlit parades.

The Nile Voyageurs were never whole-heartedly embraced as heroes, however, and despite the fine speeches about representing the country in Egypt, they are virtually absent from historical narratives of 19th century Canada and the 20th century historiography. Three members of the contingent published books based on their letters and diaries within the first year of their return, but these had a limited distribution and influence. In the first decade after

² *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 October 1884

1885, there were short references to the expedition in Canadian public school books, under the category of Canada and the Empire, but within a couple of editions, the incident disappeared. In the UK, the fall of Khartoum was a tragic but popular tale, inspiring numerous Gordon biographies and popular fictional accounts of the Expedition by prominent writers.³ In Canada, however, there seemed to be no poet or chronicler who successfully captured the public's imagination and secured a spot for the Nile Voyageurs in public memory. Almost a decade after the events of the Nile Expedition, *Toronto Saturday Night* magazine introduced a serialized collection of Nile Voyageur stories by boatman Charles Lewis Shaw and made the observation that, before Shaw, this story "has never been written up by a Canadian."⁴ A quarter century later, Robert Goulden, an aging voyageur veteran, wrote to the *Ottawa Citizen* in 1919, with the assumption that younger generations had no knowledge of the Nile Voyageurs. In the wake of the Great War, as returning veterans were praised and promised benefits, the surviving members of the Nile voyageur contingent began to organize themselves to demand a pension. Goulden explained that he and his comrades successfully completed their "dangerous task" and "gained the admiration of the world." Before the arrival of the Canadians on the Nile, claimed Goulden, "the fierce cataracts and turbulent waters of that river, had never been navigated before." He recalled "the pleased countenance of General Wolseley" at their first meeting in the Sudan and their way the Canadian commanding officer introduced them as "the cream of Canada and the bone and sinew of our country."⁵ He also recounted the exuberant welcome the men received on their return, when they were greeted with "flags flying, and bands of music to meet us, on our return from that distant land." Prominent Ottawa politicians "vied with each other in entertaining and toasting us, to their hearts delights." Based on this recognition, Goulden campaigned for what he believed was his due, to be remembered and honoured for this part in a historic expedition:

³ See G.A. Henty, *The Dash for Khartoum: A Tale of the Nile Expedition*, 1892 and Rudyard Kipling, "Fuzzy Wuzzy: Soudan Expeditionary Force Early Campaigns," *Barrack Room Ballads*, 1892 which describes the battle of Abu Klea in January of 1885.

⁴ *Toronto Saturday Night*, 4 November 1893

⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 July 1919

If we, at that time, deserved such tokens of esteem and the appreciation and plaudits of a grateful country, wherein the man who had money to burn and the artisan and labourer mingled together, in acclaiming our return to our native land, why in the name of sentiment and reason, should we be forgotten now? We are a few of those same men, which constituted the Nile Voyageurs of that period. Was that grand flourish of trumpets, and the sumptuous banquets provided for us in 1885, merely a magnificent and costly sham?⁶

Goulden received no satisfactory answer to his question, because the Canadian public had forgotten the Nile Voyageurs. Leading Canadian historians in the 20th century, if they mentioned the Nile Voyageurs at all, either dismissed them as irrelevant or rendered them invisible by passing quickly over their work in 1884-1885 and drawing the reader's attention to the fact that Canada did *not* send troops to the Sudan after Gordon had been killed by the Mahdi's forces.

GOALS OF THIS STUDY

To answer Robert Goulden's *cri de coeur* and try to explain how such an unusual and unprecedented episode was indeed forgotten in his lifetime and repeatedly and explicitly disregarded by historians since, it will be necessary to keep our analysis fixed, not on the period after 1885, but rather on what observers and participants of the Nile Voyageur contingent were saying and doing from the moment of the contingent's inception, throughout its progress upon its conclusion. Such an analysis will demonstrate that the Nile Voyageurs were publically forgotten because they did not cohere with any of the competing national narratives which existed in Canada during the 1880s. Understanding public memory as an aspect of recognition, this study will trace the forgetting of the Nile Voyageurs as a process of misrecognition characterized by the public's ambivalence towards these men in their capacity as representatives of Canada on an imperial military campaign. Using the narrative resources at their disposal, Canadians of the period could not "make sense" of the Nile Voyageurs in a way that made them memorable as part of anyone's collective story of national identity.

⁶ Ottawa *Citizen*, 19 July 1919

A theory of recognition, based on the work of Axel Honneth, can help cultural historians understand the relationship between national identities and public memory. It also serves as the foundation for the method of textual analysis utilized here to interpret a large body of previously unexamined primary source documents. The unprecedented nature of this incident, given that it was external to Canada's borders and that it was a major imperial military campaign, made the Nile Voyageur contingent a catalyst for wide-ranging public discussions about Canada's place in the British Empire and revealed cultural assumptions about the differences between soldiers and workers as national representatives. Because the men challenged many cultural expectations of ideal representatives to empire, they forced observers in Canada to publically articulate otherwise implicit narratives of national identity. In the public press of the time, there was widespread disagreement as to what image of "nationality" this group represented to external others in Britain, and there was uncertainty as to the implications for Canada's identity in sending civilian, working-class men rather than militiamen as participants in a campaign of war that had captured the attention of Europe, North America and the Empire.

After outlining the slim historiography of the Nile Voyageurs, which may go some way towards demonstrating one aspect of the thesis even before the reader leaves the introduction, I will proceed to outline how I will use Honneth's theory of recognition. On this theoretical base will rest my understanding of group identities, such as nationalism, and of public memory as the recognition of temporal others. I will then explain how this theory underpins my method of textual analysis. It will then be helpful to provide two background pieces to define the key criteria for assessing recognition of the Nile Voyageurs: (1) the language of national identity in an imperial context and (2) discourses of masculine honour culturally associated with civilians versus soldiers. This will be followed by an outline of the primary sources used and finally, I will provide a chapter outline which identifies key goals for each section of the analysis.

I. HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE NILE VOYAGEURS

There has been no academic monograph on the Nile Voyageurs. The Canadian historian who first wrote extensively on the expedition was military historian C. P. Stacey. In 1951, with E. Pye, Stacey co-authored an article entitled "Canadian Voyageurs in the Sudan, 1884-1885," which introduced *Canadian Army Journal* readers to the Canadian role in the Sudan campaign. Stacey explored Sir John A. Macdonald's attitudes towards defence and external affairs in "Canada and the Nile Expedition of 1884-1885," a 1952 article for the *Canadian Historical Review*. The arguments made in both pieces were summarized in an introductory chapter written for his 1959 Champlain Society volume *The Nile Voyageurs, 1844-1885*. This book collects and reprints key important government documents and correspondence related to the organization of the contingent; the official diary of the commanding officer of the Canadian contingent, Lt. Col. Frederick Denison; letters to Canada from Frederick and his brother Captain Egerton Denison; extracts from the diary of the River Column which pertain to the Canadians; a nominal roll of all members of the contingent; biographical notes; and various illustrations and maps. It is an indispensable collection of primary source documents created by the Governor General's office and of other affiliated records together with documents created by the contingent's commanding officer.

Stacey set out to determine the importance of the Nile Voyageur contingent in the development of the Canadian state's defence policy, particularly concerning the use of Canadian armed forces outside the country. While the episode represented several "firsts," Stacey concluded that it was not a particularly significant episode in Canada's political, diplomatic or military history. It was unique, being the first time a "self-governing colony" aided the empire with a contingent in a war, but Stacey pointed out that it was not a military force and the full costs were assumed by London, not Ottawa. Assuming a sharp distinction between Canada and Empire, and privileging formal state actions over other types of participation, he concluded that because "the Canadian government did not spend a penny on it," the Nile Voyageur contingent was therefore "a strictly imperial project." Still, he said, even such a limited formal participation set a precedent for Canadian involvement in the

South African War and World War I and it "gave Canada a share in a singularly dramatic campaign, one of the most tragic and heroic military incidents of a crowded century."⁷

From a contemporary perspective, it appears that Stacey's judgement of the relative unimportance of the voyageurs was a foregone conclusion, given his main criteria for evaluating their historical significance. Should it be surprising that they are deemed to have a negligible role in Canadian military history if, by definition, they were civilians? Because militia were not sent, Stacey saw the Nile expedition as evidence of Canadian isolationism. If the crisis over Gordon was the first time "modern world politics broke in upon Canada's colonial isolation and forced her to make something like independent decisions,"⁸ said Stacey, then it was quite clear that Macdonald's decision was to do nothing. In an oft-quoted letter to Charles Tupper, who represented the Canadian government in London, Macdonald addressed Tupper's question concerning the advisability of sending a Canadian militia to the Sudan to avenge the death of Gordon. An African adventure served no Canadian interest, Macdonald replied, and would only be a waste of Canadian men and money to save Gladstone from his own "imbecillity" [sic]. Stacey thought this exemplified Macdonald's pragmatic belief that Canada's militia was for domestic purposes and that the empire was a partnership of nations, not a unitary body. Yet this 1885 offer of militia after the death of Gordon, of which Macdonald was speaking, had nothing to do with the voyageurs. By the time Macdonald wrote this letter, Gordon was dead and the majority of voyageurs were back home in their Canadian beds having fully completed their work. Stacey's preoccupation with the narrowly defined military dimension of Canadian imperial relations caused him to over-emphasize a discussion about something that didn't happen (sending soldiers) at the expense of what did happen. He inflated the discussion about not sending soldiers after Gordon's death and paid inadequate attention to the actual voyageurs who went to the Sudan to rescue Gordon, who worked well and who lost sixteen of their numbers due to drowning, disease and other causes.

⁷ Stacey *The Nile Voyageurs, 1884-1885* p. 1

⁸ Stacey, "Canada and the Nile Expedition of 1884-1885" *CHR* vol 33 no 4, 1952, p. 340

This current study aims to revisit this episode and revise our understanding of the complexities of Canada's participation in this imperial war. Stacey's volume is a valuable and reliable source of transcriptions and represents an exhaustive and meticulous reconstruction of the progress made on the Nile by the voyageurs, with detailed references to associated battles, troop movements and the larger campaign. Since Stacey has relied heavily on the documents created by the military officers who accompanied the voyageurs, both from Canada and Britain, I will regularly defer to his campaign analysis, especially in chapter seven. But Stacey's frame of analysis, and his consequent selection of sources, reflects a very limited state-centric approach to military and imperial history. He has acknowledged that he intentionally omitted the wealth of sources created by the voyageurs drawing upon "only a few examples of the letters which members of the Contingent" sent to newspapers because he felt they were "concerned with 'local colour' rather than with matters of more historical importance."⁹ Since Stacey admittedly left much of the colour out of this history, his preliminary work in this area remains open to further exploration. It is important to return to this unusual event, which took place at a turbulent time in Canadian and imperial history, and examine it using the sources of the men who were actually involved and the Canadians at home who were trying to make sense of the Nile Voyageurs as representatives of the country. The documents Stacey has collected are primarily the work of the Governor General's office, his military secretary and Frederick Denison and his family members. This is an inadequate data set and the entire episode will be revisited using a volume of newspaper accounts and voyageur correspondence that surpasses the volume of texts Stacey has collected.

Historians of Stacey's generation and the ones that followed concurred with and deferred to his assessment of the contingent. There are few scattered references to the Nile Expedition in histories of imperial defence, but in each case the Nile Voyageurs are either ignored or

⁹ Stacey p. 49

dismissed as inconsequential. In his Macdonald biography, *The Old Chieftain*, Donald Creighton quickly skipped over the boatmen (Canada's "small distinctive contribution to the expedition") and directed his attention to Macdonald's refusal to offer London a Canadian militia. He contrasted Tupper's emotional and sentimental imperialism with Macdonald's cautious and wise assessment of Canada's national interest.¹⁰ In *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, Stacey himself made the curious observation that "the crisis caused by Gordon's death was really emotional rather than military."¹¹ Carl Berger made no mention of the Nile Voyageurs and only passing mention of the Sudan conflict in the introduction to *The Sense of Power*. He contrasted Macdonald's apparent isolationist policy regarding the Sudan with Laurier's inability to resist popular imperial sentiment at the time of the South African War.¹² This was proof to Berger that imperialism had risen in Canada from a low in 1885 to a high in 1899. Following this general trend, Desmond Morton, in his *Military History of Canada*, made no mention of the voyageurs, quoting only Macdonald's letter to Tupper and informing the reader that Macdonald had no "interest in imperial defence matters."¹³ All four of these historians agreed that the Canadian soldiers who didn't go to the Sudan were more important than the Canadian boatmen who did. They simplified Canada's role in the Nile Expedition to its military role, which was non-existent. They used the Prime Minister's supposed refusal to send militiamen in 1885 to prove Canada's indifference to imperial conflicts overseas, overlooking the active involvement of the Nile voyageurs in the Khartoum Relief Expedition, which was widely and enthusiastically supported by the public and assisted by the efforts of Macdonald's government. These historians knew about the Nile voyageurs but they dismissed them as irrelevant in their respective assessments of Canada's imperial relations and military history. For this generation of mid-century anglophone Canadian historians, the Nile Voyageur expedition was an inconsequential aberration, a colonial oddity, which was technically organized by the British government and was therefore part of an imperial, rather

¹⁰ Donald Creighton. *John A. Macdonald: vol II - The Old Chieftain*. p. 409-411

¹¹ C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, vol. 1 Toronto: Macmillan, 1977 p. 43

¹² Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970 p 5

¹³ Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada: From Champlain to Kosovo*, Toronto: McLelland, 1999, p. 109

than "Canadian" history. Almost as if they were looking for excuses to disassociate Macdonald and Canada from the Empire's wars of the 1880s (Canada didn't pay a penny, Canada didn't send soldiers) these historians have helped to obscure our understanding of this event. The Nile Voyageurs made no sense to them, it was not significant, being at best a curious footnote, ably dispatched by Stacey.

If the 1970s marked a turn to social history for Canadianists, examining the lives of ordinary people, looking at society from the bottom up, it would appear that there might be interest in revisiting this episode as a study of workers and aboriginal men. Yet these new fields of social history showed no interest in military campaigns taking place overseas. Like the older generation of anglophone nationalist historians, there was an ambivalence towards Canada's imperial past, and their revolt against the nation-building framework shifted the historical agenda to the local level, not outward to allow a consideration of Canadians in Africa. The empire may have been a key part of fur trade studies, migration studies and intellectual history, where empire made its presence felt domestically, but nowhere, it seemed, was there a place for a study of the Nile Voyageurs.

In 1978, Roy MacLaren published *Canadians on the Nile, 1882-1898: Being the Adventures of the Voyageurs on the Khartoum Relief Expedition and Other Exploits*, with the laudable goal of making the fascinating story of the Nile Voyageurs accessible in narrative form to a popular audience. Drawing on Stacey's collection, and supplementing it with popular biographies, Victorian histories and several newspaper articles, MacLaren crafted a readable tale based on some thorough research. Although the book lacks a general coherent focus, commenting on each and every Canadian "exploit" on the Nile over a sixteen year period where a Canadian happened to be present in Egypt, perhaps the book's main deficiency for our purposes is that it is uninformed by any of the key historical debates of the period. His guiding theme is that Canada progressed from colony to nation through its military exploits. He says that war and military conflict has been instrumental in "developing a Canadian national consciousness," something which has "been neglected by historians." He cites the

War of 1812, the Fenian raids and the two Riel campaigns as examples of "disciplined service in a common interest." These events, together with the Nile Expedition and the South African War, "all contributed to a greater awareness by Canadians of themselves as a distinct and identifiable society," constituting a step on the road to nationhood.

As a guiding assumption, MacLaren's claim that war helped forge the Canadian identity was not supported by any other research nor did he demonstrate that it was actually true with the Nile voyageurs. It was, nonetheless, restated as a recurring motif. MacLaren did not attempt to show the development of even a sense of camaraderie and limited shared identity amongst the diverse group of boatmen, let alone tracing their impact on identity formation in the public at large. He seems to recognize the cultural diversity among the members of the contingent, but when he says "Canadian identity", he is referring to men like Frederick Denison, the patrician Toronto alderman who commanded the contingent. Because "French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians had worked side by side" MacLaren claimed that this led to a "gradual evolution of Canadian nationhood,"¹⁴ He made passing reference to some francophone and native source materials, but he did not use them. He relied more heavily on British officer records than these voices from Canada. One of the few times he quoted Gaston Labat's book it was to paint a rather unflattering picture of the Mohawks. Louis Jackson's memoir *Our Caughnawagas in Egypt* was cited but not quoted. Aboriginal boatmen were acknowledged but MacLaren did not explain their role in a "new national identity." While drawing on such limited voyageur sources MacLaren spoke of an "essential Canadian character"¹⁵ and the "breed of men the new world produced."¹⁶ The expedition demonstrated that the "*genus Canadenses* had begun to appear on the international scene."¹⁷ MacLaren is to be credited for attempting to popularize the story of the Nile Voyageurs, but

¹⁴ Roy MacLaren, *Canadians on the Nile, 1882-1898 : Being the Adventures of the Voyageurs on the Khartoum Relief Expedition and Other Exploits*, Vancouver : University of British Columbia Press, 1978 p. 130

¹⁵ *ibid* p. 159

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 40

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 159

his work did not identify new sources, did not explore the non-official and non-British sources at its disposal and did not engage with contemporary historical debates. Because this was not his intention, it almost does not seem fair to judge MacLaren by such standards, yet the field of study is so barren that it is necessary to pause and examine the only other book besides Stacey's which makes any attempt to examine the contingent as a whole.

There are a few publications which address individuals or groups on the expedition, rather than looking at it as a complete entity. Carman Miller, in his book *The Canadian Career of the Fourth Earl of Minto*, highlights the personal role played by Viscount Melgund, who worked as Governor General Lansdowne's Military Secretary and was given the task of recruiting and organizing the Canadian contingent. Miller mentions some of the problems Melgund faced, from dealing with the ruffled feathers of the Ministry of the Militia to the rivermen's suspicions of military culture.¹⁸ Keith Wilson's 1989 booklet, *William Nassau Kennedy* is a biographical profile of this popular figure in early Winnipeg history.¹⁹ Originally from the Peterborough area, Kennedy was one of the officers in Wolseley's Red River expedition who settled in Manitoba in 1870. He eventually served as Winnipeg's second mayor and was instrumental in the founding of the 90th battalion of Winnipeg Rifles, the Winnipeg Opera and the Winnipeg Orange Lodge. Wilson outlines some of these events and Kennedy's hasty organization of the 90 men from Manitoba who joined the Nile Expedition. Kennedy is also the subject of a 2001 article by J. M. Bumsted "From the Red to the Nile: William Nassau Kennedy and the Manitoba contingent of voyageurs in the Gordon Relief Expedition, 1884-1885."²⁰ Both are based primarily on the Kennedy papers in the archives of Manitoba, and their contribution to this particular aspect of the larger story will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two.

¹⁸ Carmen Miller. *The Canadian Career of the Fourth Earl of Minto*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1980

¹⁹ Kieth Wilson, *William Nassau Kennedy* Winnipeg : Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, 1989

²⁰ J. M. Bumsted "From the Red to the Nile: William Nassau Kennedy and the Manitoba contingent of voyageurs in the Gordon Relief Expedition, 1884-1885" *Manitoba History*, Autumn/Winter 2001/2, no 42

In a special 1981 edition of the *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, there were two papers which examined the connections between Quebec, the British Empire and Africa in the 1880s, making references to the Nile Voyageurs and, in particular, the role of Rev. Arthur Bouchard, the contingent's chaplain. Jean-Guy Pelletier, in "Les relations entre le Québec et l'Afrique, 1880-1905," outlined Bouchard's career as the most prominent of several missionary Quebec priests, whose letters and parish tours gave many francophone Canadians a global vision through a very direct connection to missionaries from their communities. Bouchard served a missionary order in Khartoum for many years, knew Gordon personally and happened to be in Canada collecting money for his Sudan mission when the Nile Voyageur contingent was recruited.²¹ Arthur Silver, in his article "Quelques considérations sur les rapports du Canada français avec l'impérialisme britannique au XIXe siècle," examined popular attitudes in Quebec towards the British Empire, and also mentioned the way in which Bouchard was typical of French-Canadian missionaries who relied on the British as their protectors. Silver traced the popular interest in the Nile Voyageur contingent in the Quebec media throughout the expedition to demonstrate an understanding of the Empire as a complementary framework for the global Catholic mission that laid at the core of French-Canadian identity.²²

Olive Dickason's 1992 overview of Canadian native history, *Canada's First Nations*, made a brief mention of Kahnawake Mohawks who participated in the contingent. She explained their participation by mentioning that the Iroquois' "main claim to fame during the nineteenth century was as rivermen."²³ She shed no light, however, on what the experience may have meant for these boatmen, or the aboriginal voyageurs from Manitoba. This gap was narrowed in 2009 by Carl Benn's *Mohawks on the Nile*, a detailed study of the men from Kahnawake

²¹ Jean-Guy Pelletier, "Les relations entre le Québec et l'Afrique, 1880-1905," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, vol 15, no 1 (1981) pp. 117-120

²² Arthur Silver, "Quelques considérations sur les rapports du Canada français avec l'impérialisme britannique au XIXe siècle" *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, vol 15, no 1 (1981) pp. 55-75

²³ Dickason *Canada's First Nations* p. 355

who participated in the expedition. Benn has taken a focussed approach on this one segment of the Canadian contingent, and his study includes some very detailed genealogical work. Given the inaccuracies in official records occasioned in part by the fact that many of these men had three different names - English, French and Mohawk - Benn's work is invaluable, clarifying some vexing questions about the participation of some prominent individuals. My study and his are complementary, in that I did not attempt the family history work he has undertaken and he has neither set out to look at the contingent as a group nor attempted the type of textual analysis sensitive to recognition, memory, empire and war that guides this study.

This is the extent of the Canadian historiography on the Nile Voyageurs. Only Stacey and MacLaren wrote a book-length volume dedicated to the whole contingent, and neither is, properly speaking, an academic monograph. The focussed studies on groups or individuals and the dismissive passing references by Creighton, Berger and Morton are the few acknowledgements that the Nile Voyageur contingent event existed. Beyond this small collection, the episode seems to have been completely forgotten in Canadian historiography.²⁴

In the British histories of the Khartoum Relief Expedition, the Nile Voyageurs do not figure

²⁴ A sample survey of twelve influential general surveys written in English in the 20th century, revealed no references to the contingent: Wrong, George M. *The Canadians: The Story of a People*. New York: Macmillan (1938); Lower, Arthur. *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada*. Toronto: Longmans, Green (1946); Creighton, Donald. *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan (1965); McNaught, Kenneth. *The Pelican History of Canada*. Harmondsworth: Penguin (1969); Waite, P. B. *Canada, 1874-1896: Arduous Destiny*. Toronto, McClelland. (1971); Finlay, John and D.N. Sprague. *The Structure of Canadian History*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall (1979); Morton, Desmond. *A Short History of Canada*. Edmonton: Hurtig (1983); Francis, Douglas, Richard Jones and Donald B. Smith. *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*. Toronto : Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada (1988); Granatstein, J.L. et. al. *Nation : Canada since Confederation*. Toronto : McGraw-Hill Ryerson, (1990); Careless, J.M.S. *Canada: A Celebration of our Heritage*. Mississauga: Heritage Publishing House (1994); Brown, Craig ed. *The Illustrated History of Canada*. Toronto: Lester Publishing (1996), Alvin Finkel and Margaret Conrad. *History of the Canadian peoples*. Toronto : Copp Clark (1998). The only example I could find of a textbook that did mention the episode was R.T. Naylor's *Canada in the European Age, 1453-1919*, Vancouver: New Star Books (1987), which explicitly looked at the early Canadian experience in a global context. Even here, the reference is brief and overshadowed by Naylor's misleading quip that the relief mission was mounted "to save the Gladstone Liberal ministry from the Mahdist warriors." p. 491

prominently, for their contribution was small, civilian and colonial. Much has been written in Britain on the expedition and in general it is representative of older approaches to political and military history. Although social and cultural histories, postcolonial studies and the "new imperial history," have led to significant reinterpretations of the British imperial experience, their influence has yet to touch the Sudanese wars of the late 19th century. The most recent and exhaustive history is Henry Keown-Boyd's 1986 work *A Good Dusting: A Centenary Review of the Sudan Campaigns 1883-1899*. It gives a full account of all the personalities involved, the stated intentions of military and political leaders, lots of battlefield diagrams and excellent illustrations, paintings and photographs, which are unfortunately not analysed. Keown-Boyd provides some very useful political and economic context for the conflict, but his study did not benefit from the new approaches to imperial history that were emerging in Britain at the time that it was published. It made no reference to the Canadians at all. Julian Symons' *England's Pride: The Story of the Gordon Relief Expedition* is an older popular history, first published in 1965, which draws repeatedly on Denison's journal via Stacey to add spice to an exotic, heroic story. The voyageurs appear frequently, sometimes as "villainous looking" French-Canadians or skilful Indians. In Symons' eyes, the Canadians, as a group, proved valuable to Britain.

Lastly, in terms of comparative historiography, an impressive Australian history of the New South Wales (N.S.W.) Sudan Contingent of 1885 was written by K.S. Inglis in 1985. In general, the Sudan conflict has a more prominent place in public memory in Australia than it does in Canada, even though from a British perspective, the Canadian boatmen performed a useful service at the campaign's most decisive moments, while the N.S.W. contingent was raised after Gordon's death and only arrived on the Red Sea coast as the campaign was winding down. While the Nile Expedition does not figure in anyone's narrative of Canadian nation-building, the Sudan conflict stands prominently at the beginning of all of Australia's military and foreign policy chronologies, even though it preceded Australian federation by more than fifteen years. The N.S.W. contingent may have served no strategic purpose in the Sudan, arriving after Gordon's death and then returning home again shortly afterwards, but

since they were soldiers, not civilians, they were more easily digestible by military historians. Inglis chose to name his study *The Rehearsal: Australians at War in the Sudan, 1885*, because many at that time believed that nothing really happened (cartoonists mocked the government and soldiers mercilessly for bringing home not fame and glory, but a donkey), yet it supposedly 'prepared' the nation for its later 'emergence' onto the world stage in World War I. Inglis provides evidence of a broad cultural desire in New South Wales to demonstrate their usefulness to Britain. The book is richly illustrated and his interweaving of personal histories, with editorial cartoons, artwork, photographs and ephemera surrounding the expedition, is sophisticated and entertaining. It incorporates intellectual history, family history, national mythologies, media analysis and pays special attention to the public rituals and celebrations related to the calling up, departure, return and commemoration of the contingent. The linkage of masculinity to national identity is played out through a fascinating thread concerning "The Little Boy at Manly."²⁵ The N.S.W. Sudan contingent is not presented to the reader as an isolated military incident, but as a case study which illustrates many aspects of Australian society and culture, with all the complications of emerging nationalism, rising imperialism and ethnic, class and religious tensions.

II. THEORY AND METHOD

My analytical framework draws its inspiration from Axel Honneth's theory of recognition and his understanding of intersubjective identity-formation via Jürgen Habermas and George H. Mead. Honneth's ambitious project is to outline defensible normative criteria for a critical social philosophy.²⁶ This work can be fruitfully utilized for cultural history and my study uses Honneth's theory of recognition as a foundational base for three integrated components of my method: (i) a basis for assessing theories of identity formation, especially group identities

²⁵ K. S. Inglis, *The Rehearsal: Australians at War in the Sudan, 1885* Adelaide: Rigby Publishers, 1985 pp.

²⁶ Honneth is the current director of the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, and has inherited this role as well as the chair of social philosophy from his former teacher, Jürgen Habermas. Both have expressed a reluctance to identify themselves as "Frankfurt School" theorists, but are commonly referred to as the main innovators in the second and third generation schools respectively. See forthcoming publication by Joel Anderson, *The Critical Theory of Axel Honneth*, ed. Danielle Petherbridge, Leiden: Brill, TBD. <http://www.phil.uu.nl/~joel/research/papers.html> [accessed November 2011]

such as nationalism, (ii) a conceptualization of public memory as a culturally legitimized public recognition of temporal "others," and (iii) the selection criteria and structure for my textual analysis. Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict* (1996) is considered the landmark text in recognition studies, but some of his most important works have only been published in the last five years. For this reason, Canadian historiography has of yet no Honneth champions and this study humbly aims to break new ground, in the desire to explore alternative approaches to critical theory, discourse analysis and the study of conflict with "the other," trusting in the discipline's eagerness for innovation in the search to explore multiple ways "out of the philosophy of the subject."²⁷

Charles Taylor, a frequent interlocutor with Honneth and Habermas, has stated in a highly influential essay that "Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need."²⁸ Taylor's work on recognition grows out of his Hegel scholarship, and it is from Hegel that Honneth takes the phrase "Struggle for Recognition."²⁹ Honneth's indebtedness to Habermas's theory of communicative action is evident in his underlying assertion that "practical identity formation presupposes intersubjective recognition."³⁰ Honneth argues that struggles for recognition provide the psychological motivation and the "moral infrastructure" for most social conflicts, forms of resistance and demands for political reform, all of which are intimately bound up with personal and collective identity formation. At the base of his theory is the Hegelian notion of "becoming self through the other," which

²⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, MIT Press, 1990

²⁸ Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994

²⁹ Honneth distances himself from Hegel's idealism, his theories of a philosophy of history and many of the cultural assumptions found in his theory of freedom. He acknowledges that the social philosophies of Rousseau, Hegel, Marx and others are characterized by an uncritical assertion of universalistic claims that assumed their "insights into the preconditions of personal freedom applied equally to all humans." Assessing the evidence of global cultural diversity, Neitzsche drew "the radical conclusion that all truth is perspectival" making it impossible for social philosophy to "persist in such a state of self-certainty" amidst claims of "cultural contingency." Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press (2007), p. 38

³⁰ Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1995 p. 92

Honneth claims occurs in three distinct ways.³¹

Like Taylor, Honneth profits from Habermas' rediscovery of psychologist George Herbert Mead's theories of intersubjective individuation.³² According to Mead's understanding of developmental psychology, a child's transition from absolute dependence to gradual independence occurs through the formation of interpersonal relationships of love and friendship, or 'primary relationships.' A personal individuality emerges through the struggles and negotiations of intimate interpersonal recognition. This process of self-actualization continues throughout life via intersubjective relations of friends, family and "significant others." Mutual interdependence is the precondition, not the opposite, of authentic individuality. What concerns us here, however, are two additional levels of identity-formation that occur in public, involving recognition by "the generalized other" of society, to use Mead's terminology.

The 'legal self' who wins recognition from others in society views herself with self-respect, to the extent that she succeeds in obtaining from others, who embody a generalized other of society, the rights and responsibilities she expects as fair and just, given her cultural context. Only in society, through others, can one be "recognized as capable and able to maintain one's social obligations."³³ This type of recognition does not reflect the particular person in her individuality, but grants her respect, giving her status as a social person. Beyond this, individuals desire a third type of recognition, where one is valued by society for one's unique contributions, for one's attributes and distinctive accomplishments. Such recognition is tied

³¹ *ibid* p 143. This study cannot attempt to engage with or even summarize Honneth's justification for these claims, which are presented in *The Struggle for Recognition* both through an analysis of the western philosophical tradition (Hegel, Marx, Sorel, Sartre) which he asserts can find support in the research of social historians, psychologists and sociologists.

³² At the end of his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas states that Mead has laid the ground work for a post-idealist theory of the social self. This claim is developed more fully in "Individuation through Socialization: On George Herbert Mead's Theory of Subjectivity," in *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essay by Jürgen Habermas*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992. Originally published in German in 1988.

³³ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition* p 78

up with one's ways of life, often with one's identification as a member of a group. The winning of recognition at this level frequently involves a struggle to determine which cultural codes in society will prevail. This cultural struggle over norms and values will define what qualities are worthy of esteem. These three types of recognition respectively give a person basic self-confidence, a sense of self-respect and a sense of self-esteem, or social worth. As Honneth describes these three types of recognition in detail, it becomes clear that the intersubjective nature of personal identity leaves humans vulnerable to the denial of recognition or "misrecognition."

Honneth uses the term "disrespect" to describe situations where recognition fails or is withheld. This type of disrespect is not just an everyday insult, like a verbal put down, but rather is of a "categorical difference," such as the denial of a basic right or the denigration of a culture. Such disrespect is seen as "an injustice not simply because it harms subjects or restricts their freedom to act, but because it injures them with regard to the positive understanding of themselves that they have acquired intersubjectively." To be denied legal rights, or the cultural equivalent of one's "just due" as a member of society, provokes a "feeling of not enjoying the status of a full-fledged partner to interaction," because it implies that a person is "not being accorded the same degree of moral responsibility as other members of society."³⁴ Similarly, one can speak of wrongdoing by misrecognizing, where misrepresentation, denigration of lifeways and other forms of disrespect are internalized as injustice. In his more recent writings, Honneth has begun to identify a justification for identifying misrecognition as social pathology, in contrast to normative recognition.³⁵ In doing so, he wishes to assert that social philosophy, from Marx to Arendt, has been unable to articulate a "positive theory" and instead offers "a critique of social circumstances felt to be alienated or meaningless, reified or even demented." Many social critics have adopted this language, using metaphors of mental illness to describe social relations without putting

³⁴ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 132-133

³⁵ Axel Honneth, "A Social Pathology of Reason: On the Intellectual Legacy of Critical Theory," *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, James Ingram (tr.), Columbia University Press, 2009

forward a description of normative social relations against which pathology is contrasted. The scope of Honneth's ambition is evident in his claim to put forward such a "conception of normality related to social life as a whole" that is not "culturally defined" and against which disrespect and misrecognition can be understood as social pathologies.³⁶ Honneth provides a justification for critiquing domination and exploitation as pathological, rather than assuming they constitute the state of normal social relations.

Honneth claims that disrespect awakens a consciousness that can inspire resistance, rebellion or social struggle and that the "motives for social resistance and rebellion are formed in the context of moral experiences stemming from the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition." Some social historians, he says, have reached a similar conclusion via other means, citing in particular E.P. Thompson's work on the moral economy of the English working-class, Barrington Moore's concept of an 'implicit social contract' and Andreas Griessinger's research into political consequences of journeyman artisan's sense of injured honour. To Honneth, Thompson

took his lead from the idea that social rebellion can never be merely a direct expression of experiences of economic hardship and deprivation. Rather, what counts as an unbearable level of economic provision is to be measured in terms of the moral expectations that people consensually bring to the organization of the community.³⁷

In his commentary on Thompson's work, Honneth suggests a research program for social historians to explore struggles for recognition as the "motivational nexus" for social conflicts. My study of the Nile Voyageurs is not, despite its military context, a study of social conflict in the sense of political movements and rebellions. Rather, the struggles for recognition which occur in questions of national representation and public memory will entail conflicts over which cultural norms should be valued in society and for whose benefit.

³⁶ Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, 34

³⁷ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 166-168

Type of Recognition	Psycho-social need	Normative Recognition (Respect)	Pathological Misrecognition (Disrespect)
Respect 2 - Honour (unique, valued social contribution)	self-esteem	<i>Action of the other:</i> praise, commendation, granting distinction, honour, glory, commemoration, fame <i>Subject:</i> honour, pride	<i>Action of the other:</i> group misrepresentation, denigration of ways of life, exclusion, systemic disadvantage, cultural suppression, <i>Subject:</i> insult, humiliation
Respect 1 - Dignity (status as full member of society)	self-respect	<i>Action of the other:</i> granting fair due, equality, mutual accord, meeting cultural norms of dignity <i>Subject:</i> dignity	<i>Action of the other:</i> Denial of rights, social exclusion, paternalism, inequality, humiliation, <i>Subject:</i> moral outrage, injury
Love	self-worth	Care, security, well-being	Abuse, rejection, rape, denigration

Table 1 - Overview of Axel Honneth's Theory of Recognition (1995-2009) as it will be actualized in this study

Recognition and Identity Formation

Not every social disruption will lead to the generation of a shared identity. The translation of personal experiences of disrespect into collective action requires "a semantic bridge between the impersonal aspirations of a social movement and their participants' private experiences of injury, a bridge that is sturdy enough to enable the development of collective identity." When individuals who have formed a personal identity "within their socio-cultural environment" encounter "normative expectations [that] are disappointed by society," this can give way to the forging of such a collective identity if there can be "a shared semantics that enables personal experiences of disappointment to be interpreted as something affecting not just the individual himself or herself but also a circle of many other subjects."³⁸ It is in such a circle that we locate the basis of a collective identity. When a group of individuals, who experience disrespect, possess or can craft a semantic bridge to articulate their shared moral outrage, this narrative of identity provides compensation for their disappointment, reinforces their solidarity and articulates their struggle for dignity and honour.

³⁸ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, p. 163-4

When discussing the denigration of cultural lifeways, Honneth claims that if esteem is denied to individuals, they seek out a common language in a "counterculture of compensatory respect," which can grant recognition and esteem that has been denied by the dominant culture.³⁹ Such "languages open up an interpretive perspective for identifying the social causes of individual injuries" and with time, gain influence and "generate a subcultural horizon of interpretation within which experiences of disrespect that, previously, had been fragmented and had been coped with privately can then become the moral motives for a collective 'struggle for recognition'" Within such a subculture, individuals "uncover a form of expression with which they can indirectly convince themselves of their moral or social worth," they find themselves torn out "of the crippling situation of passively endured humiliation," and are "further strengthened" by group solidarity.⁴⁰ Honneth is clear that not all social struggles follow this pattern, for some are based on pursuit of interests. Nonetheless, he doesn't see a theory of recognition as competing with a utilitarian model but rather attempting to "extend it." As he points out, a collective movement aimed at the pursuit of certain goods cannot be properly understood without considering the cultural values that guarantee social esteem to those who control such goods.⁴¹ Throughout the Nile Expedition, we will see that what may appear to be conflicts over wages and food are articulated by the men in terms of basic respect.

Social solidarity can be built on shared experience of respect and disrespect, drawing upon compensatory narratives of injustice and progress, crisis and victory, humiliation and survival, denigration and renaissance. Such stories told within a subculture serve to abstract the process of mutual recognition through individual self-identification with the group, whether the group is based on race, class, language, religion, caste, ethnicity, region or any other identifiable shared coordinates of experience. The 19th century is understandably described as an age of nationalism and nation-building, and the growth and spread of

³⁹ *ibid* p. 124

⁴⁰ *ibid* p 164

⁴¹ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, p. 165

expressions of national identity has been the focus of much research.

Ernest Gellner's writings served as the starting point for a vigorous debate in the 1980s and 1990s on nationalism, the nation and the nation-state. Gellner clearly and emphatically put forward the position that the nation-state was neither natural nor perennial, but was rather a historically contingent invention, made possible by particular historical circumstances of modernity. In his 1983 book, *Nations and Nationalism*, he hesitated to give a strict definition of a nation, saying instead that a nation was fundamentally a matter of shared culture and a voluntary agreement that the nation existed. External criteria such as language, religion or proximity did not necessarily lead to a national feeling. A people only become a nation, he said

if and when the members of the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership of it. It is their recognition of each other as fellows of this kind which turns them into a nation, and not the other shared attributes, whatever they might be, which separate that category from non-members.⁴²

Placing his emphasis on mutual recognition, he said a group of supposedly objective attributes was neither a necessary nor sufficient basis for a nation. Gellner's biggest critic was a former student, Anthony Smith, who took issue with the claim that nations were invented. Nations, he said, required a homeland and a "fraternity", both of which supposed a "long history of collective experience" because nations "neither are born overnight or ex nihilo."⁴³ All nations, he said, rested on an ethnic past, and it was the scholars job to "to represent the relationship of ethnic past to modern nation more accurately and convincingly." Nationalists, Smith said, worked as "as political archaeologists rediscovering and reinterpreting the communal past in order to regenerate the community." While they were selective, and while it was true that "they forget as well as remember the past," their invention was limited by "scientific evidence, popular resonance and patterning of particular ethnohistories."⁴⁴ Eric

⁴² Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983, pp. 6-7.

⁴³ Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 148.

⁴⁴ Anthony D. Smith, "Gastronomy or geology? The role of nationalism in the reconstruction of nations." *Nations and Nationalism* 1, no. 1, 1994: 3-23.

Hobsbawm reiterated Gellner's view that much of what constituted 'the nation' was fabricated. It was for this reason that he insisted no historian of nations and nationalism could be a nationalist, because "nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so."⁴⁵ He agreed with Gellner that nations were modern, and not 'old as history,' and explained that they were made possible by certain technologies of the industrial age (communication, print media, transportation, public education etc.) Hobsbawm's earlier influential concept of "invented traditions" is an important dimension of his understanding of the historicity of nationality.⁴⁶ He effectively dealt with Smith's criticism of Gellner saying that nationalism "sometimes takes preexisting cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes invents them, and often obliterates preexisting cultures." He challenged Gellner to examine nationalism from below, since ordinary people were, he thought, "not necessarily national and still less nationalist," many of them retaining other identities, including region and class.⁴⁷

The cultural anthropologist Benedict Anderson accepts the modernist position of Gellner and Hobsbawm with some important qualifications. Explaining his famous formulation that a nation was an "imagined political community," Anderson said that while he agreed with Gellner's formula that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist," the word "invention" carried an unfortunate connotation of "inauthenticity." Imagination is necessary for all identities beyond the size of a small village, and perhaps even for these, he said. Their shared commonality of members of a modern nation exists in the imagination, not in actual face-to-face experience. Anderson shifted the emphasis away from any implication of a "true" community, citing Ernest Renan, to the effect that in a nation, "tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses." The object of study is not "falsity/genuineness"

⁴⁵ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 12.

⁴⁶ Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, *The invention of tradition* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983

⁴⁷ Hobsbawm, *Nationss and Nationalism since 1780*.

of nations but "the style in which they are imagined."⁴⁸ All three are modernists for their agreement that there are no medieval nations, that the nation can only exist in a modern society, particularly only after the 19th century, with the advent of print media and the apparatus of a modern state. Gellner's emphasizes mutual recognition and Anderson effectively emeshes the nation within the intersubjective communications ("imagination") of its members. What Honneth adds to this discussion is a compelling rationale for the development of an imagined community and an explanation for the motivational basis of national solidarity. If nations are invented, we still need to explain why people feel compelled to invent and reinvent them. A study of identities is also strengthened by an appreciation for the psycho-social needs such identification fills for many, but as Hobsbawm reminds us, not all. Via Honneth we can see that there are many possible communities of solidarity operating at the sub-national level, from syndicate to church to militia unit, that might satisfy an individual's psycho-social needs for respect and esteem and equip them with the semantic resources to identify with significant others in their lifeworld.

Recognition and Memory

The dependence of public identities, such as nationality, on intersubjective communication that transcends direct communication between subjects has been demonstrated by Anderson to allow members of the same "nation" to identify with an abstracted idea of other nationals, even though they are separated by space. A similar capacity of narrative allows individuals to identify across time. Co-memoration through participation in texts, rituals and narratives allows someone in the present to re-member those who time has separated from the identity community. The working model of public memory used in this study rests upon an assumption that events and people in the present can be recognized by a narrative of meaning that, through its persistence, will ensure their social remembrance in the future. Those who do not fit such stories do not make sense and they are forgotten. They have no community that reaches across a semantic bridge to recognize them from the future.

⁴⁸ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991, p. 5.

Cognitive scientist Paul Thagard proposes a general theory of coherence "as the satisfaction of multiple constraints,"⁴⁹ which presumes the perpetual existence of several explanatory theories to account for the data of everyday life. The theory that can make sense of the most data points, that has the most explanatory power, is the most "coherent." If there are two theories and one can account for 80% of the data and another for 60% of the data, then the former is more coherent. This is not a truth claim, but rather it is a pragmatic assessment of explanatory power. Thagard illustrates his point by showing the coherence of nationalism as an explanatory theory in certain situations, but not in others. His approach reveals that widely held theories are "good enough" to explain most of the data they confront and subjects are not prepared to jettison an explanatory narrative just because it encounters a few facts that do not cohere. Of course, the recognition struggles which occur at the level of honour and esteem are not value-neutral questions of comparative scientific hypotheses, but this understanding of coherence helps us understand the success of some narratives over others, and the commemoration of some events over others, in the ongoing conflict that occurs over cultural norms.

The granting of social esteem, says Honneth, is "permanently subject to cultural conflict." A group which has been denied recognition reconstitutes its identity around its struggle to reconfigure society's criteria of esteem. The success of their effort will

fundamentally depend on the dominant interpretations of societal goals in each historical case. But since the content of such interpretations depends in turn on which social groups succeed in publicly interpreting their own accomplishments and forms of life in a way that shows them to be especially valuable, this secondary interpretive practice cannot be understood to be anything other than an ongoing cultural conflict.⁵⁰

Our understanding of public memory, using the Nile Voyageurs as a test case, must be informed by this understanding of cultural conflict, in which "different groups attempt, by means of symbolic force and with reference to general goals, to raise the value of the abilities

⁴⁹ Paul Thagard, *Coherence in Thought and Action*, Bradford Book, 2000

⁵⁰ Honneth, *Struggle for Recognition*, p. 126

associated with their way of life."⁵¹ Individuals feel impelled to defend a narrative of identity that honours their contributions to society, and therefore grants them legitimacy, respect, status, authority and power. This study reveals competing narratives of empire, different claims about the nature of "Canadian" qualities, and assertions about the ability of soldiers to win honour for the country. These narratives are not merely different ways of talking or hypothesizing, they are the cultural resources that support a group's struggles for recognition.

Public memory, including commemorations, rituals, public narratives and historiography, are manifestations of cultural struggle in a society, in which some groups are recognized and the disagreements over the past reveal struggles to privilege certain cultural norms of respect and honour over others. Collective remembering and forgetting is a filtering process that can only be understood by examining the historically specific cultural codes of one's subjects. For those sharing a collective identity, behaviours which violate a shared cultural code will be 'infamous,' embedded as notorious humiliations never to be forgotten. Their remembrance stokes the humiliation and moral outrage that helps build solidarity. Individuals in the past who personify a culture's highest values will be 'famous.' By embedding individuals and events in historical narratives of identity, subjects who could not directly experience these events of the past can make them their own, crossing generations. Although the passage of time has physically separated these past members of an imagined community, an identity narrative serves to re-member them to their fellows in the present. Narratives reinforce the cultural codes embraced by the teller in both the form and content of the language deployed. An ordinary event that fits the cultural norms of society will probably be not worth remembering because it is just "normal", but frequently, extraordinary and unusual events are not memorable because they do not cohere with anyone's narratives. Their value cannot be recognized because they do not fit culturally accepted criteria of esteem. Their meaning is uncertain. Such events are not repressed or marginalised by discourses of power or by class interests, they are simply not deemed worthy of remembering by anyone in particular.

⁵¹ *ibid* p. 127

Lacking a community of interest and identity, they will not persist beyond the lifetimes of the individuals involved and will not be embedded in anyone's imagined community.

In documenting the forgetting of the Nile Voyageurs, I will not be uncovering marginalized voices or discovering a lost episode. Their letters filled the newspapers and they marched at the head of parades. They were "household names" for a while and then quickly passed from prominence into obscurity. As well, I will not explore the period after 1885, because "forgetting" as misrecognition began before the men were even recruited and continued until the end of the expedition. I will document this period looking for examples of narrative resonance and dissonance, both of which produced discussions that frequently turned not on the actual qualities or accomplishments of the men, but more often, on society's criteria of esteem used to assess them. A historical subject like Goulden, who is pleading that he be correctly remembered to posterity, is engaged in a struggle for recognition to win esteem from the significant others of his social present and of the social future. The main question in this respect is to what degree were the men misrecognized, and seen as discordant with certain identities, and to what degree were they merely not recognized, and seen as a curiosity that didn't quite make much sense.

Textual Analysis Methodology

The last manner in which Honneth will prove useful to this study is as guide to my method of textual analysis. Quite simply there is the question of which quotations to choose as significant and how to interpret them. What is commonly referred to as "critical discourse analysis" in cultural studies, literary criticism and post-colonial history usually involves an exploration of how domination and control are present in talk and text. When asked how he understood power, Michel Foucault explained that it was most simply understood as "a form of warlike domination" and he suggested that in analysis we should "conceive all problems of power in terms of relations of war." Even peace, he said is "a form of war" waged by

means of the State.⁵² Such discourse analysis is well-suited to a critique of the operation of disciplinary power operating in and through institutions, language and knowledge, to control subjects.

I will not be using such a method. Habermas and Honneth have constructed a project that emphasizes the intersubjective nature of social relations and which highlights the importance of language as communicative action based on a psycho-social need for mutual recognition. Such recognition denied can take the form of violence and disrespect, and can inspire struggle for emancipation, but as noted above, this approach understands psychological, social and political violence as pathological rather than typical. My method of textual analysis will be guided by G.H. Mead's understanding of "the other" not as a body to dominate and enslave, but as an "other" whose mutual recognition is required for human self-actualization, self-respect and self-esteem, in which social systems and individual agency create the possibility for both respect and disrespect. Such theoretical assumptions guide my text selections, interpretations and findings.

My method of textual analysis will do two things at once. First, the textual analysis must have a focal point for identifying key tropes and this will be recognition, granted or denied. Doing this type of disrespect-spotting entails noting instances of praise and denigration, statements of equality and denial of rights, salutes and insults, granting military promotions and docking pay, awarding medals and dishing out poor food rations. Talk about these types of incidents, which are interpreted by the historical subjects as evidence of respect or

⁵² Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon and others New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, p 123. Axel Honneth resists engaging in open conflict with Foucault in this manner. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, I read many of his comments on Hobbes to be comments on this martial dimension of Foucault's thought, which is so influential in social philosophy. The quote I have used here is from an interview with Foucault, and although Honneth rarely mentions Foucault, and refrains from quoting him, I believe he must be alluding to passages such as these when he says (to an audience he assumes has read Foucault) that "Foucault's normative criteria remain on the whole so obscure and so overshadowed by epistemological perspectivism that the normative direction of his critique of power can often only be deduced from his political-journalistic statements, and not from his theoretical writings." Axel Honneth, *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007, p 40.

disrespect, are considered worthy of note. Secondly, each exercise in disrespect-spotting permits the mapping of cultural norms and roles. In noting a scene of public recognition or the sting of public humiliation, the unspoken assumptions about what is "fair" and "honourable" are made explicit through language and behaviour. Probing scenes of outrage and indignation leads to cultural mapping to the extent that it reveals the normative content of how respect is understood by the participants, naming the assumptions which remain implicit until they are violated or disappointed. The discourse method is recursive because the more insights are gained into the cultural norms of the subjects, the easier it becomes to spot the insult. The normative form (that humans need respect) is the universal dimension of the theory which is modulated by the normative content (how respect works in that culture), which is historical and contested. The starting assumptions for a method of textual analysis have a profound impact on the type of analysis that can be undertaken. Foucault's originality lay in his identification of the forgotten and oppressed as marginalized. He looked at social institutions, such as hospitals, asylums, schools or prisons, and he saw war. I will be looking at participants in a military conflict and pointing out a longing for respect from a significant other. I will be using Honneth's normative form rather than Foucault's descriptive content as the basis for my discourse analysis because I believe that the former is more coherent with my data set.

EMPIRE AND WAR - A CANADIAN CONTEXT

Throughout the course of the expedition, observers and participants tried to make sense of the experience using the narrative structures at their disposal. The main challenges that they faced were the facts that the expedition was imperial and military, while the Canadian contingent was colonial and civilian. This tension provides us with the two main sets of criteria of social esteem against which the men were measured during this experience. They cluster around (a) Canada's place in the Empire, and hence the proper type of "national" representation of the country and (b) the potential for national glory and honour possible through a military vs. civilian contingent. In each of these two clusters - an imperial history and a military history - a historiographical outline will be followed by a sketch of the

prevailing discourses in Canada in the early 1880s that will provide the reader with some necessary background.

Intersections of Nation and Empire

The modern study of the British empire began with Robinson and Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*,⁵³ which accelerated a trend during in the decolonization period that focussed on imperialism's negative impacts, moving away from the previous generation's interest in a "greater Britain" of the "white dominions." Robinson and Gallagher's influential theories of an "official mind" and of an "informal empire" also succeeded in helping to pull attention away from a state-centric definition of administration and vastly expanded the geographical scope of imperial analysis. In the growth of imperial histories from the 1960s to the 1990s, there was a wide profusion of studies in social history, cultural history and post-colonial studies that explored Britain's relations between Africa, Asia and the Carribean. In such a context, J.G.A. Pocock has argued at regular intervals that British history should not be understood as segmented histories of Scotland, Ireland, England, Wales and the colonies, but rather, in a more integrated manner, as the interaction of "several peoples and several histories,"⁵⁴ including settler colonies such as Canada.

There is an enormous body of work that has since explored the mutual interdependence of Britain's four domestic "nations" but for the most part, imperial history as a field has been slow to address Pocock's challenge. Studies of Britain's identity in the context of "external others" have been undertaken, especially by those working within a post-colonial framework. Amongst those who have claimed to draw inspiration from Pocock's call, Linda Colley focussed on the formation of British identity over and against French identity, effectively documenting the evolution of a common Protestant British identity "super-imposed onto

⁵³ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, 1961. See also John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade", *The Economic History Review*, vol. VI, n. 1, 1953

⁵⁴ See J.G.A. Pocock, "British History: a Plea for a New Subject," 22–43 (1975); "The Limits and Divisions of British History: in Search of the Unknown Subject," *American Historical Review*, 87:2 (Apr. 1982), 311–36.

older alignments and loyalties" which cannot be understood "just through an internal and domestic dialogue but in conscious opposition to the Other beyond their shores" in the form of France as well as Britain's "massive overseas empire."⁵⁵ Although she positions herself as taking up Pocock's challenge, Colley explicitly models her approach after Edward Said, highlighting binary "conscious oppositions" to France and to an exotic empire. Said's conceptualisation of "the other" proved useful in such analysis, but it leaves the researcher blind to Britain's external relations with its significant overseas others, namely those settler colonies which self-identified as British such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. These were the colonies Pocock had in mind.

Antoinette Burton's highly influential 1997 essay "Who needs the nation?" was a response to the "siege mentality" amongst traditionalists who were threatened by the new imperial history, which defined Britain as an imperial space, "displacing the nation from centre stage" and showing its interdependence with empire. She even chided post-modernists who should know better that "in the wake of postcolonial studies" it is necessary to challenge "the fiction of a pre-existing England" and treat the nation as an "unstable subject-in-the-making," rather than a "sovereign ontological subject." In many ways, Burton felt the need to restate for a different audience what Gellner, Hobsbawm and Anderson had already explained about the nation. She asked historians to "think with and through the nation," acknowledging both its "inadequacy and indispensability."⁵⁶ However, she found it genuinely "puzzling and confusing" that a social historian like John M. Mackenzie, editor of the Manchester *Studies in Imperialism* series would make such "impassioned denunciations" of Edward Said. She felt a majority of the book reviewers of the *American Historical Review* bore a grudge against postmodernism. Using bad Foucaultian puns on the historical "discipline," Burton painted a picture of a war between social and cultural historians, in which the former wield

⁵⁵ Colley, Linda "Britishness and Otherness", *Journal of British Studies* Vol. 31, No. 4, (Oct., 1992)

⁵⁶ Antoinette Burton, "Who Needs the Nation?", *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol 10, no 3 September 1997. Burton revised her 1997 article and republished it as "On the Inadequacy and Indispensability of the Nation" as the introduction to her edited volume *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation*, London: Duke University Press, 2003.

the big stick of "real history" and empirical methods to bludgeon the deconstructionists. I have no wish to revisit Burton's and Mackenzie's quarrel, but to dismiss his criticisms of postcolonial methodology as "a red herring designed to throw us off the scent of other compelling issues" seemed a missed opportunity. Burton's ideal of a social history "from the bottom up" enriched by a cultural history "from the side in," to use her wonderful turn of phrase, seemed stuck at an impasse. The heat of that moment in time has passed, but nonetheless, there remains still a need for a greater methodological diversity in approaching the complex history of the British empire and its interdependent relations with peoples around the globe.

In this respect, my study will reach back to Pocock's insight that Britishness was, to use Taylor's phrase, constituted dialogically with others, both internally and externally. Unfortunately, the full scope of those external mutual relations has not always found expression, as metropole-settler colony relations are grossly under-represented due to theoretical biases. A fetishization of power and violence has distorted the representative balance of imperial interest, power and priorities for the post-colonial researcher, who ironically ends up exoticizing the empire by under-representing the roles of Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. Too frequently, the scope of research in imperial history has been shaped by untested assumptions of a disciplinary society, characterized by unrelenting control and dominance in social relations, where subjects are engaged in a struggle of "all against all [where] we all fight each other," in an Sisyphean tale of hegemony and resistance.⁵⁷ The exoticization and domination of "others" is of course a very real phenomenon for historical analysis, but we need not begin with the assumption that this is the regular state of political relations. The same phenomenon are studied as social pathologies if one begins with a theory of mutual recognition. I would argue that an approach based on recognition opens new doors and equips the researcher with the tools to examine

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon; trans. Colin Gordon and others New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. p 208. The inheritance of Foucault's martial view of social relations can be seen in the titles Burton includes in her historiographical overview.

a range of complex relations, normative and pathological, in all corners of the empire.

In the Canadian historiography of imperialism, the problematique of Empire has been based on very different assumptions. In the 1880s, historical subjects in Britain understood themselves at the centre of empire, while Canadians knew their recent confederation had been a product of empire and they understood their role, often with discontented resignation, on the colonial periphery. Because most of the historians of Canada in the middle of the 20th century were Canadian nationalists, their portrayals of the 19th century often emphasized the differences between Canada and Britain, even defining the country over and against its imperial past. So while Burton had to address traditionalists who had naturalized a mists-of-time England, mid-century Canadianists had instead naturalized the process of gradual nation-building. In the words of Philip Buckner, the British empire was presented as an early stage in Canada's development, "as if the Empire existed essentially to create a series of independent nations."⁵⁸ Such a thesis finds its exemplar in Arthur Lower's *Colony to Nation*.⁵⁹ The dominance of this generation of proto-post-colonialists, from the staples theory to the Laurentian thesis, and in which we situate Stacey, tended to obscure colonial Canada's self-understanding as part of the British empire.

Carl Berger's *A Sense of Power* had a significant impact on the profession when it was published because it demonstrated a Canadian imperial past that much of the national historiography had seemingly forgotten. His work was ground-breaking because, in helping historians to remember the prominent and influential advocates of Imperial Federation, he not only resurrected a forgotten episode, but perhaps more importantly, he revealed the underlying nationalism in his discipline which had over-simplified the late 19th century and obscured the contested nature of national identity at the turn of the century. His mapping of the connections between national and imperial identities, which was well-grounded in

⁵⁸ Buckner, Phillip and Daniel Francis, Introduction to *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005 pp. 9–20.

⁵⁹ Arthur R. Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada*, Toronto: Longmans Canada, 1946

language usage and textual analysis, is a project which the present study aspires to contribute to, refine and complement.

Berger's work contributed to the destabilisation of a nationalist historiography which was already well under way due to a range of demographic, social and political forces. In francophone Canada, older nationalist historiographies underwent dramatic revision. Groulx's presentation of empire as an external threat against which the French-Canadian people had survived, with their religion and culture intact, was re-invented and re-imagined by his post-war students, a generation of Quebec nationalists.⁶⁰ Yet as nationalists, the Montreal authors of the decapitation thesis shared much with their teacher and curiously, with the anglophone nationalist tradition, in that they all saw Empire as a historical burden that was to be overcome and eventually cast off. But with the political realities of the 1960s in Quebec, and the emergence of new expressions of Aboriginal nationalism in the early 1970s, whose story had long since been marginalized in both language traditions,⁶¹ it became evident to most historians by the 1970s that a unified national history of Canada was completely untenable. Curiously, even amidst the rich flourishing of social and regional histories that followed, the ghost of a lost national identity lingered, and the description of a new terrain of research that opened up was called, by its earliest defenders, the study of "limited identities."⁶² As if in lament for the loss of a grand national narrative, the term implied that historians had resigned themselves to lowering their sights, and studying the less-than-national identities of region, race, class and gender. Ironically, like British historians studying their internal four nations, a new generation of social historians who outlined "several histories of several people" did so, with notable exceptions in (im)migration history, within national boundaries, taking Canada for granted. Social historians went local.

⁶⁰ Guy Frégault, *La guerre de la Conquête*, 1954; Michel Brunet, *Canadians and Canadiens*, 1954

⁶¹ Bruce Trigger, "The Historian's Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present". *Canadian Historical Review* LXVII, 3, 1986

⁶² J. M. S. Careless, "Limited Identities in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 50, March 1969 p. 1-10. Ramsay Cook takes credit for first using the term in 1967. See Ramsay Cook, "Identities are not like hats", *Canadian Historical Review*, June 2000, 260-5

Canadian histories of external relations and military history were not known for methodological experimentation or a re-examination of empire during the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1993, in an address to the Canadian Historical Association, Phillip Buckner explicitly resurrected Pocock's challenge and asked his fellow Canadianists, "Whatever happened to the British Empire?" His diagnosis of the forgetfulness of Empire placed the blame squarely on an "obsession" with "the construction of a Canadian national identity" and called for "the imperial experience" to be put "back where it belongs, at the centre of nineteenth-century Canadian history."⁶³ The response to this call has been mixed. Most notably, Buckner and other commonwealth scholars actively promoted a series of British World Conferences in London, Cape Town, Calgary, Melbourne and Auckland from 1998 to 2005.⁶⁴ The framework developed amongst the champions of this approach emphasized the Britishness of much of the empire, due to the massive outmigration from the British isles in the 19th century. In the Canadian context, Buckner says that when Canadians advertised Canada abroad, they did not send images of the wilderness, but of agricultural and industrial progress "as part of the march of British civilization around the globe." He claims that "the majority of English Canadians proudly identified themselves as Britons or (more commonly) Britishers" and they believed that Canada was "a British nation, part of a Greater Britain extending around the globe."⁶⁵

Kurt Korieski suspects that this British World project is a reaction to the new imperial history and he sees the effort to put the "dominions" at the centre of imperial history as a theoretical and methodological rejection of post-colonial approaches. The British World historians have constructed a portrait of the empire as a "consensual association" of men and women in a global imperial enterprise, he claims. Looking at Winnipeg in the late 19th century, Korieski concludes that conflict played a significant role in identity formation.

⁶³ Phillip Buckner. "Whatever happened to the British Empire?" *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* III (1993): 3-32.

⁶⁴ These conferences are still running, but only biannually and only in Australia.

⁶⁵ Philip Buckner, *Canada and the British Empire*, p. 73

While the Britishness expressed by Winnipegers was capable of including some ethnic others, its rejection of certain members of society based on class and ethnicity, and in particular Aboriginality, helped to forge and intensify many non-British identities. He lauds the idea of bringing empire back into Canadian history and Canada back into imperial history, but directly challenges the British World model of doing so because it "bifurcates the history of empire into colonies of settlement and colonies of exploitation."⁶⁶ Korenski demonstrates the falsity of such distinctions.

Adele Perry has called upon Canadianists to more vigorously explore "the interpretive possibilities of analysing our past as a colonial one." Referring to the "remarkable and largely unanticipated" resurgence of imperial history by Burton's generation who have demonstrated how the empire has shaped Britain, she highlights lessons that can be learned by Canadian historians in a range of areas. Most notably, in the field of Aboriginal history, the scholarly output in the past decade has outstripped the previous fifty years. This research reminds us that "Canada was a nation born and nourished on the double act of dispossession and repossession." In trying to explain why the new imperial history has had such a small impact on Canadian history, she first identifies "the limitations of [post]colonial history as it is often practised," since "to bifurcate the division between colonized and colonizing makes little sense anywhere and none in Canada." There are also "the very real difficulties of thinking and researching outside the boundaries of nations." Perhaps the greatest psychological threat posed by rethinking Canada as a settler colony, she says, is that this "imperils identities that are premised on articulations of indigenoussness, on the idea that this piece of North America is, or should be, authentically 'ours'." Since the search for such identities have long "animated both French and English Canadian historiography, this is serious stuff."⁶⁷

The Nile Voyageur episode seems ideally situated respond to this challenge, in that it

⁶⁶ Kurt Korenski, "Britishness, Canadianness, Class and Race: Winnipeg and the British World, 1880s-1910s," *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'études*, Volume 41, Number 2, Spring 2007

⁶⁷ Adele Perry, "Canada and the Empires of the Past" *History Compass* 3 (2005) NA 008, 1-4 [Blackwell Publishing: 2003, <http://bit.ly/vtcoau>, accessed November 2011]

presents an unprecedented gathering together of Aboriginal men, francophones and anglophones, who voyaged outside of the boundaries of Canada to participate in an imperialist African war. The possibilities for analysis that it opens up, touching on so many points of intersection between nation and empire, reveal the extent to which the discipline has been transformed over the half century since Stacey dismissed the Nile Voyageurs as outside the realm of Canadian history, as being "a strictly imperial project." The terrain of greatest interest for historians today was *terra incognita* in Stacey's era. But for all the work that has been done, the historiography of empire to date cannot fully prepare us for the particularities of Canada's complex relations to empire in 1884. Much of "the empire" familiar to post-colonial studies had not yet taken shape, as the rapid "scramble" amongst European powers to expand their overseas possessions still lay in the future. At the exact time that the Canadian boatmen crossed the ocean towards Alexandria, the first "Congo Conference" in Berlin was just getting underway. The growth of imperial control over Africa came on the coattails of the carving up of the Canadian Northwest in preparation for settlements. The recruitment of men in Winnipeg for the Nile Expedition occurred 13 years after the signing of Treaty One in 1871. Treaty Five, which dealt with the north end of Winnipeg, and the Indian Act itself were less than a decade old at this time. The prairies to the west were unfarmed and the newspapers regularly reported sightings of ever-diminishing herds of buffalo. The apparent expansion of British civilization in all directions set the context for the Imperial Federation movement, which was formally launched several weeks after the voyageurs left Canada for Egypt. Berger's research turns its attention to the post-Gordon world and does not equip us with an understanding of Canadian attitudes about empire before 1885. Robert Macdonald tells us that imperialists in Britain regularly cited the period following the death of Gordon as their "Great Awakening," when their nation "arose from its lethargy to accept its moral destiny" of imperial leadership.⁶⁸ In Canada, the suppression of the Northwest rebellion and the execution of Louis Riel dramatically transformed relations between anglophone and francophone, aboriginal and non-aboriginal.

⁶⁸ Robert Macdonald, *The Language of Empire: Myths and Metaphors of Popular Imperialism, 1880-1918*. Manchester: Manchester University Press (1994), 4

The rebellion began just over a week after most of the Nile Voyageurs returned from Africa to their homes. Trying to think back to an Empire and a Canada before these milestones events is crucial. The discourses identified in this study will in many ways, provide baseline data that can inform our understanding of cultural history in the post-1885 world, where much of the work has been done by historians of empire.

Canada and Empire in 1884

What did the empire mean to Canadians living in the early 1880s? Our reliance on newspapers and books means that the common language usage of a majority of Canadians is not at our disposal, but even with the sources at hand, it is fair to say that for many Canadians the empire was an abstraction that did not, as they saw it, have much to do with daily affairs. Canadians accepted the empire as an abstract given, but for many of them it was not one that frequently touched their lives. Knowing that Canada was part of the empire could, to some extent be an imperial identity of the thinnest kind. For individuals like Wolseley and Gordon, their sense of empire was based on direct personal experiences in various parts of the globe, but for Canadian workers who had lived the majority of their lives in their town or region, Ottawa, London and Khartoum were increasing levels of abstraction whose relevance declined with distance. The Nile Expedition was unique for this period because it led to recruitment amongst the working classes of many localities in Canada, and in doing so, it made an abstract empire seem much more concrete and local to the men, their families and their town newspapers.

That said, urban newspapers did have a lot to say about the empire in generalized abstract editorials, commentaries and through the reprinting of speeches. In the pages of Canadian newspapers, one sees two main arenas of discourse around empire that provide context for this study: (a) uncertainty over the future of Canada's role in the Empire divided commentators between those who favoured "independence" and those who favoured stronger ties with the empire and (b) in the anglophone press, there is evidence of a deeply felt need for recognition of Canada from Britain.

Canada's "colonial dependency" as it was frequently described was not a satisfying state of affairs for many Canadians. The desire for recognition as a fully competent nation drove Stephen Leacock to famously state "I am an imperialist because I will not be a colonial." In 1884, popular discourse in the press revealed two general ways out of this malaise of colonial inferiority, and desire for self-respect. Both imperialists and those favouring independence considered themselves Canadian "patriots" and if they disagreed about where Canada was headed in the future, they agreed that the status quo was undesirable. The *Winnipeg Sun*, favourably reprinted the *St. John Telegraph's* judgement that there was "a stronger feeling in Canada for independence than for imperial federation," as both more "practicable" and "in line with historic precedents." Something had to change, however, because "the existing relation is not generally looked upon as permanent."⁶⁹ The *Sun's* sister paper in Ottawa also supported independence. It critiqued Sir Francis Hincks for saying that Canadian independence would be "impossible without civil war," noting that people "made the same predication regarding confederation."⁷⁰ They supported the position of Honoré Beaugrand, editor of *La Patrie* who dismissed the idea of any formal federation with the empire, saying

We are Canadians as a colony and we merely wish to become Canadians as a nation. That is the height of our ambition and it seems to be the only reasonable solution to the problem which presents itself when we ask, What shall become of us when it will be necessary to alter our present political relation with England?⁷¹

It was easy to poke holes in the imperial federation "scheme," which generally provided a convenient lighting rod for those who did not favour stronger ties with the empire.⁷² Initial reactions in the francophone press were hostile to imperial federation, certain that French-Canadian rights would not be protected.⁷³

⁶⁹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 4 September 1884

⁷⁰ *Ottawa Sun*, 29 August 1884

⁷¹ *Ottawa Sun*, 5 September 1884

⁷² *Manitoba Free Press*, 31 July, 29 September, 7 October 1884

⁷³ *Trois-Rivières L'Ere Nouvelle*, 28 November 1884

Despite the open calls by many newspapers for independence, Charles Tupper's speeches in London claim that no Canadian politician would ever advocate independence, because it would be "political suicide."⁷⁴ For the most part, calls for independence had no life in practical politics at this point and a majority of newspaper editors considered independence a non-starter. It was in connection with their expressions of British identity that many of them found the imperial federation movement appealing. It provided them a vehicle for recognition as equals in a partnership with Britain. Defenders said that although imperial federation was not urgent, the idea should be pursued and explored, which would be "far better" than "to aim at independence, cutting us adrift from our noble Empire and its glorious flag, or at annexation to the neighbouring republic."⁷⁵ The strawman of annexationism, in 1884 at least, seemed to be an option with no defenders and endless critics. The term was part of the cultural struggle over national direction, in which the independence argument was devalued by labelling it a half-way house to annexation. Apparently, "speeches denouncing independence and annexation were the order of the day" at Toronto's United Empire Loyalists celebrations in the summer of 1884. Lt. Col. George Denison attributed the "cry of independence" to "a few adventurers" and "Bohemians, who have no stake in the country," having been "reared in the United States." He both claimed that "people did not pay attention to it" and he "strongly condemned the newspapers that championed the cause of independence."⁷⁶ The split between independence and imperialism would manifest itself in reactions to the initial news of a Canadian contingent for the Nile Expedition.

In assessing the semantic resources used in public discourse, metaphorical personification of national identities should not be overlooked. The trope of a vulnerable Miss Canada, fending off the unwanted and unnatural advances of an occasionally lecherous Brother/Cousin Jonathan was common in Canadian political cartoons, illustrating Canada's

⁷⁴ LAC MG 26A - Sir John A. Macdonald fonds, Correspondence, Reel 1566, Vol 155 p. 63271, copy of *Canadian Gazette*, 3 March 1885 (Charles Tupper at the Annual Dinner of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, London)

⁷⁵ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 21 August 1884

⁷⁶ Manitoba *Free Press*, 4 July 1884

dependence upon the protection of a well-armed Britannia against the ever-present danger of personal violation. That image suited anti-American imperialists, but those favouring independence often employed a counter-metaphor of Canada as a youth who must one day "come of age," grow up and gain independence. To counter such imagery, the editor of the *Peterborough Review* made the case that when children grow up, they do not always leave home, but many enter into the family business with their parents, eventually assuming full responsibility for its operations.⁷⁷ While both independence and imperialism seemed reasonable escapes from colonial dependency, imperialists were dependent on British recognition of Canadians as equal partners in the empire. What if the parent did not consider the child an equal business partner?

Seeking Recognition from the British

It was not unusual for writers at the time to claim that "Britons and Canadians are one people inhabiting one country. This is no longer a colony of the empire but a part of it."⁷⁸ Validation of such beliefs, however, depended on similar acknowledgements from Britons in England. For Canadians who considered themselves part of the British world, recognition from British as "significant others" was of the utmost importance. Anglophone Canadian papers frequently expressed their outrage if they felt Canada had been overlooked or misrepresented in the British press. In such sensitivity to misrecognition we see evidence of a deep vulnerability at the psycho-social centre of anglophone Canada's colonial dependency. The imagined community of an Imperial Canada was continually strained by British forgetfulness that Canada even existed.

Responding to a *Punch* cartoon about Imperial Federation, which represented the Empire as a cricket team, the *Winnipeg Sun* highlighted Canada's absence: "all our efforts to attract the attention of England", which included "spending half a million a year on immigration," "sending teams to Wimbledon, foaming about the old flag," "swindling the Old Trunk

⁷⁷ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 25 November 1884

⁷⁸ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 15 September 1884

shareholders, supplying Wolseley with alleged raftsmen," all seemed fruitless for "here we are, cat dead by *Punch* and deemed of no account beside the motley colonists at the Cape."⁷⁹ Given the *Sun's* anti-imperialist stance, this is sarcasm, and should be read as a catalogue of fruitless efforts which are, the *Sun* is saying, really only undertaken to win recognition from the British. The paper revised this list when commenting on an article that ran in a British paper which recommended Canada for emigration, but also noted that "Canada practically is an undiscovered country as far as the average Englishman is concerned." Such news was described as a severe "blow." Canada was apparently as unfamiliar to the average Englishman "as if it were the colony of a foreign country" — and this "after all the congratulations which we have been indulging in as to the amount of knowledge disseminated by tons of immigration literature, by displays of our products made at agricultural and other exhibitions, and by the meetings and speeches of many Canadian and English statesmen."⁸⁰ An imperialist coming across the *Punch* cartoon and the emigration article might shrug and consider such points to be inconsequential aberrations. The *Sun*, as part of an ongoing competition of cultural values and national narratives, draws attention to the important ways in which imperialism does not cohere with reality. These two articles not only reveal a typical British forgetfulness of Canada, but they also illustrate how the advocates of independence understood the psychological vulnerabilities of imperialists.

The only thing that approached the pain of being forgotten was the insult of being misrepresented. Lord Lorne, the former Governor General, was a contributor to Principal Grant's subscription series "Picturesque Canada," which came out in installments between 1882 and 1885, largely in association with the railway project and to promote Canada in England. When the latest edition was excerpted in the illustrated *London Graphic* it caused distress amongst some who considered it "unpleasant to Canadians." In depicting "Canadian sports," it showed only skating, sleighing and tobogganing and scenes of sleigh dogs, without showing lacrosse, baseball, cricket, boating or "the thousand and one sports which delight

⁷⁹ *Winnipeg Sun*, 15 September 1884

⁸⁰ *Winnipeg Sun*, 3 October 1884

our young folks in the summertime."⁸¹ The *Halifax Morning Chronicle* said it gives the impression the country is "continually enveloped in a mantle of snow and ice." It lamented that the "average Englishman is doubtless laboring under this delusion" and such pieces only "fasten this idea in the English mind."⁸² Concerns about Lorne's publication were raised in several papers, but regional distinctions were also noteworthy. For example, The *Manitoba Free Press* focussed on the pictures of Indians and "Northwest Scenes" that were based on the works of a Winnipeg photographer.⁸³ The *Ottawa Free Press* was offended by Lorne's depiction of the capital city as "the home of sawdust and the civil service" which made them want to "throw the books down with disgust." The paper protested that he failed to mention the geography of the Gatineau-Ottawa region, which "reproduces with faithful exactness the leading features of the most impressive of English scenery." For "our ex-Governor General" to misrepresent them was an unexpected "act of injustice."⁸⁴ These responses to the publication of Lorne's article, printed for a British audience, demonstrated how "misrecognition is wrongdoing" and is perceived as injustice.

The decontextualization of sometimes contradictory, overlapping narratives provides part of the explanation for misrepresentation. In his biography, Wolseley displays an imperial fantasy of Canada as a land of untamed nature and noble Indians, tragically under threat from the unstoppable forces of civilization that settlement and empire represented. Such a story of Canada allowed him to blamelessly participate in the suppression of the Red River rebellion while, at the same time, appreciating the vastness of a limitless country and bearing witness to the passing of an admirable people. William Butler's *Great Lone Land*, written by one of the officers who accompanied Wolseley on all his campaigns, was a best-seller in Britain and helped cement this phrase into popular consciousness of Canada as a snowy frontier populated by Indians. Both stories reflected and reinforced popular British views of

⁸¹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 1 September 1884

⁸² *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, 5 September 1884

⁸³ *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 August 1884

⁸⁴ *Ottawa Free Press*, 1 September 1884

Canada.

Meanwhile, many urban anglophone Canadians participated in what Gillian Poulter has called "indigenous and indigenizing" sports like snowshoeing and tobogganing as a way to use "cultural performances" as part of their invention of "a new British type of native Canadian."⁸⁵ Participating in appropriated forms of aboriginal culture provided urbanized Canadians with what could be called an accessible frontier, each able to play the weekend Wolseley. Like all forms of "playing Indian,"⁸⁶ it no doubt fulfilled many functions, including a romantic anti-modernist escape, a self-naturalization that legitimized them as colonizers vis a vis an invisible aboriginal population, whose culture was incorporated into a new "native Canadian" identity; and it also distinguished Canadians as unique from Britons (although many imperial British enacted similar play with canoes on English lakes). Such practices fit with Gellner's assertion that the state does not impose culture, but rather, nationalism often utilizes "a putative folk culture" to impose "high culture on society." In this way, "it tends to be the 'great ladies' who go to town in what is claimed to be a peasant dress."⁸⁷ The construction of such identities were complex, helping colonizers justify their presence in a Canada where Indians were presumed to be disappearing, while selectively claiming inheritance to such aboriginal cultural elements that would help make them unique in comparison to the British and Americans, significant others from whom they sought recognition as a distinct people, in what James Sturgis calls a "Canadian territorial nationalism."⁸⁸ Yet co-existing with similar and incongruent British imperial fantasies of Canada, Canadians were sensitive when outsiders did perceive them in this manner. One US commentator described a group of American women visiting Montreal in August with their winter clothing, frustrated with "the misleading Canadian habit of dressing in furs and

⁸⁵ Gillian Poulter, "Montreal and Its Environs: Imagining a National Landscape, c. 1867-1885," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, Fall 2004

⁸⁶ See Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian*, Yale University Press, 1998

⁸⁷ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* p. 57

⁸⁸ James Sturgis, "Learning about Oneself: The Making of Canadian Nationalism, 1867-1914," *Kith and Kin: Canada, Britain and the United States from the Revolution to the Cold War*, C. C. Eldridge ed., Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997

snowshoes when photographs are taken for distribution among English friends."⁸⁹ Another US observer said that it seemed Canadians were "born in blanket coats and snowshoes!"⁹⁰ It seems that the snowshoe wearing "Canucks" who appropriated French-Canadian and Aboriginal cultural elements into a new British identity, were contributing to British views of Canada as a Great Lone Land. The British narrative of Canada as a wilderness populated by Indians was one that suited the imperial imagination, and it helps to explain how the Nile Voyageurs were constituted as a contingent. The often conflicted identities of anglophone Canadians, at times playing Indian, at times demanding to be recognized as British, are characteristic of Canada's colonial condition. Sometimes it suited the interests of some Canadians to represent themselves clad in snowshoes, but they resented the British for reflecting this image back at them, or worse, forgetting about them as members of the British world, and thinking only of Indians when they thought of Canada. Such forms of misrecognition were a recurring disappointment for Canadian imperialists.

Masculinity, War and Honour - Soldiers and Workers

It is necessary to understand the military to understand what the voyageurs were not. As well, given the presence of several officers of the Canadian militia on the expedition, it is important that the reader not confuse them with our contemporary notions of military officers. What might seem obvious today, but was rarely stated plainly in 1884, was that the Canadian militia of that time was not taken seriously by regular (professional) soldiers. In an age when nation-states prided themselves on the masculine qualities of self-reliance and military power, there were disturbing connotations when a country was not manly enough to fight its own wars. Over the course of the 19th century, a compensatory narrative evolved in Canada that praised the particular qualities of the Canadian militia, claiming that they outperformed British regulars in the war of 1812 and other domestic conflicts. The embarrassment associated with the absence of a professional army gave staying power to a "militia myth" amongst 19th century historians that could be seen as an attempt to realign the

⁸⁹ *Springfield Republican* cited as "current comment" in *Montreal Star* 13 September 1884

⁹⁰ *Montreal Star*, 7 February 1885

culture's criteria of esteem. Its relative success, inventing a tradition of a rugged, creative, inventive Canadian military personality, that compared favourably to the mechanistic professional armies evolving in Europe, had remarkable staying power. Wolseley wrote that Canadians were "in some respects [...] better than our Regulars, for, owing to their colonial bringing-up, they have more initiative, and are more self-reliant."⁹¹ Later Kipling would praise Canadians and Australians from the "Younger Nations," who "could shoot and ride," unlike the enervated Britons, "flannelled fools at the wicket or the muddled oafs at the goals,"⁹² grown soft from too much civilization. The militia myth as a compensatory narrative allowed Canadians to tell themselves that a militia did not need to be professional, and it might be better if it was not. For our purposes, this holds out a potential that civilians could also demonstrate those qualities, since they derived not from military training, but from colonial life.

By the 1880s, a formal Canadian militia had begun to develop in embryonic form. In 1871, the last British regular troops left Canada, except for a naval base in Halifax. The British government provided funds for defence and in the 1870s, and under the supervision of the Minister of Militia, the volunteer Canadian militias began to receive money for basic uniforms, guns and ammunition. The position of General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia was created by the Canadian government in 1874 to be filled by a senior British officer, whose presence would lend credibility to the administration of the militia and its budget. Two years later, Royal Military College was set up as a further step towards increasing Canada's military capacity and demonstrating its increasing professionalism.⁹³ By 1884, when General Middleton arrived in Canada to accept what he would have seen as a pre-retirement post of Commander of the Canadian Militia, there would have been a small permanent force of regular soldiers. But popular usage of the phrase "the Militia" referred not to this small force, but rather to the voluntary city and rural militia units which, in theory,

⁹¹ Wolseley, *A Soldier's Life*, p. 211

⁹² Macdonald, pp. 40-41

⁹³ Serge Bernier, *Canadian Military Heritage*, p. 15-38

attended a twelve day "summer camp" training once a year for three years. Desmond Morton estimates that, during this decade, the annual attendance at these camps, often held in "ugly, shed-like armouries" was approximately 20,000 men, although it would be a mistake to consider these shopkeepers, notaries and farmers to be soldiers in the traditional sense.⁹⁴ Most impartial observers acknowledged that the Canadian militia of the 1880s was poorly trained, ill-equipped, undisciplined, inexperienced and, thankfully, not required to serve any strategic military function. The *United Services Magazine* from Britain said of the Canadian militia that "as a satire on military organization it is a grand success." It has "no discipline at all," officers "resign just when it pleases them," "court-martials are unknown" and its guns are "in laughable shape." It is "perhaps the worst officered, the worst drilled, and the worst equipped militia force of any pretensions in the world."⁹⁵ The *Sherbrooke Examiner* mocked Minister of Militia Adolphe-Philippe Caron's "profound knowledge of war" which they said was based on a "scrap album" maintained by "a couple of clerks in his department" which "is filled with points on military economy and strategy that would make Von Moltke's hair stand on end."⁹⁶ Given such public perceptions of these summer camp soldiers, the militia is perhaps best understood as a site for socialization and public recognition in colonial Canada.

Local militias played a key role in the formation of class and regional identities in many Canadian communities at this time and it was widely understood that militia membership was a demonstration of masculine attributes and a means to further refine them.⁹⁷ The militia was a male bastion and taking part in regimental activities provided men with a "chance to pass some of the familiar tests of young manhood."⁹⁸ It also provided symbolic markers of social status through the universally recognized hierarchical rank that officers displayed in

⁹⁴ Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, pp. 93-96

⁹⁵ *Sherbrooke Examiner* 31 October 1884

⁹⁶ *Sherbrooke Examiner* 31 October 1884

⁹⁷ Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (Fall 1998), 115-41

⁹⁸ Morton p. 95

public spectacles and titles. Because officers had to purchase expensive uniforms and were expected to pass three months at a military college, workers found themselves excluded from the officer class and the military ranks reproduced the social class structure of the local community. Only the wealthiest citizens could afford to stable horses that were required for membership in urban cavalry units. Class distinctions in the Canadian militia were less severe than those in Britain where the officers generally came from the landed classes, Canadian professionals and businessmen found that a military commission provided them with membership in an exclusive network of community leaders and political contacts that was an important means for advancement. Colonel Kennedy was a former mayor of Winnipeg and Major Denison was a Toronto alderman before they joined the Nile expedition.

Beyond the impact on gender and class identities, Mike O'Brien also notes the sense of "belonging" that the men felt, which was less directed to the militia per se and more to their local regiments, such as the Queen's Own Rifles (Toronto) and the Governor General's Foot Guards (Ottawa). The exclusiveness of the officer class existed in the context of a larger regimental loyalty felt between officers and their men, who shared membership in a patriarchal kinship group that was "of particular importance given the social dislocation" that came with urbanization and emerging industrialization in 19th century Canada.⁹⁹ Belonging to a militia brought membership in a community, and by joining, even the common man gained pride and expanded his social influence and prestige. In this sense, militias reinforced and extended gender, class and local identities in complex and overlapping ways, as working men expressed their loyalties to community-based regiments whose existence and level of activity depended on the financial means of the business and political leaders who were obeyed as officers.

⁹⁹ O'Brien notes that the commanding officer was commonly referred to as "the Old Man." Younger officers and privates were commonly referred to as "his boys." The language of "our boys" is not exclusive to the military context and comes up regularly in newspaper commentary about the voyageurs, usually used exclusively for local recruits.

While these social dimensions of class, gender and regional identity formation might find parallels in other military systems, Canada's colonial status made its militia unique for two reasons that concern us here. The first of these was that Canada's apparent lack of real military threats in the 1880s, combined with its dependence on Britain for its foreign policy, meant that it was a social group first and a military group second. British officers regularly criticized the Canadian militias for being "social clubs." The military provided clear, formalized categories of recognition through rank. But since the militia was based neither on merit or military skill, the granting of such honours was subject to patronage.¹⁰⁰ Where the military was not needed for fighting, rank was primarily a social indicator of status, and social leaders frequently cemented their local authority by participating in local regiments or starting their own. One correspondent to the *Ottawa Daily Sun* scolded Canadian newspapers for "everlastingly bringing into their columns on every occasion they can, Lieutenant so and so of the Guards, or some other of the city corps." He thought it was fine to be proud of "our citizen soldiers" but "such titles are ridiculous" and should not be "brought into social life." In "the British army", he explained, no officer was "dubbed by any title under that of captain."¹⁰¹ In the 1880s, however, military titles and uniforms were brought out regularly, seeming to coat society with a military veneer. With blurred distinctions between civilian and militia leaders, many public spectacles had military music, processions and uniforms. Parades, excursions, speeches, concerts and religious and sporting events were all frequently overlaid with military language, activities and symbols. The ubiquity of uniforms and bands was not due to any sort of Canadian militarism. It reflected instead a complex web of local identities. But it also served as a symbolic link to the British metropole where the military actually did play a key role in expanding and maintaining the empire.

This second unique dimension of the Canadian militia was that it was not independent, but was formally an inferior institution tied to the British army. At a symbolic level, joining the

¹⁰⁰ Major-General Ivor Herbert complained that officers in rural units were "political hacks" and that urban regiments operated primarily as "social clubs." Capt. Floyd Low, "Canadian Militia Policy, 1885-1914," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 11 (1981)

¹⁰¹ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 10 September 1884

militia linked one to the empire, and its cultural practices and activities allowed an individual to be British, imperial and martial. Military culture provided the semantic resources for colonials to participate in an imagined imperial community. Robert MacDonald traces imagery, language and narratives in popular English literature which connected masculinity, the military and empire. British boys grew up with sports that symbolically prepared them for war, which was represented in Victorian boy's literature as "the game."¹⁰² Canadian boys read the same literature, but few would ever play the imperial game that supposedly changed boys into men. When the political leaders of cities and towns across Canada dressed up in expensive military uniforms, decorated with the insignia of Scottish and English regiments of noble lineages, it not only marked them as possessing a manly character, coming from one of the better classes and leaders in their community, it also provided them with an opportunity to more easily imagine themselves connected to their brother British officers, who fought to guard the empire. If their own spheres of influence were admittedly limited, then playing soldier made it easier for them to feel some sense of power. At the local level, they could participate in the globe-spanning empire, minimizing the sense of inadequacy that some felt with the state of Canada's colonial dependency.

One key aspect of a presumed British martial connection was that it valorized ethnic British military traditions at the exclusion of others, primarily francophone Canadian military traditions. Serge Bernier traces the roots of francophone alienation from the Canadian military to this period when militamen were forced to participate under an ethnically English military culture. When the proposal was made in the 1870s to establish units of Zouave veterans to deal with the Fenian threat, they were refused. "British traditions were becoming more and more entrenched" from uniforms and regimental traditions to officer exchanges. The language of command was always English, francophone officers corresponded with each other in English and manuals were not generally available in French. In 1878 the British government approved "the assimilation at all points of the Canadian militia with the British

¹⁰² Robert MacDonald, *The Language of Empire*, en passim

Army" and by the 1880s the Canadian militia was faced with a "francophone problem" of under-representation. Subject to such imperial regulation, francophone men found their language and cultural traditions disrespected, which hardly encouraged their participation in a voluntary militia. The Britishness that attracted imperialists to the Canadian militia drove francophones away.¹⁰³

Understanding that the Canadian militia was primarily a social club, with increasingly strong symbolic ties to the British empire, its upper ranks were occupied by members of anglophone society's leading classes. Members of those social classes expected that such men (i.e. their own people) would make ideal representatives of Canada to empire in the case of a military conflict. As we have also seen, Canadians were aware that their militia was not a professional army, and a discourse around the colonial superiority of Canadian soldiers (the militia myth) rooted their uniqueness in their colonial upbringing. This study, therefore, will test whether or not the talk about "special Canadian qualities" can be transferred from colonial soldiers to colonial civilians. There were in 1884 discourses about civilians who could positively represent Canada abroad, including writers, ministers, missionaries, athletes, politicians, scientists and men of commerce. Such domains of activity differed from those of skilled labourers and there was no deep tradition of workers representing the country abroad. Popular discourse of the day frequently represented workers as strong, virile, hardy products of colonial life, but their achievements were praised and marvelled in a generalized manner, almost as if they were a part of the countryside rather than citizens.¹⁰⁴ Workers were valorized locally, but always as a class: farming, trapping, cutting timber, mining, building canals. The workers in this study, the shantymen, were frequently described for their physical strength and skill, but also for their inclination to alcohol and fighting. While there are clear scripts of how soldiers could win honour for the country, there was not in 1884, any pre-existing narratives of working-class men representing their country abroad.

¹⁰³ Bernier p. 38

¹⁰⁴ Cleveland Moffat, *Careers of Danger and Daring*, New York: The Century Co., 1903. Moffat profiles a series of workers, from fire fighters to the river pilots of Caughnawaga, who describe their experience as Nile Voyageurs.

Cultural codes of manliness for workers and soldiers frequently had a wide area of overlapping discourse, but were not identical and the latter had a greater scope for winning public honour for his country, given gendered attitudes towards the nation and the military. In this context, the assumptions of the colonial elites about the connections between honour and soldiering, and their desire for Britain to recognize Canada as an equal in the empire created expectations which were further complicated by the unexpectedly diverse composition of the Canadian contingent in terms of ethnicity, class, region, language and the prominence of Aboriginals.

SOURCES

In the organization of the Nile Voyageur contingent, records were generated in the Governor General's Office, the British Colonial Office and the British War Office,¹⁰⁵ and Indian Affairs, all of which are available, at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), as selected microfilm copies in the case of the British records. The LAC also holds relevant material in the fonds of John A. Macdonald, Lord Minto (Viscount Melgund in 1884), Surgeon Major John Louis Hubert Neilson and the recently acquired papers of steamboat captain William Morgan Jones and voyageurs James Martin, Patrick Conroy and Robert A. Goulden. Lt. Col. William Nassau Kennedy's papers are available in the Archives of Manitoba and Lt. Col. Frederick Charles Denison's papers are in the Toronto Public Reference Library.

A particularly rich source of information is daily and weekly newspapers. The Nile Expedition was regularly front page news, especially in those cities from which the boatmen were recruited. Detailed searches in Winnipeg, Peterborough, Ottawa, Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières papers have been supplemented with cursory samplings from the press in other major cities in Canada. I have read texts contained in newspapers as falling into six

¹⁰⁵ Such correspondence which was directed through the Governor-General's Office is classified as RG 25 External Affairs, even though the Department of External Affairs was not created until 1909.

general types: (i) cable news items, which for the most part were not used except in a contextual or linguistic sense, since they dealt primarily with troop movements, contradictory battle reports and only occasionally, the voyageurs; (ii) British editorials or British news items quoting British officers that were reprinted in Canadian papers because they revealed 'what the British think of the Canadians'; (iii) reportage of the Nile Voyageurs in Canada, as they were recruited, departed, returned and were feted; (iv) in house editorials, often printed side by side with a "current comment" column that featured editorial opinions from other newspapers that the editor found interesting or concordant; (v) reprinted voyageur letters written home to friends and family members or written directly to the newspapers as 'special correspondents' and (vi) letters to the editor about the voyageurs. Appearing in the same publication, these texts all had different authors and intents and their contradictory perspectives, tropes and narrative fragments, often in the same column, reveal the range of public discourses at the time and the high tolerance for narrative incoherence that exists amongst most language users. Printed letters home from voyageurs are extremely valuable primary source documents, and the identification and transcription of dozens of these has been one of the significant research outcomes of this study. Most of this material has never been collected and analyzed before. The study's reliance on newspaper sources is also a result of the absence of publications and fonds after the incident was over. The Nile Voyageurs seemed prominent in the public media for a few months, and then they seemed to vanish from the public consciousness with barely a trace.

There were a few memoirs published by those who were members of the Nile Voyageur contingent. Sgt. Gaston Labat's book, *Les voyageurs Canadiens à l'expédition du Soudan; ou, Quatre-vingt-dix jours avec les crocodiles*, is a collection of his letters to *La Presse* with an introduction and some additional material. In 1885 Louis Jackson wrote and published *Our Caughnawagas in Egypt: a narrative of what was seen and accomplished by the contingent of North American Indian voyageurs who led the British boat expedition for the relief of Khartoum up the cataracts of the Nile*. Both of these works, and Neilson's diary, were acknowledged but not used by MacLaren. I will also draw upon a published account

by another boatman from Caughnawaga, James Deer, who wrote *The Canadian Voyageurs in Egypt*. T. Arnold Haultain, of the Grip printing company of Toronto, published *The War in the Soudan* in 1885. This chronicle of the events of the campaign, written for a Canadian audience, has a chapter on the voyageurs and makes references to them at various points, including excerpts from the letters of a Peterborough voyageur, John A Sherlock, who was probably the most prolific of all the voyageur correspondents. A biography of the contingent's chaplain, *Le R.P. Bouchard, Missionnaire Apostolique*, was published in 1897 by his friend Monseigneur Henri Têtu. It contains Têtu's impressions of the departing voyageurs, several letters from Bouchard in Egypt, a letter from a voyageur from Trois-Rivières and a hagiographic chapter on General Gordon.

In addition to the voyageur letters, another significant research outcome of this study has been the rediscovery of Charles Lewis Shaw, a talented journalist and humourist who was a regular contributor to *Toronto Saturday Night* and newspapers and periodicals in Canada, the U.S. and Britain. I have located dozens of his stories published over a fifteen year period, over 20 of which deal with his experiences as a Nile Voyageur. Shaw was one of a group of Winnipeg lawyers who pretended to be experienced rivermen so they could gain a spot in the contingent. These 'legal voyageurs' were criticized in many quarters, but as a historian of popular culture, I am grateful for Shaw's deception. His fictionalized accounts of his experience are generally internally consistent on the main points, and are often easily corroborated with other sources. His main value, like most of my other sources, is not primarily in the provision of 'facts,' but in the language he uses, the stories he emphasizes in the retelling, the way his text sheds light on various Canadian identities and his colourful perceptions of the relationships between Canadians and Britons during the expedition.

British perceptions of the voyageurs are also of interest. The Canadian boatmen are prominent in Sir William Francis Butler's *Campaign of the Cataracts*, and to a lesser extent in Wolseley's *In Relief of Gordon*. Impressions of Canada formed during the Red River expedition, recorded in Butler's *Great Lone Land* and Wolseley's *A Soldier's Life*, will also

be used for context in chapter one. Other memoirs by British officers and soldiers provide some minor insights. A published lecture of John M. Cook, of the tourist company Cook and Sons in Egypt, entitled *The Nile Expedition*, addresses the question of British perceptions of the Canadian boatmen.

There are a limited number of popular culture sources that reveal a Canadian interest in, or make some commentary on, the Nile Voyageurs. I have collected approximately twelve poems that deal with the Nile Voyageurs and the ways in which they represented Canada. There are a few brief references to the contingent in school history books. There are also a limited number of pictorial representations of the Voyageurs, both photographs and drawings. Official tokens of recognition include medals and four pages in the Books of Remembrance placed in the Memorial Chamber in the Peace Tower.

Over the course of the past decade, a range of fragmentary references to the Nile Voyageurs has continued to become available with an ever-expanding process of digitization of public domain published materials. Many provincial and local digitization projects and the ongoing efforts of the Google Books have provided me with the capacity to find new sources that contain passing references to the Nile Voyageurs throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. The obscurity of the items that continue to emerge does not challenge my basic assumptions about the forgetting of the Nile Voyageurs, but if anything leaves me convinced that I have located all the major sources on the topic.

All told, my sources allow a surprisingly large number of voices to speak. Voyageur fonds, many letters from the Nile, and published texts written in both English and French, from different regions, which include two published works by Mohawk authors, provide a wide selection of personal perspectives. Perhaps my greatest challenge in the research phase has been to find the voice of illiterate boatmen. Many men signed their contracts with an X and they neither published books nor wrote letters home. Occasionally, they can be heard filtered through newspaper reportage, they are quoted in letters from their co-workers or they appear

in Shaw's stories. It should be clear from this overview of sources, that the dominant voices I have at my disposal are those of anglophone males, for the most part middle-class, who created the most text on the expedition, both as boatmen-participants and journalist-observers. I have a richer sources of francophone and Mohawk texts than I would have imagined, but my analytical focus will be primarily on anglophone colonial identities, which can only be properly understood in relation to francophone, aboriginal and British identities.

In this respect, a brief note should be made on the language I will use to describe intersubjective identities. As should be clear by now, I make no assumptions about essential qualities, while noting that many of my subjects do talk with such presumptions. I will not assume that Canadian, Canadien, British or Aboriginal are complementary or exclusive in any general sense.¹⁰⁶ Some subjects considered Canada both a colony and a nation, others may consider Canada and Britain to be the same nation, or a *Saulteaux* Ojibway may consider himself "a Britisher" but not a Canadian. Whenever possible, I will try to remain contextual with identifications but the need to draw some conclusions requires the use of some generalities, which in turn call for some disclaimers. When the phrases 'Canadian nation' and 'national identity' appear in the study they should be read as contingent and contested. The terms 'anglophone' and 'francophone' are less problematic than "les Anglais", "the French", "French-Canadian" and "British" for many subjects, but at times it makes more sense to use one of the other phrases. I will use 'aboriginal' in its current constitutional sense, to encompass First Nations (Indians, natives), Métis, and Inuit. Indian or native will be used in preference to First Nations, which seems anachronistic discussing 1884. For similar reasons, in the main body of the study I will prefer the 19th century spellings "Caughnawaga" and "Caughnawagas" to contemporary spellings of "Kahnawà:ke" and "Kahnawa'kehró:non," which will allow for stylistic consistency with all the sources, including the books by Louis Jackson and John Deer. Unfortunately there is no simple Canadian equivalent for the Maori

¹⁰⁶ Lowry, Donald, "The crown, empire Loyatism and the assimilation of non-British white subjects in the British World: An argument against 'ethnic determinism.'", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol 31, number 2, May 2003

word "paheka" to refer to non-aboriginals. At times, it may be logical to refer to the Nile Voyageurs by their community name or province, or by their socio-economic class but in all these cases, such terms must be understood as convenient labels, not essential identities.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS - CHRONOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

For this study, I have chosen a fairly rigid chronological structure for theoretical and methodological reasons. By privileging expressions of mutual recognition in my approach, it is important to be clear and precise about the sequence of events from the perspective of the subjects. Recognition is dialogical, often involving a series of cascading reactions. The situations were confusing enough for the people involved, since there were time delays of telegrams and transatlantic mail, frequently resulting in a game of broken telephone with time-shifted feedback loops. Press reports, editorials, voyageur letters and War Office telegrams all travelled at different speeds and were all reprinted carelessly without proper attribution. Telling the story in "the right order", and even recreating the confused chronologies, is a pre-requisite to understanding the language and behaviour of the subjects. Sequence is context in historical discourse analysis. In Berger's *Sense of Power*, his keen insights into the subtleties of language usage are frequently undermined by his thematic chapter structure, which privileges abstract generalizations of intellectual ideas over chronology, as he clusters excerpts from texts created over several decades according to theme, obscuring the dialogical nature of particular quotes that have been stripped from the historical contexts to which they were reactions. Admittedly, I also have a stylistic preference for a chronological structure in a historical narrative, especially when the sequence of events warrant it. History is a story and in this particular case, this is a very interesting story, with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Chapter one will draw primarily on newspaper responses to the initial news that General Wolseley asked Canada for a contingent of voyageurs. It will explore the ways in which the Governor General's office responded to the request and how recruitment was shaped by the advice of Canadian political and business elites. It will also discuss the large number of

militia men who offered to go on the expedition. Chapter two moves from town to town and observes the recruitment of boatmen through the reportage of local newspapers. Journalistic commentary is here based not on abstract reactions but on observations of the men who are signing up and in some places, offers us detailed descriptions and interviews with them. Chapter three analyzes the parties, banquets, parades and speeches given in various locales from Manitoba to Quebec City as the men leave their homes. The chapter closes with all the men on board the *Ocean King*, greeted by the Governor General before their departure. Chapter four takes place on the Atlantic, beyond the reach of newspaper reporters and editorialists and fully in the domain of letters written by the men. This period was the most concentrated time they spent together as a group and given that they were not working, they were able to write about their journey, each other and their surroundings. Chapter five focuses on the men's visit to Gibraltar and the passage across the Mediterranean. Between Europe and Africa, and approaching their destination, more of the men began to reflect on their mission and write about their understandings of their role in Africa as part of the imperial campaign. Chapter six takes place in Egypt, through which the men passed en route to the Sudan. Several of incidents illustrate their experience of Egypt as an imperial space, although they were still travelling and not yet working. Chapter seven documents their work on the Nile, which makes up a minority of the time they are away from home. The emphasis of this chapter is not on their progress up the cataracts, which has already been mapped in detail by Stacey, but on the nature of their experience working under the discipline of the British Army, what the British have to say about the Canadians and how this is reported in the Canadian press. Chapter eight follows the majority of the men back down the Nile and across the ocean to Canada, where they were received in their home towns with banquets and celebrations. This chapter's chronology is interspersed with other fast-unfolding events in the immediate aftermath of Gordon's death.

Each chapter will identify specific goals that fit into the broader aim of the project, which is to demonstrate how the Nile Voyageurs were forgotten by being misrecognized by colonial Canada. In each chapter, texts will be examined in light of the identity clusters of

colony/nation/empire and of civilian/military. Textual analysis based on the selection of incidents of respect/disrespect will be read as the satisfaction and disappointment of cultural expectations. The results of this analysis constitute each chapter's discourse mapping and at the close of each chapter, patterns will be identified amidst the more prominent tropes and narrative fragments. Such patterns will explain how subjects use competing narratives as semantic resources in cultural struggles over the social criteria of esteem that will determine who is honoured, who is recognized and who is remembered.

Many of the findings about public recognition are necessarily connected to the ways in which the non-Nile Voyageurs understood the contingent, demonstrating why they were unmemorable in Canada's history. This is what we can hypothesize from the outset, that this happened and that it has been marginal in public memory and the historiography. But the true value of the study will hopefully be to reveal the interpretations of the event from the voyageurs themselves. Stacey's Champlain Society volume is a collection of texts created by the Colonial Office, the War Office, Landsdowne, Melgund, Denison and various members of the Denison clan. Stacey forgot the voyageurs entirely, which is to say, he did not recognize that the men who actually participated in the expedition had anything of "historical importance" to say in the matter. After 120 years of having no historian to document and analyze their stories, it is now time to take up the challenge put forward by the Ottawa voyageur, whose letter to the *Citizen* is quoted above, and to finally undertake as "a student of human behaviour," the "abundant field of labour" required to study the "sorts and conditions of men" who, whether they intended to or not, represented the country on the Nile.

CHAPTER 1 - THE CALL FOR VOYAGEURS

It was in the last week of August 1884 when newspaper-reading Canadians first learned that boatmen from their country would pilot boats for the Nile Expedition. On August 26, newspapers in Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg published notices that "600 Canadian Boatmen" would be recruited "for the relief of Gordon."¹ Initially, there were conflicting reports about the composition of the group to be sent. Some papers initially referred to them as "Canadian voyageurs,"² others merely as "Canadian boatmen."³ The *Globe* said the group would consist of "several hundred French Canadians" working in the lumber trade from the Ottawa, St. Maurice and Quebec City regions.⁴ They noted that "some Indians will be accepted" to go along with "our Canadian canoemen."⁵ The differing terminology used reflected an uncertainty concerning who the boatmen were and what their role might be. With an initial paucity of hard facts available at the outset, newspaper writers rounded out their stories with assumptions and expectations.

Within the first couple of days, reports were characterized by the seemingly paradoxical tendency to speak of the boatmen, in both pragmatic and romantic terms. On the one hand, the expedition was presented as an interesting employment opportunity, and on the other hand, the boatmen were described using anachronistic language of the fur trade from a previous century. Many of the earliest reports addressed the logistics of the expedition, identifying the terms of employment, the type of boats to be used, the nature of the contract the men would be signing, the types of skills and experience required. One of the earliest reports was based on a Montreal *Gazette* reporter's discussions with Lord Melgund, who said

¹ The very first articles appeared on 26 August 1884 in the Montreal *Star*, Montreal *Gazette*, *Globe*, the Winnipeg *Daily Sun* and the Winnipeg *Daily Times*

² Montreal *Star* and Montreal *Gazette*, 26 August 1884

³ Winnipeg *Daily Sun* and Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 26 August 1884

⁴ The Manitoba *Free Press* expected that "the majority of the voyageurs will be French Canadians", 28 August 1884

⁵ *Globe*, 26 August 1884

he would be hiring the lumber agent J.T. Lambert of Ottawa to coordinate the recruitment process. From this initial interview, this reporter wrote that Melgund believed that Wolseley had requested Canadian boatmen based on "the great services rendered" in the Red River expedition and the "adaptiveness" such men possessed.⁶ Another early article published in the *Globe* also emphasized the link between a given set of work skills and the unique requirements of the expedition. "The class of men required are those who have been engaged in running timber on Canadian rivers," the paper explained. The civilian nature of the group necessitated the engagement of "qualified foremen to accompany the voyageurs so that there will be no necessity for placing them under military discipline." Further, finding lumber men should not be difficult, because "lumbering is very dull now, and many young men without families would regard a three or four months' voyage in Egypt merely as a good holiday trip."⁷ The *Winnipeg Sun* similarly used the language of work and contracts, rather than "voyageurs."⁸

Alongside such descriptions there was a tendency to idealize the boatmen as "canoemen," "paddlers" and "voyageurs" using imagery popularly associated with the days of the fur trade. The use of voyageur language continued even when it became clear that a majority of the men were lumber workers and river pilots who would be working with modified whaler boats rather than canoes or York boats. It is impossible, however, to say for certain what the popular understanding of the word was in English before this event. The *Sherbrooke Examiner* used the word in italics,⁹ indicating that they still considered it a loan word from French rather than a Canadian English term. In March of 1885, at the end of the expedition, when the men were returning to Canada, the *Peterborough Daily Review*, made the observation that the word "voyageur" was "little heard in this part of the country a year ago," but as result of the expedition it is now "a household word."¹⁰ At this point in September, we

⁶ *Montreal Gazette*, 26 August 1884

⁷ *Globe*, 26 August 1884

⁸ *Winnipeg Sun*, 26 August 1884

⁹ *Sherbrooke Examiner*, 12 September 1884

¹⁰ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 3 March 1885

see an initial confusion in English as to how this word was to be understood in the context of the Khartoum relief expedition. In the francophone press in Canada, the general tendency was to speak of "bateliers" rather than "voyageurs" in their coverage of the recruitment and the expedition. In a French-language Canadian newspaper, the phrase "voyageurs canadiens" would indicate "Canadian travellers" rather than fur traders, especially since the adjective "canadien" would seem redundant in the historical meaning. Nevertheless, as the news broke, a majority of French-language papers did employ this phrase, with headlines such as "Voyageurs Canadiens pour l'Egypte."¹¹ But two days after the example cited above, *La Minerve* began using "voyageurs canadiens" in quotation marks and thereafter replaced the phrase with "bateliers canadiens." The imprecision of terminology in both languages and the contradictory mixture of anachronistic tropes with pragmatic details reflected an initial fuzziness about what to make of these boatmen who would be travelling from Canada to Africa.

In this early period, the responses to the call for "Canadian voyageurs" can be divided into two general categories - those who thought the expedition was an opportunity for Canada to win recognition from the British and those who did not think Canada should participate. The first group was the majority voice in anglophone and francophone press. The second group relented after it became clear that the expedition was going ahead and that a large number of men were signing up. I will pass quickly over the first group and focus on the sceptics so that we may identify them before this perspective quickly passes out of our chronology. Their dissonance provides an instructive counterpoint to illumine the dominant position.

A majority of writers spoke of the "honour" Canada had won just by virtue being asked and predicted that this "little army of voyageurs" and their services "will be noted with interest and we doubt not with pride, by their countrymen at home."¹² There was gratitude that "Lord Wolseley was quick to recognise the valuable qualities of the Canadian voyageur ... instead

¹¹ Montreal *La Minerve*, 27 August 1884

¹² Kingston *Daily British Whig*, 28 August 1884

of forgetting them." It was sure the boatmen "will bring back honor to Canada after carrying peace and safety to Khartoum."¹³ In such formulations, Wolseley was a potent representative of the British military command and a symbol of Empire itself. It was noted that "General Wolseley, before accepting the chief command of the expedition insisted upon being granted carte blanche as to the strength and equipments of the forces."¹⁴ To readers aware of Wolseley's "fondness" for Canada, such reinforcement of his Imperial authority amplified the importance of his call to Canada. Hence, the request by "the imperial authorities" to supply a transport force "cannot be otherwise regarded than as a high compliment to the country by the distinguished officer at whose instigation the request was made."¹⁵ In addition, the majority of Canadian editorialists and reporters who responded to the initial call in this manner were sure that "the request of Lord Wolseley will meet with a prompt response" from "our intrepid and venturesome raftsmen."¹⁶ There were frequent predictions of "favorable responses" from the "hardy river men who would be delighted to lead such an expedition" in Egypt and to "teach the dusky sons of that degenerate land a wrinkle in boatmanship."¹⁷

In contrast to these confident assumptions of enthusiastic volunteers there were sceptical voices. An editorial in the *Winnipeg Sun* thought that it was "not at all likely that many will enlist," despite the generous pay. "The theory that tens of thousands of Canadians are thirsting to serve Her Majesty abroad looks well in the speeches of foaming Jingoists like Lord Lorne and Sir Charles, but has no foundation in fact."¹⁸ The editorial catalogued the dangers of climate, disease and war, noting that the Canadians could not even expect to win military honour since they would be a transport corps. "The pay is not large nor is the glory to be reaped in propelling a 32 foot boat under a blistering sun likely to be as profitable a crop as

¹³ *Montreal Witness*, reprinted as "current comment," *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 30 August 1884

¹⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, 1 September 1884

¹⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 September 1884

¹⁶ *Globe* 26 August 1884

¹⁷ *Kingston Daily British Whig*, 28 August 1884

¹⁸ *Winnipeg Sun*, 28 August 1884. Lorne was the Governor General before Lansdowne and Charles Tupper was Canada's High Commissioner. Both were living in London at this time.

No. 1 hard. However, as Lincoln used to say, for those who like this sort of thing it is just the sort of thing they like."¹⁹ The *Sun's* sister paper in Ottawa was sharper still. In an editorial entitled "A Crazy Scheme," the paper outlined why they thought that the idea of sending hundreds of Canadians to relieve "Crank Gordon" did not "commend itself to the common sense of Canadians." The paper understood that Wolseley had been impressed with the "hardihood and endurance" of Canadian voyageurs, but said that the reason for their vigour was the "excellent sanitary nature of the country in which he is born and brought up." To take the Canadian out of his country and put him on the Nile, however, would expose him to an unhealthy climate:

It would be suicidal for such a Canadian contingent to go to Egypt and if the mad scheme is carried out, it will bring sorrow into many a Canadian home. The men who are such splendid fellows in the Canadian forests and streams should not be sent to work in an African sewer. We admit the compliment, but we fear that too high a price will be expected for it.²⁰

Their dismissal of Gordon as a crank is uncharacteristic in the Canadian press and after a couple of weeks, the *Sun* tempered its tone. It should be noted that the two *Sun* newspapers proudly identify themselves as part of the "independent press" regularly claiming that they provided the news and opinions most of interest to their rapidly growing body of subscribers, as opposed to the "party press" which was tied to the will of the Grits or Tories. They both opposed the Imperial Federation proposal and supported Canadian independence from Britain.

The most fundamental critique of Canadian participation in the Khartoum Relief expedition came from the Irish Catholic paper, the *Toronto World*. The French-language paper with the largest circulation in Canada, Montreal's *La Minerve* translated this editorial from "un journal anglais."

Pourquoi les Canadiens iraient-ils chercher la mort au Soudan? Elle les prendra toujours assez tôt, soit dans les rapides de l'Ottawa, soit dans la forêt.

¹⁹ Winnipeg *Sun*, 2 September 1884

²⁰ Ottawa *Sun*, 28 August 1884

Ils n'ont pas de querelle à vider avec les pauvres Soudanais, qui, à leur point de vue, ne font que ce que feraient les autres nations dans les mêmes circonstances. Si le général Gordon est en danger, il s'y est mis de son plein gré, et cela, au profit d'un peuple qui est en état de le tirer d'embarras. Aucune gloire ne s'attend les Canadiens au Soudan. On ne leur demande d'aller là qu'en qualité de scieurs de bois et de porteurs d'eau. Les troupes régulières ne les regarderont que comme des domestiques étrangers

It wryly comments that men unnecessarily pick hanging fruit, they chase women and they seek out death in far away countries, when if they were patient all three would come to them in good time.²¹ Beyond the scepticism found in the two *Sun* editorials, which found that the dangers outweighed the meagre honours, this piece revealed an empathy on the part of the Irish-Canadian writer (and the French-Canadian commentator) for the "poor Sudanese" who was only defending his home from a foreign power (the British). The *World* used the loaded language of "hewers of wood and drawers of water" that made clear their view of Canada's status in this imperial adventure. *La Minerve* commented that it was an unusual opinion that "mérite réflexion" qui "ne sont pas à dédaigner." It felt the need, however, to say "tout de même, il faut tenir compte du fait que l'expédition est organisée par le gouverneur-général lui-même, qui ne voudrait pas sans doute envoyer nos compatriotes à la boucherie."²² A similar public expression of faith in the British authorities was demonstrated by the *Globe* which had earlier observed that "this time", "as luck will have it," the purpose of the mission was a just one, "being a mission not to conquer but to save."²³ The *Winnipeg Daily Times*, a Conservative paper, critiqued the *World's* editor, who could not understand why Canadians would seek death in the Sudan rather than "stay at home and die in bed." Such "sad trash," which also appears in "other eastern newspapers," comes from men who "would laugh if anyone suggested that patriotism had something to do with these men going to the Soudan." Patriotism "still survives" it asserted, and "outside a few newspaper offices, it is quite pronounced."²⁴ Before the boatmen even began to engage, the newspapers of the day were

²¹ Toronto *The World*, cited in *La Minerve*, 6 September 1884

²² Ibid

²³ Toronto *Globe* 26 August 1884

²⁴ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

projecting their competing political visions onto them and explaining why they would or would not volunteer. The *World's* editorial touched a nerve with the other papers, drawing a strong attack from the *Winnipeg Times* but perhaps tellingly, the largest circulation English and French-language papers in the country, the *Globe* and *La Minerve* only made what could be interpreted as obligatory statements of faith in the correctness of British intentions.

The final source in this vein, which maintained its critical stance later than most was *Grip* magazine. Canada's *Punch* considered it irresponsible and "unpatriotic in the extreme" for newspapermen to promote the Nile expedition and "try and induce poor and ignorant fellows" to volunteer for such a dangerous mission. In a poem about "a Canuck named Bill Boyle," the media "talked at," "pounded into" and "growled at" Bill Boyle to entice him to enlist for the sake of "England" or "glory." When it became clear he had "no taste for the Nile," Bill's critics replied "No good Briton are you!" to which he responded "That is true, I'm the growth of the Canadian sile!"²⁵ These commentators in the *Sun* papers, the *World* and *Grip* presented themselves as patriotic Canadians for whom service to Britain was not an immediate and unthinking response. They rationalized this in pragmatic terms, saying the dangers were high, and the potential for glory was slim. From their perspective, sensible Canadians would not risk life and limb in a dangerous affair in a far away land. In such responses we see none of the concern with recognition from Britain expressed in those papers that considered this a compliment to the country and were grateful that Wolseley did not forget Canada. When men did begin to show up in large numbers at recruiting stations, this scepticism gradually gave way to a more neutral reportage of events.

It should be noted that none of these articles approached the anti-empire tone found in some papers in Australia which went beyond the *Toronto World* and in their coverage of the Nile Expedition openly expressed sympathy with the Mahdi, even portraying him as a symbolic

²⁵ *Grip Magazine*, 27 September 1884

Irish Republican fighter in Africa.²⁶ There was also no audience for the anti-British articles in Parisian papers. The *Ottawa Free Press* summarized British reports of the Republican press in France, saying that "the hatred of England which is always latent in France has now become rampant" on this matter. As evidence of this "French Anglophobia" the *Free Press* shocked its readers with scurrilous French conspiracy theories that Gladstone was using the Khartoum Relief Expedition as part of a plot to capture all of Egypt for Queen Victoria, as Disraeli secured India, "to add this other bauble to the diadem of his aged mistress."²⁷ Despite the reliance of Canada's francophone press on French newspapers, and despite the large number of Irish-Canadian papers, harsh anti-imperial critiques of the expedition were beyond the parameters of public discourse in Canada. They were reprinted not by sympathetic French-Canadians or Irish-Canadians, but rather, by shocked Anglophone Canadians.

Most commentators expressed the opinion that Wolseley's call for Canadians was an honour to the country and a "tribute to Canadians." The official announcement of Wolseley's appointment stated that the Nile expedition would resemble the Red River expedition, and thus Wolseley had "experience which no other officer possesses."²⁸ Wolseley's 1870 experience "leads him to believe that our Canadian canoe men are just the men to lead the relief expedition."²⁹ But what qualities did Canadians possess that set them apart from others? The details of "their peculiar adaptiveness,"³⁰ apparently did not need detailed articulation by observers, but rather it was enough that they were recognized by Wolseley. Whether it was mutual recognition or circular logic, it appeared that Wolseley was the man for the job based on his Canadian experience, and the Canadians were the men for the job based on their unique skills, witnessed by Wolseley while in Canada.

²⁶ K. I. Inglis, *The Rehearsal: Australians in the Sudan, 1885*, Sydney, Australia: Kevin Weldon and Associates, 1985.

²⁷ *Ottawa Free Press*, 1 September 1884

²⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 August 1884

²⁹ *Globe*, 26 August 1884

³⁰ *Ottawa Sun*, 26 August 1884

Many spoke of the formative role the Red River expedition played in Wolseley's development as an officer. During the Ashanti campaign, where Wolseley again employed the "river strategy" in 1873, he wrote to "Doc Schultz" (John Christian Schultz) in Winnipeg saying "I wish I had a thousand Canadian volunteers here at this moment."³¹ The *Globe's* first editorial on this matter said that

Lord Wolseley has expressed his faith in the dash, pluck and hardiness of Canadians in a manner which is as gratifying as it is sincere. He has never conducted a campaign outside of Canada but he has openly expressed his regret that his command did not embrace a contingent of Canadians, and an equipment of Canadian canoes, Canadian buckboards or Canadian somethings.³²

Such comments begin with the assumption that Wolseley recognized some essential Canadian quality, which seemed easily transferable from "voyageurs" to his Red River Men of 1870 to the lumbermen of 1884. The *Globe* was sure that the "difficult and perilous work of navigating the Upper Nile" should "instantly commend itself to our intrepid and venturesome raftsmen." Wolseley's decision to ask for "voyageurs" forced Canadians to rehabilitate the anachronistic connotations the word held in 1884. The *Montreal Witness* admitted that the "old brigade of voyageurs" which would annually "traverse the continent" from "Lachine to the Mackenzie River in magnificent bark canoes" was gone. Surely those men could have "surmounted the Nile difficulties, floating where they had two inches of water and carrying their boats, burdens and all, past the cataracts, singing all the way." The same could be said, they felt for "the bateau men, also, who used to take freight from Montreal to Upper Canada." Both groups had natural abilities which were lacking in common soldiers, who "know only how to perform evolutions in which they had been drilled."³³

the lumbermen of to-day are the best surviving representative of this class of our people, and it was a very happy thought to send for them. If there is anything in which the Canadian, and especially the French Canadian, can

³¹ *Ottawa Sun*, 3 September 1884

³² *Globe*, 26 August 1884 p 4.

³³ Evolution meaning a part of a set of ordered movements.

excel the world in it is in such work as this. Six hundred lumbermen are to start for Egypt in a few days. Transferred from embowered rivers to the bare, sandy banked or marshy-shored Nile and the hot, dry climate of Nubia, they will be the same dauntless, indefatigable men Colonel Wolseley found them in the Northwest.³⁴

Yes we know, the *Witness* was saying, they are not literally *voyageurs*, but they "represent the same class of our people"; they are "the same" men who travelled with Wolseley in 1870.

Upon closer examination, however, such generalities about Canadian abilities reveal overlapping narratives of identity amongst this "class of our people." Alongside such frequent sweeping references to "Canadians" and "this class of men" who were recognized by the British Empire, there were the seemingly contradictory references to other identities. First of all, glory and recognition were also expected to shine on certain provinces, races or groups in particular, not always on "Canadians." Amongst the initial reactions to the call for Canadians distinctions were made based on region, social class, civilian/military distinctions and the racial distinction between "Canadians and Indians" in the expedition.

A credit to their native province

Lord Wolseley's original request included a call for men from Red River. As we shall see below, the authorities in Ottawa and Quebec city initially regarded a Manitoba contingent as impractical given the time available. Hence, the call for a western group was delayed. When a request was finally sent to Winnipeg, the newspapers invariably spoke of local recruitment in terms of representation from the West, not from Canada and not as members of the Empire. Winnipeg itself at this time was a young and rapidly expanding city, seeing its main streets paved and its first electrical lights installed during the summer of 1884. Amongst the three local papers, the *Winnipeg Daily Sun* was the most adamant defender of "North-West Rights," but reflected a strong regional identity present in all papers coming from this relatively young settlement. Manitoba's recent losses in the border dispute with

³⁴ Montreal *Witness*, as reprinted as "current comment," *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 30 August 1884

Ontario only accentuated the province's sense of distance from "The East" as Ontario and Quebec news was often labelled in Winnipeg newspapers.³⁵ The Manitoba *Free Press* wrote that "Seventeen years of Confederation, instead of kindling a national spirit among the people of the Dominion, have only intensified Provincial feelings and aroused antagonisms to the bond that bind them together in a heartless union." Existing trade, rail and boundary disputes constituted an "unequal conflict" that put a strain on "the integrity of the Dominion and the loyalty of the provinces" where "self-interest is stronger than sentiment."³⁶

In the initial reports that Manitobans could participate in the expedition, the Winnipeg press focussed primarily on the men from their province, who were always "our contingent" and "our boys." The Winnipeg *Daily Times* was pleased Melgund would "distribute the honors of the Khartoum expedition" by allowing Manitoba to participate. It was a "source of not a little pride that our province is thus to enjoy a share of the glory of the Khartoum expedition."³⁷ The *Sun's* initial skepticism, noted above, showed first signs of melting when it became clear that Manitobans might participate. They noted that Col. Kennedy could select sufficient "able-bodied volunteers who with their bravery and pluck, are certain not only to win distinction for themselves but do credit to their native province." Although a majority of Winnipeggers were recent arrivals, Manitoba had somehow become their "native" province. The *Sun* shifted its stance from sceptic to western promoter, arguing that "It is the feeling here that in selecting the officers of the expedition Manitoba should not be forgotten."³⁸

Notre race naturellement aventurière

The French-language Canadian press almost always spoke of the call for boatmen in terms of Wolseley's compliment to French-Canadians. In its first editorial on the matter, *La*

³⁵ Oliver Mowat, premier of Ontario, had recently won a favourable decision at the Privy Council in London which awarded the Lake of the Woods and Rat Portage (Kenora) district to Ontario. There was universal disappointment in Manitoba at this, a sentiment also felt in Rat Portage, which had considered itself part of Manitoba.

³⁶ Manitoba *Free Press*, 23 July 1884

³⁷ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 29 August 1884

³⁸ Winnipeg *Sun*, 30 August 1884

Minerve explained that Wolseley has called for "canotiers canadiens-français." In calling on "nos gens" whom he came to know in the Red River expedition "il rend ainsi témoignage à leur habileté."³⁹

Il y a, c'est vrai, les risques de l'expédition. C'est une véritable aventure. Remonter le Nil, pénétrer dans le Soudan! Ce n'est pas séduisants, excepté peut-être pour notre race naturellement aventurière. Mais la Providence a semblé veiller si bien sur les aventuriers franco-canadiens jusqu'à présent! Il n'est pas de pays au monde où on n'a pas vu de ces aventuriers.⁴⁰

A few days later, *La Minerve* advised its readers to consider a letter to the editor, in which "Il y a du sérieux sous cette forme quelque peu humoristique." The correspondent offered advice to potential volunteers, telling them to only sign up for "des conditions bien définies et non militaires"; "Demandez des représentants de votre religion"; and "Demandez un corps d'ambulance de votre langue." He addressed them as "Canadiens" but assumed they were francophone Catholics in a British expedition who would have to speak up for their rights. He believed that "le Canada produit des hommes forts et vigoureux comme les chênes de nos forêts" and pleaded with the organizers "de ce pique-nique militaire" to take all necessary precautions, given that the whole thing was being put together with great haste. To the "voyageurs canadiens" he finally said "Réfléchissez, consultez, signez, parez, et, comme toujours, s'il le faut, mourons noblement. En agissant ainsi, Dieu nous sera favorable."⁴¹ Neither of these two voices objected to the expedition, they both saw in it a chance for glory, but the glory is reflected upon "notre race" rather than "Canada" as a whole.

Left in Dongola with the Boats

If the representation of Canada is complicated by examples of regional pride and representation, there is also some ambiguity regarding the military vs. civilian status of the boatmen. In the somewhat imprecise descriptions of "Canadian qualittes" articulated around Wolseley's request, there are references which imply that their civilian status is actually part

³⁹ When the Montreal Star translated this first section as current comment, it translated "canotier canadiens-français" as "Canadian boatmen." 6 September 1884

⁴⁰ *La Minerve*, 2 septembre 1884

⁴¹ *La Minerve*, 6 septembre 1884

of what made Canadians well-suited for this job. To be undrilled is to possess a wild vitality found from working in the Canadian forests. Because the men would "not be asked to go under military discipline," said the *Globe*, they would be left "perfectly untrammelled to devote all their native energy, pluck and shrewdness" to the job.⁴² Although the Canadians will not be soldiers, the writer felt that if the Canadians led the expedition as proposed "it is rather doubtful if it will be necessary for any to follow. However, if the number should be thought to small to cope with the Mahdi, each Canadian might strap a fellah to his back and take him along."⁴³ The *Winnipeg Sun* reprinted this piece with the title "Canadian Prowess."⁴⁴ The more some writers reflected on the non-military role of Canadians, however, the less satisfied they were with Canada being represented by "this class of men."

Instead of participating in battles at the front, "the Canadian contingent may expect to be left" in Dongola with the boats, and "twenty-one days' rowing up the river and a like voyage down will be the extent of their share in the expedition."⁴⁵ The *Winnipeg Sun* called the boatmen "a grade of soldier only a few degrees higher than the army mule" and said that the contingent's "efforts at the oar, however strenuous, and its heroism in 'packing' supplies past the cataracts, however noble, will not reflect immortal honor upon the country."⁴⁶ The key status and class distinctions here find voice in military hierarchy of officers, soldiers and civilian workers. Even in these initial reactions, before the reporters have had a chance to meet the men who would represent the country abroad, there is disappointment expressed by those who lament that the true abilities of Canadians will not find expression because of their role as civilian labourers.

⁴² *Globe*, 26 August 1884

⁴³ *Globe*, 26 August 1884

⁴⁴ *Winnipeg Sun* 29 August 1884

⁴⁵ *Manitoba Free Press*, 9 September 1884.

⁴⁶ *Winnipeg Sun*, 5 September 1884

Canadians and Indians

It is one thing to talk about different types or classes of Canadians, but what about participants who were not considered Canadian? In all of the initial references to the composition of the contingent, almost without exception, the English-language and French-language press spoke of "Canadians and Indians." Terms such as Canadian Indians or Mohawk Canadians were never used. There was no equivalent to English-Canadian or French-Canadian. From the outset, readers were told that General Wolseley learned during the Red River expedition about river navigation in small boats, using Indian voyageurs and hence, "In the present case it was Indians that the British Government requested." In a widely reprinted report from Melgund, the *Ottawa Free Press* correspondent said that "Lord Lansdowne ascertained that Canadians were equally as expert, if not better in performing the duties required as were Indians."⁴⁷ This semantic distinction was absolute in every description, whether in public articles or private diaries. Based on language usage, there seemed to be a clear consensus in 1884 that Indians and Canadians were two separate categories. Consequently, the fact that Indians from Caughnawaga and St. Peter's were "representing" Canada in the eyes of the British created complications as we shall see in the course of the expedition. Wolseley's request implied recruitment at Caughnawaga, St. Regis and at Indian reserves in the Northwest. The switch from selecting "Indians" to selecting "Canadian" lumbermen was not as simple as one might have concluded based on public information available through the newspapers.

The Roles of the Governor General and the Government of Canada

Based on what was reported in the press, the call for Canadian boatmen seemed to flow directly from the British government to Governor General Lansdowne, who made a few adjustments and began recruitment, under the supervision of Lord Melgund, the Governor General's military secretary. Instead, several aspects of Wolseley's request were initially rejected in Ottawa, and then eventually accepted in a modified fashion. An intervention from

⁴⁷ *Ottawa Free Press*, 27 August 1884. Reprinted *verbatim* in the *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 28 August 1884 and the *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 August 1884

Prime Minister Macdonald altered Wolseley's request and changed the intended composition of the contingent. This deviation was driven by competing narratives of Canadian identity articulated by British and Canadian political and military elites, especially concerning Aboriginal participation in the contingent.

The earliest press reports of a Canadian contingent date from August 26, noting that Lord Melgund arrived in town the day before, due to "the decision of the imperial government to enlist the services of Canadian voyageurs in the Khartoum relief expedition." Melgund had already engaged a "Mr. J. T. Lambert, a well-known Ottawa lumberman" to begin the recruitment of shantymen.⁴⁸ The public is mistakenly given the impression that Melgund was implementing orders directly from London, when in fact the request arrived in Quebec City on August 20, when Lansdowne received the following telegram from the Colonial Office:

It is proposed to endeavour to engage 300 good voyageurs from Caughnawaga, Saint Regis, and Manitoba as steersmen in boats for Nile expedition - engagement for 6 months with passage to & from Egypt. Will pay of 40 dollars a month with suit of clothes and rations free be sufficient? If this could be done perhaps you would permit Lord Melgund to undertake charge of these voyageurs to Egypt, and priest could be attached to party receiving Captain's pay & allowances. The Catholic archbishop might be induced to aid the scheme in the first instance with his influence. The voyageurs should arrive at Liverpool not later than the 1st of October, but if possible by the 15th of September. Three officers of Canadian Militia might accompany party.⁴⁹

Hours later, at 2am on the morning of the 21st, Lansdowne composed a letter to Sir John A. Macdonald, enclosing a copy of the telegram. He expressed confidence that the men could be raised and highly recommended Melgund, his military secretary, to lead the recruitment and the contingent. Lansdowne believed that the idea "has evidently arisen with Wolseley, and is founded on his Red River experiences." Lansdowne sent Melgund to deliver this letter to Macdonald in Rivière-du-Loup, which asked "whether you see any objection to the

⁴⁸ *Montreal Gazette*, 26 August 1884

⁴⁹ Stacey p. 55. When documents are available in Stacey's text, they will be cited by page number, rather than by original source (ie. Macdonald fonds, vol 84).

scheme" and sought his advice on "the best means of carrying it out." The Governor General spoke of the urgent need for Melgund "not to lose a moment in putting himself in communication with the agents for these Indian settlements." He indicated that he might write to the Archbishop, who could recommend a priest.⁵⁰ Lansdowne was prepared to act urgently upon Wolseley's request, exactly as directed.

The White Man would be more desirable than the Red Man

We have no written documentation of Macdonald's discussion with Melgund on August 21st, but after Melgund returned to report to Lansdowne, the composition of the expedition changed considerably. The influence of Macdonald, who was both Prime Minister and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, must be surmised by the way that recruitment occurred and how Lansdowne justified these changes in his correspondence to Lord Derby in the Colonial Office.⁵¹ Immediately after a briefing from Melgund, the Governor General wrote to Derby, to confirm that three hundred men would be obtained, "but that raftsmen taken from this Province [Quebec] and from the country surrounding Ottawa would be preferable to Indian boatmen."⁵² He also regretfully informed London that Melgund could not come with the expedition.⁵³ Within 24 hours, as a result of Melgund's meeting with Macdonald, the boatmen engaged were to be raftsmen rather than "voyageurs," and while contact would be made with the Mohawk communities of Caughnawaga and St. Regis, the organizers first sought out the advice of lumber merchants, not Indian agents. No effort was made to contact the Archbishop and no efforts were made to recruit in the Northwest. After Melgund's meeting with Macdonald, organization began to assemble a contingent that was significantly different in constitution than the one requested from Wolseley.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Stacey notes "Sir John's advice was probably verbal, and its precise nature does not seem to have been recorded. It is very obvious, however, that he made no objection to the plan, and it may well be that the very practical measures adopted for raising the men owed something to his suggestions." Stacey p. 6

⁵² LAC RG 07 G12 vol 82 Governor General's Letterbooks to the Colonial Office 1883-1887, p. 120, Lansdowne to Derby, 21 August 1884

⁵³ His wife was pregnant at the time and he did not wish to be abroad at the expected date of birth.

Prominent lumber merchants were sent for, and the following day Lansdowne met with one group in Quebec City while Melgund quickly boarded a train to Ottawa to meet with a second group of businessmen. From these meetings, the Governor General and his military secretary learned about the current wages of the industry and some cultural norms of lumber gangs, including the role of the "boss" or foreman. One of these lumbermen, Herbert Price, wrote to Melgund in Ottawa the same day, informing him that he had attempted, without luck, to reach one of the best foreman in the region, Patrick Rice, who was likely "up the Gatineau River" for a couple of days. Price recommended paying the men \$1.50 a day, which was less than the British had offered, but much more than current wages in the business. He said that Mr. A. McArthur, whose firm worked in the Georgian bay area had two pieces of advice. The first was to seek out men from Peterborough, the source of "many of their good men." McArthur also said that "his experience leads him to say that the white man would be more desirable for the task in question than the red man."⁵⁴ One of these businessmen later described for a Montreal *Star* reporter how they had advised the Governor General at this early stage, before there had been any public knowledge of Wolseley's request. The *Star* told its readers that when Lansdowne received the telegram "concerning Canadians or Indian voyageurs", he "immediately" and "before forwarding any reply," called a meeting at the Citadel with "leading lumber merchants" to get their advice about how to proceed. But the decision to go with raftsmen was made before consulting the merchants, and if this meeting was a "secret" that was "well kept,"⁵⁵ it was in the imagination of businessmen, for Melgund spoke quite openly to the Ottawa papers of his meetings in that city. One may assume that the prestige and compliment derived from being asked to advise Lansdowne and Melgund on this important international affair more than compensated the lumbermen for the disadvantages the expedition represented to their material interests; they would be losing some of their best employees for the season and risking wage inflation by the rates of pay being offered.

⁵⁴ RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs, Herbert Price to Lord Melgund 22 August 1884

⁵⁵ Montreal *Star*, 30 August 1884

On Saturday, August 23rd, just 72 hours after the original request, Melgund had, on the advice of the Gilmours, engaged Mr. J. T. Lambert, a lumber broker, "who thoroughly knows all the men in the lumber business here." Lambert would deal with the practicalities of recruitment in Ottawa, the largest source of men, and would serve as the local contact for families in Canada while the contingent was in Africa. Lambert spent the weekend talking up the expedition amongst workers around town, and promised to report to Melgund by Monday afternoon. By this point, Melgund was preparing tentative contracts for the men and considering a wage scale. He suggested to Lansdowne that they "consult no more lumberers" and instead "what is wanted now is to tackle the men themselves."⁵⁶

Explaining Canada to the British

At this point, Lansdowne sent a letter to London to rationalize the changes made to Wolseley's request. In the first half of his letter, he explained the turn away from an "Indian" contingent which had representatives from the Northwest. Since "the settlements mentioned by Your Lordship... are inhabited by Indians," he began, "I infer that a preference has been expressed by the Military Authorities for Boatmen of this description." Lansdowne explained "that the freighting business formerly carried on by these people has greatly declined of late and that the best class of men now obtainable as river boatmen and pilots is to be found amongst the raftsmen engaged in the Lumber Trade of this Province [Quebec] and of the Ottawa District." It would be "unwise to restrict the selection" to Indians, he wrote, and impractical to select men "from so distant a part of the Dominion as Manitoba." Based on advice from "the most competent authorities," Lansdowne felt that "that there is every reason for preferring a force composed of white men or partly of white men and partly of Indians to one composed exclusively of Indians and Halfbreeds." Introducing London to his alternative suggestion of shantymen, he explained their annual cycle of labour, working in the winter months felling trees in the backwoods, and then in the spring "driving the logs down the Rivers and navigating the rafts in which the timber is carried." Such men "are

⁵⁶ Stacey p. 56

excessively hardy and unequalled in their knowledge of river navigation;" they are "full of resource and able to turn their hands to almost any employment" and "in the face of almost any difficulties they are unrivalled." As a bonus, amongst such men, "a sprinkling of Indians and Halfbreeds will probably be found." He also noted that with such a group, it would not be necessary to include a Catholic priest, since they "are used to spending a considerable portion of the year away from their spiritual advisers and the appointment of a chaplain would I believe involve unnecessary expense" and "some difficulty." Lansdowne based these decisions on the "valuable information" provided by "gentlemen representing the leading Quebec Firms" and their counterparts who met with Melgund in Ottawa, "the headquarters of the lumber trade."⁵⁷

Perhaps his anxiety persisted over the weekend, because Lansdowne felt compelled to send a second letter to try explain the "circumstances which may possibly account for the preference expressed by the Military Authorities for Indian Voyageurs." In 1870, he said, Wolseley's Red River expedition, which was "somewhat hurriedly collected," was slowed down by inexperienced "white men who represented themselves to be voyageurs" in order to get free passage to Manitoba. Some of these men had to be dismissed, while the Indians worked out well. Lansdowne wanted to assure the War Office that "carefully selected white raftsmen are to say the least of it equal in skill and endurance to Indians and perhaps in some respects superior to them."⁵⁸ The Governor General gained this perspective after talking to Mr. Irvine, who had served as Assistant Comptroller for Wolseley in 1870. Lansdowne learned from Irvine that the "white men that they got hold of appear to have been a very inferior lot," some of whom "had never been in a boat before," despite claims to the contrary. For Lansdowne, "this explains Wolseley's preference for Indians."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ LAC RG 07 G12 vol 82 Governor General's Letterbooks to the Colonial Office 1883-1887, p. 123, Lansdowne to Derby, 23 August 1884

⁵⁸ LAC RG 07 G12 vol 82 Governor General's Letterbooks to the Colonial Office 1883-1887, p. 121, Lansdowne to Derby, 25 August 1884

⁵⁹ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Lansdowne to Melgund, 23 August 1884

In these two letters we see a demonstration of the influence of the Prime Minister on the Governor General through his meeting with Melgund. Lansdowne's initial reaction, based on Wolseley's request, was to contact Indian agents and the Archbishop, but after Melgund met Macdonald, they only consulted lumber merchants and they focussed their recruitment efforts on Ottawa, the areas around the St. Maurice river (Trois-Rivières) and Peterborough rather than Caughnawaga, St. Regis and Manitoba, as specified in the initial telegraph from the Colonial Office. From these experts, Lansdowne learned that Wolseley's intelligence was outdated, especially on the important distinctions between "Canadians" and "Indians." Canadian political and business leaders were consistent in their explanations to help educate the recently arrived Governor General.

Wages and Discipline

Lansdowne suggested a base wage of \$1.25 per day for ordinary men, which was "below the sum mentioned in your telegram" but "the average rate of the country is lower still," making the offer of guaranteed work for the winter attractive, given the current "dullness of the lumber trade." The letter also recommended that contracts should include a clause on discipline. Until the boatmen arrived in Egypt, where it was expected that they would be subject to the rule of the military authorities, the men "should agree to be subject to the officer in charge in regard to all matters of discipline - such officer to be empowered to punish any irregularity or acts of insubordination by stoppage of the offender's pay or if necessary by his dismissal." Also notable is the implication that the contingent will be part of a larger British military structure.

Ambiguity in Lansdowne's mind concerning the military vs civilian nature of the expedition was evident in his warning to Melgund to "be as civil as you can to the Militia Dept, they will perhaps be a little huffed at the whole thing not going through their hands & we must soothe their feelings as much as possible." Having delegated the selection of the boatmen to Lambert, Lansdowne and Melgund were left with the task of selecting three Canadian officers and they wanted to "make use of the [Militia] Dept." while also "keeping the reins

in our own hands."⁶⁰ Consequently, they kept in close contact with Adolphe Caron, Minister of Militia and Defence and Major-General Frederick Middleton, Commander of the Canadian Militia.

The Reassertion of Wolseley's Canada

Starting the week of Monday, August 25th, Melgund began the work of recruiting boatmen in Ottawa and Caughnawaga, with the help of J.T. Lambert. An advertisement was placed in Ottawa newspapers on Tuesday, making public the news that Canada would send boatmen to participate in the Khartoum Relief expedition. Within two days the story was in newspapers across Canada and volunteers were beginning to sign up. At this point, on the 27th Lansdowne sent a telegram to confirm a few outstanding questions, asking the War Office if the men should "bring their axes and paddles for steering?" and if they should accept up to 600 if sufficient numbers applied.⁶¹ The Secretary of State for War, via the Colonial Office, approved up to 500, so long as they were all "thoroughly experienced Boatmen." This telegram then stated: "Decidedly give preference to Iroquois and Winnipeg voyageurs. They should bring paddles, but not axes or mess equipments."⁶² This simple and direct statement constituted a refutation of the turn which had been taken in Canada. After consulting Macdonald, Lansdowne and Melgund had decided not to focus on Indians and to ignore Manitoba, given, in Lansdowne's words, the "shortness of the time at our disposal." The War Office was now insisting that they focus their efforts on the very men that "the most competent authorities" in Canada had devalued and dismissed out of hand.

Within hours of receiving this telegram from the War Office, Melgund wired Winnipeg's Col. William Nassau Kennedy, a veteran of the Red River expedition, as follows:

Lord Wolseley telegraphs to me to engage three hundred voyageurs to accompany expedition to Egypt to take charge of small boats on the rapids of

⁶⁰ Stacey p. 58 (Minto papers)

⁶¹ LAC RG 07 G12 vol 82 Governor General's Letterbooks to the Colonial Office 1883-1887, p. 126, Lansdowne to Derby, 30 August 1884, letter reprinting text of a telegram sent "in cypher the 27th inst."

⁶² LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Derby to Lansdowne, 28 August 1884

the Nile. He would like men who were in the Red River expedition. Get fifty good men to accompany party. Wages from \$30 to \$40 per month. Men are required to leave Quebec for Liverpool on September 13th. Only really good boatmen would be taken. Be very particular as to qualifications. (signed) Melgund.⁶³

Kennedy, as we shall see, had no problem finding enough enthusiastic applicants, but had he received this telegram a week earlier, as intended, it would have given him the time to be more "particular as to qualifications" than circumstances allowed.

In the original telegram of August 20th and the follow-up a week later, insisting that Lansdowne give preference to aboriginal men and men from the Northwest, we can see a collision between two narratives of Canada. As portrayed in Wolseley's memoirs *A Soldier's Life*, Canada was a healthy, pure, open wilderness, inhabited by noble Indians, who, tragically, were being undermined by the advance of Western Civilization. Wolseley had lived in Canada, and knew its leading citizens and cities, but filled his own autobiographical accounts of Canada with romantic tales of his experience in the Northwest and his encounters with Indians, who seemed to suffer greater degrees of degeneration (alcoholism) as their proximity to "the white man" increased.⁶⁴ In Wolseley's eyes, the remoteness of the Indians in the Northwest of Canada was not an excuse for their exclusion, but rather, it increased the likelihood that they had preserved the qualities he admired.

A prevalent counter-narrative to this was the story of Canada as a successful and expanding force of civilization in the New World. The lumber merchants who spoke of the distinction between Canadians and Indians wanted Canada to be recognized by Britain as a modern country, with industry, modern agriculture, railroads and cities, that had little to do with the

⁶³ Manitoba Free Press, 30 August 1884

⁶⁴ As a temperance advocate and a teetotaler, Wolseley associated alcohol with the decadence and indiscipline that he imagined was foreign to the "purity" and "simplicity" of Indians in past times. If he saw the influence of civilization as tragically corrosive on them today, he also saw it as inevitable as white encroachment on their territories. He would paradoxically believe that "remnants" of the noble Indian were still left to help him on the Nile at the same time that he was sure that, as a people, they were disappearing from history.

historical *voyageurs* and the marginal existence of Indians in colonial society. For Macdonald and the businessmen to whom he directed Lansdowne and Melgund, if Canadians boatmen needed to go, the men best suited to the task would come from the lumber industry in Ontario and Quebec.

But when London pushed back, Melgund complied. The final contingent did not fully cohere with either of these two imagined stories of Canada. It wasn't just a group of Indian voyageurs, nor was it exclusively a gang of *bûcherons*. It ended up as an imperfectly negotiated mixture of the two visions. In his eagerness to smooth things over, Melgund swiftly adopted the tropes of Canada as *Great Lone Land*.⁶⁵ He followed his telegram to Winnipeg with one sent directly to the General, bypassing Lansdowne, the Colonial Office and the War Office staff: "Message received. Shall Indians bring large Canoe for your private use?" To which Wolseley replied, demonstrating his special Canadian knowledge: "Send canoe and plenty of spare bark and gum."⁶⁶

The Nile Expedition and the Canadian Militia

In the period after the announcement of the expedition, there were two types of recruitment to be undertaken. The first was the recruitment of the boatmen, which will be discussed in the next chapter. This was delegated to agents in different cities. The second type of recruitment was the selection of three Canadian officers to accompany the expedition. Archival records provide a great deal of information on the selection of officers and little on the actual boatmen, whereas the opposite was true in the newspapers. The rest of this chapter

⁶⁵ One of the most popular books about Canada amongst the British reading public was William Butler's *Great Lone Land*, which describes the Northwest as he experienced it in 1870 with the Red River expedition. Butler was a member of the "Garnet ring" of close associates who accompanied Wolseley on all his major expeditions, and his *Campaign of the Cataracts* was probably the most widely read account of the Nile expedition. In it, he frequently describes the Canadian boatmen, some of whom he remembered from 1870. Romantic ideas of Aboriginal Canadians and the Canadian frontier in the writings of Wolseley and Butler are more fully explored in my paper "To Represent the Country in Egypt: Aboriginality, Britishness, Anglophone Canadian Identities, and the Nile Voyageur Contingent, 1884-1885", *Social History / Histoire sociale*, Vol 39 No 77, 2006.

⁶⁶ Cablegram, Wolseley to Melgund, 1 September 1884, Stacey p. 70

examines (a) how the state dealt with the surprising number of men who wrote asking to be sent as soldiers and (b) the disproportionate amount of energy the Governor General's office expended on officer selection.

Seeking Active Service

Although the British requested civilian boatmen, the mere mention of a Canadian contingent as part of the Khartoum Relief Expedition triggered a flood of applications from men seeking "active service" in the Sudan.⁶⁷ The day after newspaper ads first appeared, Lambert had already received "fifteen letters from parties outside the city, who it would appear, are under the idea they are wanted for military service."⁶⁸ The *Globe* reported from Kingston that "Large bodies of men have enquired here about joining the expedition to the Nile. They are anxious to go to the rescue of Gordon."⁶⁹ Several papers attempted to clarify the "mistaken idea abroad to the effect that it is volunteers and militiamen that are wanted." Since it was "voyageurs not soldiers" that were required, "this class of men" only need apply.⁷⁰ Major Denison told one reporter that he had received so many applications for "service" that he would "have no difficulty in raising even a whole brigade."⁷¹ He later told another reporter that he had offers "from all parts of the Dominion, both from officers and men." One of these promised to "bring along with him 30 at once, and 30 more would follow. Another said 25 were ready to come with him, and so on."⁷² Only days before departure the *Ottawa Citizen*

⁶⁷ See especially LAC RG 07 G-19 vol. 29, part 2, folder 38, "Transportation of Voyageurs"; see also LAC RG 25 A-1, Colonial Office Correspondence, vol. 35, August-October 1884 for Canadians applying from Britain. It should be noted that Stacey overlooks this outpouring of offers by militiamen, but he reports on a similar one after Gordon is killed. He describes the offers of service in February 1885 because they provide the context for the Tupper-McDonald correspondence that forms the basis of his assertion of Macdonald's isolationism.

⁶⁸ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 27 August 1884. Translated and updated: "On a reçu un certain nombre de demandes de la part de personnes résidents dans d'autres villes, qui s'imaginent qu'on a besoin d'enrôlements pour service militaire." Such rote repetition of the English-language press is typical for coverage of the expedition. In this study, such repetitions will be noted, but textual analysis in such circumstances will focus on the changes in vocabulary and tone after translation and republication. *La Minerve*, 28 August 1884

⁶⁹ *Globe*, 4 September 1884

⁷⁰ *Ottawa Free Press*, 28 August 1884

⁷¹ *Winnipeg Sun*, 2 September 1884

⁷² *Ottawa Free Press*, 4 September 1884

was reminding "officers of the Active Militia" from across Canada that they were not needed for the "transport service."⁷³ Speaking at the Dominion artillery match in Quebec City, where he paid "handsome tribute to the Canadian militia," the Governor General spoke of his satisfaction of the increasing frequency of such "meetings of Englishmen and Canadians." At this moment, on the eve of the departure of the Canadian boatmen, he wanted to publically thank "those numerous Canadian militia officers who have come forward with so much alacrity to offer their services in connection with the expedition." He told the crowd that "if we had wanted 130 officers instead of three," Militia Minister Caron "had the necessary number of applications in his pocket."⁷⁴

Over forty applications can be found in the records of the Governor General's military secretary⁷⁵ and they reveal a wide range of expressed motivations and strategies to win a place on the expedition. A majority said they sought "active service," to "accept service" or they used other expressions that indicated their desire to fight. One young man said that he "would like to be in the front as much as possible having no fear, in fact rather courting death." Such requests often included lists of military experience (half a dozen claimed they were Red River veterans). Such applicants hoped to supervise the labourers or they imagined that somehow, once in Egypt, they would find their way into battle. About a quarter of the total applicants asked to join the contingent in a quasi-military capacity, often as part of an ambulance corps, either as doctors, hospital sergeants or, in one case, a dentist. There were also others who offered to serve as translators, a paymaster, a semaphore signallist, an "attache of some sort" or just made vague offers that they "perhaps might be useful." Many of the men, the overwhelming majority writing in English, said that they spoke French, assuming they would command workers of both languages. D.C.F. Bliss from the Indian Affairs department thought he would be a valuable addition to the contingent since he was "known to the Indians of Caughnawaga and am used to them and their peculiarities." In this

⁷³ *Ottawa Citizen*, 10 September 1884

⁷⁴ *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 September 1884

⁷⁵ RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations in this section are drawn from various letters in this folder written in August and September 1884

sense, many applicants imagined that a Canadian contingent would require a particular style of discipline and command which would be better provided by Canadian rather than British officers.⁷⁶ Some applicants tried to use their connections to obtain a position. Dr. George J. Potts wrote to the Prime Minister, as a "faithful adherent and friend," and asked to be sent as the senior medical officer. When selecting supervising officers for the boatmen, Caron and Melgund considered the sons of several MPs.⁷⁷ Others relied on letters of reference from those they hoped would prove influential. Lt. Col. A.A. Stevenson wrote to Melgund on behalf of Lieut. G. Des Georges, who lived outside of Montreal and "could easily get 150 good men in a few days if they were required." In a less than charitable letter of reference Stevenson introduced his "friend" to Melgund, writing that Des Georges "was on the Red River Expedition" with Wolseley "and I have no doubt, would have commanded it quite as well" and he is "well qualified to die in a desert or be drowned in a cataract."

From this group of letters, what can be gleaned about the motivations of this disparate group of men who had written asking to serve in a military capacity, although clear public statements had been made that boatmen only need apply? Out of all the letters, not one made any reference to saving Gordon. Only two evoked the language of service to the British empire. Several, however, made general remarks about wanting to "do something for my country." This phrase emerged repeatedly even if it was not always clear which country they were thinking of, since the same writers said they were "Englishmen" recently settled in Canada or Canadians in the USA. Some applicants argued explicitly for the value of taking real Canadian officers, presumably rather than British officers in Canada (such as Melgund). Septimus Denison said that it would be necessary "that these officers will be Canadians who

⁷⁶ Recall also the advice published in *La Minerve* (cited above) to prospective boatmen: "Demandez des représentants de votre religion"; "Demandez un corps d'ambulance de votre langue."

⁷⁷ On Caron's advice, Melgund was considering Joly, son of the Opposition leader ("good people," "well connected"). (Minto fonds). See also requests on behalf of their sons from MPs Philippe Henri Du Perron Casgrain and E.O Cuthbert in RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs, Casgrain to Melgund and Howell (for Cuthbert) to Melgund

are used to roughing it, and who would understand" the Canadian boatmen.⁷⁸ Dr. Potts thought a Canadian doctor should be sent, since the men "would be more contented and better served with Surgeons of their own country." Quoting Ryerson, he said "Canadians are Canadians, not colonists" and they deserved better than "the treatment they have usually received from Imperial officers." There was not even an expected obligatory degree of lip service to "loyalty to empire" talk in the applications. If anything, many of them gave evidence of a Canadian identity that asserted itself as different than Britishness. In Laura Silver's analysis of popular discourses in the press, political speeches and sermon literature from this period, she identifies strong connections between masculinity and soldiers in which "the ultimate test for manhood was found on the battlefield." Highest respect was reserved, she found, for those who had "returned from fighting under British command overseas" or the members of the Canadian militia who fought "against domestic insurgents." She points out that a desire to sign up for imperial service did not necessarily have anything to do with an imperial identity, but "motivation" for such behaviour could come from "men wishing to prove their own manhood."⁷⁹

Besides doing "something for my country" and "being Canadian," the only other two motivations cited repeatedly were a heritage of military service that ran in the family and the clear expression (or assumption) that they were not interested in being labourers. In the words of Member of Parliament E. O. Cuthbert, his son was "most anxious to join provided he were given a position other than a common canoe man." The desire to participate somehow - anyhow - so long as it was not as a boatman was repeated by the wide range of applicants, from teenagers to men in their 50s, from bankers, farmers and retired British majors. It seems predictable that none said they wanted to go for the pay, the travel or the sense of adventure. But it was a surprising finding to discover that references to Gordon or empire were largely absent. For most, a simple statement of willingness to serve was deemed

⁷⁸ Septimus was the younger brother of Major Frederick Denison and Colonel George Denison. He asked to be accepted on the trip. Another Denison brother, Egerton, paid his own way to Egypt and joined Fred.

⁷⁹ Laura Silver, "Canada Fit for War: Image and Development of the Canadian Soldier, 1870-1914," *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23: 2007/2008, p. 12

sufficient, perhaps with some special Canadian qualifications mentioned as well. Such observations should be taken with the caveat that they are by no means a representative sample of the Canadian militia at the time. One might even go so far as to say that many of those who best understood military matters would have realized that submitting an application for this contingent would have been ineffectual and even inappropriate. It is also worth noting that this self-selected sample was not following standard procedures and was responding to novel and unusual circumstances. Some applied to the Governor General, the imperial representative, but most reportedly sent letters to Caron, Macdonald or the local recruiters of boatmen. They did not apply when Gordon first got into trouble (the spring) nor when the British announced an expedition (early August), but they were in fact only triggered by the surprise announcement of a civilian Canadian contingent of Canadian boatmen. Based on the limited information available in these letters, there can be no conclusive findings on the motivations of those seeking active service, but without a doubt, the recruitment of voyageurs did trigger this unprecedented flood of applications

These applicants were never seriously considered but they are important because they reflect a popular appetite to soldier in this campaign and allow us to hear the particularly Canadian dimensions of this impulse to participate in an imperial campaign. They were not asked for by the British, but they desired to participate in an imperial campaign. Accurate numbers were not kept, but the press attempted to measure the number making such offers. The Peterborough *Daily Review* said that applications from militia men "were so numerous that had it been a fighting force that was wanted, 4,000 or 5,000 men could have been obtained."⁸⁰ These numbers are not credible given existing evidence, but they seemed plausible to the editor, in such a hypothetical situation. They may, in his mind, also have included those men who never even bothered to apply, understanding that they could not be accepted. The publicity these applicants received and the thanks rendered to them also provided a contrast to the civilian group that would actually be going, offering to some

⁸⁰ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 September 1884

Canadians a tantalizing alternative scenario of Canadian participation on the Nile. As well, even though all these offers were refused, the numerous acts of application, and the associated media discussion, constituted an event without precedence. This was recognized by the press as the first significant public offer to serve the Empire overseas as a Canadian force. It would be followed by a larger offering in February 1885 at the end of the expedition, by offers to return to the Sudan with Kitchener a decade later, and later, by offers to fight in the South African War at the century's end. The British had refused Canadian soldiers for decades before they were finally permitted to fight in an imperial war. These men applying in September of 1884 represent the beginnings of a pre-history of formal imperial military operations overseas by Canada. Stacey made no mention of these offers for active service.

Three officers of Canadian Militia might accompany the party

Hours after hiring Lambert to begin his work on the engaging of workers, Melgund had lunch with General Middleton to discuss the selection of three Canadian officers, as requested in the initial telegram. They began with the assumption, however, that rather than putting a Canadian in charge, it would be best to get Major A. Wilson, of "A" Battery, Regiment of Canadian Artillery, who had just announced his intention to join the regular British forces on the Nile. Wilson was neither Canadian nor did he have the requested Red River experience, but he was still their first choice. While they felt confident to substantially alter the recruitment of boatmen, they felt it necessary to telegram and ask for clarification about the leading officer, and whether London really thought "the force should be sent over in charge of a suitable Canadian officer and if so whether that officer should retain charge of it while the expedition lasted."⁸¹ For lack of an answer, this question was repeated two days later with the recommendation that they select Maj. Wilson who was "in every way suitable for this employment."⁸²

⁸¹ LAC RG 07 G12 vol 82 Governor General's Letterbooks to the Colonial Office 1883-1887, Lansdowne to Derby, 23 August 1884. Any apparent uncertainty as to advisability of Canadian officers was laid to rest when Lansdowne received another telegram reaffirming numbers and the need for Canadian officers, p. 123

⁸² LAC RG 07 G12 vol 82 Governor General's Letterbooks to the Colonial Office 1883-1887, Lansdowne to Derby, 23 August 1884, p. 126

If Wilson could not go, Melgund was "doubtful, if we shall find it so easy to get suitable officers" and he wanted to see the boatmen "in some capable hands."⁸³ He wrote to Lansdowne that he was "doing all I can to find efficient men" but wanted to be "very careful and avoid committing ourselves until we are quite certain." His initial inquiry led him to believe that "nearly every officer is in business of some sort & more or less settled. The Red River men naturally are rather passed their prime, & have mostly settled into some profession which it would be impossible for them to leave." Repeatedly, Melgund expressed his fears that it would be "very hard" to "feel satisfied we are sending suitable men" if he was limited to selecting from Canadian officers.⁸⁴ Like many other British officers in Canada, Melgund had very little faith in the Canadian militia.

When it became clear that Wolseley wanted the Canadian contingent to be led by a Canadian with Red River experience,⁸⁵ they settled on Major Frederick Denison, Wolseley's former aide-de-camp in 1870. Denison belonged to an established Toronto family that proudly traced its lineage as United Empire Loyalists. It appears that he was offered the position in part due to a confusion between himself and his older brother, Colonel George T. Denison, the well-known Toronto Police Magistrate, promoter of the emerging Imperial Federation movement and author of an award-winning cavalry book.⁸⁶ After the command had been granted, the Governor General responded to a query from the Prime Minister, explaining that "like you I thought at first" that George had been Wolseley's aide de camp, and "this is how we came to select" the Major rather than the Colonel. Even though the latter "is much the smartest

⁸³ LAC MG 27 II B-1, Minto Fonds, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 23 August 1884

⁸⁴ LAC MG 27 II B-1, Minto Fonds, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 25 August 1884

⁸⁵ On receipt of confirmation from Lord Derby, Colonial Office, Lansdowne wrote "I think now bound to try for a Red River man and to prefer him to Wilson if we can find one," LAC MG 27 II B-1, Minto Fonds, Reel A-129 Lansdowne to Melgund, 23 August 1884

⁸⁶ LAC MG 27 II B-1, Papers of the Fourth Earl of Minto, Reel A-129. Lansdowne's initial thought is "George Denison or W. [Wilson] might do," see cypher to Melgund, 24 August 1884. The same day he wrote in a letter to Melgund of advice from one Red River officer to choose "George Denison of the G.G.B.G., Toronto who was Wolseley's orderly officer was a first rate man & much trusted by Wolseley. He is now I think Police Magistrate at Toronto, & it is doubtful whether he would go - But he is a smart fellow & worth trying."

looking soldier of the two," Lansdowne assured Macdonald that he'd heard good reports about Fred and that Wolseley thought highly of him.⁸⁷ Newspapers across the country announced Denison's appointment as commander of the Canadian contingent, identifying him as a Major in the Governor General's Body Guard and a Toronto alderman.⁸⁸ The *Winnipeg Sun* was politely sceptical, noting that he "comes of an old fighting stock" and "is reported to be as good a cavalry officers as his brother," but wonders "how his knowledge of cavalry tactics will help him to manage a gang of raftsmen." They offer the weak compliment that "he is probably as efficient an officer as could have been selected from the Canadian forces and will doubtless do credit to the country."⁸⁹ The *Ottawa Free Press* was more generous when it interviewed Denison in the capital, describing him as "a dashing specimen of a Canadian cavalry man, brimful of fire, thoroughly energetic."⁹⁰ Chosen partly by mistake, instead of his brother, Denison was soon receiving unprecedented public attention, being mentioned in papers across the country.

At a very early stage, Middleton told Melgund that the officers should include a "military college man and a French Canadian"⁹¹ and Lansdowne told Macdonald he was "very anxious to find one or perhaps two Frenchmen to serve under Denison but this is not an easy matter."⁹² Militia Minister Caron was Melgund's main advisor when selecting officers⁹³ and after Denison had been chosen, his strongest recommendation was for Captain Telmont Aumond, who was given the post of second in command. Aumond was a 32-year-old Captain, No. 3 company of the Governor General's Foot Guards, whose father had been a lumber merchant in the Ottawa Valley. The *Ottawa Citizen* said he was "every inch a soldier"

⁸⁷ LAC Macdonald Fonds p 32911, Lansdowne to Macdonald, 4 September 1884

⁸⁸ *Halifax Morning Chronicle*, *Montreal La Minerve*, *Montreal Gazette*, *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, *Manitoba Free Press*, *Winnipeg Times* 29 August; *Ottawa Free Press*, 30 August; *Montreal La Patrie*, 1 September; *Globe*, 3 September, *Le Manitoba*, 4 September 1884

⁸⁹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 29 August 1884

⁹⁰ *Ottawa Free Press*, 4 September 1884

⁹¹ LAC MG 27 II B-1, Minto Fonds, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 25 August 1884

⁹² LAC Macdonald Fonds p 32903, Lansdowne to Macdonald, 2 September 1884

⁹³ LAC RG 07 G12 Melgund to Lansdowne 3 October 1884 (Stacey p. 82)

with over 15 years "in volunteer service." He was "a good specimen of a native-born Canadian, and besides presenting a good physique, possesses good judgement and tact" who was "deservedly popular with the officers of his regiment."⁹⁴ The *Ottawa Free Press* thought that "no better choice could have been made" given his "experience in connection with the lumber trade," his "strong physique" and his reputation as a "highly popular" captain.⁹⁵ In both cases, the papers stressed his military identity, his physical fitness and his qualities, only mentioning briefly in passing that he worked for the Department of Marine and Fisheries, from which he had obtained a six months leave, with pay.⁹⁶ *La Minerve* considered the selection of Aumond "une bonne nomination, M. Aumond ayant des aptitudes militaires incontestables."⁹⁷ Although several papers had previously noted that the second-in-command would be a francophone, this was not considered relevant detail in these initial portraits.⁹⁸

The appointment of the third in command, Captain Alexander C. McRae of London, Ontario was noted by all of the newspapers reviewed in this study, but unlike Denison and Aumond, there was little editorial comment beyond noting that he was from London's 7th Battalion. The sole exception came from the *Ottawa Free Press* which asserted that "it would be difficult to make a better selection" due to his "knowledge of the nature of the work to be performed," his "strong physique" and the fact that he was "an excellent and popular officer." The similarity to the compliments paid Denison and Aumond lends credence to the suspicion that these tropes reflect the *Free Press's* desire to appear patriotic and supportive rather than its intimate knowledge of the qualities of a low-ranking officer from a distant city. We must then wonder if the reader would also recognize them as clichés and see the portraits of

⁹⁴ *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 September 1884

⁹⁵ *Ottawa Free Press*, 5 September 1884

⁹⁶ *The Globe* noted that he would continue to receive his pay while on the expedition, which was "a very good arrangement for Mr. Aumond" and they sarcastically titled the article "Good for the Captain." They mistakenly believed that he worked for the Militia department. 11 September 1884

⁹⁷ *Montreal La Minerve*, 6 Septembre 1884

⁹⁸ On August 27 the *Globe* said that "some French Canadian officers will also be taken, as it is expected that the majority of the voyageurs will be French Canadians." Denison told the *Ottawa Free Press* on September 3 that the second in command would be "a Frenchman." *La Patrie* noted on September 5 the selection of Denison and "de deux autres officiers dont l'un canadien français."

Denison and Aumond as inflated.

Thus, Melgund overcame his misgivings and supplied Wolseley with three Canadian officers. By the time the Canadians left for Egypt, however, other officers had joined them as well. Amongst the many applicants who asked to be included was Surgeon-Major John Louis Hubert Neilson, a medical officer from "B" Battery of the Canadian Artillery at Kingston. Neilson wrote directly to Melgund, noting that since the contingent "will not be a purely military organization" and since "accepted military traditions and usages must be departed from in its formation," he would be available to serve "in a dual capacity" as both officer and doctor. His self-identified qualities included "intimate knowledge of the language, customs and character of the Canadian Voyageurs, my own partly french descent," membership in the Red River expedition, military school training, medical training, "robust health," and "my not unfavourable records." He subtly informed Melgund that he had recently been approached by Caron who sought the names of graduates from the military college and thought he'd put his own name forward as well. He also strongly recommended the inclusion of Abbé Arthur Bouchard, a French-Canadian missionary recently returned from Khartoum. Two days after Melgund received this letter, Lansdowne arranged meetings in Quebec City with Caron, the doctor and the priest.

When Lansdowne met Neilson, he said they wouldn't need a doctor, since the men would be cared for by the ship doctor while travelling and "by our army Surgeons after their arrival." But Lansdowne found Neilson to be appealing for several reasons, including the fact that he was "a Red River man," he had a brother in Trois-Rivières who might help with recruitment and he was "very keen to go in any capacity." The Governor General noted that "Neilson is very strong on the distinction between Voyageurs and Shantymen and in favour of the former." After talking with Neilson, Lansdowne asked Melgund to contact "the Hudson Bay officials" who "could tell you more about these voyageurs than anyone else."⁹⁹ Lansdowne

⁹⁹ LAC MG 27 II B-1, Minto Fonds, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 30 August 1884

wired to the Colonial office for permission to send Neilson and offered him the post a few days later.

Lansdowne did not imagine he would be interviewing priests for the expedition, even though it had been part of Wolseley's initial request. It is likely that Wolseley assumed a majority of the Caughnawagas were Catholic and the initial telegram's references to the Bishop and chaplain should be read as two tactics to use the social influence of the Catholic Church to get more of these Indian voyageurs and French-Canadians to engage. After consultations with Macdonald and the lumber merchants, the idea of a chaplain was abandoned with the turn away from Indians and voyageurs in favour of shantymen. Arthur Bouchard was no ordinary priest, however, and on the recommendation of both Caron and Neilson, Lansdowne met with him. Born and raised in Rivière-Ouelle, Quebec, Arthur Bouchard had been recently working at a Catholic mission in Khartoum. On his recent return to Canada, he had raised thousands of dollars for the mission and had been planning to return to Cairo in the fall, to await further instruction from his superiors there. Lansdowne was impressed by this "enormous blackheaded man" who spoke French, English, Arabic and several Sudanese dialects. He knew Gordon personally and thought well of him. "I have never attached very much importance to the sending of a Priest," Lansdowne wrote to Melgund, but given his "exceptional local knowledge I shall I think close with him."¹⁰⁰ Bouchard agreed to serve as chaplain and received an officer's pay, as indicated in Wolseley's original instructions

Conclusions

The Nile Expedition provided an unexpected opportunity for colonial Canada to win recognition, of some sort, from Britain. The news of a Canadian contingent provoked a range of responses, but the majority of first impressions from newspaper editorialists reflected a satisfaction that Wolseley had "recognized" Canadians "instead of forgetting them." If the most common interpretation was that it was "a high compliment to the country," others saw

¹⁰⁰ LAC MG 27 II B-1, Minto Fonds, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 30 August 1884

the invitation as a source of pride for "our province" or "notre race." There were also many neutral, pragmatic descriptions of the expedition as an interesting job opportunity, with benefits and risks for individuals, but no evocation of local, regional, national or imperial identities. Voices of dissent expressed their scepticism, which included the editorials from newspapers that explicitly favoured independence rather than closer ties with the empire. They did not relish the idea of Canada becoming more involved in British imperial affairs ("crazy scheme") and their commentaries highlighted the dangers while downplaying the honour that would be won serving as "hewers of wood and drawers of water."

One of the major findings here, not considered important by Stacey, was the attempt by Macdonald and others in Canada to significantly alter Wolseley's request by excluding aboriginal and western participation. This attempt at colonial agency on the part of the Canadian government, to reshape the contingent, acting as Lansdowne's advisors, can only be properly understood in the context of a tight and consistent discourse about the mutually exclusive categories of "Canadian and Indian." Canadians pushed back when Wolseley asked Canada to send Indians, arguing that the "white man would be preferable to the red man," that the time of the Indian had passed. Melgund's work with the lumber agents was primarily driven by the insistence of Canadian experts that if a contingent should come from Canada, it should consist of Canadians, not Indians.

This involved a reimagining and repurposing of the term "voyageur" in both correspondence to the imperial government and in the popular press. To Wolseley, the word *voyageur* meant Indian. To most anglophone Canadians, the word signified French-Canadians. Lansdowne's experts said there are no more voyageurs in Canada, and lumbermen would be the best substitutes. The newspapers praised historic voyageurs and the *bateau men* too, but admitted that they were gone. They said it was reasonable to send lumbermen, who seemed to have inherited their traits and possessed the same qualities. Such men existed outside of history, taking different forms in each generation and these ones were the "same class of men" as the voyageurs. The essential qualities of this undifferentiated "class" came not from blood or

ethnicity seemed to be a product of the land. The raftsmen's qualities were due to "excellent sanitary nature of the country" in which his was "born and brought up," he was grown here, "produit... comme les chênes de nos forêts." He would teach a lesson to the Egyptian who came from a "degenerate land." This was why the white working class men of Ontario and Quebec's modern lumber industry, who lived on the same land as the voyageurs of yore, were substituted for Wolseley's outdated notion of frontier Indian voyageurs.

The list of specific qualities possessed by this "class of men" was somewhat hazy. It could be recognized by discerning men, like Wolseley, who seemed to like everything associated with Canada ("Canadian canoes, Canadian buckboards or Canadian somethings") and who realized that Canadians were "just the men" he needed. The words that most commonly recurred were hardy, intrepid, venturesome. They possessed dash and pluck and had a "peculiar adaptiveness" and were "full of resource and able to turn their hands to almost any employment." These attributes of Canadian masculinity came from their life in the country, making them distinct and even superior to Britons. Many of these attributes found familiar resonance with the militia myth, especially when Canadians who were "untrammelled by discipline" were favourably contrasted with "drilled soldiers." A natural Canadian masculinity allowed middle-class newspaper editors to identify with shantymen and feel proud to send them as manly representatives of Canada.

But this praise of the hardy Canadian male served to a certain extent as a compensatory narrative for the fact that the British only wanted civilians. Canadians were not free to choose their own manner of representation to empire on this expedition. Soldiers came forward, and they were rejected. The *Winnipeg Sun*, which disapproved of the expedition from the start, expressed its deep disappointment at the fact that Canada would be represented by workers (army mules) rather than soldiers. Glory resided at "the front" and Canadians would be left in Dongola with the boats. If Canada could have sent soldiers, there would have been hundreds if not thousands seeking "active service," based on the number of those who sent applications for non-existent positions. But the letters preserved in the archives provided no

evidence of strong imperial identities, for the expected tropes of rescuing Gordon and serving the empire are notable in their absence. Many Canadians wanted to fight, but the British would only accept three, and Meglund doubted that even that many existed in the entire country. The back-handed compliments Denison received in the press, and the empty polite praise given to Aumond and McRae, lent credence to the view that the militia was not taken seriously by many as a fighting force.

In the end, Meglund chose Canadian officers and Lansdowne selected a priest and a doctor, in both cases against their initial inclinations. Reluctantly, the organizers put a belated emphasis on western and Iroquois recruitment, but only on Wolseley's insistence. Compromises were made all around in the short time available, amidst competing visions of Canadian representation. To oversimplify, Wolseley's Canada was populated with frontier Indians whereas colonial society saw itself as modernizing and "white." Disagreements over the composition of the contingent reflected these incompatible narratives of Canadian identity. Wolseley was the commander of the expedition, but one of the realities of empire was that he could not uncompromisingly impose his vision via telegram on the colonial officials upon whom he depended for its realization. But colonial attempts to resist what they saw as imperial misrepresentation of the country were limited. The disagreement between Wolseley and Canadian officials, based primarily on the distinction between "Canadians and Indians," was only one facet of the complex and highly contested nature of Canada, based on regional identities, language, religion, gender and class, and all these contingent semantic categories became explicit in the newspapers and government records as a range of individuals tried to make sense of this situation. Discussion about the significance of this expedition in these initial newspaper reactions, in the language of both enthusiasts and sceptics, revealed a set of deeply-rooted and long-standing colonial anxieties which was tied to the awareness that many Britons continued to see Canadians as subordinates rather than equals.

CHAPTER 2 - RECRUITMENT

The regional composition of the contingent, as we have seen, was the product of a negotiation of competing visions in London and Ottawa. The actual makeup of the contingent was determined, however, by the local conditions in Winnipeg, Peterborough, Ottawa, Caughnawaga and Trois-Rivières. Working with only a couple of assistants, Melgund had just three weeks to get 300-500 men from different corners of the country and he relied on officers, agents and representatives in more distant cities. A general survey of Melgund's extensive correspondence and travel schedule during this period leads me to concur with Stacey's assessment that Melgund "can have got little sleep" during this period. It is an understatement to say that "larger staffs have taken longer to do less."¹ This chapter briefly examines the major over-arching decisions about the terms of engagement that Melgund had to establish for this unprecedented contingent. It then moves through the centres of recruitment place by place in a rough chronological order, discussing the particularities of each locality. In these local recruitment efforts, observers made the shift from initial reactions to the idea of a contingent to specific commentary on the actual men who agreed to sign Melgund's terms of engagement. Finally, we will examine some minor controversies that flared up in the press over perceived insults to Canada that were circulating in England at this time.

The Conditions of Engagement

Wolseley believed that boatmen from Canada were better suited for the Nile expedition than those from any other country, including Egypt or the Sudan. Facing the novelty of engaging civilian skilled labour in a military expedition, Melgund decided that "it was desirable to keep as closely as possible to the customs of the lumber trade."² Selecting officers was

¹ Stacey p. 7

² LAC RG 07 G12, Report on Organisation of the Voyageur contingent, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884, see Stacey pp 81-89

something he had experience with, but when recruiting workers he relied upon lumber broker J.T. Lambert and foreman Patrick Rice to teach him about industry norms and the working-class culture of the shantymen. Right from the start, Rice and Lambert disapproved of any references to military discipline in Lansdowne's "hurriedly concocted sketch" for the terms of engagement. When Melgund read the draft to Lambert and Rice they expressed reservations about the following section, "referring to discipline," saying that as it was phrased, there was a "danger of scaring the men away if they think the thing too military."³

"I agree to subject myself to any Regulations as to conduct and discipline which may be laid down by the Imperial Authorities from the date of my joining the expeditionary force up to _____ (date) and from the present time I agree to be subject to the authority of the officer or officers under whose charge I may be sent out, it being understood that such officer or officers shall have the power of punishing any acts of insubordination or irregularity by the stoppage of my pay and if necessary by my dismissal."⁴

The final version of the terms of engagement omitted the first half of the above clause that referred to Regulations and Imperial Authorities. They modified the second half by asking the men to "*agree to be subject to the authority of the foremen and officers under whose charge I may be*" while maintaining the language of punishment, insubordination, stoppage of pay and dismissal. As Melgund explained to Lansdowne, the men were accustomed to "look to their foremen." He felt that the officers would have "little direct influence with the men" and thus, they would "I think, have to deal with the men entirely through the foremen."⁵ This fine tuning aimed to recreate on the expedition a familiar form of discipline and control that the men would recognize as legitimate. Whether it was due to his poor opinion of Canadian officers or whether it was his newfound knowledge of the "customs" of shantymen, Melgund designed the engagement form to explicitly place authority jointly with the "foremen and officers," with the assumption that the men would likely not recognize the authority of the militia officers.

³ LAC RG 07 G12 Melgund to Lansdowne 25 August 1884

⁴ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Lansdowne to Melgund, 23 August 1884

⁵ LAC RG 07 G12 Melgund to Lansdowne 25 August 1884

Lansdowne received similar counsel from Caron, who emphasized the importance of picking the right type of foremen. The efficiency of "our Voyageurs & Shantymen," whom Caron described as "intelligent, wonderfully enduring and most active," was related to the confidence "which they place in their Boss, as the leader of their gangs is called. If he possess their entire confidence then & then alone will he exercise absolute control over them." Such a "leader should be selected according to the Nationality of the men who will enlist. If they be French-Canadians, they should be led by one of their race" or at least someone they know, who "has already led them in their arduous duties, when driving the timber down the rivers." He strongly advised that the lumbering firms be contacted for the names of the best foremen. Even though he was Militia minister, he felt that "the military side of the question is of no importance compared to the usefulness of the men on the rivers."⁶ These assumptions, that a commonality of experience and a commonality of "nationality" were pre-requisites to the mutual respect and trust that existed between "boss" and "gang" seemed widespread and shared by both shantymen and foremen as shall be seen later on the expedition. Like Rice and Lambert, Caron told the Governor General that the effectiveness of the men depended on suitable foremen. He minimized the importance of the officers.

After his first meeting with Lambert, Melgund said that he wanted to find "a really good man, as 'Boss' for the party."⁷ Patrick Rice was one of the leading foremen in the Ottawa Valley, and he worked for Hubert Price whom Lansdowne had consulted the previous week. Melgund described Rice as "the very picture of the man we want for headman. A keen active smart fellow of about 37 [years]" with a "great reputation" who would likely "bring many men" if he was allowed to go. Melgund considered "a man like Rice most necessary,"⁸ so much so that he was willing to meet Rice's demand of \$6 a day, compared to the rate of \$2.50 a day being offered for the other foremen. Melgund knew this was a lot of money. "I think myself it would be well worth it," he wrote, but he wasn't sure the military authorities would

⁶ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Caron to Lansdowne, 28 August 1884

⁷ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Melgund to Lansdowne 23 August 1884

⁸ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Melgund to Lansdowne 25 August 1884

approve, especially since "it would compare unfavourably with the pay of officers going with the expedition."⁹ They feared that Rice's wife would prove their greatest obstacle to his recruitment ("he is very doubtful if he will be successful" in convincing her), but it was in fact Price who refused to give six month's leave to his best employee. Nonetheless, Rice agreed to help Lambert advise Melgund on the expectations and needs of the workers.¹⁰

Instead of military units, the men were organized in work gangs, with each foreman responsible for approximately 25 men. Foremen were encouraged to sign up their entire gangs, and thus, the pre-existing regional identities of the work units, which were normally organized by language and nationality, were maintained on the expedition.¹¹ Foremen would be paid \$75 a month and the boatmen were to be paid on a sliding scale of \$30, \$35 or \$40 a month. Lambert and Rice told Melgund it was "the usual custom" to pay the men based on whether they were "First class", "second class" or "third class men" and suggested that for "good behaviour" they could "rise to the class above them, and also to be liable to reduction to a lower class for misbehaviour & idleness, &c. &c..¹² When it came time to engage them, Melgund found it impossible to reliably determine their abilities, and thus everyone was hired at \$40 a month, with the threat of reduction in pay to \$35 or \$30 for "inefficiency."¹³ In this way, many of the shantymen started off with a higher pay than usual, even without taking into consideration that the entire pay grid was higher than current rates on the Ottawa river.¹⁴ Those who passed a medical examination could sign the terms of agreement, upon

⁹ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Melgund to Lansdowne 23 August 1884

¹⁰ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, various correspondence from 26-29 August 1884

¹¹ Ian Radforth says that gangs usually consisted of 5 men and a shanty might have anywhere from two to ten gangs depending on the size of the company or the nature of the job site. On the Nile Expedition, gangs were groups of approximately 25 men under the supervision of one foreman. Ian Radforth, "Shantymen," *Labouring Lives : work and workers in nineteenth-century Ontario*, edited by Paul Craven, Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1995, p. 215

¹² LAC RG 07 G12 Melgund to Lansdowne, 25 August 1884

¹³ These documents are found in Stacey pp 81-89 unless otherwise noted

¹⁴ The War Office initially suggested \$40 a month, Price recommended \$1.25 a day and Rice told Melgund even \$1 a day would be an attractive wage. (Minto fonds, Melgund to Lansdowne, 23 August 1884). Melgund said "they tell me that wages are very low here just now & that directly this gets out it will send them up, which would of course not be popular with the lumberers." (Minto fonds, Melgund to Lansdowne 25 August 1884). A similar observation was made in the *Globe* that "there will be no difficulty in getting

which they received a \$10 advance. The men were given the option of allowing their families to draw remittances from their pay, although these were limited to \$30 a month, "so as to leave a margin of \$10 a month to pay fines which may be inflicted upon them."¹⁵ It was the "custom of the country," Melgund noted that the men did not expect to draw the balance of their pay until their return home, even if that meant that "they occasionally go for a year or two receiving no pay."¹⁶ On the expedition, however, agents were set up in each region to pay remittances to the men's families monthly, and the men were to receive the monthly balance while on the expedition. The men were to be paid for the full six months, including the long period of transit from their homes to the Sudan and back again, with all expenses covered by the imperial government. For the men and their families, this was a good contract with good pay and the stipulations about grades of pay, reductions and fines were considered fair and normal.

Shantymen also expected their employers to take care of their food and clothing.¹⁷ It was clear to the organizers that regular army rations would not suffice, since for the workers in the shanties "no limit is placed to his consumption of food, and he eats when he likes and as much as he likes," especially "salt pork and beans."¹⁸ Lansdowne consulted with a Mr. Irvine, Wolseley's former Comptroller in 1870 who told him that "the amount of food these men consume is something prodigious," and on the Red River expedition they would eat "a week's rations in two days." The Governor General thought it would be necessary to "explain to the authorities that they must be very liberal in the matter of rations."¹⁹ In making the final

the number of men required, provided the inducement offered is sufficient, because lumbering is very dull now" *Toronto Globe*, 26 August 1884

¹⁵ LAC RG 07 G12, Report on Organisation of the Voyageur contingent, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884

¹⁶ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, various correspondence from 26-29 August 1884

¹⁷ Radforth says that a shanty diet may not always have been of good quality, but it was plentiful and rich, as required for men doing hard physical labour. "Shantymen" p. 229

¹⁸ LAC RG 07 G12, Report on Organisation of the Voyageur contingent, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884

¹⁹ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Lansdowne to Melgund, 23 August 1884. On the Red River expedition, they did not employ "shantymen" so Irvine's comment is to be read in reference to "Canadians" or workers or boatmen or Indians. It is difficult to say since Melgund was inquiring about shantymen and

arrangements for the ocean voyage, Melgund realized that the "dietary scale" approved by the Admiralty was so low²⁰ that he increased the amount of potatoes and salt pork so as to avoid "grave dissatisfaction amongst the voyageurs."²¹ In addition, he added a large amount of beans, cabbage and apples.²²

Lansdowne thought it would be advisable to "clothe them as much alike as possible" and initially considered giving them red flannel shirts.²³ Details of the contents of the men's kit were outlined in the engagement contract based on consultations with Rice and Lambert and for the most part these were the items the men actually received.²⁴ Newspapers identified the various manufacturers who won contracts for items such as grey suits made of étoffe du pays, twill blue flannel shirts,²⁵ felt hats, 8lb blankets,²⁶ moccasins, and tump lines.²⁷ *La Minerve*

Irvine is speaking of 1870.

²⁰ LAC RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs, see Melgund's disapproving margin comments on a letter he received from the Quarter-Master General, War Office, 30 August 1884

²¹ LAC RG 07 G12, Report on Organisation of the Voyageur contingent, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884

²² LAC RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs, Report from Marine and Fisheries Inspector, 19 September 1884 stated, amongst other things, that "In addition to the scale of provision allowed by the War Office, [the Ocean King] had ten barrels of the best white beans which is an indispensable article of food to the Voyageurs, also 1,000 Cabbages and a supply of Apples." The anonymous correspondent with the *Toronto Globe* was Neilson, who attributed the beans, cabbage and apples to "liberality" of the Governor General, 15 September 1884

²³ LAC MG 27 II B-1 Minto fonds, Reel A129, Lansdowne to Melgund, 23 August 1884

²⁴ "1 blanket, 1 smock, 1 pair trousers, 1 jersey, 1 undershirt, 11 pair of drawers, 2 pairs of socks, 1 pair moccasins, 1 flannel belt, 1 towel, 1 felt hat, 1 tump line, 1 canvas bag."

²⁵ Etoffe du pays was a homespun linen, usually grey, common in Quebec. The *Globe* reporter who was unfamiliar with this fabric called it Etoffe du Paris. These grey suits and the blue shirts were reportedly made by Thomas Borbridge of Ottawa according to the *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 3 September and the *Montreal Star*, 11 September. The *Globe* (4 September) thought this contract went to James O'Brien & Co. of Montreal and *Le Minerve* (5 Septembre) spoke of "une maison de Montréal" that would be producing "leur costume" of "300 toniques et pantalons en étoffe du pays." James O'Brien was a regular contractor for the Canadian militia (see the *Globe*, 22 September 1884). It is likely that Thomas Borbridge was the outfitter in this case, however, based on reports of Ottawa recruitment (*Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 13 September 1884).

²⁶ Blankets by Russel, Forbes and Company of Ottawa, *Daily Citizen*, 3 September 1884

²⁷ The moccasins were variously described as "beef moccasins" and "top moccasins." Tump lines were straps used for carrying heavy loads that distributed weight to the head and spine rather than the shoulders. Used around the world for all of recorded history, they were familiar as the indispensable portaging tool of voyageurs in the fur trade and were at this time still the most effective way to carry heavy loads. Both leather items were supplied by S. & H. Borbridge according to the *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 3 September 1884

but are community expectations about the requirements for fair treatment. Melgund explicitly tried to learn these norms and he did his best to preemptively eliminate potential sources of conflict by codifying, quite accurately, the men's expectations.

Centres of Recruitment

When the public first learned of the British request for Canadian "voyageurs," the centre of activity was Ottawa, and J.T. Lambert was identified as the key organizer. Very quickly, however, engagement offices were established in several towns. This section will begin with a short description of initial activity in Ottawa and then turn to the media coverage of recruitment which took place in Caughnawaga, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Peterborough, then return to the Ottawa region and finally look at Trois-Rivières. The newspaper coverage up until this point was based on fairly abstract ideas of voyageurs or boatmen from Canada. In the first week of September, however, newspaper reporters at the recruiting offices could describe the volunteers in terms of their physical traits, ethnicity and speech. This shift from editorial commentary to reportage brings us closer to the expedition participants, but in this section we are still dealing with the impressions of reporters. Even interviews cannot be mistaken for the perceptions of the men volunteering. Chapters three to seven will rely more heavily on sources written by the men on the expedition, but here the focus remains on the representation of the engagement in the newspapers, which reveal a growing public fascination with this unprecedented situation. Melgund was pleased to hear that Lambert and Rice had "been verbally working the thing" and as a result, he heard that "a great many French Canadians will go." Lambert also felt it was essential to advertise in the newspapers as soon as possible.³¹ The very first day the ads appeared,³² Lambert began receiving offers,³³ and he told one reporter: "I'm flooded with applications from all parts of the country."³⁴ Since

³¹ LAC RG 07 G12 Melgund to Lansdowne 25 August 1884

³² An ad was published in each of the Ottawa newspapers and was also inserted as a full page poster. The insert may not have survived in most microfiched copies of papers like the *Ottawa Free Press* but a copy is available in the Broadside and Printed Ephemera Collection, Baldwin Room, Toronto Public Library.

³³ *Globe*, 26 August 1884

³⁴ *Ottawa Free Press*, 28 August 1884

the engagement forms were not ready, Lambert told applicants that he would need another week before he could start enrolling boatmen. *La Minerve* reported that boatmen from the district were rapidly offering their services and that Lambert "a le choix sur les meilleurs hommes de la rivière Ottawa."³⁵ Ironically, because Lambert was at the centre of operations, with the largest group, and working closely with the bureaucratic requirements of Melgund's office, the Ottawa contingent started its official engagements later than other centres.

Caughnawaga

An Ottawa *Free Press* correspondent who spoke with Melgund said that "it was Indians" that General Wolseley had requested, but Lord Lansdowne, through "enquiry" "ascertained that Canadians were equally as expert, if not better in performing the duties required as were Indians."³⁶ The next day, Lambert told the same paper that "General Wolseley is exceedingly anxious that some of the St. Regis and Caughnawaga Indians" should be sent and therefore some of them "along with the Canadian boatmen will be forwarded."³⁷ Such information was presented in a common-sense manner, reflecting a social consensus of a semantic distinction between "Canadian" and "Indian" as mutually exclusive categories.

As soon as the call for boatmen was made public, there was a strong interest expressed in the community of Caughnawaga. Newspapers across Canada in turn seemed fascinated with Caughnawaga's response. Many Montrealers knew the Caughnawaga Indians as the river pilots who expertly negotiated the Lachine rapids for commercial and tourist traffic. For most Canadians however, the imagined nation of the Mohawks, or Iroquois, was (mis)informed by a mixture of popular histories, mission traditions and journalistic stereotypes that varied between anglophones and francophones. This recruitment drive occurred in the village of Caughnawaga, rather than downtown, as was the case in Ottawa and Winnipeg, which decreased the direct access of reporters. The Montreal *Star* sent reporters across the river to

³⁵ *La Minerve*, 3 septembre 1884

³⁶ Ottawa *Free Press*, August 27, 1884, reprinted verbatim in the Winnipeg *Daily Times*, August 28, 1884, and the Manitoba *Free Press*, 29 August 1884

³⁷ Ottawa *Free Press*, 28 August 1884

talk with the men during this initial period of recruitment and other papers relied on these accounts. An analysis of the ways that other newspapers copied, changed and embellished *Star* news items reveals some recurring themes about the way anglophone and francophone Canadians spoke about "Indians."

In his book, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War*, R. Scott Sheffield pays close attention to language use and narrative structures connected to the Canadian "image of the "Indian" in war time. Such an approach "is most useful ... not as a means of revealing indigenous peoples, cultures, and experience but of understanding the desire, anxieties, conceits, and assumptions of Canadians."³⁸ Canadians frequently described and depicted Aboriginal peoples through scripted narratives that would reinforce or critique self-identity through contrast with an Aboriginal other. For example, the script of the "noble savage", Sheffield notes, provided newspaper writers with emotion and colour, whether the actual Natives who appeared in the story seemed to prove or defy the stereotypes. The "historic Indian" of days gone by was brave and warlike, stoic and self-disciplined, skilled and resourceful, all qualities associated with his "savage" state of life in nature. The script also called for simplistic and primitive language, a "pigeon-English" and "broken idiom"³⁹ with references to palefaces, Big Water, and other such constructions. In my research, I found that it was common for newspapers of the day to replicate ethnic speech patterns and accents for comical effect, reproducing French, German, Scottish, Irish or "Jewish" (Yiddish) accents. "Indian talk" was different in several respects. The supposed "Indian accent" was not based on actual pronunciation, which would vary from Mohawk to Algonquin to Cree members of the contingent, but instead, it phonetically replicated language incompetence and a projected simplicity of mind that resorted to monosyllabic compound phrases. Like Sheffield,⁴⁰ I found the exclusive use of a specialized descriptive jargon that referred to men as 'chiefs' and 'braves,' women as 'squaws,' homes as 'tipis' or

³⁸ Sheffield, R. Scott, *The Red Man's on the Warpath: The Image of the "Indian" and the Second World War*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004, 10.

³⁹ Sheffield p. 66

⁴⁰ Sheffield, pp. 63-74

'wigwams' and infants as 'papooses.'

Such codified language corresponded to narrative frameworks that served many purposes. At one time, writers could valorize the "noble savage" as part of a romantic, anti-modernist lament, while at other times, the same language could be used to rationalize Aboriginal displacement using brush strokes of pathos and a certain inevitable destiny. Above all, the use of special jargon for man, woman and baby semantically displaced aboriginals, excluding them from the language community of recognized persons, a linguistic displacement separating "Canadians" and "Indians." As Anthony Moran has pointed out in an Australian context, such formulations are a part of an ideological project [a discourse] in which "colonizers do not take stock of the colonized as men and women, but treat them as part of the natural landscape"⁴¹ These prevalent narratives and commonplace semantic structures were deployed by colonial Canadians to naturalize the dispossession on which settler society rested. Such patterns of language usage were evident in all reports of recruiting. The *Star* spoke of a "sensation... in the Indian Reserve at Caughnawaga" caused by Lansdowne's request. Apparently, "the younger Indians jumped at the offer with enthusiasm" and "several of the petty chiefs" seemed willing "to raise the party," but all awaited the decision of "the council of chiefs who are to meet to consider the matter to-night." As with recruitment coverage in general, newspapers displayed a paradoxical mixture of pragmatism and patriotism in the way they described the men's motivations. On the one hand, it was noted that the contingent would leave in late September and return in the spring "so that only a very little of the season of navigation would be lost." And yet, in the very next breath, reporters mentioned "the old warlike spirit of the Iroquois" which would drive "the ever faithful allies of the British" to "answer the call to duty in the far East."⁴² The pragmatism was likely a paraphrase of an interview, while the patriotic tropes came from script of the loyal warriors, even though the latter was contradicted by the former. Based on this initial report, other

⁴¹ Anthony Moran, "As Australia Decolonizes: Indigenizing Settler Nationalism and the Challenges of Settler/ Indigenous Relations." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* vol. 25 no. 6, 2002 p. 1023

⁴² Montreal Star, 27 August 1884. Reprinted by the *Ottawa Citizen* the following day.

papers spoke of a "a sensation in Caugnawaga."⁴³ There were dramatic headlines like "Indian Braves for Egypt."⁴⁴ Supposedly, all were "enthusiastic" and "the chiefs will find no difficulty in raising a contingent."⁴⁵ This strain of reporting continued a few days later, with reports of an interview with Chief White Eagle, a "champion lacrosse player," who had visited England and participated in Wolseley's Red River expedition. White Eagle was described as "a fine handsome man" who was "full of fire and energy." According to the *Globe*, an English correspondent reported that "his blood was up and he said he would be glad to fight the Queen's enemies anywhere. He was eager to help England whenever he could."⁴⁶ The *Ottawa Free Press* changed the last line when they reprinted the article, saying "he would be glad to fight the Queen's enemies anywhere, because England always treated the redskins fairly."⁴⁷

These initially optimistic views of fired-up Indians were soon tempered. The expected "council of chiefs" didn't take place the next night, but "the most enthusiastic of the reds contented themselves with discussing the proposal" from which the reporter gleaned that "the men are not disposed to go fight, but only for navigation purposes."⁴⁸ The press noted that these men articulated a desire to go as civilians rather than soldiers, which should not have been surprising, since this had been the nature of the request. In addition, it was reported that many of the Mohawk river pilots expected more money. The pay offered by the British Army was considered good for Ottawa shantymen, but the Lachine pilots expected more and many held back at first due to "what they consider small wages" given the risks involved.⁴⁹ Some expressed reluctance to stay any longer than six months "on account of the climate" and the

⁴³ *Ottawa Citizen* 27 August 1884

⁴⁴ *Montreal Gazette*, 28 August 1884

⁴⁵ *Globe*, 28 August 1884; the *Winnipeg Sun* on the same day; *La Minerve* the following day

⁴⁶ The *Globe*, 1 September 1884, which cites the NY Tribune, which in turn cites "the London evening papers."

⁴⁷ *Ottawa Free Press*, 2 September 1884. The following day the *Ottawa Citizen* attributed to all Caughnawaga Mohawks the sentiment that they "want to fight the Queen's enemies for she had been good to the Indians." White Eagle was no longer a young man and he did not join the contingent.

⁴⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, 29 August 1884

⁴⁹ *Montreal Star*, 3 September 1884

Star reported that there was "a little feeling of mistrust as to whether the proposal is genuine or not," so they awaited further details from Melgund and the terms of agreement.⁵⁰

The *Winnipeg Sun*, which was still looking for ways to criticize the expedition, said that "the enthusiasm of the Caughnawga Indians for the Khartoum expedition has fizzled out. They want a guarantee against death and refuse to engage for longer than six months."⁵¹ In an article entitled "LO! THE WISE INDIAN," the reader learned that they "will remain in their wigwams."⁵² The *Sun* also used this image of the reluctant Mohawks to ridicule Canadian imperialists. At a recent "U. E. Loyalist party at Niagra," several prominent figures, including Col. George T. Denison, claimed that both "whites and Indians" would, if called upon, "rush to arise on behalf of the Mother Country." However, it notes, this theory has been "tested with ludicrous results." At first "the Montreal newspapers represented them as dancing a grand war dance in anticipation of the trip. But when the chiefs met the warriors by the council fire, the enthusiasm cooled." To demand better pay and a "guarantee against death," thought the *Sun*, is a type of "loyalty not worth bragging about."⁵³ The *Sun* portrayed the Mohawks as cautious and sceptical, which they called "wise" because that validated their editorial position.⁵⁴

In Montreal, Melgund worked through Indian agent Alex de Lorimier, who agreed to coordinate recruiting on "the reserve," receiving one dollar for each man he managed to enroll.⁵⁵ Melgund travelled to Caughnawaga on two occasions to meet with deLorimier and some of the men, including Louis Jackson, the head foreman for the Caughnawaga group. Recalling this meeting, Melgund later noted that when he first visited "the Indians hung back

⁵⁰ Montreal *Star*, 28 August 1884. First half reprinted in the *Ottawa Citizen* the following day.

⁵¹ *Winnipeg Sun*, 30 August 1884

⁵² *Winnipeg Sun*, 3 September 1884

⁵³ *Winnipeg Sun*, 4 September 1884

⁵⁴ The depth of this compliment is exposed however in a comment made the following day when it is reported that Melgund's "did not obtain many Indians" during his recent trip to Caughnawaga because "they do not take kindly to work." *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 4 September 1884

⁵⁵ LAC RG 7 G19, vol 32, folder "Vol. 44 - Misc. Materials Aug 1884- Feb 1885"

very much," and despite his references to the name of Lord Wolseley, many "were inclined to stand out for a higher rate of pay than that offered to the rank and file of the party." Melgund described them as "most intelligent," especially Jackson, who had very specific questions about the types of boats to be used. He advocated for flat bottomed boats with no keel, which were immediately responsive to the helm. Hearing "that Lord Wolseley and Colonel Butler had arranged as to the style of boat he expressed himself satisfied." Melgund was impressed with Jackson and the others, saying he felt assured that "the Iroquois of Caughnawaga who have gone with the expedition will uphold their reputation as boatmen."⁵⁶ There was no equivalent to this scene in any other centres of recruitment. These pilots were widely recognized for their skill as boatmen, and that was why the Caughnawaga boatmen were not impressed with the wages being offered. They felt the value of their work was higher than this, as reflected in their regular wages. Wolseley's name had no special power to motivate them either. In addition, Jackson's critique of the boats was the only one of its type in Canada before the expedition, and his concern later proved to be well-founded.

The *Star* also reported an encounter between the Governor General and an unnamed "ancient representative of the noble red man" at a Montreal agricultural exhibit. The time of departure was fast approaching, and with the numbers of enrolled boatmen still unconfirmed, Lansdowne was particularly interested to learn that this man, "decked out in feather and buckskins," at a syrup booth, was "a Mohawk from Caughnawaga." He asked the old man if enough of his comrades would volunteer, and he replied "Bien, me not know that, but think that you get plenty hommes. You not know that men get two dollar a day on raft. Quarante piastres par mois, that's not enough." The reporter spoke of the "infinite delight of the Governor" to listen to him "stolidly" plod on in a "conglomeration of English, French and Iroquois" about the Nile expedition, concluding that "if younger he would have himself volunteered for Egypt despite the poor pay."⁵⁷ Even with the stereotypical language employed

⁵⁶ LAC RG 07 G12, Melgund to Lansdowne 3 October 1884 (Stacey p 82). In fact, Butler choose whaler boats with deep keels.

⁵⁷ *Montreal Star*, 10 September 1884

in these descriptions, it is clear that the *Star*, as the only paper that actually sent reporters to Caughnawaga, was the paper which gave the greatest attention to practical matters of wages, safety concerns and how the job contract would fit into the annual labour cycle. For a more distant paper, like the *Winnipeg Sun*, the Caughnawaga were an abstract group who provided editorially useful stereotypes.

Manitoba

Because the Manitoba group was the last to begin recruitment and the first to depart from home, it was hastily assembled, in comparison to Caughnawaga and Ottawa. Colonel William Nassau Kennedy brought 90 men instead of 50 as requested, which included a group of over 30 from St. Peter's reserve, many of whom were veterans of the Red River expedition.⁵⁸ The constraints of time, personalities involved and the particularities of Winnipeg in the 1880s all played a role in the selection of a contingent that bore little resemblance to those from Ontario or Quebec.

The narrative of Canada as a rapidly modernizing country, which was regularly articulated in the eastern press and seen in the concrete guidance given by Macdonald and Caron, was at the heart of an emerging Western identity, as Winnipeg was undergoing rapid growth and development as a city of new arrivals. In 1884, Winnipeggers were trying very hard to downplay external perceptions of their city as anything but modern. Electric lights had been recently installed and the streets were being paved for the first time. There were regular newspaper stories about the disappearance of the buffalo and speed at which the frontier was receding before the advancing railway and waves of settlers. "History is made rapidly in the Northwest," noted one writer, commenting on Métis territory. "To-day, the hunter's domain is invaded by an array of engineers, and a year hence the echoes of the locomotive will resound in his eyrie."⁵⁹ Such "progress" was often simultaneously embraced and lamented.

⁵⁸ The band at St. Peter's had its lands appropriated by the town of Selkirk in 1905. The band members were relocated further north and are today the Peguis First Nation..

⁵⁹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 1 September 1884

The "glory of Fort Garry has departed," wrote one romantic. "The historic ground where Riel used to prance around and boss the long-haired half breed soldiers of the new French Republic has been turned into a picnic ground, where church parties meet and assimilate corn starch ice-cream, and devour the solitary strawberry on the large plate."⁶⁰ The secretary of the Association of British Scientists, who was visiting Canada at the time called Winnipeg "the funniest place he had ever seen" with "the rudest structure" from "a forgotten century, fostled against the brand new edifice, imposing in finished stone and cornice." He said that it was "like a boy who was fast out-growing his old clothes." The streets were a "a fearful spectacle" given the lack of pavement, but this was understandable "in a place like Winnipeg, where expansion was so rapid and prodigious."⁶¹ Winnipeg was the newest part of a new country, its growth seemed unpredictable and unplanned, and expressions of regional identity could in turns seem both brash and fragile, with an acute sensitivity to the impressions of outsiders from Britain, the US or "the East" of Canada.

In such a city, where neither voyageurs nor shantymen could be found, the job of recruiting fell to Kennedy. Like many of the anglophone inhabitants of the city, he had been born and raised in Ontario. The Peterborough native abandoned his legal studies to travel west with Wolseley's Red River expedition. Kennedy stayed on with the standing force in Winnipeg until 1872, when he "retired" and assumed the role of city registrar. As a community leader he was the city's second mayor and the key organizer and commander of the Winnipeg Rifles.⁶² He was a constant fixture in Winnipeg newspapers as a patron of music in the city, founding the Winnipeg symphony, and a leader at the Winnipeg Rifles newly electrified drill shed, which was a regular site for concerts by the members of Winnipeg society. When Wolseley insisted on a Manitoba group, Melgund asked Kennedy to get 50 men, specifying "Only really good boatmen would be taken. Be very particular as to qualification."⁶³ Kennedy

⁶⁰ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, September 2, 1884, c.f Hamilton *Spectator* as "current comment".

⁶¹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 3 September 1884

⁶² Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 30 August 1884

⁶³ Winnipeg *Sun*, 29 August 1884

told reporters "he would not mind going with the expedition himself"⁶⁴ and the next day confirmed that he "telegraphed Lord Wolseley to that effect."⁶⁵ He was not selected as one of the officers, despite his Red River experience. Denison made clear to Melgund his opposition to his former comrade's participation, since Kennedy's superior rank threatened the legitimacy of his Denison's command. Kennedy later told a reporter "I will accompany the Winnipeg contingent as far as Montreal, but I have not as yet decided whether I shall go any further."⁶⁶

He began his recruitment with the full confidence that he "would have no trouble in getting the required number of men."⁶⁷ Even the *Sun*, which was quick to predict that there would be few volunteers, had to accept that within a day Kennedy had received fifty applications and was expecting over one hundred by the next day. The paper titled this report "Winnipeg Nile-ists: A large number wish to Nile-ate the savages," perhaps as a way of transitioning from their mockery of the idea initially to a tone more in keeping with the obvious civic sentiment. They praised the "able bodied volunteers", their "bravery and pluck" and their desire to "win distinction" for "their native province." They noted that "several officers of Winnipeg corps are eager to join the expedition" not as boatmen but "in a different capacity" and "it is the feeling here" that among the officers selected "Manitoba should not be forgotten."⁶⁸ The *Sun's* initially harsh criticism of the expedition was tempered once the affair became local and concrete, rather than distant and abstract. Their move away from a critical stance was marked by their adoption of the tropes of regional pride, distinction, recognition and satisfaction that they were "not forgotten."

The recruitment occurred out of Kennedy's home for the entire first week of September. *Le Manitoba* reported that "les demandes pour faire partie de cette expédition" were "très-

⁶⁴ Winnipeg Sun, 29 August 1884

⁶⁵ Manitoba Free Press, 30 August 1884

⁶⁶ Winnipeg Sun, 1 September 1884

⁶⁷ Manitoba Free Press, 30 August 1884

⁶⁸ Winnipeg Sun, 30 August 1884

nombreuses et il paraît que sans peine, l'on pourra engager les 50 hommes demandés de cette partie du Canada."⁶⁹ Initial reports said that 53 men were to be selected and they could be

divided into three classes. One third of them will be from St. Peter's Reserve, and are experienced voyageurs. The remainder are men who have spent years as raftsmen, together with a sprinkling of younger men who have had considerable experience canoeing and roughing it in survey parties.⁷⁰

Kennedy acknowledged the challenge obtaining "the right class of men, the applicants' own statements having to be relied on in many instances."⁷¹ He told the *Times* reporter that from the "nearly three hundred persons" who applied by September 4th, he had "considerable difficulty in choosing the men." Since the time was "so short" he had to rely on "the best information that could be obtained" and hence it was "just possible that some of the best men may not have been chosen."⁷² When the list of the men chosen were published,⁷³ some wondered aloud if the men chosen were the right sort at all.

When readers saw the names of those engaged, it was immediately apparent that they were neither voyageurs nor lumbermen. One letter writer was pleased to see that "our leading families, social circles and places of business are represented." Honour "has fallen on all classes of our people" and when perusing the list one sees "that side by side with the man hardened to toil and exposure stands the professional man, trained volunteer officer, city athlete and clerk," all of whom will "share equally the danger and labour of the expedition." The letter writer, Geo. H. Young, felt that these men "carry the word that" there are "still in the west many who would be proud of the honor of being allowed to stand in the front line with Imperial troops in defence of Imperial interests," showing a common fuzziness about the role of these men, assuming they would be winning honour in combat. To publically demonstrate that such feelings are strong "in the west", he thought that it would be "only fit

⁶⁹ *Le Manitoba*, 4 September 1884

⁷⁰ *Winnipeg Sun*, 3 September 1884

⁷¹ *Winnipeg Sun*, 4 September 1884

⁷² *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 4 September 1884

⁷³ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 4 and 5 September, *Manitoba Free Press* 5 September 1884

and proper that all Winnipeg should say good-bye and wish them God speed" through "some kind of a monster demonstration at the C.P.R. station."⁷⁴ A writer named "Red River Expedition" had a very different reaction. Looking at the same list, he was "struck with the fact that" although many "would make undeniably good fighters, they are not the class of men required for the work to be done." He doubts that Kennedy "appreciates the fact that the task will be one requiring bone, muscle, strength and endurance to an extra-ordinary degree" and that surely it was not necessary to "send to Canada to get men of the class" Kennedy had selected. The correspondent asked "where are the hardy voyageurs from St. Andrews, St. Clements and St. Peters?" and he wondered how would "our men look beside the river drivers from the Ottawa – the descendants of the couriers du bois in Quebec?" The group selected, who "have the reputation of Manitoba in their hands," clearly "are not the best that could have been selected." It was not too late to call the Hudson Bay officers, he said, who could recruit a better contingent in less time "who would not let any other contingent beat them."⁷⁵ Both men sense a competitive need for Manitoba to be well-represented, not just in the eyes of Britain, but perhaps more importantly, before other Canadians, to win recognition as equals to Ontario and Quebec. Their divergent assessment of which classes would make the best representatives to achieve this purpose is clear. The second correspondent, who chose to write under a pseudonym as he criticized Kennedy's decisions, used the pen name that revealed his expertise as a Red River expedition veteran. He insisted that working-class skilled Aboriginal men would do a better job, and that although the professional class, who were in the volunteer militia, would be "good fighters," they wouldn't be good workers so they would only bring embarrassment to Manitoba. He was sending a direct message to the leading classes of society that despite their desire to see "glory" in battle, Britain did not want them. Britain wanted Canadian workers, not soldiers, which it had in sufficient numbers.

Commenting on these reports in the Winnipeg papers, the Thunder Bay *Sentinel* singled out "a large number of Englishmen in the party." In their editorial called "English Indians" it said

⁷⁴ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 5 September 1884

⁷⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 5 September 1884

that sending many of these men was like "sending coal to Newcastle, especially as there are thousands of good canoeists in England." They imagined that Wolseley would be expecting "a crowd of dusky Canadian natives – but then this world is full of disappointments."⁷⁶ In its closing jab at the Manitoba contingent as it passed through Port Arthur, the *Sentinel* could imagine no "greater burlesque than that of replying to the request of the imperial authorities for a detachment of voyageurs by sending ninety young boys armed with paddles from Manitoba." While it admired "the spirit of loyalty which prompted these young fellows to come forward and offer their services in the cause of the British flag," it knew their efforts would be "practically useless," especially in such a "deadly" climate.⁷⁷ The *Sun's* scepticism re-emerged at this point, and they imagined that those in England who doubted Wolseley's strategy would despair if they realized that the "voyageurs" from Canada were in fact "young Englishmen, young lawyers, clerks and neer-do-weels [sic]" who knew little about boating, portaging or "actual war."⁷⁸

Kennedy had selected quite a few men "whose qualifications were more than dubious," which was in part due to what Stacey understood as his "natural partiality for militiamen."⁷⁹ The criticisms reflected a complex blend of assumptions about race, class and regional identities. On the one hand they all implied that this was an opportunity for Manitoba to win some honor and recognition. Mr. Young was satisfied with this group, imagining it to represent "all classes of our people." The *Sentinel* mocked the failure of its neighbour to successfully rise to the occasion and sent appropriate representatives. Along with *The Sun*, it seemed particularly bothered by the idea of sending "Englishmen" to represent Canada. The desire to be seen as distinctive and unique seems to contradict the thesis that upper-class Canadians of this period generally saw themselves as part of a "British world," with a

⁷⁶ Thunder Bay *Sentinel*, 6 September 1884

⁷⁷ Thunder Bay *Sentinel*, 10 September 1884

⁷⁸ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884. Unrelenting, the same paper four days later said that "THE Winnipeg men who have gone to the Nile may not be good raftsmen, but if the Egyptian bondholders want to make town lots of the Pyramids and to sell the cataracts for grist-mill power, our contingent may be trusted to do its duty for the usual commission."

⁷⁹ Stacey p. xx

common British identity. On the contrary, they seem most eager to promote a "Western" identity that they shared with the workers and Aboriginal men, the "hardy voyageurs" and "dusky Canadian natives," in a shared identity of "our people" in the west, albeit in a paternalist manner of 'our workers' and 'our Indians.'

Such language drew from different and sometimes competing narratives in this particular and unusual context. Rarely did editorialists express solidarity across race and class lines, but in this case, when they perceived their region to be in competition with other provinces before the empire, it seemed very important. Whether it was a characteristic of a region undergoing rapid change or part of a common discourse of settler identity that idealized indigneous relations when it was helpful or convenient to do so, we see here the simultaneous co-existence of a modern Canadian west narrative and the Great Lone Land narrative. In the domestic daily affairs of Manitoba, "Indians" show up in the local news in the court records or they appear in reflective pieces as a marginal people who are disappearing like the buffalo, sad as that may be. However, in an international context, in the response to an imperial call for voyageurs, the hardy, manly natives become suddenly visible again, and were seen as useful resources to demonstrate that the Northwest was at least equal to Ontario and Quebec. Particular conditions in the Northwest, and the complex nature of competing narratives of emergent identities made this the only region where there were complaints that there were too many Englishmen and soldiers and not enough Indians to represent them. The concerns were based in reality, as it was the region that actually sent the largest number of militiamen, against Melgund's instructions. They were also the only region to send a gang of lawyers.

In addition to recruiting a contingent in a very short time,⁸⁰ Kennedy was also asked to procure a birch bark canoe for the personal use of General Wolseley "similar to the one he used during the Red River expedition." Kennedy purchased a six fathom canoe, which was

⁸⁰ The size of the contingent expanded from the initial request of fifty to almost 100. There is no documentary evidence to support Ottawa's approval of this change, but the *Times* reported that "Col. Kennedy has received a telegram giving him authority to take more than fifty men if required." *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 5 September 1884

capable of holding six men and cargo, from Superintendent McCall, the Inspector of the Indian Agency.⁸¹ This simple news item resonated across the country. To the *Montreal Star* it was a four fathom canoe "manned by special crews selected for his personal service as canoe men."⁸² The *Ottawa Sun* believed the birch bark canoe was "made by the Micmac Indians of Nova Scotia" and would be "manned by a picked crew of Caughnawaga Indians,"⁸³ a version repeated in the *Halifax Daily Chronicle* the following day. More accurate reports also appeared in the *Peterborough Daily Review* and later in the *Globe*.⁸⁴ Many seemed intrigued that Wolseley was asking for Canadian men and a Canadian boat. The boat's identity as an Aboriginal technology seems evident to readers, given the references to Mohawks and Micmacs. At the same time, eastern reports of the Manitoba recruitment and the boat contained no substantial discussion or mention of the Aboriginal inhabitants of Manitoba, like those from St. Peter's, although they made up approximately a third of the Manitoba contingent.

As noted, Kennedy selected many who were not qualified as boatmen. He had to deal with time constraints and what was probably the impossible task of finding "voyageurs" and "lumbermen" in Manitoba. As a civic and militia leader, it was difficult for him personally to refuse the requests from many of the officers who, had they applied directly to Melgund from Ontario or Quebec, would have been refused. Manitoba's selection may have reflected both the disorganized growth that seemed to characterize the city of Winnipeg at the time and was likely impacted by the ever present anxieties that the "northwest" be "not forgotten" and be able to compete with other parts of Canada for recognition and honour.

⁸¹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 3 September 1884

⁸² *Montreal Star*, 5 September 1884. Translated and reprinted the next day without alteration in *La Minerve*.

⁸³ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 5 September 1884

⁸⁴ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 6 September 1884, the *Globe*, 17 September 1884

Thunder Bay

On August 30th, the Thunder Bay *Sentinel* revealed that Mr. S. J. Dawson, MP for Port Arthur had received a telegram from Melgund asking him to recruit voyageurs for the expedition. The paper's editorial identified Wolseley's journey "by way of Port Arthur" in 1870, when he "learned the value of North American Indians as voyageurs," as the obvious reason he now was asking for "a number of Redskins from this district." The editor commended imperial authorities for "acting wisely in this matter" by calling for "experienced officers and men" and noted that Mr Dawson had already begun to identify "the most likely men in the district to collect the noble natives" for this "great undertaking."⁸⁵ Dawson mobilized a group very quickly, but they never joined the expedition, due to the limited time and poor communications. As noted in our overview of militia men who volunteered for active service, there are valid reasons for examining those who offered to participate but didn't quite make it. In this case, this potential group demonstrates the fallacy of one of the guiding assumptions of the organizers, that in the 1880s it was no longer practical to seek out skilled aboriginal boatmen in Canada.

A week after Melgund had contacted Dawson, the Indian agent for the area, Mr. Donnelley, wired to say that he had assembled "30 excellent canoemen and a foreman", twenty of which were boatmen from the "Fort William band,"⁸⁶ some of whom had been with Wolseley in 1870.⁸⁷ Another group of 28 men was assembled by Chief Factor Matheson of the Hudson's Bay Company at Rat Portage, chosen "from his own crews." Donnelley's telegram was sent to Ottawa the same day that the Winnipeg contingent passed through town and boarded a steamer in Port Arthur to take them across the Great Lakes. This group of 53 men from the area between what is today Kenora and Thunder bay were not given the order to join Kennedy's group and soon after Melgund ordered them to disband. Dawson later told Melgund that Matheson felt "put out" by this treatment, for these were excellent men

⁸⁵ Thunder Bay *Sentinel*, 30 August 1884

⁸⁶ The Fort William First Nation

⁸⁷ LAC RG7 G19 vol. 29, part 2, folder 38, "Transportation of Voyageurs", Donnelley to Melgund, 8 September 1884

"accustomed to the discipline of the Hudson's Bay Company." Commenting on the "Indians of Algoma," Dawson said they "live on the water during the summer season and are perhaps the best canoemen on the continent." When word spread that the British wanted voyageurs, "young men everywhere" from "the different bands" showed a "great eagerness to join" and consequently "there will be no difficulty in obtaining voyageurs, on timely notice, should a further contingent be required for the Nile Expedition." Dawson thought that it was "indeed a pity" this group was not included, for they were "very carefully selected, having in view their skill in the handling of boats in rapids."⁸⁸ It was clear that members of the European-Canadian settler elite of the Northwest, including the editor of the *Sentinel*, the Member of Parliament, the Indian Agent and the Chief Factor, all held great admiration for the skills and abilities of the Aboriginal boatmen of the district and considered them excellent representatives of the region. After articulating a regional identification with these boatmen, Dawson and Matheson took Melgund's rejection of this group as a personal affront.

Why did this group of fifty skilled boatmen not join the expedition, especially since they appeared ready to go before the Manitobans passed through Port Arthur? The communications breakdown is understandable, given the margin of a few hours and a reliance on a telegram system running south of the great lakes and connecting the Northwest via Minneapolis. The lack of "timely notice" however, was a direct result of the organizers' reluctance to follow Wolseley's original instructions and the lost opportunity caused by their delay. Instead of asking for these men right away, Lansdowne and Melgund were redirected by Canadian politicians and lumber barons away from the west and towards the recruitment of shantymen from Ontario and Quebec. After Wolseley's insistence on the need for Manitobans and Neilson's pleas to get some "real voyageurs," the Governor General finally told Melgund to contact "the Hudson Bay officials" who could probably "tell you more about these voyageurs than anyone else."⁸⁹ Ten days were lost between the time Lansdowne first

⁸⁸ LAC RG7 G19 vol. 29 part 2, folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs, Dawson to Melgund, 25 October 1884

⁸⁹ Stacey p. 69, Lansdowne to Melgund, 30 August 1884

received the request for voyageurs from the Northwest and the time that Dawson was first contacted. This delay is almost entirely attributable to the persuasiveness of arguments, likely emanating from Macdonald first, but clearly documented in the advice given by others, that voyageurs had disappeared in a modern Canada. Melgund's official report for the War Office, which was written as the men were steaming across the Mediterranean, repeated this narrative once again, saying that the "bona fide 'voyageurs' have in many districts now become extinct. The Country which fourteen years ago supplied the water transport of the Red River Expedition is now intersected by Railroads, and except in the remote North West long canoe journeys are no longer necessary."⁹⁰ The persuasiveness of this modernizing narrative allowed the organizers to ignore the Northwest until the last possible moment, when Wolseley demanded representatives from that region. The ability of Kennedy to secure over 30 men from St. Peter's and the rapid assembly of this Thunder Bay/Rat Portage group, under less favourable conditions, contradicted this narrative of the Indian who had disappeared in the face of progress and an advancing settler society. It also deprived the expedition of at least two gangs of boatmen who were, in stark comparison with the young professionals from Winnipeg, experienced and skilled boatmen.

Peterborough

By contrast, a group of men was successfully selected from an area not normally associated with voyageurs: the town of Peterborough, Ontario. The decision to recruit in Peterborough was based on the advice of Mr. A. McArthur who hired many Peterborough lumbermen for his Georgian Bay operations.⁹¹ Until the mid-19th century, the timber trade had been focused around river systems, but the range of lumber territory expanded rapidly with rail technology. After the 1850s Peterborough became a major lumber hub for the exploitation of the lakelands areas stretching north all the way up to Georgian Bay, sourcing its products to Lake Ontario via a rail link to Cobourg. A modernizing discourse of Canada in the 1880s was

⁹⁰ Stacey p. 82, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884

⁹¹ LAC RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2, folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs, Price to Melgund, 22 August 1884

based upon concrete realities like this, which were part of the lifeworld of the Governor General's expert Canadian advisors.

Melgund sent Capt. Aumond to Peterborough on September 9th, and with the help of Mr. T. Cavanagh, "the veteran man-finder," he engaged 20 men before returning with them on that evening's night train.⁹² Cavanagh had apparently "been talking with the river men about the expedition" since it was first announced.⁹³ A local doctor was hired to inspect the men and declared the recruits "a fine, hardy lot of men, who are likely to do good service"⁹⁴ and "sound as a bell"⁹⁵ Reportedly the medical examiner only turned away one "enthusiastic old man." A quarter of them were married and made provisions for half their wages to be paid monthly to wives, while others set up similar arrangements with their parents.⁹⁶ The following day, when they arrived in Ottawa, the *Citizen* described them as "fifteen strapping fellows from Peterboro."⁹⁷ The paper reproduced Sidney Blade's offer of engagement, which detailed all the practicalities of wages, time, travel, clothing and discipline.⁹⁸

From the perspective of the Peterborough *Daily Review*, Aumond came "in response to a despatch stating that there were men here who wished to join the expedition." We know that Melgund was guided by the advice of merchants, not in response to an appeal from the town, and yet such a remark likely implies that discussions were occurring around town, even before they knew that recruitment would occur there. We can't speculate about the contents, scope, tone or intensity of such conversations with no documentation of such town buzz, but the editor knows it existed, even if he has a mistaken understanding of its impact. The *Review* understood that this was a civilian affair and used no romantic language of honour

⁹² Peterborough *Examiner*, 11 September 1884. Only fifteen out of this group of twenty of these actually engaged

⁹³ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 10 September 1884

⁹⁴ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 10 September 1884

⁹⁵ Peterborough *Examiner*, 11 September 1884

⁹⁶ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 10 September 1884

⁹⁷ Ottawa *Citizen*, 11 September 1884

⁹⁸ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 10 September 1884

or implications of "active service." After mingling with the men and talking to Aumond, the reporter "presum[ed]" that it was "generally understood" amongst his readers that "Canadians are engaged as boatmen, not as soldiers." The Peterborough volunteers were described as "river men," a term that classed them as workers. The weekly *Examiner* explained that once they were on the Nile, "two Canadians will be told off to each boat" at bow and stern "while the soldiers man the oars."⁹⁹ The lines between Canadian workers and British soldiers seemed very clear in the articles from both of Peterborough's newspapers. The Peterborough crew was one of the smaller groups, but they were assembled more quickly and efficiently than any of the others. They arrived in Ottawa early and had several days to relax in the capital at the crown's expense while Lambert rushed to complete the engagement of the largest group in the contingent.

Ottawa Recruitment

Immediately after the "Important to Boatmen" advertisements began appearing in Ottawa newspapers, Lambert told reporters that he was "flooded with applications."¹⁰⁰ But it wasn't until a week later that engagement forms were ready and boatmen began to assemble at his office.¹⁰¹ Reporters from all three Ottawa daily newspapers joined them. The *Sun* reporter said the Wellington office "was besieged" and he had to "squeeze" his way through the blocked entrance stairway to find Lambert, who "hadn't time to spit."¹⁰² The *Free Press* reporter "found him busily at work" engaging "first-class workmen" who were "thoroughly representative of Canadian raftsmen."¹⁰³ In descriptions of the men in Lambert's office, some common themes emerged from reports of all three papers. First, the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the applicants figured very prominently in most descriptions. Secondly, there were detailed descriptions of the men's bodies, complimenting their physique. A variety of other observations were made too, about their skills, their motivations and their districts.

⁹⁹ Peterborough *Examiner*, 11 September 1884

¹⁰⁰ Ottawa *Free Press*, 28 August 1884

¹⁰¹ Ottawa *Citizen*, 3 September 1884

¹⁰² Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 4 September 1884

¹⁰³ Ottawa *Free Press*, 2 September 1884

Reporters thought that one of the most noteworthy aspects of the Ottawa recruitment was that it included many nationalities. A reporter from the *Citizen* noted that the men

so far are about evenly divided between French and English speaking, the latter of course including English, Irish, Scotch and Canadian born, so that the [Ottawa] forces will be composed of representatives of the aboriginal owners of the soil, those who took possession of it and kept pace with the progress of the age, and those who are native born and represent the commingling of races.¹⁰⁴

This reporter saw in the assembled men an embodiment of his particular version of the region's settlement narrative, with "aboriginal" francophones (who could not keep "pace with the progress of the age"), followed by three British races, who in turn give way to a fusion of all of these in the native-born Canadian.¹⁰⁵ This sketch did not recognize an Algonquin presence of the Ottawa River preceding European colonization. For this one reporter in Lambert's office, such a tidy settlement story that overlooked aboriginals was not contradicted by the presence of any actual Indians there that day. Another reporter said "the majority are French-Canadians, but there are a number of Old Country people" as well.¹⁰⁶

Both the *Citizen* and the *Sun* emphasized the "racial" (nationality) differences evident at the recruiting office through the use of stylized accents that were immediately recognizable to their readers. A Scottish applicant said "he would go up that shtrame if he had to ate every bloody crockodile on the Noyle"¹⁰⁷ A few days later the *Citizen* reporter again connected crocodiles and Scottish accents in the following conversation: "I say, Mike, is Roney going' up the Noyle?" "Faith an' I'll nivir tell yer Dingis. They do be tellin' me though that Jack Averill intinds wadn' a grey shirt an' bale shkins [pale stockings] this winter. Shure Dingis won't the brackydoles be parslyzed on his ilegant shape."¹⁰⁸ In a story called "Crocodile

¹⁰⁴ Ottawa *Daily Citizen*, 3 September 1884

¹⁰⁵ For documentation of similar language usage twenty years later, see H.V. Nelles, "Historical Pageantry and the "Fusion of the Races" at the Tercentenary of Quebec, 1908," *Social History / Histoire sociale*, Vol 29, no 5 (1996)

¹⁰⁶ Ottawa *Free Press*, 2 September 1884

¹⁰⁷ Ottawa *Citizen*, 3 September 1884

¹⁰⁸ Ottawa *Citizen*, 13 September 1884

Converse," a *Sun* reporter listed all the accents overheard in Lambert's office. An unaccented foreman declared "We'll feed the crocodiles with our own bodies, if we can't eat them," before assuring the reporter "they'll get no chance to snap their jaws at a Canuck, you bet!" He also interviewed "a Frenchman from Maniwaki" ("I keen leek de' devil out ob de Arrahbs."), a Scotsman ("Eh! mon, I dinna ken ef we'll tak the fever after we'll gang awa' to the soud o'Egypt."), an Irishman ("Be the piper that played afore Moses, we'll see the kintry at-any-rate") and even "a Yorkshire man" ("We'll 'ave a pewtah pot of bloomin' British beah when we land h'at h'Alexandria."). He also included "an Iroquois Indian" who said "Ora-ke-wa-ta-na-ka" "in a guttural voice," which was translated (gutterally) as "me go dere too", a "German waterman" who inquired about "Schweitzer cheese un lager beer" and "a Jew" who offered to loan money to the men if they'd sign their remittances over to him. The latter was rebuked by "the blustering, red-faced Irishman, on behalf of the rest."¹⁰⁹ The phonetic spelling of the various accents was reserved for working-class men, since this practice was never evident with Prime Ministers, lumber merchants or visiting British scientists who would have had a range of accents. As we will see later, English reporters on the Nile detected and commented on the "American accent" of the Canadians from Ottawa, but the reverse did not seem to be true. Like the Scottish accent of a Prime Minister, might it be possible that the English accent of an immigrant worker was culturally inaudible for a reporter who "noticed" the accents of "other" nationalities and used them as markers of difference for comical effect?

The idea that the contingent was comical due to its ethnic and national diversity was something also noted in the British press. Reprinting a British article that documented the "heterogeneous forces for Gordon's relief", it was noted that "the international character which the expedition will assume with these allies is the subject of numerous jokes and cartoon in the comic papers," with the mixture of Kroomen from West Africa, Egyptian

¹⁰⁹ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 4 September 1884

soldiers and Canadian voyageurs making a "motley crew."¹¹⁰ When Ottawa journalists looked at a "motley" diverse group, they identified the "others" (non-anglophone Canadian, non-English) and mocked their difference by invoking stereotypes. Typically, such misrepresentation was perceived by the misrepresented as insult. The vulnerable position of anglophone Canadians in this situation was evident in the way they were being already portrayed in British "comic papers." The tables were turned, and Canadians were lumped together, regardless of these apparent differences visible in Ottawa, and they were all placed side by side with Africans, to be mocked as part of a motley crew of non-British others.

If the men were differentiated by nationality and speech, they were measured and examined by common bodily criteria. In general, there were regular comments on these "able-bodied raftsmen"¹¹¹ and individual gangs were "much admired for their physique"¹¹² When Dr. J. A. Grant gave them a medical examination the paper reported that he had seen "about 40 as finely physiqued rivermen as ever handled a paddle." It provided the details of several of the men, including a 19 year old who "measured 43 inches around the chest, 36 inches around the waist, 6 ft. 1½ inches in height" and a 25 year old who "stands 5 feet 10½ inches in height measures 44 inches around the chest, 37 inches around the waist and is aged 25 years."¹¹³ These quantifiable measurements were physical indicators tied to well-understood cultural norms concerning idealized masculine bodies, with different types suited for different social roles. The "comedy" pieces which were cited above inverted these well-understood criteria to support their satire about men with unsuitable bodies for such an

¹¹⁰ *Ottawa Free Press*, 30 August 1884. A cursory glance at Wolseley's campaigns in Manitoba, the Ashanti and Egypt in the preceding years provides a simple explanation for the international composition of this expedition. It was well known that he liked to surround himself with familiar officers, who were known in the press as "the Garnet Ring." The Nile expedition shows that he also liked to draw on colonial workers from those same campaigns, as an extended ring. The press, however, mistakenly imagined that the Kroomen were engaged because they came "from one of the worst climates in Africa" and would therefore "be able to do much of the hard work required without suffering from the climate of the Soudan." They were selected because of Wolseley's Ashanti experiences.

¹¹¹ *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 September 1884

¹¹² *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 5 September 1884

¹¹³ *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 September 1884. Translated and reprinted in *La Patrie*, 6 septembre 1884

expedition. One applicant proudly proclaims: "I masures sixty-two inch rown' de waist and tirty-six roun' de ankle, weighs two hondre foatu two-ah, and I draws six feet two inch loaded. I'm only twenty five hears 'ole, and de docter after crack my ches' say "I'm the bes' yet."¹¹⁴ Many serious reports of the physical measurements of the applicants demonstrated to the reader that the boatmen would be worthwhile specimens of Canadian manliness. From such descriptions, and their comic inversions, the newspaper reader was able to visualize the idealized physical form of the boatman who would be sent to represent Canada to Wolseley.

Gender satire also presented the unmanly figure of several "dudes" who supposedly wanted to join the expedition. They were not explicitly called dudes, but they were portrayed to be immediately recognized as such by the reader. Throughout this period, there are scattered slang references to "dudes," who are men from the well-monied classes who have no particular work to do and were very pre-occupied with clothing and fashion. The term originated in the US in the late 1870s but was in widespread use by this time and then gained notoriety later in 1884 from a Montreal court case in which a gentlemen took another man to court for slander, after he had called him a dude. The dude character, was a comic foil whose presence highlighted the manliness of the voyageurs. One "masher" asked the tailor for "a good stylish fit", "a 'Nihil Fit,'" and received padded shoulders. A "dandy with high-heeled gaiters and large brass earrings," claimed "Ef I wor sure dere would be some bands to see us hoff I would sign de paper dis mawning." He also claims that he would hold out for a "gorranty" that he'd get de "custard pie tree time a week."¹¹⁵ If the overweight 25 year old above was an unmanly class equivalent to the raftsmen, then these dudes were the class equals of the more manly officers in the Canadian militia. The dudes' fashion obsession, their undisciplined pudding bodies and their lisps made them the categorical opposites in both class and masculine qualities to the "finely physiqued rivermen" who know "every inch of the Ottawa in all its intensities."¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 September 1884

¹¹⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 September 1884

¹¹⁶ *Ottawa Citizen*, 3 September 1884

The other main characteristic noted by the Ottawa press, beyond ethnic diversity and gendered portraits of working men's bodies, was the descriptions of their enthusiasm. The press reported "great excitement among the Ottawa river men," where the news of the expedition "spread like wildfire along the line."¹¹⁷ The *Citizen* gave "as evidence of the anxiety of some of the applicants to be enrolled" the fact that five men asked about positions as foremen and "expressed themselves sadly disappointed" when told that those posts had been filled.¹¹⁸ In contrast, those who were going were "in great glee over their trip."¹¹⁹ The reports spoke of an excitement in the daily crowds that "hung about the steps leading to Mr. J. T. Lambert's office."¹²⁰ What was never explicitly articulated, or inquired into, in these reports from Lambert's office were explanations for such excitement. After signing the agreement, one foreman told a reporter "that he had worked for some big men on the Ottawa the past ten year, but Queen Victoria is the biggest he work for," and "you bet," he said, "the bes' yet."¹²¹ This was the only time in any of the reports that someone mentioned the Queen or any idea of service to the empire. Was this an expression of working-class imperialism from this francophone foreman, or rather, had he adopted the perspective facilitated by Melgund's preparations, of seeing the crown as a surrogate employer and he was merely impressed to be working for such a "big boss"? By September 12, the day before their departure from the city, Mr. Lambert closed the enrollment list and was congratulated by the originally skeptical Ottawa *Sun* editor for having performed his duty with "entire success." Despite the harsh opinion initially expressed by this paper, their daily reports from Lambert's office left them with the impression that the men selected "compose as fine a body of voyageurs as could be found anywhere" and they were sure that they would "perform their work satisfactorily, and in a way to win honor for themselves and credit for Canada."¹²²

¹¹⁷ Ottawa *Citizen*, 3 September 1884

¹¹⁸ Ottawa *Citizen*, 3 September 1884

¹¹⁹ Ottawa *Free Press*, 2 September 1884

¹²⁰ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 5 September 1884

¹²¹ Ottawa *Citizen*, 3 September 1884

¹²² Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 12 September 1884

Trois-Rivières

Wolseley's original request did not include bûcherons from the St. Maurice region. This idea was developed in August after consulting the Prime Minister and lumber merchants. At that point, there was an expectation that between Ottawa and Trois-Rivières, it would be possible to get 300-500 men, with perhaps 50 from Caughnawaga. By the time the contingent left Canada, the organizers had expressed their disappointment in the low numbers of men from the St. Maurice region and Melgund placed all the blame on his agent in that city, Mr. O. Z. Hamel. Official records and newspaper reports give some indications of both the impact of an individual personality like Hamel as well as other factors that may have resulted in a relatively modest turnout from the St. Maurice region.

On Monday, September 1st, Melgund paid a visit to Caughnawaga across from Montreal and the next day he travelled Trois-Rivières. He wrote to the Prime Minister that he felt he could "expect a good contingent from there"¹²³ and just after Melgund returned to Ottawa, Fred Denison told the *Free Press* that "we expect 200 men from the Three Rivers District"¹²⁴ from which other papers reported that "applications at Three Rivers are booming."¹²⁵ The *Star* reported that Melgund had asked Hamel, by telegram, to "accompany the party as superintendent of the whole force." Without hesitation, Hamel accepted the position.¹²⁶ *La Minerve* reprinted this story, adding an additional note that "C'est un homme compétent" and as a result of his services to Wolseley on the Red River expedition, he has received "des témoignages les plus flatteurs des officiers" in command at that time.¹²⁷ As late as September 10, Aumond told Peterborough reporters that Hamel "was going with the party as superintendent."¹²⁸ All through this first week of September, these scattered references to Hamel's role as superintendent were the only recruitment news that came from the region.

¹²³ LAC MG 26A Macdonald fonds, Melgund to Macdonald, 3 September 1884, p. 32910

¹²⁴ *Ottawa Free Press*, 4 September 1884

¹²⁵ *Ottawa Daily Citizen* 4 September 1884, reprinted the next day in *Montreal Star*

¹²⁶ *Montreal Star*, 5 September 1884

¹²⁷ *La Minerve*, 6 Septembre 1884

¹²⁸ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 10 September 1884

Unfortunately, newspaper coverage from Trois-Rivières itself was sparse because two of the three local papers from this era began publication just after the departure of the contingent.¹²⁹ The *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, a bi-weekly conservative publication of politics and religion, was the main local source of news and it first wrote about the contingent in the week before the group's departure. The paper understood that "le gouvernement anglais" required "bateliers canadiens," on the request of "General Wolseley lui même, qui a appris à connaître l'habilité et le courage de nos bateliers" in 1870. According to the *Journal*, Lansdowne telegraphed Hamel the week before "pour l'inviter avec instance à prendre la direction de tout le contingent des bateliers canadiens." It is safe to assume that the reader would understand "direction" in this context as more of a head foreman role, as opposed to "command," since the article also mentioned that Denison was in town to meet with Hamel and go over details. Hamel would be leaving in several days "avec ses hommes dont une centaine sont de cette ville et du district."¹³⁰ The *Journal* gave no detailed descriptions of any men being recruited through Hamel. Comments about recruitment in the Montreal and Trois-Rivières papers, therefore, never really appeared to be based on any observation, which had been the case in Winnipeg, Peterborough and Ottawa.

Although there was no engagement in the city of Montreal proper, *La Minerve* ran a series of editorials reflecting on the meaning and significance of the recruitment. With the largest French-speaking newspaper circulation in Canada, *La Minerve* likely assumed that its editorials were read by francophone men in Ottawa and Trois-Rivières who were weighing the merits of enrollment. Its first editorial asked whether or not this request was an honor to "canotiers canadiens-français." While it was reluctant to take a stance in favour or against the expedition ("Nous ne voyons dans la chose ni honneur proprement dit, ni déshonneur"),

¹²⁹ The Liberal paper *L'ère Nouvelle de Trois-Rivières* published its first issue in July, their second in November and only began to comment on the voyageurs in December when letters begin to return home from Egypt. *La Liberté* began publishing in October, with the stated intension of filling a gap in news, commercial information and politics since "la ville des Trois-Rivieres était -- disons-le sans crainte de blesser la vérité - sans organe" and they hoped they would be able to "combler cette lacune." *La Liberté de Trois-Rivières*, 1 Octobre 1884

¹³⁰ *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 8 September 1884

they began by emphasizing that Wolseley "rend ainsi témoignage à leur habileté." The paper assumed a tone of knowing identification with the working class men who should consider this opportunity. Such a stance allowed them to enumerate the dangers of the expedition, making it unpleasant for most, "excepté peut-être pour notre race naturellement aventurière."¹³¹ By seeing neither honour or dishonour in the decision for members of "notre race" to participate in, the editor played at the military meaning of "honneur proprement dit" while also acknowledging that there would be no shame in joining such an exciting adventure. If the boatmen do not sign up, this editorial can accept and understand that, and they will not have turned down a chance at "honour". But if they do go, the writer will take vicarious pride through his identity as a naturally adventure-seeking French-Canadian.

As the week went on, and English-language newspapers began to report details of the engagement forms, the editor raised concerns about the contract terms. As previously noted, concern was raised that the volunteers should only sign up for conditions "bien définies et non militaires" and should demand "des représentants de votre religion" et "un corps d'ambulance de votre langue." There was a clear expectation that the government should provide "toutes les garanties morales et matérielles" to the volunteers. The paper expressed their confidence that the Governor General "ne voudrait pas sans doute envoyer nos compatriotes à la boucherie," but emphasized "la responsabilité qu'entraîne nécessairement la démarche officielle." The paper warned that "si cette expédition tournait à mal, ni lui, ni le général Wolseley n'auraient à compter sur la gratitude des Canadiens." While this was couched as the advice of a loyal but realistic subject, the paper discussed a growing discontent with the terms of engagement. As the *Ocean King* was anchored to take "nos nationaux" to Egypt, it said that "on nous informe" that the recruitment which had been going so well until now "ne va plus du tout." Many of those bûcherons who had previously offered their services "sont revenus depuis sur leur décision et ne veulent plus entendre parler de l'Egypte." While "les soldats anglais" had been promised a government pension if wounded

¹³¹ *La Minerve*, 2 Septembre 1884

or killed, this was not offered "de nos 'voyageurs'," who, if disabled during the campaign, "devront compter pour l'avenir sur leurs propres ressources."¹³² Doubts were being voiced that the British government (always referred to as "le gouvernement anglais") would provide "toutes les garanties morales et matérielles" to "nos voyageurs" that it was giving to "les soldats anglais."

Four days later, the paper reported that "le recrutement ne va guère" to the point that for every one who accepts there are four more refusing. It noted that, although the authorities granted French-Canadians a doctor, a chaplain and a third of the officer corps, they did not assure them of "les avantages qu'ont de droit les soldats anglais," namely "une pension qui reste de leurs jours" for those rendered invalid during the campaign. "Pour les bateliers canadiens, rien de tel; s'ils reviennent éclopés, ils se tirent d'affaire comme ils pourront." It was unfair ("pas souriante") that "nos volontaires" could be subject to military discipline and court martials like a soldier and yet not get the protection of a disability pension. Along the same lines, they would be "exposés aux attaques de l'ennemi, puis qu'ils ne seront pas armés." In such a situation, the paper concluded that while "nos voyageurs" would be useful, "le gouvernement anglais," if it tried to engage them under such conditions, could only blame itself if it failed to enroll enough of them.¹³³ The tone here was one of sharp disappointment over the disadvantaged situation faced by Canadian volunteers, who would be subject to all the hazards of military discipline and enemy attacks, without guns for their self-defence or pensions for their security.

In their last of these series of editorials, however, *La Minerve* seemed to return to its initial point of departure in emphasizing the respect shown to their countrymen by the imperial government. Perhaps ironically, it was several statements made in the British press, which were widely interpreted in Canada as unfavourable, that prompted this defensive response. Wolseley's decision to engage "des bateliers canadiens sur le Nil" caused a "sensation en

¹³² *La Minerve*, 6 Septembre 1884

¹³³ *La Minerve*, 10 Septembre 1884

Angleterre." That the British public should question the necessity of using Canadians caused *La Minerve* to articulate "les qualités particulières de nos fameux voyageurs, explorateurs, aventuriers canadiens-français, leur vigueur, leur bravure, leur intrépidité exceptionnelles," and explain to a Quebec readership that such facts were not widely known to "des Anglais qui n'ont pas visité le Canada." But since Wolseley got to know French-Canadians, especially those who accompanied him to Red River, "à travers un pays désert et difficile," this explained the call to Canada. The perceived slight by British opinion towards Canadians (presumed to be to Canadiens), not only made *La Minerve* strike a defensive pose regarding French-Canadians, but towards Wolseley and the whole imperial apparatus as well. It wanted its readers to know:

nous n'avons pas combattu le projet de lord Wolseley, appuyé par lord Lansdowne et lord Melgund. Seulement, nous avons prévenu nos compatriotes contre le caractère périlleux de cette expédition. Nous leur avons recommandé de ne pas s'engager à l'aventure, mais plutôt en parfaite connaissance de cause.¹³⁴

Within the course of a few days, this paper, which seemed to spend more space and time reflecting publically on the implications of engagement than any other paper in Canada, moved its position from cheerleader to sceptic and back to cautious supporter. Its mood shifted with its changing perceptions of the British government's recognition (or not) of "nos canotiers candiens" as exceptional workers, as second-class combatants and again as skilled specialists. The changes in tone of these messages reflected the dynamics of the complex, shifting patterns of intersubjective recognition at play. Attempting to explain these reactions merely through a lens of French-Canadian attitudes to Britain in the abstract or based on analysis of the material considerations of disability benefits would be too reductionist without understanding the moral insult felt by having Canadian abilities questioned combined with the pride expressed in being collectively recognized for unique and valuable skills by a significant external power.

¹³⁴ *La Minerve*, 11 Septembre 1884

The *Journal de Trois-Rivières* spoke of the impending departure of "quatre ou cinq cents bateliers" as an event that had caused "une certain émotion dans le public." They encouraged those who were going to consider carefully, "pour éviter les désappointement." Considering "le mauvais côté de la médaille" they felt that "le rôle de ce contingent de bateliers sera assez humble et probablement très laborieux." They continue to list the poor climate, "les misères de la vie de campagne" and a host of difficulties and dangers that would make a positive final outcome "peu probable." On the other hand however, everything might go well, "sans aucun désagrément important." But even if they get "un salaire raisonnable" and they "gagneront amplement" from the experience, it will not be "un voyage de plaisir." After this fairly neutral assessment, which makes no mention of pride or honour, except perhaps for the passing reference to their "humble" role, the editor expressed his strong approval of the choice of Bouchard as chaplain (using both the word aumônier and chapelain). Because of "sa connaissance" of place, language, manners and hygenic conditions of Egypt and the Sudan, he will provide "un grand secours."¹³⁵ Like *La Minerve*, this paper felt it was responsible to spell out all the pros and cons of the expedition without strongly advocating for or against enrollment. Compared to much of the English-language press, this was a much more dispassionate portrait of enrollment, reflecting neither imperial enthusiasm nor the sharp scepticism of many of the "independent" English-language papers.

The turnout from the St. Maurice region was low in the end, however, and Melgund placed all the blame on Hamel, who met with him in Ottawa on September 10.¹³⁶ While no records remain of a meeting with Melgund, based on comments in later documents it is clear that around this time, Hamel asked for a very high wage as superintendent. The *Globe* spoke of the "old 'Trifluvian' voyageur" as over 50, with a family and having "thrown up his position of City Inspector of Three Rivers at \$1,200 a year at the pressing request of General Wolseley."¹³⁷ The *Star* called it "a rare example of unselfishness and noble-heartedness in

¹³⁵ *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 11 September 1884

¹³⁶ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 10 September 1884

¹³⁷ *Globe*, 11 September 1884

matters relating to the upholding of our Canadian military prestige," for Hamel to resign his \$1,200 a year post to recruit 100 men and travel to Egypt with them.¹³⁸ Other papers began to report that he would receive the same salary on the expedition.¹³⁹ But in reporting on the contingent's departure, the *Journal de Trois-Rivières* said that, being unable to reach an agreement with the authorities "au sujet du salaire qu'il demandait," Hamel "a retiré son acceptation et refusé de prendre part à l'expédition."¹⁴⁰ A week after the group left, Melgund admitted to Macdonald that "the district which disappointed us most was the 3 Rivers district" which had held promise of many men, but only yielded thirty-nine. He explained that "we had not fair play as I am convinced that a Mr. Hamel worked against us there owing to my refusing to let him go with the expedition on account of the enormous wage he asked."¹⁴¹ In his final report, Melgund also stated that he had hoped for "a large contingent from this district" but based on "the mismanagement of Mr. Hamel our agent there, our expectations have been much disappointed."¹⁴²

Recruitment in Trois-Rivières did not occur publically in the same way that it did in Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Peterborough, Ottawa and Caughnawaga. Once again, we can see how the decision by Lansdowne and Melgund to deviate from Wolseley's request left them in an awkward situation. They had been encouraged to seek the assistance of the Bishop for Quebec recruitment and they chose instead to rely on Mr. Hamel, a Red River veteran who led the press to incorrectly believe that Wolseley had called for him personally. By contrast, Kennedy recruited more men than requested and was, as we would later see, even willing to sink his rank and accept the pay of a foreman if allowed to travel with the expedition. Hamel, it turns out, was no Kennedy. When he did not receive the fee that he felt was his worth, the disgruntled city official refused to go and, in the opinion of Melgund, he sabotaged the recruitment in his town.

¹³⁸ *Montreal Star*, 12 September 1884

¹³⁹ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 11 September 1884 said that he'd receive \$100 a month, while the *Ottawa Free Press*, 11 September 1884 said that he'd get a salary of \$1,200 a year

¹⁴⁰ *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 15 Septebmer 1884

¹⁴¹ LAC MG 26A Macdonald fonds, Melgund to Macdonald, 23 September 1884, p. 32918 to 32924

¹⁴² Stacey p. 82, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884

Despite the absence of a real recruiter, thirty-nine men still signed up, although at this point in the expedition, we have no record of their motivations or the language they used when engaging. What we can see, however, is that the parameters of the discussion around engagement in the French-language press were quite different than in the English-language press. In *La Minerve* we find the only serious assertion made in a Canadian paper of the lack of a disability benefit and widow's pension could be a deterrent to volunteers. This is the probable source of the confusion in some Winnipeg newspapers that there were some Mohawks from Quebec who were asking for "assurances against death." To be sure, no shantymen in 1884 expected assurances against death and disability in their work, so this was the concern only of a newspaper editor comparing the Canadian boatman to the common British soldier. In this light, *La Minerve*, *Le Journal de Trois-Rivières* and other papers weighed the pros and cons of enrollment and were more likely than their English-language counterparts to emphasize the dangers and the negative aspects of military service. There was really no hint of any animus towards the concept of serving on a British imperial campaign, but rather, a relative indifference to the potential for glory, honour and credit for the country or region. We are safe in assuming that this would seem to be the result of a weaker need for recognition by "les anglais" than found in the English-language Canadian press. While the English-language press seemed more polarized on questions connected to British recognition, *La Minerve* and the other French-language papers began with the common-sense assumption that Canada was a part of the empire, and then tried to realistically enumerate the pros and cons workers should consider. *La Minerve* was the newspaper which was most direct about the uncertainty that would exist for the voyageurs, who would live in a grey zone between soldier and civilian on this expedition, since they could suffer the dangers of war (military discipline, court martial, being shot) without the advantages possessed by soldiers (disability pensions, being armed). As the English-language press watched the men enroll, they were more likely to debate whether or not these men were the best representatives to Empire, whether they would win glory and honor and if so for whom, and perhaps most importantly, whether or not the civilian nature of the contingent was a major or minor disappointment. The parameters of French-language journalism exposes Anglophone Canada's pre-occupation

with a national image and representation of Canada to the empire, to the extent that only the "unpatriotic" papers, like the *World, Grip* and the *Ottawa and Winnipeg Suns*, spoke of the dangers of the trip and even in those cases, such arguments served to supplement a partisan opposition to the imperial campaign rather than a dispassionate assessment of the risks involved. If we assume a weaker need amongst French-Canadians for recognition from the British, related to a weaker identification with "Britishness," this would explain the difference in the parameters of the media debate in the two languages.

"What is Thought in England of the Canadian Boatmen"

During the first week of September, at the same time that newspapers were reporting their impressions of enlisting voyageurs, they were also reprinting a string of articles from the British press that were critical of Canadian participation in the Nile expedition. Canadian papers that expressed gratitude that Canada could participate in the campaign were protective towards Wolseley, linking his reputation and that of Canada, given that the Red River expedition gave him "experience which no other officer possessed"¹⁴³ to lead the Nile Expedition. When well-respected commentators like Sir Samuel Baker criticized Wolseley's plan publically in the *Times*, "unhesitatingly predicting the failure of the Government expedition" and declaring it "impossible to row against the Nile current with any effective result," his comments were widely reprinted in Canada, raising the stakes as a test of Canadian competence.¹⁴⁴ The *Army and Navy Gazette* issued a "strong condemnation" of the whole plan, saying it was the "opinion of every man who knows the Nile" that the boats constructed were "useless" and "a more wicked waste of money has never been committed." It would be "a monstrous armada" that would be only "fit for firewood."¹⁴⁵ Some papers recognized that such "heartburning in professional [military] circles" was based on rivalry, jealousy and partisanship rather than "expert" opinion. It was "notorious" (widely believed) that Wolseley was leading the expedition because "the military authorities on the spot in

¹⁴³ *Ottawa Free Press*, 28 August 1884

¹⁴⁴ *Ottawa Free Press*, 26 August 1884

¹⁴⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 September 1884

Egypt thought his plan of relief by the Nile impracticable" so he was "determined that he'd try the thing himself." Apparently, "Wolseley's self-confidence is gigantic, and makes him hosts of enemies." The papers spoke of such a high degree of "political acrimony" that Gladstone could expect no "political credit from his enemies" in "the Conservative press."¹⁴⁶ For many Canadian commentators, however, this English domestic context was mentioned only in passing and the real story seemed to be that improper respect was being shown to Wolseley and Canada.

"The Thames Watermen are Jealous"

There was one category of opinion from England which said that it was not necessary to hire Canadians, since they were no better than Englishmen. This was the opinion of the recently arrived General Middleton, who told Melgund in private that "they might get as good men on Portsmouth beach."¹⁴⁷ A travelling British officer in Manitoba told the Winnipeg *Daily Times* that sending Canadians to Egypt was "simply nonsense where equally good men were to be had in England."¹⁴⁸ A direct challenge to the engagement of Canadian boatmen came from the Thames watermen who were "offended" by the call to Canada. They had apparently "offered their services" on the expedition and "resent the fact that they were overlooked and assistance sought in Canada."¹⁴⁹ The Ottawa *Daily Sun* article titled "English Boatmen Jealous of our Voyageurs" said that an "outcry" has been provoked by the Thames boatmen who "reproach the authorities for having passed them by."¹⁵⁰ Such critics denied that Canadians possessed any special skills.

¹⁴⁶ Ottawa *Free Press*, 2 September 1884

¹⁴⁷ LAC MG 27 II B-1, Minto Fonds, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 25 August 1884

¹⁴⁸ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 30 August 1884

¹⁴⁹ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 30 August 1884. Copied by the Halifax *Morning Chronicle*, 1 September 1884, who label the watermen "resentful."

¹⁵⁰ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 30 August 1884

"Sneering at the War Office"

But such widely reprinted comments provoked only a minor response compared to the outrage evoked by a report that claimed Canadian officers disapproved of Wolseley. The *Globe* reported, via the New York *Tribune*, that the London evening papers were publishing reports from a central news correspondent in Montreal who said "the Canadian officers always sneered at the War Office" comparisons between the Nile and the Red River, since the 1870 expedition was "a mere pleasure excursion through a beautiful country and splendid climate" with no real fighting. "Some of the most outspoken [Canadian] officers condemn in vigorous terms the assumption that Iroquois Indians taken from the frosty climate of Canada can ever be made serviceable on the Nile."¹⁵¹ This refracted echo that appeared in the *Globe* and then other papers, claimed that British and American newspaper readers were being told that Canadian officers showed an open and blatant disrespect towards Wolseley, towards the call for voyageurs and even towards his signature "river expedition" strategy that was forged in the Canadian North West, used in the Ashanti Campaign and now planned for the Nile. The *Ottawa Free Press* responded with an article entitled "CANADIANS FOR WOLSELEY / FALSE STATEMENTS REFUTED / *An English Correspondent Who does not tell the Truth - Jealousy the Cause.*" The *Free Press* explained that the "English correspondent" spoke to Denison before making his "astounding statement" that "the officers of the Canadian troops generally disapproved of General Wolseley's appointment to the supreme command of the Egyptian expedition," they "pooh-poohed his plan" and they "sneered at the War Office's" references to the Red River. The Ottawa paper sent a correspondent directly to the Dominion Rifle Association competition, which it considered "an excellent opportunity" to test this theory. From the article, it would seem that each Canadian officer wished to outdo one another in their praise for Wolseley. "Without an exception," we learn, "the appointment is approved," and the reports in the British press are "received with incredulity, as General Wolseley, for obvious reasons, is the idol of the Canadian militia service." Major-General Middleton told the press that Wolseley was

¹⁵¹ *Globe*, 1 September 1884

exceedingly popular in Canada." Captain Costin, the secretary of the Dominion Rifle Association thought the report was "arrant rot" and the "very opposite is the case," this being "the first time that I have ever heard of a Canadian officer pooh-poohing General Wolseley's appointment." Other officers said they would be proud to serve under Wolseley. Col. Panet, Deputy Minister of the Militia considered it "a piece of jealousy on the part of Englishmen ... who think they have been slighted" by Wolseley's request for Canadians. He said "ours are the best men and the General knows it." Wolseley was "popular with Canadian officers," he continued and he "has evidently not forgotten Canadians." There was "no General more popular with the staff" (Col. Otter), and his popularity extended beyond "the officers of the troops but [with] the people generally" (Col. Bacon) to the extent that "there is no officer in the British army more popular in Canada than General Wolseley." (Lt. Col. Macdonald). Speaking of an identification with Wolseley that was deeper than mere popularity, Capt. Gourdeau of the Princess Louise Guard thought that "every Canadian officer is proud of General Wolseley, and delighted that he is in command of the Egyptian campaign, as they have every confidence in him as a commander."¹⁵² When questioned the next day, Denison attested that "We in Canada swear by Lord Wolseley" and said that the flood of volunteers for active service was a sufficient answer as to whether or not Canadian officers "approve of Wolseley being in the supreme command." The *Free Press* felt that the press despatches were "under some malign influence whose object is to discredit the Gladstone administration and weaken its influence for good by adverse criticism and false statements."¹⁵³ A reporter for the Winnipeg *Daily Sun* who had been in Ottawa to report on the Rifle competition also wrote about "English correspondents who send home lying reports of Canada and Canadians." He said that in Ottawa "considerable feeling exists" amongst Canadian military men "regarding the fact that English soldiers and officers are endeavoring to belittle Canada through jealousy, because Canadian boatmen have been asked to go as voyageurs." Denison denounced the article as "pure fabrication" and General Middleton "laughed heartily at the ridiculous story," adding that officers gathered in Ottawa "looked upon Wolseley as almost

¹⁵² *Ottawa Free Press*, 3 September 1884

¹⁵³ *Ottawa Free Press*, 4 September 1884

a semi-Canadian." It was expected that this matter would "form a lively discussion for many days,"¹⁵⁴ demonstrating how easy it was to prick the insecurities of a large section of the colonial elite with little more than the thoughtless telegraph of an anonymous central news agency correspondent.

"Simply Murder"

It seems that the same brief report from Montreal might have been the cause of another thread of articles which can only be read as indignant responses to perceived allusions to Canadian weakness. As noted in the *Globe* above, Canadian officers in Montreal told the London reporter that they did not think much of sending Iroquois Indians on the expedition. "They argue that the climate of Upper Egypt will be fatal to the Lachine Indians, and Lord Wolseley will need stretchers and ambulances instead of boats."¹⁵⁵ The morning after the appearance of such remarks in England, a cable was received from London that said "Experts declare it will be simply murder to take Canadians into the Nile region."¹⁵⁶ This was then amplified into a story that "Egyptian experts in London" declared it "simply murder to take these men into the Nile region, accustomed as they are to a cool climate and a meat diet." The "burning sand", aridity, and light rations "would kill them as frost kills flies."¹⁵⁷ Canadian editorials demanded: "Who are the experts? Upon what data do they judge? Why will it be murder in the case of Canadians and not of Englishmen?" Blame was placed on those who imagined that "Canadians come from a land where everlasting winter reigns."¹⁵⁸ A letter writer to the *Globe* attempted to dismantle these "old errors" saying that "Canadians endure the heat of India and other hot countries much better than Englishmen." In Lower Egypt, "the winter is cooler than an Ontario September, and January in Khartoum as cool as October at

¹⁵⁴ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 4 September 1884

¹⁵⁵ Ottawa *Free Press*, 2 September 1884

¹⁵⁶ Ottawa *Free Press*, 3 September 1884. See also Montreal *Star* same day, Toronto *Globe* and Montreal *Gazette*, *La Minerve*, 4 September 1884; Thunder Bay *Daily Sentinel*, 9 September 1884

¹⁵⁷ Montreal *Star*, 3 September 1884. *La Minerve* 4 September 1884

¹⁵⁸ Ottawa *Free Press*, 3 September 1884

Toronto or Montreal."¹⁵⁹ *Le Quotidien* asked "Pourquoi le climat de l'Egypte serait-il plus meurtrier pour les Canadiens que pour les Anglais?" If the English could go there "nos nationaux peuvent le suivre. Les Canadiens sont répandus dans le Missouri, le Kansas, La Louisiane," where the heat is as great as in Khartoum. They asked if French forces from Normandy who fight in Tonquin "sont-ils plus habitués que les nôtres aux climate du sud? Les journalistes humanitaires qui disent aux Canadiens de ne pas aller courir à une mort certaine sont des gens nés évidemment pour tourner la marmite."¹⁶⁰ A general sense of insult, in both English and French language press, was the result of a perceived criticism of the hardiness and physical endurance of Canadian men. The original comments referred specifically to "the Lachine Indians," based on the racial ideas of a specific officer in Montreal who made them, but the translation in London of these "Indians" to "Canadians" in the cable that returned to Canada led to these impassioned defences of Canadian physiology and fitness. At the exact same time, an English Conservative MP named Stavely Hill, wrote a letter to *The Times* to say that he was boarding a steamer with the stated purpose of trying "to dissuade the Canadians from enlisting for a service which would end in their certain death."¹⁶¹ The Canadian newspapers reflected a deep sense of insult at such "melancholy forebodings" of the British press¹⁶² and widely understood them as an insult that aimed to sabotage recruitment. Alexander deLorimer, the agent in Kahnawake wrote to Melgund that "Daily reports come from Montreal and even from England that this expedition of the Nile is simply murder to the voyageurs, we have to contend against these false reports."¹⁶³ Weeks later, the British military newspaper *The Broad Arrow* said that "the indignation of Canadians" over the matter "seems likely to be not quickly subdued" and "the slur cast upon the hardihood of the Canadian voyageurs will not be a subject which the

¹⁵⁹ *Globe*, 5 September 1884

¹⁶⁰ *La Minerve*, 11 September 1884, with reference to *Le Quotidien*

¹⁶¹ *Montreal Star*, 3 September 1884; *Ottawa Free Press*, 5 September 1884 "A Mistaken Opinion of Canadians"; *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 8 September 1884 "British MP Talks in a Very Discouraging Manner."

¹⁶² *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 September 1884

¹⁶³ RG 07 G-19 vol 32, folder "Vol. 44 - Misc. Materials Aug 1884 - Feb 1885", Alexander deLorimer to Melgund, 8 September 1884

Canadian papers will quickly let drop."¹⁶⁴ Canadian outrage was so hot it was even noticed in England, which in turn was a newsworthy event meriting a reprint.

The insults perceived by these three messages from the British press - that Canadians were not uniquely skilled; that Canadian officers did not respect Wolseley; and that Canadian workers were not hardy enough to survive a tropical climate - these three insults can be taken together, with the initial disappointment expressed at the civilian nature of the contingent, to reveal a desire amongst anglophones to win recognition from the British in two ways. They desired respect type 1, as full members of the empire, the dignity of being treated like peers, and also they desired respect type 2, with the recognition of a unique Canadian identity that distinguished them from the English, Scottish and Irish, not to mention the other "white" settler colonies, amongst which Canada considered itself the most senior member. The initial enthusiasm over "active service" reflected a strong desire by many to be seen as equals in the Empire. But the letters also stated that Canadians possessed special, unique qualities that would be tested and revealed for the British to see. The "jealousy" of the Thames rivermen and those who misrepresented Canadian views on Wolseley were perceived as unjust denials of the "fact" that Canadians were better suited for the job. The anxiety over British beliefs that Canadians would die in the tropics seemed particularly unnerving. It took one of the oft-cited advantages that Canadians felt they had, namely their healthy geographic upbringing in the north and turned it against them, implying that they could not stand the heat. The deeper misrepresentation in this "simply murder" thread of articles was particularly ironic, since the indignant editorialists failed to realize that when British "experts" said "Canadians," they meant "Indians."

Were there any positive comments in the English press about the engagement of Canadians? The British *Timber Trades Journal*, tried to explain to the Thames watermen that Canadians "are accustomed to the difficulties of rapids" and know their "torrent power" which

¹⁶⁴ Winnipeg *Sun*, 15 October 1884, reprinting an excerpt from *The Broad Arrow*, 27 September 27 1884

"peculiarly fits them for service on the Nile." It described Canadians as knowing how "to do the right thing at the right moment, with united energy" and said that due to their "discipline, hardihood, pluck and resolution," that "Canadian boatmen, most of whom are also lumberers during the season, are unsurpassed by any race of toilers in the wide, wide, world."¹⁶⁵ The challenge for colonial Canadians of winning recognition from the British becomes apparent in such praise. The article lauds Canadians and their skills. It also makes the case that such men will not wilt under the Egyptian sun. However, being recognized as the greatest "race of toilers" on the planet is hardly satisfying for an imperialist seeking the respect between equals that one finds from officer to officer, not officer to toiler.

Conclusions

The reports of the men signing up revealed considerable regional differences. In Winnipeg, there was an inappropriate inclusion of militiamen and members of Winnipeg's "best families" that was entirely attributable to Kennedy's role and status as community leader, confident in the exercise of his own best judgement over who should represent the West. His local critics, also fixated on the need to correctly represent the West (rather than Canada), said he needed to pick hardier men who could compare with the "river drivers" and "descendants of the couriers du bois" from Eastern Canada. Before departure, the Winnipeg group did include a group from St. Peter's that had not been previously mentioned in the newspapers and the Canadian contingent almost included two gangs from the Thunder Bay region, both illustrating the fallacy of the modernizing narrative told in the east (and in Winnipeg when it suited the circumstances), that the Indian had all but disappeared from Canada. The Caughnawaga recruitment captured the attention of newspapers across the country but was characterized by stereotypical images of exotic others with scripted behaviours that seemed impervious to contradictory evidence. River pilots who said they did not want to fight were immediately thereafter described as possessing the "old warlike spirit" of the Iroquois, who were the "faithful allies" of the British, even though the press, Melgund

¹⁶⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 11 September 1884

and the article about Lansdowne at the agricultural fair all state clearly that the major consideration for these men was the poor rate of pay compared to what they made working the Lachine rapids. The voices of the Ottawa men are silenced by comic portrayals based on ethnic stereotypes that reflect the journalists' surprise at diversity rather than actual speech. In all of these portrayals of the men signing up - from the westerners lamenting the inclusion of "Englishmen" instead of Indians, to the pride expressed in all regions in the masculine physiques of the "hardy" boatmen - we find the desire by middle-class journalists to pick the right men to satisfy Wolseley and leave an impression with the Empire that Canada produces hardy men. Nowhere do we hear any evidence of the volunteers talking about wanting to go and save Gordon, or wanting to do their duty for country or empire. There is a great deal of excitement in Caughnawaga, Winnipeg, Peterborough and Ottawa, we are told, and there is discussion of wages, working conditions and Egypt, but no tropes of patriotism or imperialism. This is noteworthy, especially since we can see that journalists did not hesitate to misrepresent the men through scripts of warlike Iroquois and humourous ethnic accents, nor did they ever tire of calling them hardy. No journalism reported imperial or national sentiment amongst workers nor did any project it upon them, which reminds us of Hobsbawm's caution to Gellner that we cannot assume workers had strong national identities.

The concerns of workers were very important for Melgund, since the boatmen held a global labour monopoly on the voyageurness that Wolseley was expecting. Melgund was creative and innovative in his design of terms of engagement that accommodated the customs of the industry within the constraints of a military expedition. From the perspective of the men, this was an attractive contract with very good wages, all expenses covered and clothing provided. They also understood that they would not be subject to the rules of military discipline like soldiers.¹⁶⁶ Melgund's initial doubts in the capacity of Canadian militiamen were reinforced after consulting Lambert and Rice, and as a consequence, he decided that authority was to be shared between the officers and foremen. In practice, only the foremen, in whom the men

¹⁶⁶ *La Minerve's* concerns about the vulnerability of Canadians to courts martial was understandable but unfounded.

"placed their confidence," would have any control over them. The British government acted as a surrogate lumber firm, hiring the men by offering above-market wages and satisfactory working conditions. The officers were there to "accompany" rather than command, providing a thin military veneer to a civilian operation. Given the nature of the engagement forms, their authority seemed tenuous and their actual purpose was obscure in this unprecedented situation. Melgund was charged with crafting a non-military contingent for a military expedition and his success can be judged by the perceptions of one worker that of all the "big bosses" he had worked for, Queen Victoria was the "best yet." In the end, they got the numbers required, in a very short time, with aboriginal men from the Northwest and Caughnawaga and a large group of skilled shantymen.

No matter how well he had designed things to accommodate the workers' customs as he understood them, giving them extra underwear and beans, lingering confusion remained about grey zone between soldier and civilian. Some of the comments in the Manitoba press continued to confuse the two roles, no doubt due to the number of the men from the Winnipeg Rifles whom Kennedy signed up. The Peterborough papers were clear that the men were workers and not soldiers, but the fact remained that they would be on a military campaign, not working in the forest. In a series of editorials, *La Minerve* drew unfavourable comparisons between the boatmen and the common "English" soldier who could protect himself with a gun and who could assume a disability or widow's pension if the expedition "tournait à mal." Canadian civilians would be facing the same hazards of enemy fire and dangerous rapids without the expected "material and moral reassurances" that they considered fair and just for participants in a military campaign. Caughnawaga was the other community where we heard some expressions of concern about the dangers involved. It is fair to conclude that the concerns raised in Caughnawaga and in *La Minerve* were differently understood locally, but they were both free from the prevailing anxieties over "British opinions of Canadians" that consumed the English-language press, where pro-imperial writers downplayed dangers and opponents of the expedition could not discuss the dangers and risks without sounding partisan and unpatriotic. Since the English-language press was

more dependent on British opinion than the French-language press, *La Minerve* provided a more pragmatic assessment of the pros and cons, demonstrating no fundamental hostility to French-Canadian service to the empire.

The preoccupation with British recognition was evident in the anglophone newspapers in two ways: through their insistence on the need to get hardy men with the right physiques, and through their indignant reactions to a series of supposed insults to Canadian competence, loyalty and manliness which appeared in the British press. It is important to note that these two streams of commentary did not happen one after the other, but at the same time chronologically and we should understand them as mutually informing each other. At a more abstract level, there was a wounded national pride from the perceived jealousies, "lies" and "insults" in Britain against the Canadian character that produced a widespread indignation in the press. At a more practical, local level, the actual men who would be going on the expedition had begun to appear and could be described and interviewed. Militia officers made the loyal claim that Wolseley was a Canadian idol, which proved that they were not "sneering at the War Office." In the same way, the shantymen appeared before journalists, but instead of speaking with their mouths, they presented well proportioned quantifiable bodies to effectively refute the claim that Canadians would "die like flies" on the Nile.

These proofs were not as convincing and consistent as they might have seemed. Even without jumping ahead to events of the campaign, problematic conflicts between simultaneously held cultural narratives are evident at this point. On the one hand we are told that Wolseley had respected, admired and remembered Canada, and his call to Canada was a compliment. On the other hand, he wanted workers, not soldiers. The colonial elites, from the newspaper editors to statements by Minister Caron and Winnipeg's "best families," spoke with great pride of "their" strong, hardy workers that would represent the country, but on the other hand, those in Britain who recognized this image of Canada praised such men as the greatest "race of toilers" in the world, which could hardly have been the national representation desired by imperialists. If they tried to tell themselves stories about their

common identity with the workers because they inhabited the same sanitary, great, lone land that produced "strapping fellows," like oak trees in the forests, adopting the tropes of geographical determinism, then that made them vulnerable to the argument that such men could not survive transplantation to the unhealthy, disease-ridden tropics. One of the greatest self-delusions in this "indignation of Canadians" over the supposed "slur cast upon the hardihood of the Canadian voyageurs" rested upon a semantic confusion over the meaning of the word "Canadian," because comments about Canadians dying like flies in the tropics actually referred to the Caughnawagas ("Lachine Indians"), not the francophone or anglophone settlers, who linguistically considered Indians to be categorical non-Canadians. Before the ink was dry on the engagement forms, it was evident that uncertainty and ambivalence had begun to build concerning the way these men would represent the country on this imperial military campaign.

CHAPTER 3 - DEPARTURES

In communities across the country, the timing and manner in which members of the contingent left "home" for Egypt varied. The group from Manitoba left a week before the others, with men from Peterborough, Ottawa, Caughnawaga and Sherbrooke¹ meeting them in Montreal on September 13th before collecting the last group of men from Trois-Rivières the following day. With each leave-taking, there are records of farewell dinners, ceremonial gatherings and newspaper editorials, all of which contain public reflections on the significance of these departures and the motivations of the boatmen. The culmination of these send-offs was an official inspection and speech from the Governor General in Quebec City to the entire assembled contingent. In these departures, Canadian newspaper writers had their last direct access to the voyageurs until March of the following year. A new source of public communication about the expedition, in the form of letters from voyageurs, first began to appear in this transition period in which the men leave their communities, their centres of engagement and Canada. To the extent that diaries and letters from the members of the contingent inform our description of the departure, the authors will be mentioned briefly. Chapter four will contain more detailed profiles of the main correspondents who wrote during the contingent. This chapter examines the successive departures as pre-liminal transitional rites which presented the possibility of both reproduction and reimagination of existing cultural categories. As the men prepared to leave, the rituals normally associated with the military, with travelling and with the granting of public honours were modified to bid farewell to the Nile voyageurs. Frequently, military forms were recruited for this civilian departure in varying degrees, for not only was there a regular confusion as to whether or not the men were "serving" in the military sense, but military traditions also provided a standing

¹ Five men on the nominal roll are from Sherbrooke. None of the newspapers noticed them arriving in Montreal. None of the five wrote letters to the Sherbrooke or Montreal papers in any identifiable way. The Sherbrooke *Examiner* does not document their departure or return after the expedition. None of the men died on the trip. They were included in the Peterborough gang and the only documents linked to any of these men is LAC MG29 E109 James Martin fonds which actually contain texts by W.H. Lowry from Peterborough.

reserve of well-developed semantic and ritualistic resources for public rites such as parades, uniforms and speeches that were already associated with a group of men leaving overseas on a campaign, representing their country. The language and practices surrounding departure required some improvisation within these forms and the creation of meaning around the trip took the form of a dialogue between those who stayed and those who went. In this broader sense of liminality - where leave-taking and crossing borders created a very tangible contextual shift, questions once again arose concerning the men's motivations for going, the meaning or significance of their coming experience and the suitability of these men as representatives of their group, their community and their country.

Manitoba

The Manitobans were the first to leave home, travelling by train from Winnipeg to Rat Portage (Kenora) and Port Arthur. On the night before their departure, many of the men gathered with friends and some of these farewells found their way into the press, including the friends of W. A. Galliher and Fred A. Manson, who gave "the two young heroes" a "send off in the shape of a farewell dinner" and presented each with "a Tam O'Shanter hat and pipe."² The *Sun* told readers that the Canadian Pacific Railway was "being represented by" H. C. Marks, whose co-workers gave him a "rousing sendoff."³ The Manitoba Lodge No. 1 of the Independent Order of Oddfellows presented W.C. Baldwin with an address "recognizing his past valuable services to the order" and as a "token of their esteem and regard." Wishing him well on his journey to Egypt, they also gave him "a beautiful and costly gold ring" for which he thanked them, assured them he would "remember them while rafting on the river Nile" and hoped he would be able to return to Winnipeg again.⁴

The most widely publicized gathering was a banquet for a group of law clerks that the Winnipeg press called the "legal voyageurs." When the junior members of the Winnipeg bar

² *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 8 September 1884

³ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 6 September 1884. Marks identified himself as "Private H. C. Marks" on his engagement form.

⁴ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

association realized that "eight law students" amongst them had been accepted for the Nile expedition⁵ they organized a banquet to give their colleagues a "rattling sendoff" and to commemorate this "epoch in the history of Manitoba."⁶ The event was a private affair in the sense that it was between confreres in the legal profession but, given their status in the young city, it was also a public event with 150-200 attendees who gathered in a hotel. Detailed reports followed in the *Free Press*, the *Daily Times* and the *Daily Sun*. The gathering followed a standard banquet format, with formulaic toasts and speeches which were proposed, accepted, responded to and received by over 45 speakers who came with prepared comments, songs and recitations. And yet, within the script of a formal banquet, the reason for the affair and the content of the speeches were completely unprecedented. Jokes and song adaptations revealed a pre-occupation with the strangeness of lawyers working as boatmen, lawyers going abroad with soldiers, Canadians serving on an imperial campaign and Manitobans going to Africa. Within the traditional vehicle of the banquet, those present improvised new narratives to try and make sense of this unusual situation. Having three detailed independently created texts describing the same event gives us a thick description of the formal normal for this group of Winnipeg lawyers. Through these three newspaper accounts, we see the participants, in toasts, responses, speeches, songs, jokes and laughter, stretch the boundaries of their intersubjective definitions of what it means to be a lawyer, a Manitoban, a Canadian and a subject of the British empire through the lens of the Nile voyageurs. We can call this event pre-liminal because it takes place on the eve of a departure, with the men standing on the threshold of a voyage out of normal society.

The three journalists introduced their readers to the event for "Manitoba's legal representatives" on the expedition by reformulating pre-existing public assumptions about lawyers. It admitted that in Winnipeg, it was "generally thought" that "the desire to take up

⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 6 September 1884. The eight voyageurs identified by the three papers were Charles Blanchard, W. A. Gallagher, N. McCallum, Lawrence J. Clark, Herbert G. Wilson, T. Atkinson, Charles Lewis Shaw and F. A. Munson. The last individual does not appear on the nominal roll, however, and I found no record of him on the expedition.

⁶ Manitoba *Free Press*, 6 September 1884

arms (and paddles)" on the Nile expedition would be "confined to hardier citizens" of the city, but readers were reminded that "lawyers will do almost anything," that "the intelligent man makes the best soldier"⁷ and that lawyers "never do things by halves."⁸ After making passing references to the fine dinner and the "choice selections" of the Italian string band, the bulk of the articles were dedicated to toasts and speeches.

The first toast was to "The Queen," which was "loyally drunk"⁹ and this was followed by the "national anthem," presumably God Save the Queen. There were apparently "other loyal toasts"¹⁰ but none of these were individually named by any of the journalists. The *Free Press* skimmed over this entire opening section with a passing reference to "the usual loyal toasts."¹¹ After this, the "rousing French chorus, 'En roulant ma boule roulant,'"¹² which was "rendered by a number of gentlemen on the gentle kazoo," created a "thrilling effect."¹³ The final toast of this section was "The Army and Navy."¹⁴ Mr. A. E. Mc Phillips, "amid a furore of applause," rose and "eulogized the sterling qualities of the Canadians" who had volunteered and "spoke of the loyalty that was to be found in this part of Canada."¹⁵ The word "loyal" appeared in an usually dense succession by all three papers to describe this opening section of the evening.¹⁶ The papers however, reported such "loyal toasts" rather hurriedly, and after this opening salvo, the word "loyal" was not mentioned again. These

⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 September 1884

⁸ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

⁹ The *Times* and the *Sun* both used this phrase

¹⁰ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

¹¹ *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 September 1884

¹² *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

¹³ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 6 September 1884

¹⁴ The *Sun* and the *Times* use this phrasing, but the *Free Press* reports it as "The Army and Navy and Volunteers" which would seem more appropriate in the circumstances. Perhaps this indicated an innovation in the script on the part of one of the speakers to suit the novelty of the circumstances, an innovation forgotten by the other papers in their reporting of the formulaic nature of toasts at banquets. Or the *Free Press* may have misreported the phrase.

¹⁵ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

¹⁶ See Syd Wise's reflections on "Loyalty" in Upper Canada, *God's Peculiar People: Essays on Political Culture in Nineteenth Century Canada*, Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1993 p. 180

introductory imperial and military toasts seemed part of a formulaic preamble that was dutifully respected before the banquet really could get under way.

After reading letters of regret, one of the voyageurs sang "Over the Billows Afar" and then a toast for "Our country" was "heartily drunk." This included a speech on the courage of the volunteers, a singing of "Dear Canada" plus two other speeches and two songs by Mr. Connybeare, one of which was "The Union Jack of Old England."¹⁷ It would be possible to read from the grouping of these items under the toast for "Our country" that those present may have been thinking of both Canada and England when they spoke of "our country." It might be a mistake to read too much into the sequencing of musical numbers, however, for it would certainly be difficult to explain how a kazoo version of "En roulant la boule" fits logically into the "loyal" toasts of Queen and empire.

The next toast, "To the Provincial Bar," began with the acknowledgment of the general view that "the legal profession was not a fighting profession," but the legal voyageurs must therefore represent "somewhat of a variance of this saying."¹⁸ Jokes were made about lawyers' willingness to stay "at home to look after the money"¹⁹ when "warriors went forth to fight their battles." There was also much laughter when Mr. W. E. Perdue spoke of the "considerable anxiety in legal circles" that "the learned Chief Justice should insist on going to Khartoum to personally serve a writ of habeas corpus on the false prophet."²⁰ As the subject of each toast moved from the imperial to the national to the provincial and professional, the level of audience engagement, the humour and the number of newspaper inches increased.

This trend continued to the most prominently section of the night, a toast to "Les Voyageurs."

¹⁷ *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 September 1884

¹⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 September 1884

¹⁹ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

²⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 September 1884

The chair of the evening, Mr. Campbell, proposed this toast to the voyageurs, which "was drunk with three cheers and a tiger."²¹ Each of the lawyer voyageurs responded to the toast in turn, expressing "regret at leaving 'the boys' behind them" and hoping "like Englishmen and Canadians to do their duty, and to return in a short time again to dear old Manitoba."²² They promised to wake "the old Pharoahs who slept in their musty graves on the banks of the Nile" and when they asked "'What manner of men are those?' They would inform them they were 'voyageurs from Winnipeg, and don't you forget it.'"²³ After their speeches, the voyageurs entertained their colleagues with songs ("Dear Old Pals", "The Tar's Farewell," "Farewell my Own", "Annie Laurie") that stressed personal farewells to friends and loved ones. Formal banquets of recognition and respect had forms well known to reader and journalist alike, but the novelty of this event was seen in the description of guests "whispering to each other their regrets that such fine and intelligent young men should leave Manitoba and embark on so dangerous an expedition."²⁴ The light and humorous tone of the evening prevailed, but there was a tangible undercurrent of uncertainty and melancholy with such references and the remarks of voyageurs who hoped "to return again to their dear home, Manitoba."²⁵

The final section of the event wrapped up with a few musical numbers including a version of the Marseillaise from the franco-Manitoban lawyer Antonio Prince "in his native tongue" which "was enthusiastically received," and some closing toasts. The first of these was for "Chinese Gordon," who supposedly sent his regrets at being "unavoidably detained by a prior engagement with the Madhi."²⁶ Speakers listed his "many great and noble deeds" and

²¹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 6 September 1884. The "tiger" is described by the Oxford English Dictionary as a shriek or howl at the end of a cheer, 19th century US slang.

²² Manitoba *Free Press*, 6 September 1884. Concerning the references to "Englishmen," it is worth recalling that the Thunder Bay *Sentinel's* critiqued the fact that several of the clerks and lawyers were newly arrived Englishmen.

²³ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 6 September 1884

²⁴ Manitoba *Free Press*, 6 September 1884

²⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 6 September 1884

²⁶ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 6 September 1884

predicted the brave exploits that the Canadians would undertake to rescue him. Finally, there were toasts to the Press, the Ladies and the Host (ie. the hotelier). During this event, the participants articulated their imperial, Canadian, Manitoban, city and professional identities. Judging from the coverage in the papers, the most memorable portion of the evening dealt with those levels of identity that were most immediate, tangible and local. The men did see their trip in an imperial and Canadian context, but this context was not pre-eminent for them. In an array of nested identities, the more abstract imagined communities of nation and empire paled this night in comparison to their expressions of devotion and ties to their "dear" friends and their "dear" region. As toasts progressed from Queen to nation to their friends, they were drunk "loyally", "heartily" and "with three cheers and a tiger." There were references to duty, acknowledgements of the dangers they'd face, and some sadness at leaving home, but the overall tone was one of excitement, adventure and a self-conscious sense of the absurdity of lawyers taking part as boatmen in a military expedition.

After the private parties on Friday night, thousands of people came to the train station the following afternoon to see the contingent off, but "contrary to general expectation" no one had planned an "organized demonstration arranged to mark the departure."²⁷ Earlier in the week, alderman Mulvey, representing "one or two" of his colleagues, tried to convince Winnipeg city council "to give the voyageurs for the Nile a nice little 'send-off'"²⁸ and he moved that \$200 be granted to Colonel Kennedy for "the comfort of the voyageurs."²⁹ In response, the Mayor said that he thought the Imperial Government was supposed to pay all the expenses. Another alderman spoke against it and a third suggested raising the sum to \$300, but only for "when they come back covered with glory."³⁰ No motion of any sort passed successfully and instead of an official farewell, the men found themselves surrounded by a spontaneous gathering of well-wishers. Like the selection process, the public send-off

²⁷ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 8 September 1884

²⁸ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 2 September 1884

²⁹ Winnipeg *Sun*, 2 September, 1884

³⁰ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 2 September 1884

in Winnipeg was relatively haphazard and disorganized.

All three newspapers remarked on the unexpected size of the crowds at the railway station. A Winnipeg *Sun* article, subtitled "Goodbye, My Lover, Goodbye" paid special emphasis to the "many affecting incidents" to be seen, as friends and sweethearts said their goodbyes. Each voyageur was "surrounded by a large circle of his friends and acquaintances." The "legal voyageurs gathered together to form a circle" and sang songs, including Auld Lang Syne. In contrast to the "intense excitement" displayed by most, they noted that "the only men who preserved their sang-froid were the native voyageurs, who looked on unconcernedly at all the bustle around them."³¹ These men said their farewells in St. Peter's, much earlier in the day, before travelling to Winnipeg. It was estimated anywhere from 2,000 to 3,000 people were present. The *Daily Times* stated that the "immense turn out of citizens" was the largest ever seen at the CPR station. Men, women and children of "every creed and nationality" turned out as the voyageurs boarded the "largest train" that ever steamed out of the city. They "felt jolly at leaving" and in the face of the dangers ahead, they consoled their friends that they may meet again "in the upper world." Once again, the reporter observed personal conversations between friends but felt it necessary to add commentary on the greater significance of the event, hoping that "their efforts on behalf of their country will be crowned with honor and glory."³²

A reporter from the *Pall Mall Gazette* was in town at the time and informed his readers that it "would have thrilled the pulses of an Imperial Federationist" to see 4,000 people cheering the men. It seemed "a strange thing," he wrote,

to stand upon a spot that but yesterday was a desert prairie, crossed by a few Indian and half breed trails, and find oneself carried off one's feet by a surging and a shooting throng of stalwart Anglo-Saxons leaving a new city behind them to fight for England in the East.

³¹ Winnipeg *Sun*, 8 September 1884. Unlike in eastern Canada, only a minority of Winnipeggers could claim to be "native" westerners in the 19th century sense. Hence the use of the word here for aboriginal peoples.

³² Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 8 September 1884

This observer found it required "almost a mental effort to realize the scene that was taking place," since Manitoba was "such a far cry in every sense of the word" from Sudan.³³ The *Manitoba Free Press* described a "scene of much excitement" at the CPR depot, where the platform was "packed from end to end." The voyageurs were in "the very best of mood", singing to "their hearts content." The reporter was surprised that the scene resembled "a jolly excursion party", when in reality this was a group leaving "to do service for their mother country at such a critical period." Tension was noted between the lighthearted tone ("great cheering") and the grave concerns ("the dangers the boys" would face). The writer observed intimate personal exchanges ("hand-shaking and hasty goodbyes") that stressed those personal fears and hopes, but his interpretive remarks expressed the expectation that they would return "crowned with honors for their services under the British flag."³⁴

During a day's delay in Rat Portage, which they passed "going to church, boating and visiting the rapids," their conversations dwelt on that "far-off spot on the Dark Continent", its dangers and its points of attractions, and speculations about the probable outcome of the expedition.³⁵ They arrived in Port Arthur the following day where the citizens of the town gathered on the dock with "hearty cheers" for the men who sang "God Save the Queen" before they left to cross the Great Lakes.³⁶ A reporter from the Port Arthur *Sentinel* obviously lacked sufficient "mental effort" to imagine the Winnipegers as heroic figures, seeing only "shorthand writers, bank clerks, Canadian Pacific paymasters and lawyers." The "other Canadians," he noted "are either half-breeds or Indians," in an exceptional deviation from the "Canadians and Indians" discourse. He wondered aloud if "Col. Kennedy will not be asked to return home with his men without going up the Nile."³⁷ They crossed Lake Superior and stopped briefly at Sault Ste. Marie, where some of them got drunk and one was fined three dollars for "frightening one of the policemen with a kazoo." In a foreshadowing of things to come, readers were told

³³ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 15 October 1884, citing *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 September 1884

³⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, 9 September 1884

³⁵ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 8 September 1884

³⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, 9 September 1884

³⁷ *Thunder Bay Daily Sentinel*, 8 September 1884

that the men "astonished the natives."³⁸ The *Sentinel* continued its critique of the Winnipeggers after it read a report of this incident and a supposed observer commenting on the fine physique of the men:

Why if little Page gets hold of one of those six-feet-six Arabs, woe betide the dusky native of the plains. And then there's "Chappy." Imagine the fate of Osman Digma should they too run foul of each other. How the Scotch regiments will hide themselves behind thier kilts when they see these men of "fine physique" come along, and how the Welsh fusileers will lead their goats forth as offerings to these mighty men of sinew.³⁹

The *Sentinel* thought it was an unkind "insult" to these scrawny fellows to compliment their physique. After arriving in Owen Sound on the 10th of September, the group apparently picked up "three Orillia Indians"⁴⁰ and continued on through Toronto arriving in Montreal the following day.

As the men from Manitoba left their homes and travelled over two thousand kilometres to Montreal, various observers saw in them what they wished to see: melodramatic farewells, stoic "natives," brave patriots, loyal frontier Anglo-Saxons or inept pretenders. The Manitoba men were discussed, quite disproportionately, in terms of the middle-class professionals who made up only one third of the group. This group, especially the "legal voyageurs", were criticized and made the object of humour (or ridicule) because they were unqualified as boatmen and not the "class of men" Wolseley was looking for. In all of the language used around their departure, this subgroup was acknowledged to be fine representatives of the modern, growing city of Winnipeg, which depending on one's perspective, made them excellent or inappropriate representatives of Canada for this expedition. When Wolseley said "the Northwest," he was not thinking of "the new city." Much of the Winnipeg press placed a stronger emphasis on local identities than imperial identities, although they universally paid respect to the Queen in a formal manner. The criticisms of the Thunder Bay paper might be

³⁸ *Manitoba Free Press*, 17 September 1884

³⁹ *Thunder Bay Sentinel*, 19 September 1884

⁴⁰ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, *Manitoba Free Press* 10 September 1884

seen as a more detached critique, having invested no local pride in these men as "their" representatives, and therefore, seeing only the dissonance between the imperial call and the Winnipeg response. By contrast, the Métis, Swampy Cree and Saulteaux Ojibway from St. Peter's, who also made up a third of the Manitoba group, seemed almost invisible to the papers. They did not fit into the social networks that included newspaper journalists, they did not actually live in Winnipeg and they were neither described in the imagined community level of nation/empire nor in the local civic outpouring at the CPR depot, towards which they were seen to display a stoic "sang froid." It can also be noted in passing that despite the occasional use of military images, language and practices at the banquets, stations and docks along their way, it did not really make sense to try and portray these men as soldiers. Instead of portraying them as soldiers, the three main papers in Winnipeg portrayed them as courageous men about to bravely participate in a dangerous journey, with a noble cause. There was a civic expectation that after undergoing such hardship, they would return having won glory and honour, which would reflect positively on Winnipeg and Manitoba.

Eastern Departures

The Manitoba group was recruited in a hurry and left with no organized official ceremony. It was accompanied by Col. Kennedy, who was not selected as part of the crew of Canadian officers. By contrast, recruitment in the other locales was more closely coordinated by Melgund and his agents. Aumond was sent to Peterborough, McRae to Caughnawaga and Denison to Trois-Rivières. Lambert was given responsibility for collecting the Ottawa men and Neilson was sent ahead to Montreal to prepare the *Ocean King*, the steamer which would carry the contingent across the Atlantic.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the engagement and departure in Peterborough happened extremely fast. Aumond took a night train to Peterborough, spent September 9th in town recruiting and they left for Ottawa the same day. There was no time for an organized parade, farewell dinners or any build-up in the city that could constitute a formal departure ceremony. Nonetheless, as the small group left on the 11pm train, "a number of people" came

to the station to "see them off" with "loud cheers."⁴¹ As noted previously, the Peterborough newspapers emphasized the distinction between workers and soldiers, using the language of contracts and labour and making explicit distinctions between their projected roles on the Nile and those of soldiers. In an editorial about "the Peterborough contingent" which was written after they "took farewell of their home and friends" to "to aid in the rescue of a British soldier," the *Review* expressed its belief that workers could be representatives of Canada and sources of local pride. They realized that it was a dangerous voyage that could prove "a fatal trip to some" but that regardless of the outcome, they were sure that "Canada, and especially the citizens of this town" will "feel proud" of them, believing that no one could better "perform these hazardous duties than Canadians." References to both a Peterborough and Canadian identity were equally strong in an editorial that seemed used formulations normally used for soldiers serving overseas ("do their duty like men," "pluck, energy and courage," "may success crown your efforts," "evidence of your true loyalty"⁴²) and repurposed them for the unprecedented departure of workers to an exotic and hazardous war zone.

W. H.. Lowry and John A Sherlock began to write about their experiences as soon as they had left Peterborough, the former in a private letter and the latter as a self-appointed correspondent for the Peterborough *Daily Review*. For both, the overnight journey to Ottawa on the Ontario Quebec Railroad "passing several villages too numerous to mention"⁴³ was the beginning of their Ottawa tourist vacation. They arrived in the city at 6am on Wednesday the 10th and spent three days "doing the city"⁴⁴ - the Senate, House of Commons, the Patent office, the canal, hotels, the Chaudiere Falls and the E.B. Eddy Match factory. Lowry was quite impressed with the Parliamentary Library ("books of from the ground to the ceiling and the queen in the middle larger than life"⁴⁵) and with the "fishery exhibit," a display of

⁴¹ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 10 September 1884

⁴² Peterborough *Daily Review*, 11 September 1884

⁴³ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

⁴⁴ John A. Sherlock, first letter (12 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 13 September 1884

⁴⁵ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

Canada's inland and marine fisheries. On Thursday evening, Sherlock said that he "had a shake hands"⁴⁶ with Colonel Kennedy and his brother, Captain James Kennedy as the Manitoba contingent passed through Ottawa on their way to Montreal. The Peterborough group was evidently travelling in smaller groups of friends, however, as Lowry and a few of the others were out on a "moonlight excursion" of the Ottawa river for the whole evening, with two bands and a piano and fiddle. The group had a "good time" and "lots of music"⁴⁷ reported Lowry. Sherlock related a story of how many of them crashed the wedding of a German bride and groom ("the gawkiest couple I ever saw") who had walked into the city to get married at their hotel ("my poor ribs are still aching yet.")⁴⁸ In all their detailed descriptions of the time they spent in Ottawa, neither spoke once about the Sudan or Gordon or Wolseley or Canada or even the trip ahead of them. This was a notable contrast to the editorials and other public commentary in the press, which seemed unable to resist finding meaning in the trip, typically in terms of winning recognition ("honour", "glory") that would be reflected on the country or region. The Peterborough men, however, were left to their own devices for a few days, without formal organization and out of the public eye. In this context, these two individuals begin their voyage with letters that could have come from any first-time tourist to the capital. The Peterborough group waited until Saturday, September 13th when they joined the men recruited from the Ottawa area and boarded a train to the Montreal port. On the Thursday and Friday evening, while the Peterborough men were enjoying the city, private parties across the town were organized by friends and associates to bid farewell to members of the Ottawa group.

Ottawa's Private and Public Send-offs

The first and largest of these was for Captain Aumond, held at the Drill Hall on Wednesday evening after his return from Peterborough. The men he commanded in C Company of the Governor General's Foot Guards "considered it their duty" to gather and give him "something

⁴⁶ John A. Sherlock, first letter (12 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 13 September 1884

⁴⁷ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

⁴⁸ John A. Sherlock, first letter (12 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 13 September 1884

to remind him, in that far off land, that he had left many warm friends at home."⁴⁹ They made a "special presentation" of "a very valuable meerschaum pipe with a suitable engraving on a silver ferule," all of which "took the captain by surprise."⁵⁰ In a note accompanying the gift, they praised his eagerness "to serve your country in an arduous and dangerous field of action" in a "distant land." They regretted his departure and looked forward to his return in the spring after completing his "patriotic service to your country, as a Canadian Volunteer is always ready, willing and proud to give." The gift they said, should not be valued for its "intrinsic worth, but on account of the feelings which have prompted those who offer it."⁵¹ Songs and speeches, of which we have no record, were given by the men of the company "till near midnight."⁵² Of all the send-offs recorded, this was the only one which was explicitly military in tone. Like the lawyer's banquet, a familiar ritual was employed to express the sentiments of comradeship for those about to leave to a strange land, but the themes of "action" and service as a "Canadian Volunteer" seemed more tightly woven to the shared bonds that lay behind the "feelings" of these "warm friends." The Foot Guards may have been a social club, but the shared identity of its members was expressed using these military tropes, which were the most appropriate way for them to make sense of the exciting and unprecedented nature of Aumond's appointment as an officer on such a high-profile expedition. Their comments make no real reference to his role in terms of the voyageurs; they are just celebrating the fact that he is going. It is also noteworthy that in the accounts of this event presented by two newspapers, there was no mention of the Queen, Britain or the Empire.

Passing reference was made to a party in a private home for William McCullough⁵³ but two others were the subject of large gatherings in city hotels. The friends of foreman James Graham presented him with a "first class Dollond telescope" in recognition of his "true Canadian pluck in being one of the first to volunteer." Before a crowd consisting of "a large

⁴⁹ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 11 September 1884

⁵⁰ *Ottawa Free Press*, 11 September 1884

⁵¹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 11 September 1884

⁵² *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 11 September 1884

⁵³ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 12 September 1884

number of citizens of all classes and creeds," a friend read a dedication that spoke of the "respect and esteem" they had for him and hoped he would enjoy his telescope on the expedition and on his "return to his native Canada from the land of the Pharoahs." Graham replied making reference to "the courage and hardihood of the Canadian boatmen" and he "concluded by epigrammatically stating that he intended to leave with a Canadian heart and intended to return with the same." He was also given "an elegant toilet bag." After many toasts, speeches, songs and "a genuine good time," everyone was "summoned across the street" to another presentation at the Albion Hotel. This time the recipient was William Hodgson, a "popular member" of Graham's gang. He was "presented with "a first-class belt, knife and revolver." They passed another "pleasant hour with speech, song and wine" until closing time.⁵⁴ These civilian gatherings used none of the military tropes observed at Aumond's party, but otherwise the three were quite similar, following the same pattern of presentations, warm sentiments, toasts and singing. In all three cases there were no recorded references to the Queen, Britain or the Empire. The references to "Canada" were most pronounced in Graham's case, and while the newspaper considered his speech "epigrammatic" it was also, for our purposes, somewhat enigmatic. Why did he feel the need to tell his friends that his "heart" would remain Canadian? Might one expect (fear?) that serving on an imperial campaign might make him less Canadian? In contrast to many editorials, the semi-private gatherings of these three men and their friends seemed most concerned with the local and the Canadian, and expressed no tangible concern with winning British recognition.

After the private and semi-private parties noted in the press, there was a very public civic send-off on Saturday morning with a public procession to the train station. One letter writer to the *Ottawa Citizen* wrote about the approaching departure of the men and hoped for "a good turn out of citizens to give the boys three rousing cheers as they leave." A musical band would be essential, he thought and asked of his fellow citizens "Who will take the initiative

⁵⁴ *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 September 1884

in the movement?" The morning of their departure, a *Citizen* reporter spoke with some uncertainty about aspects of the day, noting "several leading citizens" had suggested that "in complement to" the way the volunteers "have responded to the Imperial call," that "flags should be hoisted" on the key buildings in town.⁵⁵ If such things seemed uncertain up to the last minute, other aspects were organized well in advanced. Melgund arranged tents of food for the men at the station before their departure and Aumond arranged to have his company of the Governor General's Foot Guards provide music and a military presence to the scene. Within this structured frame, the inhabitants of Ottawa participated in an unprecedented and largely spontaneous spectacle on Wellington street.

Newspaper advertisements called the volunteers to gather at Mr. Lambert's office on Wellington street at "11 o'clock sharp," but by 10:30 the sidewalks of both sides of the street were "crowded with spectators anxious to see the departure of the men."⁵⁶ The group of about 200 men went to Parliament Hill where three photographs were taken. Sherlock said the photos were "taken in gangs, each foreman at the head of his own men" but since "the boys were restless and excited" and since they couldn't keep back "the crowd of outsiders, I don't think it will amount to much."⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 11 and 13 September 1884

⁵⁶ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

⁵⁷ Sherlock, second letter (14 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 17 September 1884

The photos give an impression of an undisciplined mob, where the voyageurs in their regular clothes are indistinguishable from the curious onlookers who have mingled in with them. The note of disappointment in Sherlock's voice implies that the general chaos cost them the chance to organize a proper photo for posterity.

The *Sun* reported a "lively scene" around Lambert's office and Parliament Hill. The voyageurs were "a motley gathering" of "right good gallant, whopping, tall, strapping, short, stout, rough and ready fellows." Their names were "Baptiste and Sandy, Bill and Pat, Hans and Samuel and goodness knows who else." The theme of comic disorder seemed amplified by the presence of families and the band of the Governor General's Foot Guard, which created a cacophony of "foremen shouting, women crying, bandsmen tooting, men vociferating."⁵⁸ The reporters emphasized the interactions between the voyageurs and their friends, family and the curious onlookers, who included "many of the leading citizens of Ottawa."⁵⁹ In supposedly captured dialogue, the *Sun* reporter overheard a voyageur telling his friend "We'll lick the Egyptians, and don't you forget it!" at the same time that he observed "a squad of rafstmen dancing a quadrille." The foremen had a difficult time herding their men into a procession towards the train station ("Where's Antoine Lagasse?" "Round shaking hands with his friends.... and they're all doing the same.")⁶⁰ Attempts made to corral the boisterous Wellington street crowd into a formal procession achieved moderate results at best. To the reader at the time, the "indiscipline" of the men supposedly going off to a war would have been inherently comical.

In their gangs, the men "formed a line and marched to the station,"⁶¹ headed by the Guards' Band.⁶² The first group, which belonged to Capt. McLaurin, was "decidedly the best on the ground" and they received compliments for "their physique and general bearing." Campbell's

⁵⁸ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁵⁹ Ottawa *Free Press*, 13 September 1884

⁶⁰ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁶¹ Sherlock, second letter (14 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 17 September 1884

⁶² LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

squad, which followed, was "a credit to the Capital" and, in a diminuendo of compliments, "the same may be said" for the rest.⁶³ The Ottawa papers, the *Globe* and two letter writers all said the men "marched," but it is unlikely that these civilian shantymen had much marching practice before that morning. All reporters mentioned the Guard's band, but none reported any martial music, only a "pot-pourri of enlivening airs" such as "En Roulant Ma Boule," "The Girl I Left Behind Me," and "Auld Lang Syne."⁶⁴ Such was the repertoire of a Canadian militia band.

Many accounts emphasize the excitement of the procession, noting that the crowd followed the men and "its members were augmented at almost every step" as people joined from side streets and houses along the way. The windows were "filled with faces", "handkerchiefs waved to them, flags flying in their honour, and expressions of all kinds of well wishes offered." Turning to the crowds, "at several points the recruits responded by waving their hats,"⁶⁵ striking a familiar military victory pose. As was evident at the lawyer's banquet in Winnipeg, expressions of enthusiasm co-existed with a clear anxiety on the part of some of the observers, who thought only of the dangers of Egypt as they gazed upon the departing voyageurs. To one observer, "the bold Canuck voyageurs" were cheered on and "marched with a determined look."⁶⁶ From a voyageur perspective, Sherlock noted that "the whole city seemed to have turned out to see us off" and "from the many anxious looking faces, one would think it was to prison we were going instead of on a holiday trip to see the Khedive."⁶⁷ Anxiety and excitement existed side by side in both Winnipeg and Ottawa, but the grave faces in both places belonged to those staying behind. The day after they left, "prayers were offered in most of the city churches" for the "safety and welfare of the Nile contingent," as a further expression of these concerns.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ottawa *Free Press*, 13 September 1884

⁶⁴ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁶⁵ Ottawa *Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

⁶⁶ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁶⁷ Sherlock, second letter (14 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 17 September 1884

⁶⁸ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 15 September 1884

Word had spread in advance that the men would be given a "grand banquet"⁶⁹ or "farewell dinner" at the train station.⁷⁰ South of the depot, a lunch, "furnished by the government"⁷¹ was set out for the men under four large tents, where tables were spread with "a capital dinner"⁷² that included "a goodly array of eatables."⁷³ Echoing the same compliments to the host that we saw in the lawyer's banquet in Winnipeg, the papers praised the caterer, Mr. Dunlop, who had won previous canteen commissions for regional summer brigade camps.⁷⁴ The importance of food to the Nile voyageurs, especially the need for sufficient quantities of it, was noted by all involved in the organization of the contingent, who watched them depart and who chronicled their time on the expedition. As the volunteers ate their lunch, a detachment of the Dominion Police guarded the station, "but their presence was not required."⁷⁵ Capt. Aumond's entire Company C of the Foot Guard supposedly "kept back the crowd at the station" but it is clear from the description that their main motivations for showing up in uniform was to give Aumond and a few of their fellow guardsmen who had signed up as boatmen "a fit send-off."⁷⁶ Their functional capacity as guards was secondary to their desire "to say good-bye to their captain."⁷⁷ It would be tempting to imagine that the general public, or at least officials who organized the event, perceived the contingent in a quasi-military capacity, given the ranked marching, the military band, the military-parade behaviour (handkerchief waves, hat waves, flags out) and the presence of the uniformed company at the station. A more plausible explanation is that military symbols, rituals and behaviours possessed social legitimacy and gravitas. These military cultural practices and resources were borrowed and adapted for the Nile Voyageurs because it was the only way

⁶⁹ John A. Sherlock, first letter (12 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 13 September 1884

⁷⁰ Montreal *Star*, 13 September 1884. What the *Star* called Union Station, W. H. Lowry called the Ottawa and Quebec Railroad Depot and Sherlock called the CPR Depot.

⁷¹ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

⁷² Ottawa *Free Press*, 13 September 1884

⁷³ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁷⁴ Ottawa *Daily Citizen* and *Free Press*, 13 September 1884

⁷⁵ Ottawa *Free Press* and *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁷⁶ Ottawa *Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁷⁷ Ottawa *Daily Citizen*, 13 September 1884

to hold an "important" public demonstration for this novel situation. There existed no ceremonies of departures for civilian, working-class men going abroad as representatives of the country. On a practical level, it was through the militia that officials had experience holding civic ceremonies, from matters of pageantry to catering.

Observers noted that this public demonstration was unprecedented, and "such a crowd as has never been gathered on that ground before." Lord and Lady Melgund were joined by the "leading citizens" of the city and the workers as well, for it seemed "as if the mills had emptied their hands *en masse* to bid good-bye to the voyageurs."⁷⁸ The large, unruly, civilian crowd featured prominently in newspaper descriptions, which emphasized the personal dimension of their intimate farewells at the train station. The journalists here were caught up in the excitement observed around them rather than more abstract references to national honour or imperial duty. Between lunch and the train's departure at 2:30, the voyageurs said farewell to "parents, brothers, sisters, sweethearts and friends."⁷⁹ Some "scenes of parting" were "very affecting,"⁸⁰ but with their "many and hearty... hand-shakings" the men were described as "all in excellent spirits and seemed to regard the work they were going on almost as a pic-nic party." These patterns of behavior, contrasting sentimentality and anxiety with excitement and bravado, seemed to have been noted in all the men from all districts, except, as previously noted, from the St. Peter's gangs. Right up until the last minute, the excitement and the sentiment continued even as the train left "amidst rousing cheers" and "Good-byes" and "God bless yous."⁸¹

In contrast to these eye-witness crowd-level reports, the editorials of Ottawa's three newspapers all pulled back their lenses of analysis to identify what they considered the wider meaning of this departure. The *Ottawa Free Press* articulated a clear and consistent story of

⁷⁸ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

⁷⁹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 13 September 1884

⁸⁰ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

⁸¹ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

the boatmen as representatives of Canada who were motivated by a desire to serve the empire. "Our corps of countrymen," they said, "go to support the dignity of the British Flag, having been chosen by ... the greatest general of the age, Sir Garnet Wolseley." The "Canadian voyageurs" were seen by the *Free Press* editorialist not "as members of any particular nationality or race, but as 'Canadians' in the pure sense of the word." Having covered the details of the voyageurs' recruitment for two weeks, it proclaimed "we have reason to be proud of them," and encouraged its fellow citizens to "give them a grand public send off. Turn out our bands and banners."⁸² To the *Free Press*, the "departure of the Ottawa contingent today to assist General Wolseley" was offered as clear evidence of "the loyalty of Canadians, especially the residents of the Capital, to the British Crown." The enthusiasm of the crowds "could not have been more marked had it taken place in the capital of the British Empire instead of the capital of a colonial dependency." Despite the "English jealousy" expressed in the British press that critiqued the employment of Canadians, questioned their ability to survive the African climate and generally tried "to deter Canadians from embarking in the enterprise", the *Free Press* seemed confident that "our boys knew better, and also did Sir Garnet Wolseley."⁸³ Ottawa's boatmen and crowd were more loyal to the Empire's leadership than the jealous English.

Considering their initial dismissal of the idea of rescuing "crank Gordon," the *Ottawa Daily Sun* displayed what amounted to a proud identification with the Ottawa recruits, who it described as a "fine a body of voyageurs as could be found anywhere." Using a common formulation, they said the men would "win honor for themselves and credit for Canada." They even evoked an image of Canadians as conquerors, although their coverage emphasized the civilian nature of their engagement: "Sound the loud timbrel / Ower Egypt's dark sea / For Canadians are gone / To lick the Mah-dee."⁸⁴

⁸² *Ottawa Free Press*, 11 September 1884

⁸³ *Ottawa Free Press*, 13 September 1884

⁸⁴ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

On the Saturday of the departure, the *Citizen* published several pieces about the voyageurs including a lead editorial and a reflective opinion piece in the local section. Both assumed that the contingent would represent the country and their framework was explicitly imperial. The departure of this "force for transport duty with the troops," the editorialist felt, should be considered "a high compliment to the country" from Lord Wolseley. Despite the "hostile criticism" in "English journals," the writer was sure that while some Canadians would likely be felled by the "climatic and perhaps malarial influences," the losses of Canadians "in proportion to their numbers" would not be more than "soldiers born in the United Kingdom." While the risks of death of individual men could not be avoided, the writer minimized risk of associated wounds to the national reputation. The editorial thought that this experience, which "will be a new one in many respects," would strengthen the ties of Canada and the empire. The voyageurs would have the "opportunity of visiting an ancient land" whose fame "in song and story" and whose many "magnificent ruins" would cause them to ponder "the greatness of a nation" which once had enormous "power and greatness and glory." At the same time, they would appreciate "the nature of the services which British troops are obliged to undergo" in such places across the world. Those Canadian voyageurs "who are given to reflection" in such a situation, "will not fail to contemplate the power and influence of the great Empire to which it is the proud boast of Canadians to belong." Not only was the expedition an opportunity for the empire to recognize and appreciate Canada, but Canadians would have the opportunity to recognize and appreciate the power of the Empire. The expedition had the potential to make Canadians more imperial. The voyageurs carried the best wishes of "all classes of the Canadian people" who had confidence that they would "worthily uphold their beloved country's untarnished name" and "prove deserving the compliment paid them" by Wolseley, "the gallant General whose praise is in every Canadian's mouth." The mutual recognition of Wolseley and "Canadians" is already firmly established in the minds of many Canadians it seems, and upon this base, the editorialist expected that during the campaign, that "the reports sent from the War Office" would "reflect

credit upon each man personally and will do honour to the Dominion at large."⁸⁵

A second reflective piece turned its attention to the motivations of the men. The writer was sure, based on his "personal interviews with the men and from reports received from Mr. Lambert and others," that "a finer set of boys" could not be found. The Ottawa group

leaves in good spirits, splendid physique, enthusiastic in the cause of the motherland, fully confident of good treatment from the Imperial Government, of cordial cooperation from the British soldier, and a [with] determination to show that the breadth of the Atlantic does not sever the sympathetic ties which unite British subjects the wide world over.

These assumptions about the convictions and motivations of the men were not supported by any real evidence and indeed, the writer felt it necessary to say that although the Ottawa contingent was "comprised of men of various descent, who speak various languages" nonetheless they "have one bond of sympathy -- devotion to the British flag." The writer's faith in their imperial enthusiasm was matched by his certainty that, although they had been "called upon more as labourers than as soldiers," if the need arose and "if fighting is required of them," they would each "do his duty." The third point the article articulated was that these Canadian men would prove themselves in a very challenging place, in Africa, "which has baffled the experience of some of the most determined and intelligent explorers." Evoking a contrast used by many observers, he noted that "the ablest living commander" in the Empire called to "a British dependency in the so-called frozen north" to help him relieve "British troops in the burning south." From the speed of enrollment, the writer concluded, "Canada's devotion to the interests of the empire is practically shown."⁸⁶ The editorialist believed that the men possessed a strong imperial identity, even though we learned from the pages of the same paper that when those men gather together to bid farewell to their friends and families in public, they speak only of local attachments and Canadian hearts.

⁸⁵ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 13 September 1884

⁸⁶ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 13 September 1884. The previous article from the *Citizen* on this date was an editorial on p2 whereas this is reportage from the Local News section on p4.

On the margins of the Ottawa contingent's triumphant departure there were scattered reports of drunken disruptions at the station that caused several of the men to miss the train or even the expedition. Around lunch time, approximately two dozen of the voyageurs, "imbibed too freely" to board with their comrades and had to be rounded up by their foremen and brought to Montreal on another train.⁸⁷ Most of these "stragglers" managed to catch up with the rest later that night,⁸⁸ but several were left behind. One individual scheduled to join the expedition was taken in by police and "allowed to go with a caution."⁸⁹ Describing another of these "most amusing" incidents,⁹⁰ the *Ottawa Sun* explained how one individual, "who is a respectable enough looking fellow while he's sober," was locked up "for enthusing too much on Saturday at the station" after nearly caused "a fracas between the Dominion and City Police over his arrest."⁹¹ In the chaos of the farewell festivities, several volunteers "backed out of their engagements and managed to have their papers cancelled." Readers were told of one "fine looking fellow" whose "enthusiasm went down rapidly" after spending his \$10 advance, and the paper concluded that the expedition would probably be "all the better without him."⁹² Ottawa newspapers could make light of such behavior, which was not unexpected from its "rough" shantymen.

Montreal

If Winnipeg, Peterborough and Ottawa witnessed farewells, Montreal was the site of a coming together, where these men joined with the voyageurs from Caughnawaga on the *Ocean King*. Lying in harbour, the steamer waited several days while preparations were made to outfit it for the men, primarily involving the construction of hundreds of bunks. As boatmen arrived from their centres of recruitment, reporters from Canadian newspapers had

⁸⁷ *Ottawa Free Press*, 13 September 1884. See also *Globe* 15 September 1884

⁸⁸ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

⁸⁹ His name was Onisee Laundry, and he doesn't appear to have travelled with the expedition after all. *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 12 September 1884

⁹⁰ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 13 September 1884

⁹¹ *Ottawa Daily Sun*, 15 September 1884

⁹² *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

their final opportunity to mingle among the volunteers before they left the country. Our understanding of how the Nile voyageurs were recognized as representatives of Canada cannot be separated from an inquiry into the degree to which the members of the contingent understand themselves as a cohesive group, with a Nile Voyageur identity. As the contingent begins to take shape here in Montreal, we can begin to track the extent to which the men themselves, and other Canadian observers, identify the contingent as one body or a collection of several regional gangs.

Dr. J. L. H. Neilson, the contingent's medical officer, had been sent ahead by Melgund to supervise the construction of beds and ensure the ship was in sanitary condition. The ship "gave forth many foul smells on Thursday" but by departure time on Sunday the 14th of September, it had been "thoroughly cleansed."⁹³ While supervising this work, Neilson happily made himself available to journalists, and explained to the reporters the nature of the work the Canadians would be doing on the Nile, with two voyageurs per boat, one in the bow and one in the stern while "the soldiers will man the oars." He told a Montreal *Star* reporter that the expedition "will bring the country very much into prominence, not only in England but in Europe more especially" because using men in this way was "a complete departure from the custom of the War Department".⁹⁴

The first group to arrive on the *Ocean King* was the Manitoba contingent, which pulled into Montreal late Thursday night, where the men "marched quietly on board" and took their supper.⁹⁵ They moved into the first bunks which had been constructed and some had a chance to explore Montreal before the others arrived. Kennedy arranged to have the Winnipeg men photographed on the dock, in front of the *Ocean King*.⁹⁶ One Montreal paper made disparaging remarks about the Manitobans, noting the presence of "un avocat, des étudiants

⁹³ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

⁹⁴ *Montreal Star*, 9 September 1884

⁹⁵ *Montreal Star*, 13 September 1884

⁹⁶ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 18 September 1884

en droit, des scieurs de bois, des gens sans profession aucune" and even a cook. Even before it had seen the group from Trois-Rivières, this writer predicted that "c'est la province de Québec qui fournit ceux qui pourront se rendre véritablement utiles."⁹⁷ The writer already saw the contingent as a series of regional gangs. Although reports conflicted, it seems likely that the second group to arrive was the group of 56 boatmen from Caughnawaga, a number that the *Star* said would have been larger, had it not been for the resistance of many of their wives.⁹⁸ The *Globe* described them as a "a particularly fine lot," averaging 30 years of age and half of them married.⁹⁹ In his memoir, James Deer described the departure of the Caughnawaga group, accompanied by "sorrowful good-byes and warm wishes of a host of friends" who came to Montreal.¹⁰⁰ In the eyes of Euro-Canadian observers, the Mohawk families presented a strange, exotic scene. In his diary, Dr. Neilson notes all the female relatives on the ship, with "a sprinkling of papooses."¹⁰¹ A reporter from the *Citizen* thought the "Indians of the party attracted not a little attention" as they were "surrounded on board by their squaws, from whose eyes tears flowed copiously, while the children and the papooses in arms stared with their black eyes..." He wrote that "some of the Indians spoke very good English, and all were demonstrative in proclaiming their readiness to die for the "Great Mother," whom one of the aborigines from the North-West proclaimed as his 'dear Sovereign'."¹⁰² A *Globe* reporter also directed attention to "squaws and papooses" who came on board, and said "the confusion was undescrivable" until they left.¹⁰³ The *Winnipeg Sun* thought the Mohawk men looked "every inch the typical voyageur, clean of limb, strong of nerve and alert in all their movements," but spent more time describing various "affecting scenes" involving families:

mothers embraced their boys, wives their husbands, daughters their fathers and girls their beaux, and though evidently with true Indian reticence they

⁹⁷ Montreal *Le Monde Illustré*, 20 September 1884

⁹⁸ Montreal *Star*, 13 September 1884

⁹⁹ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

¹⁰⁰ James Deer, *The Canadian Voyageurs in Egypt*, Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1885, p. 3

¹⁰¹ LAC MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, 9 September 1884

¹⁰² Ottawa *Citizen*, 15 September 1884

¹⁰³ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

strove / HARD TO CONCEAL THEIR FEELINGS / many a tear was dropped and many a bosom heaved convulsively as the moment for separation came.¹⁰⁴

One Mohawk boatman was heard consoling his girl "by saying he would kill half-a-dozen Arabs before he got back." Another "fine-looking young Indian" decided to enlist "in the hope of surrounding himself with a halo of glory that would make him more acceptable to the lady of his heart." He told the reporter "No married, but sure thing when I come back."¹⁰⁵ Charles Shaw would later write of an "old mother" who had followed her two sons to Montreal "from their little village" to dissuade them from "crossing the Great Salt Lake." These two brothers were, for Shaw, "perfect types of what I supposed the Iroquois of our early history to be," and he marvelled at their brotherly affection, "which display is phenomenal in an Indian and their youth."¹⁰⁶ Labat's first letter to *La Presse* paints a very unflattering picture, parodying a supposed tearful embrace as a fumbled attempt by a wife to pass her husband a bottle of whiskey.¹⁰⁷

One Mohawk man captured the attention of two different reporters by delivering a speech "to the crowd of on-lookers in a loud voice, with extraordinarily animated gesticulation, and in a spirit of great enthusiasm." The *Citizen* reported that this "dusky orator" spoke of "the loyalty of his tribe to the Queen and to the British Government, and expressed their readiness at all times to sacrifice their lives in the Imperial cause," which won great applause from both "his comrades and by his audience."¹⁰⁸ The *Sun* said he was "haranguing from the ships's side a couple of hundred Indians, whites and half-breeds. His speech was a conglomeration of bad rum, thickened articulation, and mixed language, but there was no doubt of HIS RHETORICAL POWERS [inset caps and emphasis in text]." He "pounded the ship's

¹⁰⁴ Winnipeg *Sun*, 18 September 1884. Inset and emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁵ Winnipeg *Sun*, 18 September 1884

¹⁰⁶ Charles Lewis Shaw, *Toronto Saturday Night*, 23 December 1893

¹⁰⁷ Gaston Labat, *Les voyageurs Canadiens à l'expédition du Soudan; ou, Quatre-vingt-dix jours avec les crocodiles*, Québec: L.J. Demers & frère, 1886, p. 63

¹⁰⁸ *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 September 1884

bulwarks" and "threw his arms about in graceful curves," and with the "vivacity" with which he "swept circles through the air," spoke with a power that would make him the envy of many Canadian politicians.¹⁰⁹

The burden of his eloquent utterances was that the Queen and the Iroquois Indians were allies, that in virtue of the treaty of amity and comity established, the Queen called upon them in the person of Lord Melgund, and told them General Wolseley, who knew the Iroquois well, wanted them to give a helping hand to rescue one of her great generals. That call they gladly responded to. Their wives and families were willing they should exposed themselves to unknown dangers at the call of the Queen, and they were going with glad hearts when they thought of the great Mother and General Wolseley, but with sorrowful feelings when they thought of their homes.¹¹⁰

Beyond a predictable script of loyal "braves" talking in broken English, surrounded by "squaws and papooses," and the other racial stereotypes of stoic reticence etc., this account resonates with the long-standing insistence of Mohawk communities that they were not Imperial subjects, but rather were Imperial allies who had never surrendered their sovereignty.¹¹¹ Officials in Indian Affairs had long rejected such claims¹¹² but consistently at Montreal, both the Mohawks and the Saulteaux are quoted as pledging their loyalty not to the Dominion government, but to the Queen.¹¹³ Not a single non-aboriginal voyageur departing from Manitoba, Peterborough or Ottawa was recorded as giving a speech that placed a strong, explicit value on the Queen. One writer reported that in the afternoon, "the Indians and other members of the contingent fraternized in a kindly manner," as much as was possible given "the former's knowledge of English and French."¹¹⁴ Exotic language employed

¹⁰⁹ The praise was perhaps inflated for the sake of making disparaging remarks about certain Ontario politicians who congratulated themselves on their victory in the recent border dispute with Manitoba.

¹¹⁰ *Winnipeg Sun*, 18 September 1884

¹¹¹ J. R. Miller, "Petitioning the Great White Mother: First Nations' Organizations and Lobbying in London", in Phillip Buckner, ed., *Canada and the End of Empire* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), p. 309

¹¹² Sheffield, *The Red Man's on the Warpath*, pp. 52, 58

¹¹³ See Miller for a good overview of the meaning of kinship metaphors such as "Great Mother" in Aboriginal diplomatic language and the political consequences of Canadian misunderstandings of this language based on Victorian cultural norms of parent-child relations ("Petitioning the Great White Mother", *passim*).

¹¹⁴ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

in the description of the residents of Caughnawaga as part of a settler story that used a language of "Canadians and Indians" to maintain a border around the word "Canadian." This settler narrative existed alongside the clearly articulated Mohawk narrative of their nation's bi-lateral alliance with the Queen.

The Winnipeg and Mohawk groups were soon joined by the Ottawa contingent, which arrived on the five o'clock train and "reached the wharf amidst cheering and hurrahing." The twenty or so who "missed" the train showed up later and were deemed "a fine looking lot of men, capable of endurance" and "well skilled in the work for which they will be wanted."¹¹⁵ Another observer described the Ottawa group as "well primed with liquor, but generally seemed inclined to obey orders."¹¹⁶ Due to their sheer numbers, being the largest group, their arrival "interfered somewhat with the small army of workmen engaged in carpentering, plumbing and other work."¹¹⁷ When the reporter from *Le Monde Illustré* mentioned the men from the "province de Québec" above, he also called them "les canadiens." He must have been referring to the francophones from Ottawa, who had, he informed his reader, renamed El Mahdi. He "a été baptisé.. par les canadiens... "le Maudit!"¹¹⁸

The Contingent Observed

In the newspapers that reported from the wharf in Montreal, a few common themes emerged which included a) the diverse composition of the group, b) their physical "hardiness" and c) the unusual preparations required for a trip to Africa. The multi-ethnic nature of the contingent was regularly noted. The "composition of the party was by no means uniform," wrote one reporter. "There were Englishmen, Irishmen and Scotchmen on board; native born English speaking Canadians, and Indians from the North-West and from the Province of Quebec," which all together made for a "heterogeneous conglomeration of human elements."

¹¹⁵ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 18 September 1884

¹¹⁶ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

¹¹⁷ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

¹¹⁸ *Montreal Le Monde Illustré*, 20 September 1884

Noting that the men were drunk and unruly for the journey between Montreal and Quebec City, this reporter remarked that in "such a mixed assembly, trouble, under the circumstances, would not be an unnatural result."¹¹⁹ The *Globe* called it a "motely crew of voyageurs" and a "cosmopolitan crowd."¹²⁰ Contemporary references to a "heterogeneous mixture" of nationalities was rarely positive. In certain British newspapers, as reprinted in Canada, the Nile Expedition's cultural diversity was the source of much comedy. The British papers were apparently making fun of the "heterogeneous forces for Gordon's relief," which were to include 300 Kroomen from west Africa "as hewers of wood and drawers of water for the British soldiery." If the "international character which the expedition will assume with these allies" was the source of "numerous jokes and cartoons,"¹²¹ and if Canadian papers assumed that heterogeneity and mixture would constitute trouble, then Britons who were following reports of the expedition would be given an image of Canada as a "mixed assembly" within a "heterogeneous force" that a Canadian imperialist would find far from encouraging. Did the British papers recognize Canada as part of Greater Britain or not?

Even though it was apparent to many observers that some of the men would be "strangers to the duties" in Egypt, nevertheless, "physically speaking, they [were] a fine body of men" who seem[ed] capable of "severe hardship."¹²² At least as important as their boating skills were the references to a physical prowess that could be adapted to almost any circumstance. They were described as "tall and powerfully built"¹²³ and "a hardy – not to say a hard-looking – lot."¹²⁴ Descriptions of the men's hardiness and fitness frequently used variations on the term "rough," which depending on the context meant harsh or violent,¹²⁵ and in this case was a class-specific code word for their capacity for fighting and other "trouble." As noted in some

¹¹⁹ *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

¹²⁰ *Globe*, 17 September 1884

¹²¹ *Ottawa Free Press*, 30 August 1884

¹²² *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

¹²³ *Montreal Star*, 15 September 1884

¹²⁴ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

¹²⁵ The most popular brand of rat poison advertised in Canadian papers bragged that it was "Rough on Rats"

of the departure scenes, newspaper reporters affirmed this perception with reports of fighting that they often described as comical. Visiting the *Ocean King*, one reporter explained how he got caught in "a scene of wild confusion." While the workmen finished constructing the last of the beds, he spoke with the men, "who readily entered into conversation," especially since many had spent their \$10 advance getting "gloriously drunk." He spoke with Mr. Deslisle, one of the Caughnawaga foremen who explained that originally, some of his men did not want to engage, "as they thought they were wanted as soldiers" but said "Indians peaceable men, never fight." At that moment "a French Canadian struck one of the Indians on the head," which sent the Caughnawagas "tumbling out of their berths to take their comrade's part" in what quickly developed into "a free fight, in which nearly every man had a hand." Scrambling to safety up a ladder, the reporter then met Kennedy on deck; he bragged that his men were the best on board, "All expert boatmen too, and so quiet and orderly." Looking down the hatchway, the reporter confided that he was "unable to distinguish the 'quiet and orderly' Winnipeggers from the 'Ottawaits' in the melee which was in progress," since the only ones who were quiet "were being sat upon."¹²⁶ The comedy here drew upon the cultural assumption amongst the newspaper reading public that working-class men were big, strong, often drunk and that they loved to brawl. Language used to describe the men on this expedition was characterized by an unresolved incoherence between then men's generalized suspicions of military service and avowals against "fighting" at the same time that they showed an eagerness to "fight" in a different fashion. From such "hard men," there was discussion about wages, talk about avoiding military discipline and rarely any mention of political loyalties and national identity. Interviewing one "white man" about the hazards of the journey, a reporter was asked if the wages would be guaranteed. When he told this "hard-looking citizen" that "he had the British government at his back," the man said "D--n the dangers, if the money is sure" and "his wavering disappeared."¹²⁷ The British government was a factor introduced by the reporter, and for this boatman, it represents less of a source of loyalty than a reliable employer, who offered solid wages worth the risk involved. There

¹²⁶ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 19 September 1884 "From the Montreal papers of Monday"

¹²⁷ Winnipeg *Sun*, 18 September 1884

was regularly a close association of their "hardiness" and their "hard"-ness, of their good physique and their "rough" disposition.

Commentators also highlighted the tropical climate and geography of the Nile as a key component of the novelty of this situation. The men were not going off to fight in a European conflict, they were going to Africa. Articles were peppered with references to crocodiles, hippos, palm trees and burning sands. Special preparations were noted that would prepare Canadians for this strange land. Mr. Lawrence, an optician from London, England, who often visited Canada and whose advertisements could be frequently found in major newspapers, gave 450 pairs of blue tinted spectacles to the voyageurs. These coloured glasses, which were a new invention at the time, were offered by Mr. Lawrence to protect "the eyes of the Canadians from the fierce glare of the sun and the dust of the desert."¹²⁸ He sent the glasses to Major Neilson, with an extra pair with instructions "to present them to El Mahdi, with Mr. Lawrence's compliments."¹²⁹ With their sunglasses, the Canadians learned that they would be drinking a new beverage. Since Lord Wolseley announced the expedition would be "conducted on teetotal principles"¹³⁰ and since Dr. Neilson said that Nile water is "not very wholesome", he predicted that each morning the men would "fill their bottles with cold tea, the most refreshing beverage, and very much recommended by Lord Wolseley."¹³¹ If some preparations were survival strategies for an exotic climate, others aimed to maintain a familiar way of life for the men. From the outset, Melgund believed they would have to "make special arrangements as to feeding on board ship as the men eat so much."¹³² In particular, Melgund told Lansdowne that "the meat ration sanctioned in the enclosed letter from the Admiralty was so very much below" acceptable levels, that unless he increased the amount of pork, it was "likely to cause grave dissatisfaction amongst the voyageurs."¹³³ Also

¹²⁸ Peterborough *Examiner*, 18 September 1884

¹²⁹ Montreal *Star*, 13 September 1884

¹³⁰ Peterborough *Examiner*, 18 September 1884

¹³¹ Montreal *Star*, 13 September 1884

¹³² LAC, Minto Papers, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 25 August 1884

¹³³ LAC, Minto Papers, Reel A-129, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884

added were "a liberal supply of beans, cabbage, and apples."¹³⁴ A week before departure, a contract was announced for the purchase of "a large supply of Canadian tobacco."¹³⁵ Melgund was concerned about their Canadian bellies, while others were concerned for their souls in the land of the "False Prophet." Rev. Mr. Gavin of the Auxiliary Bible Society supplied each man with a bible prior to their leaving for Egypt.¹³⁶ Denison gave these English language bibles to one of the Ottawa foremen to take on board the steamer with instructions to "distribute them prudently among such of the Ottawa contingent as are Protestants."¹³⁷ The glasses, tobacco, bibles and other items would all be aids to help them in a strange land.

The papers felt the need to frequently remind readers that the Canadians were not part of the military. At departure time, several papers reported that "the voyageurs will not be supplied with firearms," for as Melgund explained, the organizers wished to "avoid as much as possible the introduction of the military element."¹³⁸ As seen above, some of the men were publically given gifts of pistols and were not forbidden to carry their own guns, but the men were not intended to "be armed." The departure revealed a new concern with controlling the movements of these rough and undisciplined men, especially concerning shore leave. Harbour police "on duty at the gangways should have prevented" visits into Montreal by the voyageurs, but several men snuck out and a few missed the boat and had to be forwarded by train to Quebec City the next morning.¹³⁹ Lowry wrote about his tour of "the Principal buildings and part of the city" before returning to bed.¹⁴⁰ Sherlock described how, once aboard, "we were caught" by police on the gang way. He managed to "slip shore" by "skin[ning] the starboard line." He had a "good time" up town, including a visit to "the celebrated Joe Beef's establishment," where you can "go in, cut a chuck off a ham, raw or

¹³⁴ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

¹³⁵ *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 September 1884

¹³⁶ See *Ottawa Free Press*, *La Minerve*, *Winnipeg Daily Times*, *Manitoba Free Press*, 11-12 September 1884

¹³⁷ LAC, RG7 G19 Vol 29 Governor General's Military Secretary, Folder 38 Transportation of Voyageurs

¹³⁸ *Montreal Star*, 13 September 1884

¹³⁹ *Globe*, 15 September 1884

¹⁴⁰ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

cooked, or beef, tomatoes, or in fact any thing, all you can eat for five cents."¹⁴¹ The two Peterborough men managed to make it back before the boat left the following morning at dawn. When the boat left without all of the men, the *Globe* correspondent presumed that many had been "no doubt being overcome by alcohol" while others thought it would leave later in the day.¹⁴² Louis Jackson said he was "left behind in Montreal" because of "incorrect information given me by one of the ship's officers" about the departure time.¹⁴³

As the men travelled down the St. Lawrence, the papers continued to report "rumours" of "trouble on the way to Quebec" due to whiskey, which was not an "unnatural result" but, given that the "mischief making article" was in limited supply,¹⁴⁴ they would soon be beyond such instances of "bottle hilarity."¹⁴⁵ One intoxicated Ottawa voyageur, Jos Laroque, fell down an open hatchway and broke his rib on the first day.¹⁴⁶ The men were not given another such opportunity in Trois-Rivières the following morning, when they anchored off shore while forty-one voyageurs rowed out to join the *Ocean King*. In Trois-Rivières, Denison and Bouchard boarded the *Ocean King* with the group from the St. Maurice region, witnessed by "un foule nombreuse" who came to wish them farewell at the dock, "à l'issue de la grand messe."¹⁴⁷ A *Globe* correspondent writing from the *Ocean King* said that this contingent was "poor" and "not nearly as fine looking men as the others on board." A large number that were expected "failed to turn up at the last moment." He described large crowds assembled to "cheer off the voyageurs" and said that in response to the local crowds, "the boys" on board the ship sang Auld Lang Syne "in a most artistic manner."¹⁴⁸ As noted in the previous chapter, Mr. O.Z. Hamel, Melgund's designated organizer for the region, did not join the

¹⁴¹ Sherlock, second letter (14 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 17 September 1884. See also Peter DeLottinville, "Joe Beef of Montreal: Working-Class Culture and the Tavern, 1869-1889," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, Vol 8/9, 1981, 9-40.

¹⁴² Unidentified correspondent (15 September), Toronto *Globe*, 17 September 1884

¹⁴³ Jackson p. 5

¹⁴⁴ Ottawa *Daily Citizen*, 15 September 1884

¹⁴⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 15 September 1884

¹⁴⁶ MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, 14 September 1884

¹⁴⁷ *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 15 September 1884

¹⁴⁸ *Globe* correspondent (unidentified), "A Useful 600," Toronto *Globe*, 17 September 1884

expedition because his requested salary was refused and his resentment over this perceived insult negatively affected the size of the Trois-Rivières group. Here and at Quebec City, the men could not physically disembark because the steamer remained moored in the river where, in the latter place, the men awaited inspection from the Governor General's party.¹⁴⁹

Quebec City

Because it was the site of the Governor General's second residence, Quebec City was a symbolic locale for the official state departure ceremony. Lansdowne had an opportunity to inspect the fully assembled contingent and give them an official message, to interpret for them and the country the significance of their endeavour and to offer encouragement to the voyageurs. Quebec City was also the last chance for newspapers to observe the men before they left, for although they would make a stop in Cape Breton for coal, there were no newspaper reporters to observe them there and they would not be able to interview or directly observe the men until their return in March.

This was also the point at which final decisions were made to augment the number of officers. Colonel Kennedy had travelled from Winnipeg to Quebec with the men that he had recruited, and although he had let it be known to reporters from the outset that he would be interested in joining the expedition, Major Frederick Denison resisted his participation. The two men had known each other since the Red River expedition at least, so Denison's motivations were no doubt complicated, but the most obvious reason he would resist Kennedy's presence was that Kennedy outranked him. The *Winnipeg Times* reported that "The Braves want their Old Colonel," saying that when they realized he was not officially amongst the officers, the St. Peter's men got off the boat in Montreal and they told Melgund they would not go without Kennedy, for "they knew him in their country" and they trusted his command alone.¹⁵⁰ Another letter writer said that all the Manitoba men "were disturbed over the fact that Col. Kennedy was about to leave us," but luckily they did not have "to kick"

¹⁴⁹ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

¹⁵⁰ *Winnipeg Sun*, 22 September 1884; *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 23 September 1884

because Kennedy was made paymaster "and we are well looked after"¹⁵¹ Denison received a promotion to Lieutenant-Colonel to appease his sense of dignity and assure him that he would be publically recognized as the senior officer and commander. At this point, Major Neilson also seems to have arranged to have Hospital Sergeant Gaston Labat assigned to the expedition as his assistant. Labat would be one of the most prodigious correspondents, penning regular letters to *La Gazette de Montreal* that would later be published as a book, *Les voyageurs Canadiens à l'expédition du Soudan; ou, Quatre-vingt-dix jours avec les crocodiles*. These two appointments, which had been made *de facto* in Montreal by Melgund, were officially sanctioned by Lansdowne at Quebec.

"Hiding in Mortal Fear"

Quebec City was also the final point at which men could join or at which their women could attempt to stop them. There were several references to wives not letting their men travel with the contingent, and this included an incident at Quebec city. From the earliest days, Melgund and Patrick Rice expressed their doubts that they would be "allowed" to travel, and the same was later said for many of the Caughnawaga boatmen. As noted above, those from Caughnawaga who did travel said they did so with the permission of their women, that their "wives and families were willing" to let them go because it was to aid the Queen. Others from Caughnawaga spoke of the expedition as a way to increase their marital capital. In all local ceremonies, there were "affecting" scenes of leaving wives and sweethearts. But there were also scenes in which women were reported to resort to desperate means to prevent their men from leaving. Under the title of "The Girl I Left Behind", the *Peteborough Review* reported on two such cases. In an "affecting scene" involving a boatman who had "enlisted without the knowledge of his wife," the woman made her way onto the *Ocean King*, presumably in Montreal, and "implored her fugitive spouse to return home with her." She had to eventually be "removed in a state of great excitement from the vessel as it moved out of the harbor." In the second case, "a poor girl had followed her lover, it is said, all the way

¹⁵¹ Unidentified correspondent (16 September), *Manitoba Free Press*, 27 September 1884

from Manitoba." Although she begged the Quebec City river police to be put on board "with the Governor-General's party" to say good-bye, her husband would not permit it and only "allowed her to write and send a farewell letter."¹⁵² Decades later, one letter writer to the *Globe* would reflect on the death of Lansdowne by recalling an incident from this day. In Quebec city, he was part of the Governor General's party when Lansdowne was begged by a woman with "a wild look" to carry her on his launch to the voyageurs' steamer, for "she had missed her husband on the last boat and might never see him again." She was hustled ashore when it was discovered that she had a concealed pistol and had been "trying to get on board for two or three days in Montreal and here in order to shoot her husband" who was "hiding in mortal fear."¹⁵³

The theme of men escaping from their wives to go on the expedition is also echoed in a 1919 collection of Gaspé stories collected by M.G. MacWhirter. He recounts the tale of the near-recruitment of a group of Aboriginal men who had been personally invited to participate in the expedition by Landsdowne, who knew them as his summer hunting guides. Knowing "how expert these Indians were in a canoe, the Secretary of the Governor General" sent free ferry passes to Louis Jerome and three of his colleagues, so that they could get to Quebec city in time to board the *Ocean King*. The story, as MacWhirter heard it 35 years after the fact, was that Louis' wife "issued her threat" that if he went to Egypt, "I'll be married sure when you come back," to which he replied "go get married." The wife of Narcisse Gideon "expressed her disapproval of the expedition" by showing up "on the scene with an axe and a pot of boiling water" and by threatening their driver that she would "chop the spokes from his wagon-wheel and scald him in the bargain." Because of this threat, Gideon stayed back, but later that night he "effected his escape from his affectionate spouse" and rejoined the other three, who were enjoying a "mass meeting of the Indians, who had gathered to bid the travellers for 'E-gipt' farewell." The story teller noted that "chief among" those present was "Jinny Martin, the Indian doctor-woman, who supplied the departing friends with balm, salve

¹⁵² Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 September 1884

¹⁵³ Toronto *Globe*, 16 June 1927

etc. for the journey." After "adieux" which were "prolonged and vociferous," they proceeded towards the ferry, only to find that the agent at the Cambellton train station, had "through some mistake" received no instructions to let them pass to the ferry for free. He would not accept Jerome's "telegram that he had received from the Secretary at Ottawa."¹⁵⁴ The persistence of this non-recruitment story after 35 years is notable in a couple of respects. First of all, while there is no corroborating documentation to support this episode, the story sounds plausible, given its references to the "secretary in Ottawa" and Lansdowne's panicked attempt to find more Indian voyageurs at the last minute. The communications breakdown and the failure to follow up on transport logistics echo the near-recruitment in Thunder Bay. The reference to the opposition by wives easily fits on a spectrum of references to the negotiation that occurred between women and their men as to whether or not permission would be granted to participate. Across different regions and cultural groups, we find many examples of women successfully or unsuccessfully opposing their men's participation in the expedition. In other cases, it is explicitly noted that such permission has been granted, and universally, there are emotional scenes of women at the sites of departure. In no cases, however, except for this local legend, do these women actually speak, and thus while we have descriptions of teary farewells, sentimental songs, denied permission or hidden pistols, it is difficult to actually map the language of the women who were closeley tied to the voyageurs through bonds of family and marriage. The women remain marginal figures in the men's stories. The well-scripted and detailed account of the (failed) resistance of the men's wives was not, after all, the main point to their story. The men remembered and retold this story because Lansdowne's invitation was a recognition of their skill and the personal call was a distinction that few in their community could match. Louis Jerome wanted MacWhirter to understand that he and his colleagues were almost members of the Nile voyageur contingent, thwarted only by events beyond their control. And they *certainly* weren't stopped by their wives, they seemed compelled to say.

¹⁵⁴ MacWhirter, M. G., *Treasure trove in Gaspé and the Baie des Chaleurs*. Quebec: Telegraph Printing Co. (1919). pp. 194-196. The four invited men were Louis Jerome Sr., Louis Jerome Jr., Etienne Dedam and Narcisse Gideon.

"Quel assemblage étrange!"

Several guests joined the Governor General and his wife when they inspected the voyageurs including Militia Minister A.P. Caron and Monseigneur Henri Têtu, who accompanied his good friend Père Bouchard to the steamer to say goodbye. Têtu spoke frankly of his impressions of the assembled contingent:

Je dois à la vérité de dire que je ne fus pas très enthousiasmé, ni très fier, à la vue des trois cents voyageurs qui étaient sur le pont et qui allaient représenter le pays en Égypte. Quel assemblage étrange! Pas d'uniformes - des habits de toutes couleurs - des figures hâlées, quelques-unes aux traits durs et féroces - ca et là les sinistres visages des Iroquois de Caughnawaga - un demi-silence - l'air ennuyé de gens qui attendent; tout cela avait un aspect terrible et funèbre que je n'oublierais jamais.¹⁵⁵

These "unforgettable" private thoughts of Têtu, which were published years after the fact, express in great clarity two recurring themes. First, when he looked out at the men, what he saw were the hard, fierce traits of workers, distinguished by their tanned faces and the sinister Iroquois, all out of uniform wearing coats of different colours. Clearly these men did not constitute good representatives of the country in Egypt. Secondly, in Winnipeg and Ottawa we saw evidence of a contrast between the eager and enthusiastic mood of the men and the fearful anxiety on the faces and in the whispers of those watching them leave. Expressions of regret, concerns about dangers, discussions of death, morose faces in the parade here find their counterpart in Têtu's perception of the "demi-silence" of the boredom of those who wait and of an "aspect terrible et funèbre" (dismal, ghastly). Given the events of the preceding 48 hours, the mournful mood of the men could also be plausibly explained as the result of a not inconsiderable hangover. This too would have done little to make Têtu either enthusiastic or proud of these men as national representatives.

The Governor General's Speech

Lansdowne inspected the men and then addressed them in a speech that was reprinted widely in Canadian newspapers. He divided this speech into three parts addressing, the men in

¹⁵⁵ Henri Têtu *Le R.P. Bouchard, Missionnaire Apolostique*, Québec: Pruneau & Kirouac, 1897, p. 125

general, the "Indian race" and the "French-Canadians," speaking French in the last case.

Lansdowne began his speech in English, saying he was glad that "the Dominion is going to be represented" on the expedition because they "will show the whole world that the British Empire means something more than the British Islands and that in this part of it, the Queen has loyal subjects who are ready to obey her summons and to serve under her flag. (Loud applause)." He explained that this was not a war of "wanton aggression or selfish conquest" but a mission of "rescue of a man whose simplicity of character, whose personal courage and profound religious faith, qualitties to which Canadians are not indifferent, have earned him the respect of the whole British Empire." He reminded the men that the British Government "had the four quarters of the globe to draw from," in looking for boatmen, but "turned its eyes at once to the Dominion of Canada." He was confident that the men would work "as no other men in the world could" and carry "the reputation of your own country" which they must bring back "without blot or blemish (Great applause)." This could best be done, he said, by being "bold," "skilful," "well-conducted" and "obedient to discipline," for although they were "not going to serve as soldiers," they could still "show the soldiers that a civilian can upon occasion display many of the best qualitties of a soldier."

He then turned his attention to "those men of the Indian race," telling them that Lord Wolseley "begged particularly that we would not forget the men of Caughnawaga and the Indian settlements of the west (Applause)." Lansdowne said he was "sure that you will show yourselves worthy of Lord Wolseley's high opinion of you." He reminded them that "the Government of the Dominion has always endeavoured to deal justly and fairly with you. Your people are as loyal to the Queen of England as her white subjects, and I am glad to see that so large a number of you are ready to accept service under her." This was received with "Loud applause," said the *Quebec City Chronicle*.

The final portion of his speech was delivered in French to French-Canadians, a "bold and resolute race" whose ancestors were the "warlike mariners" who had "laid the foundation of

the Dominion upon the shores of the St. Lawrence." Although "for a time your fathers and ours fought each other for the possession of this country (Cheers)", today we work "peacefully and side by side with each other as citizens of the same Empire and subjects of the same sovereign (Cheers)." He appealed to the tradition of the voyageurs to be "dexterous, enduring and good companions" and was sure that they will show courage in the Egyptian cataracts, as in Canada, and soon the banks of the Nile would "echo the musical notes of your Canadian song."¹⁵⁶

To each group, Lansdowne delivered a message directed at their implied ethnicity (race), and in each case, he made an tailored appeal to how each third would be able to express a British imperial identity and demonstrate masculine qualities appropriate to their identity. The tripartite division should not be surprising, but in a very formal way, it underlined the problematic nature of the Nile Voyageurs as representatives to Empire: this group was not just representing "two nations" but it included those who are categorically not-Canadian. He said they were all loyal subjects of the Queen, members of the British empire and they were now going to serve in an imperial campaign, but he addressed them as three distinct groups. The only way the Queen's representative could address the men within the framework of a single narrative was on the basis of the British empire, and even here it seemed a fragile construction. This did not bode well for the possibility of a common understanding of the contingent as Canadian representatives.

Lansdowne's speech also revealed the problematic nature of the men's status as workers. When he explained that this was a just war, he expressed confidence that "a civilian can upon occasion display many of the best qualities of a soldier." On this basis, acting as substitute soldiers, the men were charged to bring back honour for their country. Given Melgund's reports of their drunkenness, indiscipline, fighting and the general impression of "roughness" that they gave, as noted by Têtu, Lansdowne reminds them that they must protect their

¹⁵⁶ *Quebec City Chronicle*, 16 September 1884; see also *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 18 September 1884

country's reputation and preserve it from "blot or blemish." The discourse here indeed aims to discipline and control the men, not as an end in itself, but rather to control how the country will be represented and recognized. It is an acknowledgment that the men have the power to bring shame upon Canada. Behind appeals to the men to be "well-conducted" and "obedient to discipline" lays a vulnerability amongst the colonial elites that the country's reputation may rest in the hands of this "assemblage étrange."

Not surprisingly, such discursive appeals were comically ineffective as means of discipline. We cannot even be sure that the men were listening. A letter from Lowry said that Lansdowne "got up and made a speech" but that was all he said about it. He was more interested in describing the geography of the river than Lansdowne's speech. As might be expected, its impact seemed to diminish with rank and class. Neilson wrote that his "his graceful and eloquent addresses in both languages" at Quebec "gave very great pleasure to the voyageurs... and inspired them with new courage and enthusiasm."¹⁵⁷ Jackson thought that "His Excellency's very kind words had an especially encouraging effect upon my boys" from Caughnawaga.¹⁵⁸ Voyageur William Cram from Renfrew thought it was "a very good speech," and "after the usual amount of cheering and inspection," Lansdowne and the Vice Regal party left, "and we immediately started down the St. Lawrence, when our voyage began in earnest, as well as our hardships."¹⁵⁹

Conclusions

When the time came for the men to leave their homes, their friends, families and other community members came together to demonstrate their love, respect and esteem for them

¹⁵⁷ Letter of J.L.H. Neilson dated 18 September 1884, *Montreal Star* 19 September 1884

¹⁵⁸ Louis Jackson, *Our Caughnawagas in Egypt: A Narrative of what was seen and accomplished by the Contingent of North American Indian Voyageurs who led the British Boat Expedition, for the Relief of Khartoum up the Cataracts of the Nile*

¹⁵⁹ Renfrew *Mercury*, 27 September 1884

before they cross the boundary of the familiar and left for a foreign land. They repurposed rituals and ceremonies from other social practices, including military traditions, as means to recognize the men before they left. They gave them banquets, made speeches, gave gifts and asked them to remember their "dear friends" while on the Nile. Regardless of whether these pre-liminal gatherings were given formal structure or whether they were spontaneous, there was an outpouring of tearful farewells, hand-shaking, back-slapping, photo-taking, cheering and singing. Such events attracted the attention of the newspapers, who sent journalists into the midst of the crowds and parties to capture the speech of the men and their immediate friends and relations. The voyageurs were excited and looking forward to their trip, which they variously described as a jolly excursion, a holiday trip or a picnic party. Most of those around them were also excited for them, but there were frequent references to anxiety and fear, expressed in word and facial expressions, which communicated their worries that the voyageurs were going off to prison or death. While voyageur enthusiasm was usually matched with cheers from friends, they were also faced with tearful partings and anxious faces. This was universal, in all towns where we have texts describing departures and it is not connected to any sense of group identity or recognition. It frames the expectations that the men were going to a strange place, in a war zone and might not come back alive.

There were very different patterns of speech evident in these crowd-level texts from the sites of departure ceremonies and the language used in editorials. When friends farewelled their Nile Voyageur friends, they evoked identities of profession, community, region and sometimes Canada, but they did not mention Britain or the empire very often. In contrast to this, newspaper editorials, which were abstracted from the details of the particular lives of individual voyageurs, emphasized the Queen, Gordon, the British Flag and Empire. People talking at banquets, on the street, at train stations and at docks did not express an imperial identity or a British identity amongst each other, and if they did it was a weak identity relative to the other bonds of affection they mention, whereas many of the editorials framed the experience almost exclusively in imperial terms. In banquets and farewell crowds this event was important on a personal and local level. In the editorials, they tried to make the

case that it was important on a national level, and that national identity was expressed through empire, winning recognition from Britain for participating in this campaign.

This was not the case with all newspapers, but in these final days as the men were departing, the papers that had been most critical kept silent and did not publish editorials on the Nile voyageurs. If they had previously made the case that this was just a job for the men to take or leave based on their personal assessment of the advantages and disadvantages, then there was no need for them to find national meaning and significance in their departure. These skeptical papers merely reported the events of the farewells and held back any criticisms as the men were leaving. Those papers who did wax philosophically about the voyageurs were therefore those that considered Wolseley's request an honour, that were glad that he had not forgotten Canada and that hoped the experience would increase imperial sentiment in the country. In the days surrounding the various local departures and the final departure from Quebec City, most editorials and the speech of the Governor General articulated a Canadian imperialist narrative which claimed that the contingent would send a signal to the British that Canada was an eager partner in the empire of Greater Britain. They also expressed certitude that participating in this campaign would educate these voyageurs to the greatness of that empire and strengthen their connection to it. According to this interpretation, the expedition held great potential to more tightly connect Canada to the rest of the British world.

In representing Canada to Empire, some tropes begin to appear, such as "return crowned with honor and glory." Several papers across the country predicted the men would "win honor for themselves and credit for Canada." Sometimes this formula inverted the words honor and credit, or used glory, but the formula was used frequently, implying the trip provided an opportunity to win both personal and national respect (type 2 - esteem, unique credit and distinction). The use of such a double-barrelled formation assumed that the individuals always won recognition for themselves and as representatives of a group (nation, province, people.) This was why they each held Canada's reputation in their hands. For this reason, the gap between these two spheres of discourse was considerable and problematic. Those public

voices that were most desirous of imperial recognition placed their hopes in a group of men who showed no imperial sentiment in their public talk whatsoever. Those who most strongly identified with a British identity were sending as representatives to the British, men who were not like them in language, religion, race or class.

This chapter also revealed the increasing frequency of the word "rough" and its derivatives to describe men who were primarily described as "hardy" during recruitment. It is suspected that the two, while closely related have negative and positive connotations respectively, with many working-class behaviours being designated "rough" and many of the positive masculine attributes of those same workers, from their physiques to their determination are examples of "hardiness." A "hard" man, however, has a "rough" temperament. This is something to be testing going forward. Associated with this are emerging references to drinking and fighting amongst such "hard cases" and "rough characters." These men, we have learned, carried pistols, but as civilians on the expedition they were not "armed."

At Quebec, Lansdowne made a clearly articulated appeal for a wide concept of British identity applicable to all living in the Dominion to express themselves as part of the British world, including the three groups he saw standing in front of him. His assumption of a shared British identity rested on shaky ground, given the findings in this chapter. The participants, in their farewell language demonstrated weak British identities, if they mention "British", "loyal" or "imperial" at all. Newspapers believed this expedition would be of national importance because of the imperial connection. The men believed this expedition would be a great experience and they articulated this in personal, local, regional and sometimes on a few rare occasions, in Canadian terms. This is how their friends and families spoke as well.

The findings of this initial section of the study indicate a disjuncture between the expectations of many of those staying behind and the motivations of those departing on the expedition. Whether or not the gap or tension between these expectations and reality is a wide or narrow one would have to wait until the men were actually working with the British

on the Nile. At this point, however, certain questions are apparent and await some sort of resolution. How would such rough undisciplined civilians, such fighting non-fighters, who had no discernable imperial motivations represent Canada in the eyes of the British? Would Britons see these men as fellow-Britons, despite their various backgrounds and so-called races? Would they respect them as equals in empire, or see them as labourers, who were of a lower status and incapable of winning the same honours as a soldier? Lansdowne hoped that the presence of a Canadian contingent would "show the whole world that the British Empire means something more than the British Islands." No one doubted that Canada was part of the empire. What was uncertain, and what caused no small degree of ambivalence amongst some observers, was the *way* that these men would represent the country on the Nile and what this would say about Canada's status in British eyes.

CHAPTER 4 - THE ATLANTIC

As the *Ocean King* left Quebec City, the men crossed a threshold. Up until that point they had been observable by multiple publics who spoke of them as "the Nile Voyageurs," yet they had never come together as a group. Now, as they crossed the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and ascended the Nile towards their place of engagement in Wady Halfa, Sudan, they would be living together as a group, but they could not be directly observed by their Canadian publics and were not yet under the scrutiny of British war correspondents. For this period our primary focus is on the men's perception of the contingent's experiences and the extent to which they did or did not form an identity as a contingent called the "Nile Voyageurs." How did the men see themselves and the larger group? How did their understand their common purpose? What were the cultural norms and resulting expectations that clashed and was there evidence of new group norms developing in this liminal experience, beyond the boundaries of Canadian society? The negotiation of cultural difference is revealed to us through speech and actions in a wealth of documents created by the men, who had a lot of time to reflect and write. For the most part during chapters 4 and 5 they were at sea, with two coaling stops in Sydney and Gibraltar. They lived in close quarters, followed new daily rituals, faced novel expectations of obedience to Canadian officers, engaged in social activities playing games, making music, participating in religious services and they experienced life at sea, which was a novelty for most of them. In examining the question of how they understood their relationship to one another as representatives of the country on an imperial campaign, the analysis will pay close attention to the two running themes of the lived boundaries between nation/empire and worker/soldier.

Nile Voyageur Correspondents

The textual sources for this section of the study are primarily those created by the men of the contingent as they travel to the Sudan. While the men were out of the country, British cables about them continued to appear on the front pages, but articles about the men moved from the "Local News" page to "News of the World." Some members of the contingent wrote to

family members, who would then bring those letters to the newspapers, while other contingent members wrote as "special correspondents." They were often identified by name but others chose to write anonymously as "the Globe correspondent" or "the Ottawa Free Press correspondent." Denison and Neilson both wrote anonymously. The physical distance which separated these men from Canada transformed them from subjects of journalism to writers documenting the progress of the expedition. In addition to published letters, there were other texts created by members of the Canadian contingent, including diaries, unpublished letters and remembrances published after their return. There are voyageur texts in English and French, from all three provinces, urban and rural, aboriginal, settler and newly arrived immigrants; they were from Canada's leading families and from the humblest backgrounds. The expedition brought together an unusually diverse collection of men, who had the time to write to eager reading publics. A few introductory remarks about the principal authors will be the best general preparation for our use of these sources. Nine writers left behind a substantial body of letters or published remembrances of the expedition. Another dozen or so who were occasional or minor contributors to this body of texts.

Louis Jackson and James Deer both came from Caughnawaga and upon their return, they each published a book about their experiences. Jackson was a figure who "commanded the respect of both Canadians and Mohawks," in the words of his editor. At times referred to as a chief in the non-Mohawk texts, he was a community leader and left a positive impression on those outside his immediate community, including General Wosley and Lord Melgund. He was not only a foreman of a gang of river pilots from Caughnawaga, but was considered the head foreman of the entire Caughnawaga group. Jackson studied at Upper Canada College¹ and one of his contemporaries, the river pilot and internationally famous lacrosse player Big John Canadian was remembered as saying that Jackson had so much education he was "damn near a lawyer."² Interviewing Jackson for his book *Careers of Danger and*

¹ Renfrew *Mercury*, 7 November 1884

² Johnny Beauvais, *Caughnawaga; a Mohawk Look at Canada; Adventures of Big John Canadian*. Caughnawaga, 1985

Daring twenty years after the expedition, Cleveland Moffett describes him as "a big, powerful man" who deserved "the high opinion in which he was held" as he possessed "a fund of adventure" and "so entertaining a way of drawing upon it, that one would listen for hours while he talks." Upon his return to Montreal, Jackson published and received praise³ for his memoirs of the expedition entitled *Our Caughnawagas in Egypt: A Narrative of what was seen and accomplished by the Contingent of North American Indian Voyageurs who led the British Boat Expedition, for the Relief of Khartoum up the Cataracts of the Nile*.⁴ As the title demonstrates, Jackson's narrative focusses on his "Caughnawaga boys" and the important leadership role they played. He said that it was at the "express desire of General Lord Wolseley" that the Caughnawagas should be "part of the Canadian contingent," showing a touch more ambiguity as to the semantic categories of Canadian and Indian.

One of the men in Jackson's gang was James Deer who published a smaller book entitled *The Canadian Voyageurs in Egypt*.⁵ Deer commented on different items than Jackson and wrote in a more informal conversational tone, providing some unique insights into key incidents on the expedition. As a community leader, Jackson was consistently more diplomatic, positive and chose to exclude certain conflicts and unpleasanties that figured in Deer's account, including the flaws of British officers and acts of violence committed by members of the Canadian contingent. Deer identified himself and his fellow Mohawks as Canadians, saying that his gang would "wait for the rest of the Canadians" and using similar constructions. Given that only three published books were written by members of the Canadian contingent on their experience, the Caughnawaga boatmen were well represented in the production of published texts. These two books about the Nile Expedition stand out

³ The anonymous author of a *Saturday Review* article on the voyageurs, attempting to make the point that some of the Canadians were "men of considerable intelligence" in addition to great skill, gave the example of Jackson's book as "an excellent account of what he saw and did." "The Voyageurs on the Nile", *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, London (UK), No. 1,553, Vol 60, 1 August 1885

⁴ Louis Jackson, *Our Caughnawagas in Egypt: A Narrative of what was seen and accomplished by the Contingent of North American Indian Voyageurs who led the British Boat Expedition, for the Relief of Khartoum up the Cataracts of the Nile*. Montreal, W. Drysdale & Co., 1885

⁵ James D. Deer, *The Canadian Voyageurs in Egypt By James Deer of Caughnawaga One of their Number*, Montreal: John Lovell & Son, 1885

in a period with very few memoirs or historical accounts published by aboriginal authors.

While several letters from francophones from Trois-Rivières and the Ottawa region were published in newspapers, there were three who produced a significant body of commentary, and none of these were working-class boatmen. Père Arthur Bouchard was a Catholic missionary who had worked in Egypt and the Sudan for several years with a religious order that would later be known as the Combonis. He had studied in Verona, Italy and the headquarters of his order was in Cairo. A native of Rivière Ouelle, Bouchard happened to be touring parishes in the province of Quebec at the time that the Canadian contingent was being raised. Bouchard was a skilled writer who regularly wrote mission reports to serve the internal needs of his order and also to report his work to French-Canadian parishes that supported his mission. Jean-Guy Pelletier identifies Bouchard, whom he said had "une certaine notoriété au Québec," as the first missionary to be published in the Canadian edition of the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*. Founded in 1877, the *Annales* provided missionaries with "un moyen important de propagande et marquent le début de l'épopée missionnaire canadienne."⁶ Bouchard's letters during the campaign were written to his friend Monseigneur Henri Têtu, chaplain of the Archbishop of Quebec, who published them in the *Annales* and later included them in the biography he wrote about Bouchard.⁷ The first of this set began with an open letter to the public, which was printed in several Quebec newspapers, just before his departure. He thanked church leaders, his compatriots and the members of various archdioceses for the support they had shown him over the past few years. "Avant de laisser mon pays, peut-être pour la dernière fois," Bouchard wished to fulfill "un devoir bien doux à remplir, c'est celui de la reconnaissance." In the two years since he came back to Canada to "tendre la main en faveur des pauvres noirs de l'Afrique Centrale," he said that Canadians have treated him and his cause with great generosity, contributing over \$15,000 for his mission. He expressed his gratitude for the generosity "du clergé et du peuple

⁶ Jean-Guy Pelletier, "Les relations entre le Québec et l'Afrique 1880-1905," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, Vol 15, No. 1 (1981), pp. 117-120.

⁷ Henri Têtu, *Le R.P. Bouchard, Missionnaire Apostolique*, Québec: Pruneau & Kirouac, 1897

canadien," on behalf of "des petits nègres et négresses qui vous doivent la double liberté du corps et de l'âme."⁸ He passed on "des paroles de remerciements adressées au peuple canadien" from the head of his order in Egypt. The intertwined civilizing mission of ending slavery and spreading Christianity was a powerful narrative and framed Catholic francophone Canadian participation in the expedition.⁹ It seemed unproblematic for Bouchard to open his letter with reference to his departure with "des Canadiens qui vont rejoindre l'expédition anglaise pour secourir le général Gordon," because Gordon was a man whose public reputation was based on a similar dedication to the same twin goals.

As we have seen, Surgeon-Major J. L. H. Neilson advised Lansdowne on the importance of taking both a Canadian doctor and Père Bouchard. Although Neilson was not one of the three officers approved by the War Office, he quickly assumed a leadership role amongst the officers for the expedition, gaining early responsibility for fitting, inspecting and stocking the *Ocean King*. At some point during these final few days before departure, he also managed to find a position for Hospital Sergeant Gaston Labat, who served as his aide. Neilson promoted himself to Lansdowne as someone with training from the military college in Kingston, who had been on the Red River expedition and who was perfectly bilingual, with a French-Canadian mother and English-Canadian father. His skill with words was evident as the anonymous but prolific correspondent for the *Montreal Star*. He also wrote some anonymous letters as one of three "Globe correspondents." Amongst all the Canadians, he also kept the most comprehensive personal expedition diary on the public record.¹⁰ Although he was bilingual and is on record addressing the men in French publically, he does not seem to have written any letters in French to the Canadian press or in his journal. Neilson wrote only in English, but consciously adopted the role of liaison for his anglophone readers,

⁸ Arthur Bouchard, *Annales de la propogation de la foi pour la province de Quebec*. Vingt-Cinquième numéro, Février 1885, Montréal. pp 85-86

⁹ Arthur Silver, "Quelques considérations sur les rapports du Canada français avec l'impérialisme britannique au XIXe siècle," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, Vol 15, No. 1 (1981), pp. 55-75B

¹⁰ LAC MG 29 E37 Neilson Fonds, File 1 Diary of the Nile expedition

regularly informing them of his conversations with francophone boatmen and officers whose perspectives he purported to translate and represent.

In one of his first letters as the *Globe* correspondent, Neilson referred to himself in the third person as "the doctor, and his able assistant wearing the non-combatant badge, 'Red Cross.'"¹¹ The evident novelty in this medical uniform placed him and Labat, his assistant, in a different category than the other officers. Labat's role on the expedition was never really clear in the official records, but he turned out to be the most prolific correspondent writing in French. He wrote twenty long letters which were published in *La Presse* and upon his return, he published these letters, together with some other materials associated with Egypt, the Sudan and the people involved in the expedition. His professed motivation was commemorative: "laisser dans les *Annales Canadiennes* le souvenir des services rendues par les *Voyageurs Canadiens*." His book, which he called *Les voyageurs canadiens à l'expédition du Soudan; ou, Quatre-vingt-dix jours avec les crocodiles*,¹² was the longest published by someone in the Canadian contingent, even if one omits the orientalist country-profile essays that his editors attached to pad the front half of the volume. Although he seemed amused that the *London Gazette* mistook him as related to the famous brewer from London, Ontario,¹³ Labat was a recent arrival from Europe, who described himself to a French officer as "un Polonais qui a cru devoir choisir le Canada pour y planter sa tente, convaincu que ce pays renferme les vertus de la France et de la Pologne."¹⁴ While Neilson wrote anonymously, with a sober official tone, speaking of himself in the third person, Labat aimed first and foremost to amuse his reader with funny incidents, misunderstandings and first-person opinionated observations of those around him.

¹¹ *Globe*, 16 September 1884

¹² Gaston Labat, *Les voyageurs Canadiens à l'expédition du Soudan; ou, Quatre-vingt-dix jours avec les crocodiles*. Québec: L.J. Demers & frère, 1886

¹³ *Ibid* p. 97

¹⁴ *Ibid* p. 69

Louis Hylas Duguay from Trois-Rivières wrote as a correspondent for *La Minerve*, the largest francophone paper in Canada at the time. Those letters were reprinted by the *Journal de Trois-Rivières* and other papers. He volunteered as a boatman, but was one of the few from that town with no experience as a bûcheron. From 1868 to 1870 he had fought in Italy as a Papal Zouave, being present at "la prise de Rome" and returning "au pays sous le protectorat anglais." Like many militia officers across the country, he saw the Nile expedition as an opportunity to see "active service" and out of the chaos of a disorganized recruitment in his hometown, he managed to secure himself a position in the smaller-than expected group. His letters are valuable because, unlike the other two significant francophone writers, he was the only one assigned to a gang and living amongst the boatmen while on the *Ocean King*. The French-language press also had infrequent contributors including the boatmen Joseph Laroque, Narcisse Ripel, Simon Remington and George Nicholas.

Two major writers from Ontario came from very different positions in society. John A. Sherlock was a young boatman recruited from Peterborough and Frederick Denison, the commander of the Canadian contingent, was a member of one of Toronto's wealthiest and most influential families. In terms of sheer volume, Sherlock was the most prolific correspondent on the expedition, writing even more than Labat, but his work was never published beyond the pages of the Peterborough *Daily Review* and the pages of several other papers across the country who reprinted excerpts from the *Review*. He would normally sign his letters J.A.S. and as they were reprinted across the country his true identity was always obscure to people outside his town, since most newspapers at the time did not attribute the original sources of such items. The Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, for example, even changed the text of Sherlock's references to Peterborough to make it appear that he was really from Winnipeg. In this sense, his regular letters may have had the widest readership and potentially the deepest impact on Canadian perceptions of the progress of the contingent. He was a good writer, keen observer and an insightful analyst of the expedition, which went a great way to explaining the widespread republication of his letters. Denison expressed great satisfaction when he learned that his wife had started a subscription to the *Daily Review* and was saving

all of Sherlock's articles. A painter and reader of world history, Sherlock demonstrated a deep curiosity of Egyptian life that was often absent in the letters of Labat, Kennedy and others, who were much more likely to dismiss the cultural differences they saw around them as simple backwardness, barbarity or other expressions of cultural intolerance. Sherlock was a talented young lumber worker and writer in his 20s, and one of the minority who chose to stay beyond their six month contract.

Frederick Denison was part of the wealthy and influential Denison family in Toronto and the brother of the influential public figure, George Taylor Denison III. As noted, Frederick Denison had been Lord Wolseley's aide de camp during the Red River expedition of 1870 and for this reason, and a conflation of his reputation by mistaken confusion with his older brother, he was selected as commander of the expedition. He resigned his seat as Toronto alderman to accept the position and received a promotion from Major to Lieutenant-Colonel to appease his wounded sensibilities and to maintain clear lines of command that were blurred by the last-minute inclusion of Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy. As commanding officer, Denison kept an official diary of the expedition. Stacey published the diary but chose not to publish the order book which Denison had maintained in the back. These entries recorded all the orders he gave to the men, including the various punishments and fines administered as disciplinary measures. There are letters in the Denison papers of the Toronto Reference Library and some of these are also included in Stacey's volume on the Nile voyageurs. A third writer from Ontario was William Cram, who wrote several letters for the *Renfrew Mercury*. Cram was the only shantyman from the Ottawa valley who wrote a number of published letters and they reveal a set of cultural assumptions about his role not found in the language of any other correspondent.

In a very different category than all of the other writers was Charles Lewis Shaw's professional serial "Random Reminiscences of a Nile Voyageur," which ran in *Toronto Saturday Night* from December 1893 to February 1894. Like many members of the settler population of Manitoba in the 1880s, Shaw was born in Ontario. Born and raised in Perth,

he got his law degree at University of Toronto and had recently begun to work as a law clerk in Winnipeg in 1884. He was one of the "lawyer voyageurs" at the legal banquet in Winnipeg discussed in the previous chapter. Upon his return from the Nile, he moved to Edmonton where he set up his legal practice. He gave many public talks about Egypt and wrote articles in newspapers about life in the Northwest and the Nile. He also began to write articles for newspapers across Canada and eventually turned his hand to one of his most memorable experiences, his time on the Nile Expedition. *Toronto Saturday Night* promoted his "reminiscences" by calling him a Canadian Mark Twain. The stories are told in a descriptive, entertaining and humorous manner almost a decade after the fact, but the publication also includes a short interview with Denison, who notes that despite some of the creative liberties Shaw took, it was a very accurate rendering of the expedition. Twenty years after the expedition, Shaw was still mining his Nile experiences for various newspapers and magazines. Another of Shaw's "lawyer voyageur" colleagues on the expedition was W. A. Galliher, who also wrote several letters that were published over the course of the expedition.

There were other writers who wrote less frequently, including Col. Kennedy, a native of Peterborough and Winnipeg's second mayor. His fonds in the Manitoba Archives contains several letters to his wife. A few of his letters were printed in Winnipeg papers. Some other Winnipeggers, including foreman Lieutenant Alfred McKeand and Gunner Nourse, were also occasional writers for the local papers. Kennedy brought along a large number of inexperienced boatmen from Winnipeg, including the lawyers and other members of his local militia, but while they were poor boatmen, many of them were letter-writers, albeit more infrequent and sporadic than individuals like Sherlock and Labat.

Command and Discipline

One of the key uncertainties as the men were leaving Canada was to what extent they were a military or a civilian force. Denison's initial challenge to his authority came not from a boatman but from the presence of another officer. As a Major he was outranked by Col. Kennedy, who unexpectedly accompanied the Manitoba men all the way to Montreal and

then stayed on the boat with Melgund to Quebec City. As noted in the previous chapter, Kennedy was so "popular" that the St. Peter's men and several of the Winnipeg men threatened to "kick" if he was not going. Not only did the men express loyalty to Kennedy as a person and regional leader but it is also clear that they thought that they were sufficiently free agents that they could have stepped off the boat at Quebec City if their conditions were not met. When Denison boarded at Trois-Rivières, he was surprised to find that Kennedy would be accompanying the expedition. Kennedy offered to "sink his rank" if this would cause problems, and Major Denison's first entry in his book of orders was "Mr. W. J. Kennedy will until further orders act as superintendent of stores look after stores of the content."¹⁵ Denison had an icy relationship with Kennedy before and during the expedition. Melgund consented to this arrangement, but Denison also demanded a promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, so that he would not face the humiliation of being outranked by the popular Kennedy, who everyone would continue to call "Colonel." Given the potential risk of alienating the St. Peter's crew, who had been specifically requested by Wolseley and no doubt hoping to ease tensions between the officers, Melgund had both the motivation and rationale to explain to Lansdowne in Quebec that Denison should receive a promotion. In his personal diary, Neilson began using the phrase Lt. Col. Denison on September 14, the day they arrived in Quebec City.¹⁶ Writing as an anonymous *Globe* correspondent who takes the nom de plume "CANADA," Denison informed readers that "before the Governor left, Major Denison was promoted to the rank of colonel" and told readers that "Col. Denison has spared no pains in providing for the comfort of those under his command."¹⁷ Taking a pen name that made him seem to be the voice of the country, Denison played the circumstances effectively, as did Kennedy and the Manitoba men, all managing to gain something by creatively applying military norms and rules to this novel situation. Frederick Denison left Toronto a Major, and was now a Colonel, like his brother.

¹⁵ Denison, September 14, Order book, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885 (Frederick C. Denison), Toronto Reference Library

¹⁶ LAC MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, 14 September 1884

¹⁷ Denison ("CANADA"), first letter (18 September), *Globe*, 23 September 1884

While this promotion propped up Denison's dignity and confirmed his role as commander, along with the concomitant prestige this would bring him in his future Canadian domestic life, it did little to help him manage or control the men of the contingent. As a general rule, they considered it their right to explore each local town along the way, which provided a series of regular challenges to Denison and his ability to enforce any sort of control over the men. There had been intimations of these problems as soon as the men began to gather together. The Peterborough men were unsupervised for several days in Ottawa and in Montreal. The Manitoba group arrived early and had "a jolly time for two days"¹⁸ without any limits placed on it. When the train arrived with the Ottawa and Peterborough men, Neilson said that many were "in a drunken condition" and while they managed to get them all on the boat, "it was quite another matter to keep them there and twenty or more broke away."¹⁹ That evening, the local Water Police were used "to restrain some of the more turbulent spirits" and keep them on the ship, but many "got ashore in spite of the vigilance of the police."²⁰ Coming back from Joe Beef's, Sherlock described how, in realizing "we were caught", he had to "skin the starboard line" from the bow when he sighted police on the gangway.²¹ Those who spent the night in town had missed the boat the following morning and rejoined the contingent in Quebec via the train. A *Globe* correspondent expected they'd "be forwarded by the river police, who have greatly helped to diminish the labours of the authorities."²² Wishing to avoid a similar problem in Quebec, the steamer was anchored offshore and Sherlock said that the men were "sadly disappointed" to see that "a police boat was moored alongside to prevent escape." It was at this point, "and only then," he wrote, that "most of the boys realize[d] that they were not free agents, and that the 'Do as you please' kind of business" had come to an end.²³ The fact that they were "not allowed ashore"²⁴ was a surprising limitation that many

¹⁸ MacKeand, first letter (28 September), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

¹⁹ LAC MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, 13 September 1884

²⁰ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 19 September 1884

²¹ Sherlock, second letter (14 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 17 September 1884

²² Unidentified correspondent (15 September), *Toronto Globe*, 17 September 1884

²³ Sherlock, third letter (18 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 23 September 1884

²⁴ MacKeand, first letter (28 September), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

of the men would not accept. The Canadian officers' expectations that the domestic police should and could restrain the contingent would be a recurring pattern throughout their trip.

One correspondent noted that they "this motley crew were not under discipline, but soon would be." He imagined a "British officer who has travelled on a troop-ship must certainly laugh at the want of discipline and 'savoir faire' among the 'voyageurs,'" but thought that as they sailed down the river, they "are seeming to tumble into form."²⁵ Morrie MacKeand, a lieutenant in Kennedy's Winnipeg Rifles, wrote to tell his brother that he had been made foreman right away, in command of a gang of "Winnipeg boys" (ie. the lawyers and their friends). He said "the discipline is awfully weak" because "the engagement is only a civil one," which "does not give us half power enough over the fellows" who spend their idle time in "mischief, grumbling, etc." but he expected things would be "slightly different when we get en route."²⁶ Right from the start, there was an expectation amongst the militiamen that those opposed to "discipline" are "grumblers."

Repeatedly throughout the expedition, incidents revealed these conflicting expectations between the norms of military discipline and the freedom many of the men presumed they should have to come and go as they pleased. Labat recorded a conversation he had with "un beau gars de six pied, à la figure franche et honnête" as they were entering the Gulf, who stopped to ask about the possibility of changing his mind about Egypt. "On m'avait pourtant dit que si l'on rencontrait un bateau qu'on pourrait le prendre et revenir." Labat is amused at his "naivite" for thinking you could just get off in the middle of the ocean if you felt like it, like you get off "un char dans la rue St. Jean."²⁷ For the most part, the ocean served as a convenient cordon of discipline that kept the men contained, but it was necessary for the *Ocean King* to make stops in Sydney and in Gibraltar to recoal. In both locales, the officers and the boatmen had different expectations of how the contingent should behave.

²⁵ Unidentified correspondent (15 September), Toronto *Globe*, 17 September 1884

²⁶ MacKeand, first letter (28 September), Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

²⁷ Labat p 64

"Some funny tricks were played by voyageurs"

Neilson told readers of the *Star* that the men had already begun to speak of their return "covered in laurels." The 73 year old Alexis Decateau told him "We must march like men, for the Queen will certainly see us when we return, and we must not come before her like a flock of sheep." Neilson said "this idea of teaching our voyageurs to fall in fours and march with a certain amount of precision" would be attempted in Sydney while the ship was coaling.²⁸ If any of the men shared Decateau's enthusiasm for marching they didn't write about it. After several days at sea, especially in the rough waters beyond the Gaspé peninsula, "we were all anxious for permission to go on shore" wrote Deer, but "were disappointed on being obliged by the officers to march in gangs."²⁹

They were greeted by "the town band, and numerous flags were flying in our honour,"³⁰ but the Sydney press made no mention of them. After breakfast, said Sherlock, they "were all formed in squads under our respective foremen and drawn up in a double line along the wharf," for an inspection by the officers of a twenty-gun French man-of-war, the *Flore* that was in the harbour. The French officers "took a good look at us," said Sherlock, "and we flattered ourselves that they thought we were worth looking at."³¹ Using almost identical language as Sherlock, Denison says that "the men were drawn up in double line along the long wharf" for inspection by "the Admiral and his officers, accompanied by the officers of the contingent." He thought that the "satisfied smile which the Frenchmen wore" passing down and between the lines "was a significant compliment to both officers and men." Writing anonymously, he also mentioned that "an invitation was extended to Col. Denison and officers to visit the *Flore*, but their duties precluded the possibility."³² The importance Denison placed on teaching the men the correct vocabulary and behaviour of military discipline was matched only by his satisfaction that these efforts were recognized by a

²⁸ Neilson (Anonymous), first letter (18 September), *Montreal Star*, 18 September 1884

²⁹ Deer p. 4

³⁰ Anon, *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 October 1884

³¹ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

³² Denison writing as "CANADA," *Globe*, 14 October 1884

prestigious and significant "other": an important foreign officer. Sherlock's self-satisfaction is expressed more playfully, but both anglophones assume the officers are impressed based on their attention, their gaze and "satisfied smiles." Some men sought no approval from the officers of the *Flore*. W. H. Lowry wasn't really sure who they were, he just knew that "some head officer come along to examine us with our fulcloth uniform and our Shoe packs on."³³

Labat on the other hand, who wrote under his own name, was most quite delighted to find French speakers unexpectedly in Nova Scotia. When he related his discussion with the officers, it seems that Sherlock and Denison may have misunderstood the impressions left upon the foreigners. One officer of the *Flore* complimented Labat, saying "Vos prisonniers sont bien tranquilles." Labat laughed and corrected him: "Ce ne sont point des prisonniers; ce sont les Voyageurs Canadiens qui vont en Egypt!" With awkward apologies, the French officer excused himself, "mais en voyant le costume," which was to his eyes "gris mais confortable," he said that it resembled the uniform of convicts. Labat seemed eager to share with his readers this misrepresentation, which was not understood by the English speakers. He seemed personally unconcerned of any possible implication that if the recently refurbished *Ocean King* looked like a convict ship, this would make Denison chief warden and his officers prison guards.

After their inspection, the men were "marched four deep along the beach for a considerable distance" for a "a salt water bath" before their lunch.³⁴ Sherlock said that "all who wished to" go in the water "got leave to do so" and he thinks that over 250 did.³⁵ but Deer said that since the water was very cold, "not many availed themselves of the privilege." According to Neilson, however, "the men were delighted with their two hours run on shore," but in his anonymous letter to the *Globe* he makes no mention of the events that followed.³⁶ Everyone

³³ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

³⁴ Anon. 28 September, *Globe*, 15 October 1884

³⁵ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

³⁶ Neilson writing anonymously, *Globe*, 22 September 1884

expected to head in to town after their march on the beach, said Deer, and "in this we were again disappointed, as we were marched straight back to the ship." After lunch, they were not allowed off of the boat again; "some of the lads, however, went without leave, and of these, many returned to the ship, later, in an intoxicated condition."³⁷ From Lowry's perspective, after they "fell in 4 deep and we marched up the Bay Shore ... for a wash," some of the men "ran away down town and the rest of us came to the Steamer and ate our dinner & then tried to get down town but had foreman and officers watching all the time to keep us on board."³⁸ In a similar vein, an anonymous correspondent for the Winnipeg *Daily Sun* wrote that "a lot of the boys took to the bush and made for the town, while others went in for a swim." With his fellow swimmers, he "returned to the ship under the impression" that they would be permitted to visit Sydney after lunch, "but we were sold, for the gangway was closed and guards were put along the sides of the ship."³⁹ Sherlock said that after their swim "a dozen or more broke the ranks and made across the fields," for town, revealing here as elsewhere that he was more likely than many of the other voyageur writers to use the language of the officers in describing the same behaviours as "breaking ranks." In most of the letters from the men at this point however, we find expressions of disappointment and resentment at "being sold" or deceived by the officers. It was clear that many of the men considered this restriction of their movement to be unfair and it was not something they would easily accept.

Escaping the unjustified confinement of the officers became a challenge, and "many a stratagem was resorted to baffle the officers."⁴⁰ Lowry explained this as a fairly straightforward contest of muscle, saying that "at night the guards was not strong enough to hold us all so we got out and got down town. [sic]"⁴¹ Another voyageur, who described himself as "determined to see Sydney," explained how he changed into his civilian clothes, "and when some visitors were leaving the ship," he "passed out unrecognized." He said that several

³⁷ Deer p. 4

³⁸ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

³⁹ Anon, Ottawa *Daily Citizen*, 15 October 1884

⁴⁰ Anon. September 28, *Globe*, 15 October 1884

⁴¹ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

others did the same thing, while some "eluded the vigilance of the guards and escaped in their uniforms," while a third group made "a concerted rush" and "escaped to town by main force, not returning till late at night."⁴² Louis Jackson told his readers that he "must not omit" describing "some funny tricks" that the men "played" to escape the ship. There were several "daring fellows" who jumped from the ship's rigging "into the empty coal cars returning to the wharf" and then slipped away to town. Most of these snuck back onto the ship by climbing up a rope. When one could not manage it, his friend and he "contrived a plan" where "the one on the wharf laid quietly down" pretending to be unconscious, "while his friend climbed aboard and there informed our officers that a man had hurt him-self by falling off the coal shoot." They fooled the officers into rescuing the man, even carrying him to his cabin. While being carried, "the apparently lifeless one was seen to open his eyes three or four times," but no one noticed until he was taken to the doctor "who eagerly examined him, but soon pronounced him dead, 'dead drunk' and ordered him to be taken to his bunk, where he soon sat up laughing and feeling good, to escape so easily."⁴³ A different letter writer referred to the same incident, where "one man fell in between the ship and dock at midnight, but was pulled out none the worse for his salt water bath, as he had been too "fresh" previously."⁴⁴ The "funny trick" was so effective that it fooled not only officers, but the other men as well. This man, and many others, had gone to Sydney and had "got pretty drunk there."⁴⁵ In the eyes of the *Globe's* most colourful but anonymous writer, "Sydney will not forget this memorable day." It was "needless to state that they became intoxicated," he wrote and then went on to describe "some very amusing incidents" which were also "very embarrassing and detrimental to the dignity of our mission."

One young man entered a schoolhouse and delivered a speech to the children, and endeavoured to "mash" the teacher, and concluded by excusing himself for being drunk. He next entered the court house and addressed the magistrate and told him that he had come to wish him good-bye. A constable endeavoured to put him out. He resented this injustice and laid the constable

⁴² Anon, *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 October 1884

⁴³ Jackson pp. 5-6

⁴⁴ Anon, *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 October 1884

⁴⁵ Anon, *Ottawa Daily Citizen*, 15 October 1884

prostrate on the ground.

This reporter also spoke of one man who, while returning, "fell through the coal slide and was carried to his berth." The correspondent even made the remarkable statement that these misbehaviours "somewhat foreshadowed the conduct of some when in Egypt and foretold stringent measure to be applied to enforce discipline."⁴⁶ This projection into the future imagined an inevitable application of military discipline on these civilians.

Not all those who went to town got drunk and started fights. Sherlock asked for permission to go ashore but was denied, "very properly I suppose." This didn't stop him, however, and he "tried my Montreal game and slipped my cable" down to the wharf before walking past two villages and into Sydney. He painted a rather grim picture of a "country lined with coal." He was struck by this "poverty stricken" place and with the small wages "paid to the coal heavers considering the nature of their work." Like several others he found himself trapped in the town, as the *Ocean King* was anchored across the Bay, to which many of the men had to be ferried late that night.⁴⁷ Deer says that "many of the pleasure seekers could not get on board until morning"⁴⁸ and there were so many of them that the boat running between the wharf and the *Ocean King* attracted "quite a few of spectators during the time we was there."⁴⁹

Once everyone was on board, a quick count revealed that three men were missing. Denison sent McCrae into town, who found all three of them, but only brought one back and asked the local police to arrest Alfred Boswell and Thomas Graviston, both from Winnipeg.⁵⁰ The nature of their crime was not mentioned by Denison at the time. Based on the other reports,

⁴⁶ Anon. September 28, *Globe*, 15 October 1884. To "mash" was to make flirtatious or seductive advances, often unwelcome. The "masher" was Jos Laroque of Ottawa who Sherlock later said had "insulted a schoolteacher in Sydney" *Peterborough Review*, 29 October 1884

⁴⁷ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

⁴⁸ Deer p. 4

⁴⁹ LAC MG 29 E109 James Martin, Document 3, Copy of letter of W.H. Lowry, 22 September 1884

⁵⁰ Denison to Melgund, September 17-19, RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageur

the local police had reasons to resent the voyageurs and they may have been arrested for disrupting the peace. In the newspaper accounts of this incident, however, it was quickly assumed that the men were guilty of the military crime of "desertion" even though this language was not initially used in letters sent by Denison to Melgund. It only took a few days for the incident to make its way into the press. The *Winnipeg Sun* reported that the two men "deserted from the Ocean King at Sidney" and that "the deserters" were en route to Ottawa where they "will be prosecuted."⁵¹ Later Denison wrote in the *Globe* that the contingent was delayed in Sydney "to hunt up two deserters from the Manitoba men."⁵² The *Winnipeg Times* deluded itself that the deserters "were not of the Manitoba contingent."⁵³ Later in reports to the Prime Minister and Governor General, Melgund called them "deserters" and in all these usages there was the implication of a military rather than civilian engagement.

As noted above, many men did not feel bound. They spoke of "kicking" if Kennedy was not appointed and would ask officers about the possibility of changing their minds and going back again. Recall that in designing the engagement form, Melgund went out of his way to remove "the military element" to avoid scaring off the workers. Sydney was the first real conflict in which the presumptions of military discipline shared by some officers and the editorial voice of the press collided with the presumptions of labour norms held by many of the boatmen. For example, the *Winnipeg Sun* printed an excerpt from the *Ottawa Citizen* from five days previous on their back page under the title "GOSSIP." The writer mentioned in passing that "two of the Winnipeg men skipped out and could not be found."⁵⁴ The writer didn't respect the men, but he didn't call them criminals. Sherlock merely says that "some of the boys got loose and we had to wait till the town was searched." He does not consider them to be deserters, but he does mock them as "having no ambition, I suppose, beyond six

⁵¹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 23 September 1884. In the *Manitoba Free Press* the following day, this report was reprinted noting that "the deserters have been captured."

⁵² Denison writing as "CANADA," *Globe*, 14 October 1884

⁵³ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 30 September 1884

⁵⁴ Anon, *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 20 October 1884

months' snow, frozen pork, and periodical blizzards. Well, I wish them joy of their choice."⁵⁵ What some saw as indiscipline and resistance to authority, others considered merely laughably bad judgement. Louis Hylas Duguay was a bit harsher, "s'ils ne sont pas assez braves pour nous suivre," he said it was better for them to stay, "car nous en avons toujours trop de cette sorte de lâcheurs."⁵⁶

Denison was relieved that he could report having the same number of men, despite the two 'deserters' because he "found two more men on board" after leaving Quebec. One of them, named Condon, was "a suitable fellow" and was engaged, whereas "the other" he said he would "leave at Sydney." So by picking up Condon, who joined at Montreal without his knowledge and a man named Macdonald who he recruited at Sydney, he was able to tell Melgund "it leaves our number just as you had them."⁵⁷ This extra person, who was not a 'suitable fellow' left an impression on both James Deer and John Sherlock. Deer says that after all the confusion at Sydney, and once "the truants had all been collected," the captain of the boat had "one young lad tied to a post." He said that when "the boys" challenged the captain on this "quite indignantly," they were told "that he had never been hired, but had slipped on board" and "must be sent onshore." An indignation at presumed injustice turned to a sympathy among Deer's companions and "we raised amongst us a purse of twenty dollars for the boy, of which the captain subscribed five dollars himself."⁵⁸ Sherlock calls him a "young vag" who got on the Ottawa to Montreal train and "managed to keep clear of the officials until we arrived in the gulf." Although he was "old enough," Sherlock said, he was too small and unskilled in river work "to be of any use." He declined an offer of the captain to work on the boat as crew because his real ambition was "to see the pyramids, not of

⁵⁵ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

⁵⁶ Duguay, second letter (19 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 23 October 1884

⁵⁷ Denison to Melgund, September 17-19, RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageur. Stacey's footnote on p. 79 is incorrect in presuming that Melgund made an error by telling the Prime Minister that Denison had recruited two men at Sydney. Melgund was not incorrect, he was likely sparing Macdonald unnecessary details in his memorandum by telling him that they lost two and gained two, which is what happened. Condon is listed in the nominal roll with the Manitoba group and likely travelled with them from Winnipeg without first signing an engagement form.

⁵⁸ Deer p. 5

Cheops, but of \$40 a month." Sherlock described the unnamed youth "tied to the rail on deck and exposed to the gaze of all hands." He credited the officers McCrae, Aumond and Kennedy with going "among the men" and raising \$21.25 before the stowaway was put on a boat and sent ashore. Sherlock thought "he did well by the trip, a fine excursion from Ottawa to Sidney and money enough to take him back and to spend."⁵⁹

As the men finally left Canada, there were a few editorials sparked by the events at Sydney. The *Toronto Telegram*, considered the 'desertions' to be "discreditable... as far as Canada is concerned" but "the best thing that could happen" for the contingent itself. If there are any "weak kneed persons" then "it is a great deal better that they should turn tail while on the way to the scene of action than after they were in their boats and possibly subjected to fire." Nonetheless, the editorial writers were surprised "that there were young men in any part of the country" who were "mean enough to back out of an enterprise of this kind after once embarking in it."⁶⁰ The *Winnipeg Sun*, which was initially very critical of the whole idea of an expedition, and which had then jumped on the bandwagon once recruitment began, made comments that the events of Sydney don't "restore confidence to those who felt from the first that the undertaking was a foolhardy one." It noted that many volunteers don't "relish the restraints which are placed upon them, and scenes of disorder appear to have been of frequent occurrence." It hoped that

these scenes are necessarily incidental to the preliminary stage of such an expedition, and that when the men realize that it is work and not play that is before them they will buckle down to business. They certainly will soon find that it is no holiday picnic in which they are taking part.⁶¹

Such editorials both acknowledge the difficulty in making these men conform to military discipline, but both assume the men must conform to those standards. The men, however, acted with surprise at the imposition of regulation and tried to make a game out of such situations as they chafed at attempts to restrict their movements.

⁵⁹ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

⁶⁰ Editorial of the *Toronto Telegram*, reprinted *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 30 September 1884

⁶¹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 September 1884

Denison was also surprised at the conflict of cultures and was left a bit rattled by the men's behaviour. On the approach to Sydney, he told Melgund that he planned to "take them on a march into the country and back" but to "then allow no men on shore." Two days later, he tried he tried to explain to Melgund that "we had an awful lot of trouble with the men" who "broke away together and got up to the town," something he did not admit in the official diary of the expedition or his letter to the *Globe*. There were delays in identifying who exactly was missing and the crew and officers could not differentiate between Sydney locals and members of the expedition. Before Sydney he discovered two extra men, but this was by accident, not from any systematic roll call. Leaving Sydney he told Melgund that he intended to number the men "from one upwards," to create a more organized list.⁶² When they were finally at sea again, and he had arranged all the men on deck, he was surprised to find an additional thirteen men ("I am glad the error was on that side.")⁶³ Ever since he left Quebec City, he had no clear sense of how many men he really had on board, who they were or how to control them. He seemed truly surprised that they would ignore and even defy orders to stay away from town and whatever experience he had gained from his Toronto militia had not prepared him for such a command. If he wished to instruct the men in military norms, the Atlantic afforded him both the time and the physical constraint to keep the men in one place while they learned.

First Time at Sea

Upon leaving Sydney, Sherlock "gave a last fond look at our native land, our glorious Canada" and "only then did we realize the infinite vastness of the great ocean" whose "heaving rollers" surrounded the contingent "as far as the eye could reach."⁶⁴ The emptiness of the ocean, outside of Canada, displaced the men from regular social routines and placed them in a novel situation with no external interventions. They were isolated from everyone save the crew of the *Ocean King*. They recreated their own social activities, visited each

⁶² Denison to Melgund, 17 - 19 September 1884, RG 07 G-19 vol 29 part 2 folder 38 Transportation of Voyageur

⁶³ Denison to Melgund, 29 September 1884, RG 07 G-19 vol 36, see Stacey p. 80

⁶⁴ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

other's quarters and passed time in various ways that gave them both a limited basis for some shared experiences and the same time refined existing cultural categories. For some of them it was a pleasant trip, for some it was a transformative passage, marked dramatically by a burial at sea, while for others it was a gap to pass over on the way to the job site.

In a more immediate sense, beyond its liminal capacity to provide the time and space for group norming, the ocean itself left a strong impact on the voyageurs. The passage through the Gulf was rough and "it was here that we received our first taste of sea-sickness"⁶⁵ wrote Deer. Neilson reported that "the gallant voyageurs suffered all the tortures of a first sea voyage,"⁶⁶ which drove many of them to the edges of the ship, where they "looked wistfully over the side of the vessel."⁶⁷ It was "a most laughable, and yet pitiable, scene" explained another correspondent, to see these "brave warriors run and scamper up the stairs to gain the deck."⁶⁸ Sherlock claimed that he was well, but felt "obliged to isolate myself" for fear of getting "sympathetically" ill at the sight of so many others.⁶⁹ Like Neilson, Denison thought it comical that the rough sea "did not seem to agree with some of our fresh water sailors" and he noted that initial complaints about the food gave way to widespread loss of appetite so that soon "there was plenty of room at the tables" in the mess hall.⁷⁰ Sea sickness was not mentioned again after these initial days, and soon different aspects of the ocean became more prominent in accounts.

Games, Sports and Music

The men passed their time in private amusements, sports and games, musical concerts and other past times. Writing anonymously, Denison told readers that "the Governor General deserves the thanks of the men" for his gift of "amusements" to satisfy "all tastes" including

⁶⁵ Deer p. 4

⁶⁶ Neilson, *Toronto Globe*, 22 September 1884

⁶⁷ Neilson, *Montreal Star*, 18 September 1884

⁶⁸ Unidentified correspondent, *Globe*, 15 October 1884

⁶⁹ Sherlock, third letter, *Peterborough Daily Review*, 23 September 1884

⁷⁰ Denison writing as Canada, *Globe*, 23 September 1884

"illustrated papers, books of general useful information, novels, half dozen different card games, checkers, chess, navy chess etc."⁷¹ In particular, Duguay wanted to "reconnaitre que Son Excellence n'a pas oublié les Canadiens-français dans cette distribution" including many books and magazines in French.⁷² Most of the references to games, however, were more physical contests that usually took place up on deck. Sherlock says that "our men amused themselves" in various ways, "boxing and dancing chiefly." He makes another reference to "fun" they had watching an attempt at military marching. One "wild Irishman, who has seen service somewhere" organized "a squad of greenies" for a marching drill. He had a "wooden sword" and with his "comical sayings, and the clumsy awkwardness of his awkward squad," he kept everyone "in an uproar of laughter for an hour or so."⁷³ Duguay, writing the same day, spoke of boxing ("Ils ont des gros gants") and he figures that some of these men "figurer avec les meilleurs champions de cet art."

The men appeared most engaged, however, with what Denison called "Shanty games."⁷⁴ Sherlock advised his readers if they are "inclined through curiosity or recklessness" to try "a game called 'shove the slipper'," it would be best to wear "a copper-plated pair of breeches."⁷⁵ Deer said that "we amused ourselves with sports of different kinds" and "the most popular" one was "the Tug of War." He wrote with pride that "our Indian team, led by our foreman Jackson, came off victorious, beating the Manitoba, Ottawa, Peterborough and Three Rivers teams each three times in succession."⁷⁶ The Manitoba team came in second, according to Kennedy⁷⁷ but the same claim of a near victory was made by the correspondent for the

⁷¹ Denison writing as "CANADA," *Globe*, 14 October 1884. The *Winnipeg Daily Sun* noted on 17 September 1884 that "The Governor General sent on board the Ocean King before her departure a large case filled with the latest French and English newspapers, games of dominoes, chess, draughts etc., to entertain the Canadian contingent on the voyage."

⁷² Duguay, second letter (23 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 27 October 1884

⁷³ Sherlock,

⁷⁴ Denison, October 4, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885 (Frederick C. Denison), Toronto Reference Library (Stacey p. 97)

⁷⁵ Sherlock, fifth letter, *Peterborough Daily Review*, 29 October 1884

⁷⁶ Deer p. 6

⁷⁷ Kennedy, letter to his son Charley, *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

Ottawa men.⁷⁸ Duguay seems to have had no word for this new game "douze hommes qui tireraient leur concurrents avec un cable" but it seems that "les Trifluviens ont gagné le second prix."⁷⁹ Denison said that while the "Caughnawaga Indian team won, the others said [it was] because some of them had rubber shoes on."⁸⁰ The mutually agreed upon rules of any game-play is based on codes of fair play which at times are only revealed in their violation. Manly sports provided a low-stakes forum for inter-group competition and bragging rights, especially where teams based on regions were involved. Duguay said that the Caughnawaga team was wearing "des claques" but "peu importe, c'est pour le *fun*." Nonetheless, he thought that next time they should all try it "sans chaussures."

Music and Harmony

Music was not as obviously competitive as sports. Writing for the *Globe*, Denison said that their evenings often included "a jolly chat over a friendly pipe or an impromptu concert." The group included "a number of excellent vocalists" of "no mean talent."⁸¹ Sherlock and Kennedy also wrote about the high quality of singing. Deer noted the number of good "fiddlers" and there had been earlier mentions of banjoes and horns brought on board. Kennedy brought his flute and he played together one evening with the *Ocean King's* captain, who was a violinist.⁸² At the very first concert, shortly after they had left Quebec City, "Col. Denison was called upon to sing, but being no singer, he excused himself" and instead gave "a few words of advice in a well-chosen and appropriate speech."⁸³ The after supper concerts also included recitations by Labat and others, and skits. Duguay describes one concert "digne du 'Museum' de Montreal" that included acting, gymnastics and acrobatics.⁸⁴ Kennedy wrote home to say that "Manitoba fellows are getting up that farce with the Charleston Bleus they

⁷⁸ The Citizen correspondent, first letter, *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 October 1884

⁷⁹ Duguay, second letter (24 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 27 October 1884

⁸⁰ Denison, September 26, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885 (Frederick C. Denison), Toronto Reference Library (Stacey p. 95)

⁸¹ Denison writing as "CANADA," *Globe*, 14 October 1884

⁸² Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

⁸³ Anon. September 28, *Globe*, 15 October 1884

⁸⁴ Duguay, second letter (22 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 27 October 1884

gave in Winnipeg once," and Sherlock described how one fellow, "Dublin, as we call our crazy Irishman," had "rigged up an elephant and a camel" whose "likeness was good as well as laughable."⁸⁵ They regularly closed with God Save the Queen.⁸⁶

In commenting on the concerts, the two most common types of remarks were compliments about the quality of performers on board and the diversity of languages and songs. Denison noted in the official diary that "some Indians sang a very good song"; a few days later he said there were "songs in English, French, Indian, Gallic and Italian."⁸⁷ Kennedy said that the "French members of the party sing very well, and they have plenty of it to do."⁸⁸ Writing for the *Globe*, Denison described "the rollicking Irishman, the sturdy Briton, and the jolly Canuck" who sang "anything from a 'come all ye' to the 'anvil chorus.'"⁸⁹ Singing songs was an important part of life both for workers on the rivers and the middle classes in their salons, but for everyone involved, this was a truly novel experience to blend different types of music and languages. This novel blend of familiar songs in an unfamiliar setting left Sherlock deliriously dislocated:

... a scene lighted by ship lanterns, a hundred or more men lying on deck, perched on the rail or hanging in the ratlines eagerly listening to the sweet songs we all love so well. The steady throb of the engines, the sigh of the wind and the swish of the waves blending with the sweet notes of "Home Sweet Home" make the scene appear to me more like a weird dream than a reality.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Sherlock, fifth letter, (October 8), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 29 October 1884. In his October 6 entry of the official diary, Denison wrote "After tea the men came aft with an elephant and a camel and produced a good deal of amusement. After that they had some songs."

⁸⁶ Lowry: "then at night had a concert on board consisting of songs and music and a speech from C. Denson [sic] and then all sung God Save Queen then went to bed." Sherlock also describes that there concerts closed with "God save our noble Queen" in his fourth letter.

⁸⁷ Denison, September 17 and 22, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885 (Frederick C. Denison), Toronto Reference Library (Stacey p. 93 and 94)

⁸⁸ Kennedy, letters to family, Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

⁸⁹ Denison writing as "CANADA," *Globe*, 14 October 1884. 'Come-all-ye' are traditional multi-verse ballads. They begin with a formulaic "come all ye..." asking the listener to acknowledge their plea and hear their tale. The Anvil Chorus is the English name for "Gypsy Chorus" (*Coro di zingari*) from Act 2, Scene 1 of Verdi's *Il trovatore*.

⁹⁰ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

Like sports and games, music was a pastime on the boat that provided a low-stakes arena to win recognition for prowess and also just "pour *le fun*." Musical performance worked differently than checkers or boxing. Through music, individuals and groups impressed each other with their personal skills and their culturally admired styles of performance. We have no evidence of any competition, bravado, humiliation, violence or jealousy. In mid-Atlantic, dislocated from work and culture, all seemed quite enamoured of their "weird dream" they experienced in the social life of their concerts.

Such harmony struck some writers as surprising, given the reputations of shantymen. Duguay was not of the same class as many of the men and he was surprised to see such peace and understanding "parmi des gens qui on la réputation d'être amateurs des sacres, des jurons et de bataille." He admitted being surprised at their "coeurs généreux et des esprits dociles" as well as their obedience to orders of their superiors. He understood why Wolseley wanted such men "qui montraient autant de dévouement et de respect pour l'autorité."⁹¹ Later in their voyage Labat described the "vie de bateau" as "biscuits, lard, patates, amusements, lazzis [mocking jokes] et conférence." He thought his reader might find it surprising "de voir la Méditerranée être témoin de conférences Françaises et Anglaises?"⁹² Labat's readers would think of the ongoing imperial tensions between France and Britain, especially over the recent "Egyptian conference" held by the Khedive's European creditors. The Parisian papers vehemently denounced Wolseley's Nile expedition as a blatant British attempt at imperial expansion in the middle east. Knowing that French-language papers in Canada regularly reprinted articles from France, Labat wanted to tell his readers that while the English and French couldn't make their conferences work, English and French Canadian lived in harmony at sea. "The Indians," said Kennedy in one of his brief, compact letters "are great favorites with all the voyageurs,"⁹³ which was apparently something worth noting. Once again, we turn to Sherlock to expand in more romantic terms what others mention in passing, when he says

⁹¹ Duguay, second letter (23 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 27 October 1884

⁹² Labat, *La Presse*, 30 Octobre 1884

⁹³ Kennedy, letters to family, Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

that a "thoughtful man" would "learn a thing or two" observing the men on board.

They would see nearly 400 men of all nations, creeds, and I might add colours, use each other like brothers, lending their books, smoking the friendly pipe, chatting in little groups, talking in chastened tones of days gone by, and cheerful tones of days to come, tending those who are sick with all the tenderness of a woman, all peaceable and quiet and sociable, no quarrelling, and every one not only ready to oblige, but willing and happy to help - in fact I may dub them, egotistical as it may seem, Nature's Gentlemen.⁹⁴

There are none who state it quite as boldly as this, but his claim that everyone got on very well and that there was no fighting, is supported by all the other accounts of the Atlantic crossing. Expectations of fighting and conflict in such a potentially dangerous group proved unwarranted. To the pleasant surprise of writers like Duguay, Labat, Kennedy and Sherlock the men seemed obedient, peaceable and sociable.

Gang Identity

Such comments about the group getting on well together, with all sorts of classes, languages and colours living together harmoniously, also highlighted the importance of those categories in the men's speech. It was very clear that there were pre-existing "gang identities" that were often reinforced by the daily routines of ship life. The gangs bunked together, they ate in shifts together, books and checkerboards were distributed by gang foremen, and as noted above, the tug-of-war explicitly pitted gangs against one another.

Sherlock told his readers that the entire Peterborough contingent bunked and messed together and they were known as "Anderson's gang." W.H. Anderson of Harvey is a "tip top fellow" who "uses his command wisely and looks after our interests well."⁹⁵ Because they messed together, Sherlock said, "the boys are all very good to each other" when it comes to sharing food, and "you can hardly believe at home with what unbiased affection you cling to a man who will share with you a nice dish of fried potatoes, a mutton chop or a pudding." He writes

⁹⁴ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

⁹⁵ Sherlock, third letter (September 18), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 23 September 1884

"I take pride in being able to say" that Anderson's gang has a reputation as "the most orderly men" on board.⁹⁶

Duguay explained how, early in the trip, the Trois-Rivières gang "organiser notre quartier français," with rows between the bunks named after the men, "de rues Chaurette, Nadeau et Duguay" et "nous avons baptisé notre compartiment 'Quartier Remington' du nom de notre *foreman*." Its "inauguration" was presided over by Bouchard who came to play dominoes with them, as other men from their gang would play cards, sing, or "dansent au son d'un violon que nous avons acheté aux Trois-Rivières." As they were leaving Cape Breton, he predicted that the "quartier Remington sera notre cercle français." When the sea permitted, "tous les Canadiens-français d'Ottawa et de Manitoba viendront se joindre aux Trifluviens pour assister à la messe" and evening prayers.⁹⁷ So for Duguay, there was an expectation that language formed the basis of his "quartier" which served as a hub for other francophones from the rest of the contingent, over-riding regional boundaries. Within a few days, however, he was talking about visits from Denison and the anglophones from Manitoba and Ottawa, so the "quartier" was fluid and had many visitors.

To give another example, the Manitoba group also had three distinct gangs, including William Prince's gang from St. Peter's reserve and MacKeand's gang, in which served all of the "lawyer voyageurs" and bank clerks. As a group, the Manitobans travelled for days together by train and boat from Winnipeg to Montreal, where they spent a couple of more days together before the rest of the contingent was ready. They also had the advantage of a popular champion in the form of Colonel Kennedy. In the same way that Sherlock praised Anderson for looking after their interests, Kennedy was an advocate for all the Manitoba men who, according to one reporter, "owe much to the Colonel for the many comforts they have enjoyed since they left Winnipeg, and accordingly feel grateful that he has received an

⁹⁶ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

⁹⁷ Duguay, second letter (19 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 23 October 1884

appointment worthy of himself."⁹⁸ This Manitoban "identity" was complex and rapidly evolving. Most of the non-aboriginal men in the Manitoban contingent were in fact born in Ontario, with some from other parts of Canada and several from England and Europe. Shaw, who was born and raised north of Ottawa on the Bonnechere river recalls his first meeting with two men who would later be life-long friends, a Métis Alick Kennedy and a German immigrant named Schneider. He first met them on the train as the contingent travelled on the north shore of Lake Superior and he came across them "seated together talking in Cree," which Schneider had learned to communicate with his wife and her relations. Speaking of the journey ahead of them, he perched "on the arm of their seat" and shared "what little I remembered Herodotus, Land and Baedeker had told of Egypt, the mysterious land of the pharaohs we were bound for."⁹⁹ This unlikely scene of these three different men was not only an example of the changing face of Manitoba in the 1880s, but it was an example, especially as the story is written as a remembrance from the perspective of the early 20th century, of how the bonds of friendship were shaped by the boundaries of gangs. The regionally based gang structures of the expedition favoured ties and bonds of mutual recognition and identity based on region, even across the expected boundaries of language, ethnicity and class, who travelled, ate and eventually worked together. As the men crossed the ocean, these regional identities began to gel. In the case of the Manitoban group, this process had begun with scenes like the one above which we must imagine happened in the bunk quarters in a similar manner that they happened in this train car.

Food

While the men got along well enough with each other, there was a recurring conflict which may even have overshadowed the tensions around discipline and freedom of movement on shore. Many of the men expressed considerable anger over the way they were fed. Their stories of events related to food expose the differences in assumptions and expectations about food between Canadian working class culture and British military culture and they reveal

⁹⁸ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 24 September 1884

⁹⁹ Charles Lewis Shaw, "The Story of Schneider," Edmonton *Saturday News*, 13 October 1906

how the men interpreted these situations as injustices and responded accordingly.

In William Cram's first letter published in the Renfrew *Mercury*, he described the departure from Ottawa and the trip to Quebec, where "our voyage began in earnest, as well as our hardships." Over 50% of his first letter focussed on food, which was his only real hardship. The *Mercury* titled his letter "THE BOYS NOT SATISFIED WITH THE PROVISIONS ON BOARD THE SHIP." He explained to his reader that they had all been deceived. The men who signed up "had understood" that the way they would be fed "was to be as near as possible to what we would have in the shanty. But such was not to be." From the very first meal "we had to go without bread; and it was the same thing until we struck, when the Captain allowed us bread three times per week." He does not explain how they "struck" but they were clearly aggrieved and they won concessions from the Captain of the *Ocean King*. He gives a detailed list of "our bill of fare":

Pork and potatoes for breakfast, with hard tack; potatoes and pork, and cabbage water that the pork has been boiled in, for dinner, with hard tack; and the same nourishing food for supper. We have pea soup for dinner sometimes; but it is generally burnt; and our tea now is like the steepings of a burnt sugar barrel...we have three apples three times per week, and - would you believe it? - half a gill of rye whiskey every day; but there are not many that take it now. If they would keep their liquor and give us bread once per day, it would do us more good.

Complaints about the hard tack were widespread amongst those unaccustomed to these dried biscuits used by the British navy. When this author said "we were looking forward" to visiting Sydney, it was not to get drunk, but "to get filled up; but - death to such hopes!" He said that "yesterday, the 26th, we had a grand strike for bread" again, but they "got none: all that came of it was more attention to the cooking of our other food." He hinted at possible corruption as a possible explanation, saying he "hears" that the British government provided 90¢ per day per person and "if so, some one is making a haul, for I am sure it does not cost more than 15¢ per day per man for the prog we are getting." His dissatisfaction over the food was so high that he speculated that "knowing what we do now," he doubted that the British government would be able to hire "more than 25, if that many, out of the whole number

here."¹⁰⁰ When it printed this letter, the Renfrew *Mercury* supported Cram saying that this would help Canadians understand the Sydney desertions. Since other newspapers were printing similar letters and noting that he didn't mention sea-sickness, this is "a pretty good proof that he does not grumble at trifles habitually." Instead, it thought that to "lead them to believe" they'd get shanty provisions and then serve them an "unaplatable tea was a piece of folly" which only made "the majority of the men discontented from the start."¹⁰¹

On September 26th, the second reported strike, Sherlock said that dinner "was a failure" with "nothing but hard tack and burnt pea-soup and rancid pork." This resulted in "such a howl among the men that the cooks were marched up to the Captain's cabin, and I guess they got a dressing, and the negligence is not likely to be repeated."¹⁰² A *Globe* correspondent said that although the provisions supplied were good, they were "prepared in a discreditable manner," calling forth "the reprobation of every one on board." Because the cooks were "men whose habits are filthy, and who have no regard for cleanliness in the least," he said that good food "has been literally spoiled." Sometimes they "have been seen to drag the meat through tobacco juice, dirt, and filth of every description." They would "slaughter sheep and immediately to put their blood-stained hands and arms into the tea and sugar." They served rice and porridge that were "burned and unfit to eat." Rather than describe a couple of strikes, this author said that "complaints were daily made to the captain," but he felt that "the Captain is to be blamed" most of all "for there are no proper cooking arrangements on board, and he ought not to have employed men who do not understand the business. The men," he concluded, "are greatly dissatisfied."¹⁰³ When this article was reprinted in the Winnipeg *Daily Sun* it ran under the headline "EATING FILTH, Sickening Food for Manitoban Stomachs."¹⁰⁴ The cooks were portrayed in an unflattering light by Denison who, writing anonymously,

¹⁰⁰ "Voyageur of the Nile Expedition" (Cram), September 29 (from Gibraltar), Renfrew *Mercury*, 17 October 1884. Note: Prog - food or provisions for a journey, OED prog n2, 2a

¹⁰¹ Editorial, Renfrew *Mercury*, 17 October 1884

¹⁰² Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

¹⁰³ *Globe* correspondent (unidentified). September 28, "Escapades at Sydney," *Globe*, 15 October 1884

¹⁰⁴ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 15 October 1884. The *Sun* did not credit the *Globe* and passed the story off as written by one of their correspondents, even including the subtitle focussing on Manitoba stomachs.

mocked their accents and their frustration with the Canadians. The cook "swears in the latest and most approved style about the blo-o-o-min' Canadians because he can't fill their stomachs," and would like to "make their bloomin' 'eads reel and see 'em all jolly sick."¹⁰⁵ Duguay said that the captain tried to make up for the burnt rice with an extra rum ration and described the cook's complaint that "le Canadien est grand mangeur" so he wouldn't have "un bon temp avec nous."¹⁰⁶ The *Citizen* correspondent said that the men were complaining that their rations were too small which "annoyed the cooks, who, thinking the men would be sea-sick," told them they would soon not need much food. When they "found the contrary, they now say the devil could not get these bloody Canadians sick."¹⁰⁷ The picture painted by all commentators reinforced the themes of inadequate food, burnt food, unsanitary food and high tensions between the Canadians and the cook.

Denison and the officers were generally unsympathetic with the pleas of their men. The seeds of dissatisfaction were evident as soon as they left Montreal and Melgund agreed to put more meat, apples, bean and vegetables on board. Two letters were sent to the press to preemptively disarm potential criticisms from the men. Neilson said that Melgund responded to the men's complaints "with regard to the insufficiency of the meat rations" by doubling the daily allowance to "2lbs. of meat, salt or fresh, and 2lbs. of vegetables" which seemed "extremely liberal and more than the average man can consume."¹⁰⁸ Denison anonymously gave all credit for solving this problem to himself, admitting that there was "a little dissatisfaction with regard to the food which was being served on board ship" at first. When the matter was "laid before the Colonel," however, "the cause of complaint was immediately remedied and everything is now working well."¹⁰⁹ But of course, the Renfrew correspondent said that this was where their troubles truly began and as complaints escalated, the officers repeatedly referred to the men as "grumblers." Writing to his family, Kennedy said that "the

¹⁰⁵ "CANADA" (Denison), *Globe*, 14 October 1884

¹⁰⁶ Duguay, second letter (22 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 27 October 1884

¹⁰⁷ The *Citizen* correspondent, first letter, *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 October 1884

¹⁰⁸ Anonymous (Neilson), *Montreal Star*, 18 September 1884

¹⁰⁹ "CANADA" (Denison), *Globe*, 23 September 1884

boys" were generally "pleased and satisfied" except that "some of them grumble a little about the grub."¹¹⁰ Denison wrote in the diary that "some of the men grumbled because the pea soup was burnt" but he said "the cabin had the same soup" and it wasn't so bad. On a different occasion he again reported "a little grumbling," about soup and meat, and this time he admitted the soup "was a little burnt." The grumbling was mostly "some of the Manitoba men" and "the majority aboard thought it all right."¹¹¹ Denison, Neilson and Kennedy thought the men were grumblers and dismissed their complaints as neither serious nor legitimate.

This was also the perspective found in an interesting letter from Frank Ritchie, who wrote to a friend in Winnipeg to say that everything has been going well, with "nothing to complain of" but noted that "several are grumbling, but without cause." He believed that "several persons are going to write to the papers that the rations given us are inferior," when in fact the daily meals "are sufficient to satisfy any person and much better than is usually furnished on such expeditions." To prove his point he then listed what they ate each day. He provided practically the same list provided by Cram (ie. Tea, meat, potatoes, hard tack, apples every other day etc.) to show that "we are not so badly treated as some chronic grumblers would try to make out."¹¹² To Cram, such a menu was outrageous compared to shanty fare, which was what they had been promised. To Ritchie and to the officers, this fare was better than expected for a military expedition.

This was not merely a material question of sufficient nutrients for the day. Perhaps one could imagine that large meals make sense when one is doing physical labour all day, but these men are merely sitting on a boat for three weeks and that therefore they should require less food. The fact that this was not the case served to demonstrate the persistence of expectations, despite changed material conditions. To these men, the inadequate quantity and poor quality evoked strong emotions of insult and affront. With the expectation of proper

¹¹⁰ Kennedy, letters to family, Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

¹¹¹ September 26 and 29, Stacey p. 95

¹¹² Frank Ritchie to Joseph Hursell, Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 20 October 1884

shanty fare, they understood these meals from these cooks as deception and disrespect. So strong was this feeling, that we are told that a majority would probably not have signed up. Faced with this situation, the boatmen did not shrug and adapt their expectations to conform to those of a military expedition. Neither does it seem that they engaged in what James Scott has called the "weapons of the weak," engaging in foot-dragging, sabotage, reputation destruction, petty theft etc.¹¹³ They reacted strongly and directly, by verbally harassing the cook, who in turn responded with outrage and anger. They complained to each other, building a solidarity out of their shared sense of insult. They complained to their officers, who missed an opportunity to be their champions by dismissing them as grumblers. Finally, they put together a "strike" and went to the Captain.

To strike in this situation was most unusual, given that they did not have the power to withhold their labour. They had no work to do, they were technically passengers, and yet they said they "had a strike." This would seem to affirm Honneth's reading of E. P. Thompson, that at the heart of a labour conflict lies a moral conflict. These men can bring on no economic damage by holding up production. Perhaps they understand the word "strike" to mean a confrontational protest which is required when dignity is at stake, which is again, how Honneth describes labour conflicts. They assembled a group of dissatisfied co-workers and they marched to the Captain to protest, saying that the conditions were intolerable. They demanded better treatment, which is to say they demanded a recognition of their rights, of what they culturally have internalized as their fair due. They did not get exactly what they wanted, but both Cram and Sherlock indicated that they did win some partial concessions, which was a moral victory of the sort that is usually adequate to save face in such confrontations. Their cultural transference of the language and form of a strike to this unusual situation, reveals the moral core of their traditional understanding of "strike." It also provided further evidence that these men were not going to easily adapt to the norms and expected behaviours of military culture. They were here as workers and such poor working

¹¹³ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Yale University Press, 1985

conditions were deal-breakers for men like Cram, who refused to passively accept such dietary norms and who was certainly not going to eat filth as part of a necessary sacrifice in service to Queen and country.

Authority of the Officers

The conflict over food also raised questions about the nature of the developing relationship between the officers and the men. The men's complaints were not directly addressed by Denison and his officers, either as a defense or reprimand. They were merely dismissed as grumblers and left to approach the Captain of the vessel. How exactly did Denison and the other officers understand their roles, duties and responsibilities vis a vis the men? They were products of their culture and history, but had choices over how to play their roles. An examination of Denison shows us how he understood the duties, powers and suitable behaviours associated with his role as commander and we can also identify through his speech and actions how he navigated what he understood his options to be. Both Kennedy and Bouchard are described by several sources as "popular" amongst the men. Since no one says this about Denison (or McRae or Aumond), we can also compare and contrast how the choices made by the officers match or misalign with group expectations of a good officer.

Denison found himself placed in a very unusual situation. He was a Colonel who would report to the British military and he was the commander of a contingent. But the men he was commanding were not trained as soldiers and they were not subject to normal military discipline. As we have seen, Melgund did not expect that the commander of the expedition could control the men directly so he designed the contingent's command structure so the officer in charge would indirectly influence the men through civilian foremen. Denison was offered a position as an indirectly-commanding commander. He commanded the contingent using the foremen as go-betweens. If the men wanted more supplies - ranging from checker boards, to cards to tobacco and Bibles - they would ask the foreman who would get these

from Denison.¹¹⁴ But beyond such quartermasterly duties, Denison delegated from his officers to his foremen the authority to enforce his orders. At Sydney, his method for controlling the men was to "forbid them to go to the town" and to place foremen on guard at night. When smoking was banned between decks, foremen were told to take down names of violators who "shall be fined." Denison "had the foremen all up and spoke to them" about enforcing room cleaning. They were told that they "must personally demand rations for their men" and should "have control of men belonging to their respective gangs" and "be held responsible that good order is maintained."¹¹⁵ As we shall see, his dependence on the foremen to enforce his command did not result in obedience and compliance. While it would have been appropriate for a militia commander to give such orders to junior officers to implement amongst militamen, the foremen were not accustomed to policing the rules created by a stranger. They knew their men well and would likely continue to work with them for years to come. Denison was an outsider and he would soon go back to Toronto. Some men said that they pushed past the foremen to make their way into Sydney. We don't know whether or not the foremen pushed back, but in several situations it would be evident that Denison could not count on them to restrain their men as he wished them to do.

The use of foremen as a buffer between the officers and the men did little to narrow the cultural difference between them. Neilson told the *Star* that during the first couple of days, "the officers visited the men in their quarters, becoming personally acquainted with the foremen and as much as possible with the men."¹¹⁶ From all indications "possible" was indeed very little, and the officers' reliance on the foremen probably only exaggerated the interpersonal distance between them. O'Brien found that working-class men felt motivated to participate in a middle-class led militia because the organization created a paternalistic

¹¹⁴ Sherlock, third letter (September 18), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 23 September 1884

¹¹⁵ In chronological sequence, these commands are recorded by Denison September 18 (diary), September 19 (order book), September 22 (diary) and September 24 (order book). L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885 (Frederick C. Denison), Toronto Reference Library

¹¹⁶ Anonymous (Neilson), *Montreal Star*, 18 September 1884

solidarity often led by a "charismatic and enthusiastic commanding officer."¹¹⁷ Kennedy, who is regularly described as quite "popular" with the men, was such an officer in Winnipeg and maintained his popularity on the expedition. It is worth noting that he actively participated in concerts and is mentioned by several of the men for playing his flute whereas Denison resisted calls from the men to sing a song and instead delivered a speech that won polite applause. He did visit the Trois-Rivières men one time to hear them sing Labat's Nile Voyageur version of "En Roulant Ma Boule" and was described by Duguay as "tres enthousiasmé," asking the men to teach everyone so they could all sing the refrain while marching in the streets of Gibraltar.¹¹⁸ But for the most part, he was not adept at making himself popular amongst men who, according to Caron, would be most likely obey those in whom they placed their confidence. Delegating his practical authority to the foremen during this initial portion of the voyage, as necessary as that might have been in Denison's eyes, had the additional effect of further accentuating Denison's aloof and distant personality.

Shaw mocked these dynamics by beginning his reminiscences with a grandiose introduction to the expedition, saying it was made up of the most "reckless and devil-may-care Canadians as the Ottawa and Red River Valleys' produce." He then casually noted that "Col. F. C. Denison and I went along" as well. He informed the reader that he always called him "Fred," but this was something that the Colonel didn't really know because "whenever we were together he always did the talking." Shaw explained that there was no "undue familiarity between us. He always respectfully referred to me as No. 113." Whenever "Fred" addressed him, he stood "shoulders square to the front, heels at an angle of forty-five degrees, chin slightly drawn in, arms hanging straight by the sides, thumbs along the seams of the trowsers, and listened in dignified silence." He chose this stance because "we are proud, we Lewises" and he found that "things ran smoother" and [I] "preserved my dignity" by adopting this "haughty manner."¹¹⁹ As different as all the voyageurs were from one another, they were

¹¹⁷ O'Brien, Mike. "Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (Fall 1998), 115-41

¹¹⁸ Duguay, second letter (23 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 27 October 1884

¹¹⁹ Charles Lewis Shaw, *Toronto Saturday Night*, 23 December 1894, p25

for the most part civilians. The officers could not draw on the cultural capital of men who accepted the norms of military culture. Shaw built his comedy on a character who mentally levelled the playing field with Denison, who recognized Shaw only as a number, by self-consciously interpreting a deferential military stance as a form of haughtiness and disdain with which he preserved his pride and dignity.

Denison clearly could not count on existing respect for his authority, but he did make some limited attempts to train the men. One of the earliest duties he assigned the foremen was to muster the men "every day for issue of grog." Each foreman was to do a gang roll call and check off each man as he received his whiskey. This was described briefly in the diary and by Sherlock but in the *Globe*, Denison gave a satisfied description of the effectiveness of his grog training method. Each day at 2:00pm "the fife and drum parade takes place." While initially "the boys did not know the meaning," their "readiness to attend" showed that they "evidently understand, for every man who puts in an appearance is careful to provide himself with his tin mug. 'All hands on deck for grog.'"¹²⁰ The muster for rum was Denison's major initiative that aimed to habituate the men to a basic form of military discipline.

Christian culture

In one sense, Arthur Bouchard was considered one of the officers. He was given the equivalent rank and pay of a captain with private quarters and cabin privileges. Wolseley presumed the voyageurs would be Catholic and that they would require a priest for their spiritual care. If Lansdowne was skeptical of this need, Neilson persuaded him that Bouchard could also serve as translator and cultural guide, since he knew Egypt, the Sudan and the languages spoken there. Within these parameters however, Bouchard had much freedom to decide how he played his role as chaplain. Indeed in his first letter to his friend Monsigneur Têtu, Bouchard expressed his satisfaction at being able to freely operate as a priest amongst the men. He got on well with the officers, he said, "qui se montrent d'une politesse exquise

¹²⁰ "CANADA" (Denison), *Globe*, 14 October 1884

et me laissent la plus grande liberté." He described how he wore his cassock, he preached whenever and wherever he liked, took confession, "enfin je suis comme un curé dans une paroisse; et si le bateau qui me port s'appelle le "roi de l'ocean," je suis presque roi à son bord."¹²¹ There was a tone of pleasant surprise to find his military chaplain role legitimized his leadership in what amounted to a parallel authority structure for spiritual matters. As a "king," he ruled without interference, challenge or middlemen.

The manner in which he chose to exercise this authority left him too busy to feel "l'ombre de l'ennui." His busyness was largely due to his efforts "à faire connaissance avec mes paroissiens nouveaux," spending a good portion of the many hours available to him mingling with the men and getting to know them, which he considered a key part of his job. In his letters he always spoke positively about the men, saying he was encouraged by "les excellentes dispositions de ceux que l'on a confiés à mes soins." He said that "ces braves m'ont données" great "consolation" during the voyage. These "bons enfants du Canada sont les mêmes partout," having "un grand respect et une grande confiance dans la prêtre catholique," he said humbly, "même quand il s'appelle le Père Bouchard." He wrote in the register of a missionary priest who expected that his letters would be published, but nonetheless, his particular form of self-deprecation was more of a reflection of playful humility than a ritualized piety. He took no personal credit for his oft-cited popularity, attributing it solely to a cultural respect that Canadians had for the role of priests.

Bouchard could have performed his role in an aloof and haughty manner, spending time in his quarters and performing minimal duties. Instead, he expressed regret when the sea was too rough to perform mass. He told Têtu how happy he was with the advent of good weather for the later part of their journey which permitted him to celebrate mass every day and allowed him to give communion to all Catholics before arriving in Alexandria. The numbers who would attend mass at any given time were not large, even though the voyageurs were

¹²¹ Bouchard, Première lettre

"la plupart catholique"¹²² in his estimation. One morning there were 53 men in attendance, as though this were the largest turnout. It may be that the percentage who participated were consistently low, but if he says above that he gave communion to nearly all of "his canoeists," one imagines that his regular and frequent masses were in small groups, perhaps separated by gang and language.

Religious affiliation was a major identity marker in 19th century Canada and on Sunday mornings, most of the men on board separated into Catholic and Protestant groups. Bouchard led a larger outdoor mass in the bow of the ship each Sunday, weather permitting, where he was joined by Neilson, Labat and MacRae. A simultaneous Protestant service was held in the stern, led either by the ship's captain or Denison, who was joined by Kennedy.¹²³ Duguay reported that good weather allowed everyone to look forward to Sunday services, whether they would clean themselves up "pour assister soit à la messe soit au *meeting*."¹²⁴ Although this arrangement physically divided the men, the sections were internally made up of a cross section of language, "race" and region. Amongst the Indians, for example, the St. Peter's group were all Anglican and the Caughnawaga were Catholic. In this sense, the Sunday services were probably did more to mix the men across their existing identities than to reinforce them, because the two simple categories of Catholic and Protestant did not line up with categories of Indian/Canadian, language, class or region. By contrast, the formation of a Freemason "Ocean King Lodge, No. 1884" represented a very narrowly defined social grouping whose members were middle and upper-class anglophones.¹²⁵ It must be noted that

¹²² Bouchard, Première lettre

¹²³ Lowry says "C. Denison held Protestant meeting in aft end and priest in the bow end" and Sherlock also refers to it as Protestant. Neilson describes Denison's service as "Anglican" (September 28) Neilson diary, September 28.

¹²⁴ Duguay, second letter (28 September), *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 27 October 1884

¹²⁵ Three separate correspondents write about the formation of a Freemason Lodge, given that "we have quite a few of the craft with us." MacKeand said it was "rather nice to find as many aboard representing some five or six Grand Registers," meaning those Grand Lodges that mutually recognized each other. Col. Kennedy was elected Worshipful Master, J. Craig was elected Senior Warden and the first mate of the *Ocean King*, Mr. Gould was elected Junior Warden. MacKeand thinks the SW was Capt. MacRae, from London, but the Citizen correspondent thinks it was J. Craig, who is from his city. MacRae was Catholic. Denison give the dates of three meetings. This short-lived lodge with a comical name (substituting the town

there were never any expressions of interdenominational conflict or tension noted in any of the public or private letters and diaries. In this sense, the weekly rhythm of parallel Catholic and Protestant services was just a normal part of Canadian life transported to a boat and would not have been understood as a division.

And yet, that boat was headed to Muslim Africa. When religion is mentioned, it is more frequently connected with some sort of "western" identity vis à vis the "East" and not a Catholic vs Protestant identity. Denison personally connected being Protestant with being British. Rather than reporting on the particular hymns or readings from his Sunday service, he notes that they "finished up as usual with 'God Save the Queen'". The service provided him an opportunity to "inoculate [sic] them with a good loyal spirit and they certainly take to it very kindly and are all good subjects of Her Gracious Majesty."¹²⁶ For Labat and Bouchard, religion lay at the heart of a civilizing mission that they each in their own way connected to the current expedition. In a humorous vein, Labat wrote some alternative lyrics to the song "En roulant ma boule" which began proclaiming "Le Canadien est bon enfant," and then built a stanza around each of the qualities of the Canadian. He said "le candien est grand mangeur," who could eat the gunner, "Mais il préfère la poule." Other stanzas bragged that "le Candien" is "travailleur," "fier-a-bras," and "fort galant." The second verse however says "Sur l'Océan, le canadien, en roulant ma boule. Le canadien qui est chrétien, s'en va convertir l'Egyptien." This was the first time that anyone on the expedition suggested converting Egyptians to Christianity. Like the rest of the song, and much of Labat's writing, this stanza was a playful joke, written under the pen name "Croquillard."¹²⁷ His joke that

+ administrative register with no-place + point in time) reproduced the familiar patterns of a social club, much like the Canadian militia at the time. See letters from Ottawa Citizen correspondent, 15 October 1884; letter from Morrie MacKeand, Winnipeg Sun, 16 October 1884; Denison's second letter as "Canada," *Globe*, 14 October 1884. For the whole of September 1884, the *Journal de Trois Rivière* seemed pre-occupied with the moral threat of Freemasonry in Quebec, talking of the clergy's "guerre ouverte à la secte" in a region "presqu'exclusivement français et catholique." *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 1 Septembre 1884

¹²⁶ I am presuming that he meant to say "inculcate." Denison, October 5,

¹²⁷ He has combined the word crocodile with "coquillard," which had various connotations including con-man, rogue and even villain, based on a much older usage of the word to describe the vendors of seashells (coquilles) as false pilgrimage relics from St. Jacques de Compostella in Spain.

these big eating, hard-working, brave and proud Canadians, these "crocodile-scoundrels," were going to convert Africans was not to be taken seriously, but it fit in a general frame of reference concerning the underlying meaning of the expedition for Labat. We will examine Labat's reflections on this theme in the next chapter, since this writing is triggered by the visual cues of North Africa as they sail across the southern Mediterranean. Religion was used by both Catholics and Protestants, in their own particular ways, to make sense of Canadian participation in the Nile expedition. The differences between Protestant and Catholic were minimized in this context, and we see how denominations cross-cut other identity markers and gave the men a common reference point in Christianity, albeit differently interpreted, over and against their impending arrival in Egypt. While Denison explained his weekly religious observances as occasions to demonstrate and inculcate loyalty to the British crown, Labat used religious tropes to connect the Canadians to a much larger western, European mission bringing Christian civilization to Africa. Bouchard was the only one with actual practical experience in this field however.

Bouchard's letters were in many ways more pragmatic than those of other members of the contingent. Unlike Labat, he did not speak in pious terms about conversions and a civilizing mission. Familiar with the limited success of missions in converting Muslims, when he spoke of his mission, he speaks mostly of attending to the poor in his care. He also had first hand practical experience with a British protector, in the form of General Gordon, of whom he had a very high opinion, as did many in the Quebec press. His first-hand, personal experience of the country as a missionary and with the hero they were going to rescue ensured that there was an eager audience for the evening talks that he gave for the men to prepare them for their coming time on the Nile. Denison said that Bouchard's "petites causeries" in the forward hatch were very popular. They "consist of a description of the country and the habits and customs of the people we are about to visit." Given his experience and language skills, "his counsels are well-timed" and his "adventures are sometimes amusing but always full of

interest and instruction."¹²⁸ Labat had high praise for these talks which frequently turned to the evils of slavery in Africa. Some believe it is gone, he said, but 400,000 souls, "faites à l'image de Dieux, nos frères en Jésus-Christ, sont livrées annuellement à la traite."¹²⁹ Bouchard's talks also dealt with the practical details of items such as the quality of drinking water in the Nile ("wholesome and pleasant" and not "poisonous as reported") and Neilson told his Canadian readers that Bouchard "has made a most favourable impression and promises to become most popular."¹³⁰ The popularity of some leaders and their ability to influence the men will be tracked throughout the expedition. Bouchard was popular and influential, and his talks carried much more weight and authority than Denison's attempts at martial and imperial inculcation and Labat's pious talk of a civilizing mission. In fact Bouchard's stories had a wide area of overlapping discourse with both narratives and were the most consistent and systematic preparation the men received for their work on the Nile.

The Death of Richard Henderson

In a rather sudden manner, Richard Henderson, from St. Peter's, Manitoba became ill and died shortly before the *Ocean King* arrived in Gibraltar. This was the most notable incident on their Atlantic passage and almost every diarist and letter-writer mentioned both his death and the funeral. On September 24th, Neilson expressed fears that Henderson was gravely ill and within two days he died of meningitis, caused by an inner ear infection. It was variously described as "an abcess on the brain,"¹³¹ "une affection cérébrale."¹³² or "an abcess in his ear, which went to the brain"¹³³ Some thought he had initially been suffering from sea-sickness,

¹²⁸ "CANADA" (Denison), *Globe*, 14 October 1884

¹²⁹ Labat p. 71

¹³⁰ Anonymous (Neilson), *Montreal Star*, 18 September 1884 and *Globe*, 22 September 1884 were two similar articles.

¹³¹ The exact same phrase was used in these two letters: *Globe* correspondent (unidentified). September 28, "Escapades at Sydney," *Globe*, 15 October 1884. Frank Ritchie to Joseph Hursell, September 29, reprinted in *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 20 October 1884

¹³² Labat p 64

¹³³ MacKeand, letter of September 28 from Gibraltar, *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884. A letter from Lt. Aumond to the *Ottawa Citizen* says he died "from an abcess in his ear which turned to inflammation of the brain." 15 October 1884

but Sherlock claims that "he came on board with an abscess in his head" and there was nothing that could be done by the doctor.¹³⁴ Beyond these consistent and simple diagnoses of the cause and swiftness of his death, accounts of his final moments and of the funeral the next morning were more elaborate and deeply melancholic. In contrast to commentary about the wonderful concerts, the beauty of the sea and the grumbling about food, there was a sudden, widespread realization that one of their number had unexpectedly died thousands of miles from home.

When Denison heard that Henderson "was very low" he went to see him a mere hour before his death and was surprised to see his friends "bending over the wasted form" of the man he had seen a few hours earlier up on deck watching the tug of war contest. Even at this point he was surprised "the end would have come so soon." Like many, he noted that he was Cree, that he had a wife and children. His brother, who was also a member of the contingent, kept constant watch over him and was now "the object of general sympathy" as he faced his "sad bereavement" in "the middle of a great watery wilderness."¹³⁵ Henderson was monitored by his brother and friends from St. Peter's, as well as Bouchard, Neilson and Labat, who were collectively responsible for his spiritual and medical care in his final hours. Labat was with Henderson during his suffering and his description of it appears in two different letters. As a medical sergeant he assisted Neilson in caring for Henderson and, although he acknowledges that he died of a cerebral infection, he contradicts this scientific explanation by telling us that in reality, Henderson died of homesickness.

Voici la cause réelle de cette mort imprévue. Henderson a été pris de nostalgie, mal du pays, deux jours après le départ. Très superstitieux, il voulait revenir chez lui voir sa femme et ses enfants. Cette pensée l'obsédait, le poursuivait comme un cauchemar continu.

This episode illustrates Labat's tendency to minimize the specifics of the concrete situation before him and generalize it into a grand, ideal-type story. Instead of identifying him as

¹³⁴ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

¹³⁵ "CANADA" (Denison), *Globe*, 14 October 1884

Swampy Cree, Labat calls him "un enfant de la forêt." He composes a long poem about Henderson, filled with the tropes the urban European-Canadian uses to speak of Indians that has little to do with the actual life of the man. Instead of describing the death of an unfortunate Cree worker who perished from an ear infection, Labat spun a tale of a wild Indian who was unable to survive outside his forest home, away from kith and kin. Labat's tale is romantic, fanciful and maudlin, weaving imagined versions of reality when mundane, servicable explanations will do. He does tell us about the ear infection and seems comfortable to let the two explanations co-exist, despite apparent contradictions. He is not sacrificing the details for the sake of a good story. He gives us both, perhaps self-aware that the "story" is more a literary gloss that his readers will expect, that explains itself on its own terms, regardless of the empirical details.

As a writer, Labat's dramatic story-telling provides us with a list of the dominant tropes of the age, but his eye for poignant details also identified items that others did not consider worthy of mention. Henderson asked him for laudanum, an opiate used as a painkiller, but also which also carried the connotation of a substance favoured by working-class men since it was fairly cheap. Labat told us that Henderson suffered from violent head-aches after being struck by lightning years ago, and for this reason, laudanum "d'habitude cela le soulageait." Such plausible details about the painkiller, even if the lightning story seemed a bit sensational, helped him tell a dramatic story. His embellishments, often contradicted by others or even his own story, served the end of his story-telling, were part of the way he processed his perceptions of reality and communicated via narrative to his audience. The same traits were also evident, in smaller degrees, in all the other letter-writers, most obviously in Shaw, but also in Sherlock, Denison, Jackson and the rest. Labat had a different public, feeling no compulsion, like Denison or Neilson obviously did, to narrate stories in their letters and journals which would serve as the official history of the expedition.

Labat assured his readers that, in addition to Henderson's brother "et les gens de sa tribu" who were with him in his last moments, the dying man received "tous les secours religieux et

médicaux qu'il est possible de donner en pleine mer." The religious support was provided by Arthur Bouchard in his role as chaplain, who was well aware that "'le pauvre homme était protestant" like the majority of the men from St. Peter's.¹³⁶ Henderson seemed "bien convaincu que sa religion était excellente" and therefore, he wrote to Monseigneur Têtu, "Vous comprenez que ce n'était pas le temps de lui donner des doutes à ce sujet et de faire de la controverse." In his role as a chaplain, Bouchard provided a sort of generic Christian comfort to Henderson, praying by his bedside. "Il était à l'agonie et il me fallait le préparer à la mort."¹³⁷ The service the following morning was Anglican and was led by the ship's captain, but it was Bouchard's job as chaplain to be with Henderson at the end of his life. In this sense, Bouchard played his dual roles as Catholic priest and chaplain with pragmatism, sensitivity and respect for all involved, when we consider that almost all the authority figures on the British expedition, the *Ocean King* and in the Governor General's apparatus were Protestants, in an age when the polite co-existence between Catholic and Protestant in Canada always held the potential for insult, disrespect and "controversy." His improvised generic prayers for Henderson are related to Têtu in his letter¹³⁸ and he then states that Henderson's death was "le premier sacrifice de l'expédition du Nil" and laments that "nous en ferons probablement bien d'autres." The voyageurs, whom he calls "mes bateliers," were "pour un grand nombre des jeunes gens intelligents et religieux, de véritables Canadiens, et je suis tellement content d'eux que je me propose de les accompagner jusqu'à Kartoum." Unlike the officers, he had the option to leave the expedition when they arrived in Egypt. Formally, he needed to obtain the permission of Bishop Sogato, the head of his order in Cairo ("je vais me mettre à son entière disposition"), which Lansdowne understood and accepted. Bouchard decided to stay with the group, and if he had chosen otherwise, Sogato could also have provided him with a convenient excuse to bid them farewell in Cairo.

¹³⁶ Carolyn F. Podruchny, "I Have Embraced the White Man's Religion': The Relations between the Peguis Band and the Church Missionary Society, 1820–1838", *Papers of the 26th Algonquin Conference*, vol. 26 (1995), pp. 350–378.

¹³⁷ Bouchard, première lettre, *Annales de la propagation de la Foi pour le province du Québec*. Montreal: Vingt-Cinquième numéro, Février 1885

¹³⁸ "Je l'engageai à demander pardon à Dieu pour toutes les fautes de sa vie, et aussi longtemps qu'il eut la connaissance, Je lui ai fait dire: Jésus, ayez pitié de moi," *ibid*.

His decision to stay with the voyageurs is perhaps all the more notable when we read Têtu's biography of Bouchard, in which he relates that the missionary left Canada with a very pessimistic view of the whole expedition. Leaving too late to succeed, he felt that it was a project doomed to failure, "qui venait comme la moutarde apres diner." When Bouchard left Canada, "sa répugnance était si grande que, d'après moi, le sacrifice qu'il fit en acceptant le titre d'aumônier, fut le plus grand de sa vie."¹³⁹ Despite his deep misgivings about the expedition's chances of success, during the course of their ocean passage Bouchard made a personal commitment to identify with the men and their mission. In both his general comments about the men and in his description of Henderson's death, we see evidence of his respect for them, helping us appreciate the regular comments about his general popularity.

Denison, Labat and Bouchard were not the only ones to reflect on Henderson's death and his funeral "cast a gloom" over the entire contingent. The next morning, all on board turned out for Henderson's funeral. The captain half-masted the flags, stopped the engines and tolled the ship's bells. Henderson's 6' 2" body was washed, sewn into a canvas winding sheet with 100 lbs of iron, placed on a plank and covered with the Union Jack. His brother Henry Henderson "pressed an affectionate kiss on that cold cheek," his face was covered and then "eight Indians" carried the body in a "mournful procession" to the bridge where the Captain led a service¹⁴⁰ in "the most solemn silence." With the words "We now commit this body to the deep," the plank was tilted and the body "dropped into its ocean tomb."¹⁴¹

As might be expected, there were some who gave no indication of being affected by such a novel scene. MacKeand, who had earlier dismissed the food strikers as "grumblers" simply notes that "an Indian" died and "we dropped him overboard yesterday" after a service.¹⁴² Henderson's death, however, was the one item mentioned in virtually every letter written

¹³⁹ Têtu p. 123

¹⁴⁰ Denison notes that they sung "the 162nd hymn." Sherlock mentions II Corinthians chapter 15.

¹⁴¹ "CANADA" (Denison), *Globe*, 14 October 1884

¹⁴² MacKeand, first letter (28 September), Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 16 October 1884

during this time period, and most said they were deeply moved. Frank Ritchie of Winnipeg thought the service was "a very impressive one, more than one wet eye being seen in the crowd."¹⁴³ It "caused many a thoughtful look far back over the sea towards friends and home," wrote Denison as CANADIAN. Such a scene "claimed a space in every diary on board," but no doubt they would refer to it "in after years without the aid of memorandum."¹⁴⁴ William Cram of Renfrew described the funeral as a "melancholy scene" and Bouchard said it was "un bien triste cérémonie qui laisse dans l'âme de longs et douloureux souvenirs."¹⁴⁵ Sherlock said Henderson's death "caused a gloomy feeling among all hands, and few slept with such soundness as they had hitherto done during the voyage"¹⁴⁶ and in his private journal Neilson said that "a deep gloom covers the ship on account of today's events."¹⁴⁷ Labat was deeply moved by the ceremony he said and will never forget it. "Je ne suis pas sceptique," he said in an exhibition of florid piety. "J'aime assez cette cérémonie. Pourquoi donc s'effrayer de cette sépulture? Est-ce que la Résurrection ne nous attend pas tous?", he asked. His enthusiasm concerning the ceremony set him apart somewhat from the others as much as Mackeand's. Deer likely spoke for many on board, in a very direct and pragmatic sense, saying that "it made us all feel sad to see the body of our poor friend and comrade launched into the sea." His "sudden death," we are told, caused the rest of the men to be "more careful of their health," being sure to get "more exercise and fresh air upon the deck."¹⁴⁸ The death seems to have deeply affected many of the men, and no doubt it drove home the gravity of their situation and their distance from home. The day after Henderson was buried at sea, they spotted land. Their Atlantic voyage ended and they prepared to stop in Gibraltar for coal.

¹⁴³ Frank Ritchie to Joseph Hursell, September 29, reprinted in Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 20 October 1884

¹⁴⁴ "CANADA" (Denison), *Globe*, 14 October 1884

¹⁴⁵ Bouchard, première lettre, *Annales de la propagation de la Foi pour le province du Quebec*. Montreal: Vingt-Cinquième numéro, Février 1885

¹⁴⁶ Sherlock, fourth letter (29 September), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884

¹⁴⁷ MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, 27 September 1884. An almost identical phrasing was used by the civilian *Globe* columnist ("a gloom was cast over the entire vessel", 15 October, *Globe*) and by Kennedy ("cast a gloom over the entire ship", 16 October, *Winnipeg Sun*)

¹⁴⁸ Deer p. 5

Conclusions

The start of their journey, as they crossed the Atlantic, was a period in which the men tested each other, in games of strength and struggles to set the norms of order, discipline and control. It was also a period in which the men socialized and shared common experiences with one another, both within groups based on region, language, class and religion as well as across those boundaries, through their shared experiences of maritime life, food, concerts, religious practices and a funeral. Although their journey was still underway, some concluding observations can be drawn from this section which will inform the rest of their travels together as a group until they reach the Sudan.

We must first note that it would be a mistake to understand certain writers as representatives of "the shantyman" perspective, the "francophone officer" or "the middle class westerner." By focussing on these texts from a limited number of authors we hear voices that are individually the product of particular life histories. Taking the texts together, however, it is valid to trace the parameters and range of discourse that sheds light on the contingent's behaviour and its developing sense of identity. Our intertextual reading of these sources rests on the theoretical presumption of intersubjective communication between the men who created them, and it is empirically supported by the way in which they almost universally reinforce each other's truth claims. The thick descriptions that we can create, around the men's dissatisfaction over the food for example, show a universal agreement about the facts, but a divergence of language over the meaning and implications of those facts.

One of the earliest findings in this chapter was that there remains confusion over whether the men have engaged under the norms and expectations of a civilian job or a military campaign. From their initial refusals to accept restraints in Montreal, to their drunkenness going down the St. Lawrence and their visit to Sydney against Denison's orders, we can piece together a very clear idea of what actually happened, down to the hour, but the participants understood the situation in two very different ways. Melgund and the officers employed the Montreal port police to try and keep the men on board, but the men easily evaded them and went ashore to

eat and drink one last time before leaving the city. To prevent a similar problem in Trois-Rivières and Quebec City the Ocean King anchored off-shore with a police boat to stop their "escape." Sherlock said this disappointment led some to realize that they "were not free agents" able to "Do as you please." In Sydney, however, it was clear that a large portion of the men refused to recognize Denison's authority and visited town against his direct orders. For those on board and for commentators in Canadian newspapers who heard of such behaviour, there was a presumption that such a lack of military "discipline" needed to be remedied. The expectation was articulated in various forms that the men would learn to conform to military culture "soon enough" and Denison, Neilson and others wrote about vague plans to teach the men marching and standing in line on Sydney beach, on board the ship and through the distribution of the daily rum ration. Seen from the perspective of the men, however, such attempts to control them were challenges to overcome, and "some funny tricks were played by the voyageurs" as they pushed past guards, skinned ropes ("my Montreal game"), changed clothes, jumped into empty coal trains and found other ingenious or aggressive ways to circumvent Denison's orders. Most men did not sign up for a military campaign and had no intention of conforming to military culture. The engagement form weakened the hand of the officers and Denison lacked any real command experience, so he had to exercise his command ineffectively through the foremen, who were just as unaccustomed to military norms as were their men. Denison believed he needed to enforce discipline but the men considered evasion of such attempts a humorous sort of game-play that they enjoyed reporting to the newspapers.

This clash between military norms and the norms of the shanty also became evident through the moral outrage expressed by the men over the unsanitary canteen and the inadequacy of the food. Two men could recite the same food list to different audiences and to one it was evidence of generosity by the War Office because it was "more than the average man" could eat, and to the other it was an insult, an injustice and a deception. Even when some of the officers admitted the food was sometimes burnt and ruined, they considered it part of a soldier's life and thought that "grumbling" about it was undignified. By contrast, the men

decided to "strike" on at least two occasions. Gaining no sympathy from the officers, they protested to the captain, who responded more like an employer and granted them some limited concessions. The cultural values of the middle-class militia officers determined what an "average" man should eat in their eyes, and "grumbling" about it was poor character. The workers' unwillingness to put up with the insult that the food represented in their customary expectations demonstrated another way in which they were not willing to subject themselves to the norms of a military campaign.

If the men met expectations that they were "grand mangeurs," they did not live up to their reputation for being "hard" and "rough" men who loved to fight and instead were reported to be "surprisingly" harmonious and peaceful. The Indians were not war-whopping, sinistre nor stoic but were described as "popular." Games and concerts provided social opportunities to perform, applaud and recognize cultural form and correspondents regularly praised the singing ability of one other's groups. Even the Tug of War, which had the potential for rivalries and complaints of foul play, was seen by the losers (all of whom believed they won second-place) as "*pour le fun*." Although first impressions described them as "drunkards" and "cut-throats" after some time together, Sherlock was calling them "nature's gentlemen," perhaps giving the sea credit for transforming these workers into maritime aristocrats.

If place and region seemed to be one of the strongest identity markers amongst the men, housed as they were by gangs that were built from regional work and professional familiarity, then religion was one of the forces that destabilized it, pulling Catholics and Protestants together across geographic distribution. Christianity also gave both groups a common language with which to make sense of the anticipated cultural differences they would face upon reaching their destination. The Mahdi was a false prophet to a false religion and they could joke that they were really going to Africa "*pour convertir les Egyptiens*." Bouchard's tales of his mission and the campaign to end slavery in the Sudan were not exclusively Catholic stories, but were tales that Denison and others could easily associate with Gordon and Empire.

While their passage across the Atlantic did little to weaken existing local identities, they were temporarily recontextualized outside of Canadian society, in a climate of mutual respect and co-existence between the men and their groups, through the passing of time in games and sports in an unfamiliar surrounding. This was a rare situation. At the same time, there was no recorded significant discussion of "Canada," "Africa" or "Empire" by the men, except for references to Bouchard's talks, Denison's Sunday sermons and Labat's comic poetry. There was also no evidence of successful inculcation of military cultural norms. Gibraltar represented a welcome break from the time at sea and the recent "gloom" of Henderson's funeral. It would also provide another test of the various understandings of the civilian vs. military nature of the contingent.

CHAPTER 5 - THE MEDITERRANEAN

As the *Ocean King* pulled away from Gibraltar towards Alexandria, Neilson noted the sharp contrast in the world around him. The Atlantic was "deep blue" whereas the Mediterranean was "a lovely azure," a sharp and distinct difference. Their time on the *Ocean King* was divided not merely by the sea below them, but by their entrance between Europe and Africa, and this was a division evident in the two-fold nature of the voyageur texts. The main correspondents mailed one letter from Gibraltar that documented their Atlantic crossing, and then another from Alexandria about their reflections while entering and crossing the Mediterranean. The main focus of this chapter is on the ways in which these writers began to explain in more detail their understanding of their impending participation in the Nile expedition. Their shore leave in Gibraltar, followed by two days steaming close by the coast of Algeria, seeing abundant material evidence of French and British colonial activity provided fertile materials for reflection upon the significance of this expedition and their unusual role in it. As has been previously noted in the first three chapters, the events of this expedition caused subjects to record their opinions on nation and empire that otherwise would have had no reason for articulation. Writing on the Atlantic, between Sydney and Portugal, they focussed primarily on the novelty of the sea and the social life on the boat. From Gibraltar to Alexandria, correspondents were more likely to write with reference to a thick set of histories, geographical knowledge and national stereotypes that they had learned from a complex set of social institutions and textual sources. These narrative resources were the cultural materials utilized by these colonials from Canada to make sense of their participation in a British campaign in a nominally-Turkish Arab province that was struggling to retain colonial control over another African region against a highly motivated army of resistance.

Gibraltar as an Imperial Fortress

The first sighting of land came the day after Henderson's funeral and several writers expressed great relief at this good news, given the sense of "gloom" that had descended upon

the vessel. The *Ocean King* first passed Cape St. Vincent and as they approached the straits of Gibraltar, several correspondents made reference to Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar, likely a reflection of discussions on board as such landmarks were identified.¹ Passing the spot of the death and victory of Britain's greatest Admiral, whose story was taught to every anglophone child in a Canadian school, Sherlock cited two lines from the popular song "The Death of Nelson."² A couple of days later, in a speech to the voyageurs, Neilson evoked Nelson's name to inspire the men. In this way, they approached the Spanish coast with automatic cultural references to British victory over France and Spain, and prepared to encounter Gibraltar as an imperial post at the mouth of the Mediterranean.

With different cultural backgrounds, however, the men saw other things in the same coast. As they approached, Labat expressed his strong desire to see Gibraltar as an opportunity "de rendre hommage à Québec, ce Gibraltar du Nord." Accustomed to hearing this name associated with Quebec City, he would now get to see the original, which stood as the "sentinelle" that guarded the entrance to the Mediterranean, on whose shores were built ancient Phoenecia and Egypt.³ He managed to impress upon his readers in *La Presse* the historical importance of Gibraltar without making any reference to either Nelson or the present-day British rule. Even the "most illiterate among us was not without having heard of the wonders of the great fortress," wrote Neilson, "the historic Pillar of Hercules" and "mighiest of the mighty fortresses of the world."⁴ Even those who did not make references to mythology or history books, understood Gibraltar as a gateway to the "Old World" and Cram closed his Atlantic letter abruptly so he could "go on deck to view... both Europe and Africa."⁵ With a coal stop of just 36 hours, the men were given a short time to explore the

¹ Frank Ritchie to Joseph Hursell, September 29, reprinted in Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 20 October 1884

² Sherlock, fourth letter (September 29), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 15 October 1884 "'Twas in Trafalgar Bay / We saw the Frenchmen lay," from "The Death of Nelson" by SJ Arnold, melody by John Braham

³ Labat, p 74

⁴ "Joe" (Neilson, October 7), Montreal *Star*, 28 October 1884

⁵ "Voyageur of the Nile Expedition" (Cram), September 29 (from Gibraltar), Renfrew *Mercury*, 17 October 1884

town and regardless of the stories they had heard before, all of the correspondents left with a deeper sense that this was an imperial outpost, which was characterized as a cosmopolitan cross-roads, a well-administered British colony and an impressive military installation. Gibraltar was also a post office for "tous les reporters d'ici," who Labat says, are more numerous than the porpoises. All of the voyageur correspondents took advantage of this stop to send their letters "à leurs journaux sur les beautés de Gibraltar,"⁶ although in reality it is the letters mailed from Alexandria that have the long descriptions of the town, written with time to reflect, after their departure from the fortress.

The men were allowed to go ashore, but warned to be back by 7 p.m. since the town closed its port then. Despite the threat of fines, "some did not pay much attention to the orders, they were in too much haste to go on shore, it was such a handsome looking place"⁷ The *Ocean King* was "almost deserted, not more than fifty remaining on board," said Neilson, noting that "curiosity is an important factor in the composition of the average voyageur." The first item of "interest" he noted was the town's "cosmopolitan population of soldiers, blue jackets, native Spaniards (nick-named rock-scorpions), Moors in orthodox 'Arabian Night' costumes, Arabs in flowing white robes and hoods, Greeks, Italians, Hindoos, etc., etc."⁸ In his diary, Neilson admitted that given the heat, he "envied the comfortable clothing of the Moors"⁹ As soon as they landed, Sherlock said "the deck was soon swarming with Hybrid Spaniards vulgarly called Rock Scorpions."¹⁰ Cram thought there were some "very peculiar people to be seen there" but also noted that "we made a great sensation." Spanish women and men "looked at us with eyes that you could snare with a hayrope, as the saying is; and we even excited the curiosity of the Turks and Moors that are lounging around there."¹¹ Labat felt the need to warn the voyageurs about the sharks, "Les requins dont j'ai à vous parler sont

⁶ Labat p. 74

⁷ Cram, first letter (6 October), Renfrew *Mercury*, 31 October 1884

⁸ "Joe" (Neilson, 7 October), Montreal *Star*, 28 October 1884

⁹ LAC MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, 30 September 1884

¹⁰ Sherlock, fifth letter, (October 8), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 29 October 1884

¹¹ Cram, first letter (6 October), Renfrew *Mercury*, 31 October 1884

cosmopolites; ce sont des Italiens et des Espagnols, d'autant plus polis et séduisants qu'ils échorchent le monde." They will steal your eyes right out of your head if they can, he said.¹² Sherlock said that the "money brokers" took advantage of their ignorance and "we were cheated to our hearts' content."¹³ The men were eager to immerse themselves in this unfamiliar social environment, drawing on their existing cultural knowledge and quickly picking up the local racial stereotypes to navigate their way in this brief stay, all the while realizing that they too were the objects of curiosity for others.

One contemporary state of affairs which likely increased the North African presence in Gibraltar during their visit was a massive cholera outbreak in Spain. It was a regular feature of the "world news" section of all Canadian newspapers before and during the time the voyageurs were abroad. The British colony had a "sanitary cordon" across the isthmus of land connecting it to the Spanish peninsula blocking all travel and commerce. There was therefore a temporary increase in the number of North African merchants bringing in produce and other goods. There was also a preoccupation with cleanliness and Cram called Gibraltar "the cleanest place, I think, I ever saw." Neilson thought the streets were "scrupulously clean" and Sherlock said the town was "spotlessly clean" and "to use a common saying, you might eat off the road." He was sure that this state of affairs was due to "British rule and strict sanitary laws."¹⁴

As the Peterborough men had done in Ottawa and the Winnipeg gangs in Montreal, the men were all let loose as tourists. Cram had noted in passing that many of the men had no money to change with the money changers, but even the poorest of the voyageurs could climb up to the galleries for stunning views of the Mediterranean. Others, like the Mackeand and his fellow "boys" from Winnipeg, hired guides to show them around. Mackeand said they "directed our guide to take us to the old Moorish castle," whose history he didn't need to

¹² Labat pp 76-77

¹³ Sherlock, fifth letter, (October 8), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 29 October 1884

¹⁴ *ibid* Cram, Neilson and Sherlock

repeat to the boys at home, "because all of them have read of it." He was fascinated with this ancient castle that "has stood for eleven hundred years of silent witness to the dark deeds of Spanish treachery and British victories."¹⁵ The contemporary beauty of the British colony was praised by everyone who passed through the promenade gardens called the Almeida. MacKeand said its "deliciously perfumed flowers" and tropical plants were so beautifully maintained, one felt "almost carried away with the idea that he has been transported to some fairy kingdom," and he recommended the city for future "vacations" to the "Winnipeg boys." In the same garden Cram "recognized the palm tree, from the pictures we had seen in Canada."

But judging from the letter writers, the most impressive parts of the town were its guns and battlements. Most of the men had never seen a military fortress and they were, as they understood it, standing on top of the most powerful one in the world. MacKeand, who was a member of Kennedy's Winnipeg 90th battalion said that he "cannot describe my feelings" on climbing up on this "impregnable fortress" which was "hewn out of the solid rock and defended at every point by massive guns." His only regret was that "all the Winnipeg boys" were not with them. The British soldiers here "could withstand the largest armies of the world" with their 1,860 guns, "placed at every twenty feet," he marvelled and found it difficult "tearing ourselves away from this wonder of wonders." Sherlock like others spoke of the "one hundred ton gun" as the big highlight, but said the entire "rock" was "absolutely bristling with cannons," from the "level of the water to the extreme summit in every conceivable and inconceivable place are guns." Over a thousand "of these death dealers are guarding the greatest strong-hold in the world." Cram was satisfied that the batteries and guns were "very strong and in good position."¹⁶

Not only were these letter writers impressed with the British fort, they were also impressed with the British soldiers there. Cram could not praise the soldiers enough, for their "kindness

¹⁵ MacKeand, second letter, *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 1 November 1884

¹⁶ *ibid* MacKeand, Sherlock, Cram

and hospitality, the soldiers there take the palm." With his friends, he visited the Engineers' barracks, "here we were treated like lords," only to find the same treatment at another barracks they visited. Because of this, he says, he would like "to stop there for a week at least" on the way home again. Sherlock and Foreman Anderson didn't hire guides because a soldier named Higgins of the 23rd Fusiliers showed them around and even gave them presents at the end of the day. These writers had what one might call the colonial tour of the town and were suitably impressed by its exotic charm, order, cleanliness, architecture, tropical gardens, fortifications and by the welcome they received from the British soldiers there.

However, Neilson noted that at the end of the day, many of the returning men gave him "unsatisfactory accounts" of the galleries and fortifications, which was evidence that they had spent their entire day investigating "only the narrow limits contained within the four walls of some den or other," of which Gibraltar had many, drinking "Vino Negro," an "insidiously pleasant but potent beverage." All of the correspondents said they were eager to eat and drink on shore after their long Atlantic passage. Cram said that once they got their money changed, "the town was like a circus – our boys were everywhere to be seen," with grapes, quinces and other fruit, and "more staggering under a load of grape-juice, which was very cheap - three-halfpence per half-pint." Mackeand's group, with more money to spend, had "a royal feast" of "beefsteak and onions, eggs, potatoes, etc., etc., and a bottle of fine Maderia to wash it down properly, paying the enormous sum of one shilling a piece (25 cents) for it." They also bought some "first-class Havana cigars" for 3 cents a piece, which was something they thought would evoke the jealousy of "you Winnipeg smokers."¹⁷

In addition to wine and food, many of the men commented on the women there. Sherlock was struck by the "bright eyes of the Spanish ladies, whose dark lithe forms in their black dresses and heads covered with the graceful mantilla glide more than walk." They were

¹⁷ *ibid* Neilson, Cram, Mackeand

"plying their fans with a dexterity that would make a New York or Saratoga belle get too utterly too too with envy."[sic] As if reading from the same script, Neilson spoke of "the bright-eyed signorittas smiling behind the conventional fan, the head set back in the folds of the graceful mantillas" who "played particular havoc with the heart of the impressionable courier de bois, bent on 'a lark.'" Years later, in one of his many Nile stories, Charles Lewis Shaw wished to let the public know that he was one of those who stayed out all night against curfew, together with Alex Kennedy and W.H. Schneider. As the authorities rounded up "the riotous Canadians in time for the transport's sailing," Shaw and Kennedy climbed out of trouble to watch them "tear Schneider's arm from round the waist from the prettiest fruit seller in the market," as he recalls those days when their "blood ran warmer than in the land of blue skies and balmy breezes."¹⁸ There were plenty of references to the beautiful women of different nationalities, but none of the men gave any hint that they visited prostitutes. Neilson and Labat were worried that this was a real or potential danger and left hints to the discerning reader that some of the men had visited "dens" for more than alcohol. Labat hints at the town's night life, the "*belles de nuit*" and his comments about Gibraltar's "Italiennes" being distinguishable from "des Espagnoles parce qu'elles portent, presque toutes, la masque effrayant de la petite vérole pour ne pas dire plus!" His comments about diseased women and a discussion of the town at night follow the remark that in Gibraltar many "s'y brûlent et y laissent leur santé." Labat is avoiding reference to brothels explicitly in his letter to the papers, but he here raises the matter as a medical concern which will be later addressed by doctor Neilson.

While the men were being tourists for the day in Gibraltar, so were their officers. Labat, Denison and Neilson went to the post office, then met up with Kennedy and hired a guide to show them around the Moorish castle, the galleries, the guns, gardens and the lookouts. They walked past Government House. By the time they returned at curfew time, wrote Neilson in his diary, a large number of the men were waiting to be ferried back to the boat,

¹⁸ Charles Lewis Shaw, "The Story of Schneider," *Edmonton Saturday News*, 13 October 1906

"many of them drunk."¹⁹ Denison also notes that by 7 pm they were "nearly all on board, a number under the influence of liquor as might be expected." In general, the men were mostly very self-disciplined and the officers played no role in orchestrating their boarding. No roll call was taken. The officers assumed that their primary responsibility was to issue an order to return at seven o'clock, and then they were effectively all off-duty. Denison quickly returned to the town at 7:30 when he "learned that the Governor wanted to see me" for dinner to "learn how we got over with the men."²⁰ Denison did not invite any of the other officers to join him.

Most of the men did return at the correct curfew time. Cram said that the day "passed too quickly" but noted that if they didn't get back when "the big gun was fired and the bugles were sounded, we should not get back at all." He said "a good many" of his colleagues stayed in the city all night and came back at 10 am the following morning.²¹ Deer said that "most of us" returned when instructed, "but some of the tardy ones" were "locked in for the night."²² He didn't see the men as disobedient or causing trouble, but just being tardy. Neilson's letter to the *Star* pointed to a clear moral weakness, "Alas! Frail, frail human nature!" for their absence. There is no way of assessing the various activities the men were engaged in that caused their tardiness, but it is fair to say that they were not a very time-conscious group and they had probably never visited a city that locked itself up at 7 pm. MacKeand and his friends stayed out until after the evening concert at 9 pm and then "returned leisurely to the gate and through to our boat, and came aboard, retiring at once."²³ The next morning, no one was allowed to go ashore as McRae and several foremen were sent out to find the stragglers.

The Ayotte Brothers

Denison described Alfred and Jos Ayotte as "hard cases," saying "one has been in prison, for

¹⁹ LAC MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, September 29, 1884

²⁰ Toronto Reference Library, Denison fonds L22 Diary of Nile Expedition, 4 October 1884

²¹ Cram, first letter (6 October), Renfrew *Mercury*, 31 October 1884

²² Deer p. 6

²³ MacKeand, second letter (nd), Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 1 November 1884

shooting a man." He was writing to George Denison about them because he was worried that the disturbance caused by the Ayottes might make it into the Gibraltar papers, and if the news should happen "to reach Canada," Fred wanted George to know "exactly what occurred so that you could deny" any rumours of a mutiny.²⁴ Neilson, writing to the *Montreal Star* as "Joe," also attempted to control the public perception of what happened, telling his readers that "the Canadian public will be treated to more than one version of the *gesta et acta* of the Canadian voyageurs" in Gibraltar.²⁵

Alfred and Jos had stayed out all night and by all accounts they had been drinking. Neilson described the Ayotte incident as "the results of Vino Negro." The brothers were "rounded up" the next morning by their foreman Fabien Laroque. Delivering them to the *Ocean King*, Laroque tried to return to port for more men but the Ayottes refused to get out of the rowboat. Denison said he "ordered them out" and even Bouchard asked them, but they wouldn't move. They "stayed there like mules, standing the jeers and chaff of their companions, and answering back in their choicest upper Ottawa French," reported Neilson, posing as the anonymous correspondent "Joe." Unable to order, coax or cajole the men on board, Denison said he "told the chief of the water police to arrest them, handcuff them, and take them ashore." Six members of the harbour police approached their boat and "four of them, little Spaniards (Rock scorpions)," said Denison, tried to grab Alfred "but he shook them off" and they quickly called for help from another "four or five civilians" in a nearby boat.

Cram said that the water police did not have a chance: "they were Spanish police, and only eight of them" matched against "two Canadian boys, pretty full of Spanish wine."²⁶ Whether

²⁴ Letter Frederick Denison to George Denison, 2 October 1884, Stacey pp. 149-150

²⁵ "Joe" (Neilson, 7 October), *Montreal Star*, 28 October 1884 The description of this incident here is mostly based on Denison's letter to his brother and this article in the *Star*. Neilson does not use the Ayotte's real names either but calls them Baptiste and Jos. The *Ottawa Citizen* did not reprint the sections of the *Star* article about touring the town of Gibraltar, but reprinted this incident under the title "Baptiste and Joe: How Two Upper Ottawa Boys Cleaned Out a Police Boat at Gibraltar," 30 October 1884

²⁶ Cram, first letter (6 October), *Renfrew Mercury*, 31 October 1884

the total was eight or eleven (estimates varied), the Ayottes managed to "fire them out" and Denison said that Bouchard and Kennedy told him "it was laughable to see them flying out of the boat." Denison was unable to see what was happening because "our men got excited and made a run for the gangway." With Aumond and McRae, he tried to stop the men from descending to help the Ayottes, including one foreman who the officers sent "flying" back into the steamer. In Neilson's version, the brothers tossed the Spaniards "back into the police boat by neck and crop" and the rest pushed off as fast as they could, "leaving behind, one a hat, another a torn sleeve or some such memento of their hasty and undignified retreat." The entire "scene did not last twenty seconds. It was absurdly ridiculous," wrote Neilson in the *Star*. The Ayottes were the recipients of "the wildest cheering from the spectators on board the ship" who had nothing but "jeers for the cowardly police." It was at this point, Denison wrote, that the police boat "beat a graceful retreat" and went ashore to say that there was a mutiny on board as an effort "to cover their own failure," being defeated "10 or 11 to two men." At this point, the Ayottes "thought they would condescend to come on board" the boat, "climbing a rope hand over fist." Denison told his brother that they then "apologised to me for their conduct." A couple of days later, all the men were fined \$5 each, and Alfred Ayotte was fined \$7, which Denison believed would be "a lesson to them."²⁷

The reaction of the men and the officers towards the Ayottes seemed to change as the incident unfolded. If Neilson was correct, at first the men jeered at the brothers for their stubbornness. But at the point where the police tried to arrest them – and all commentators mentioned that they were Spanish police, or even "rock scorpions" – then at that point the event was transformed into a contest between "our boys" and "others." MacKeand alluded to this incident saying "fights were indulged in, but happily not among themselves."²⁸ At this point, there was a rush to help the Ayottes and much cheering at their physical and manly demonstration that two "Canadians" were more powerful than 10 Spaniards. Stacey correctly

²⁷ *ibid* Denison and Neilson. Note that the *Citizen* in reprinting Neilson's letter from the *Star* omitted the sentence that described fines for the Ayottes. In the article below based on George Denison's letter, they have changed the fines to finger-wagging.

²⁸ MacKeand, second letter (nd), Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 1 November 1884

noted that Denison was "torn between disgust with this display of indiscipline and a sneaking pride in the reverse the Ayottes inflicted upon the police."²⁹ Denison reported Bouchard and Kennedy laughing at the situation and Neilson portrayed the scene as a comedy, in which all of the officers could not help but express satisfaction at the fighting prowess of the Ayottes. Although Labat did not write about the incident at the time, a few weeks later, when defending the voyageurs against criticisms for being rough and undisciplined, he explained what "really" happened:

Vous le savez, ces grands enfants gâtés aiment la gaudriole, à se battre, à rire, à chanter, et c'est ce que deux de nos forts gaillards ont fait, lors de notre passage à Gibraltar, en mettant la police en déroute, et en s'écriant; nous avons vaincu Gibraltar!³⁰

This pride in "our big strapping lads," even when they were disobeying orders and assaulting the police, bore similarities to the newspapers that praised "hardy" men during the recruitment period and thought that their physical prowess, as strong labourers, would reflect well on Canada. Even Monsigneur Têtu thought Labat's commentary was funny and reprinted it in his biography of Bouchard, saying that some of the men should have been kept on the boat at Gibraltar because they made too much noise. In Canada, George Denison shared his letter with the press, or at least he told them a version of it which highlighted the "Canadian prowess" storyline. "In an amusing letter home," reported the Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, Denison reported on "the encounter of two stalwart voyageurs with seven Spanish policemen at Gibraltar." The "two Canadians" who were "full of liquid patriotism" were pitted against "seven Spanish water policemen." When they made a "joint onslaught on the two Canadians," the "voyageurs loomed up in force" and "dumped the policemen into the water." Asking forgiveness from Denison, they admitted that they "did not like the idea of seven Spaniards thinking they could handle two Canadians," and were let go "with a reprimand."³¹ This discourse of pride in the brawling exploits of labouring men may be limited to a certain class of observer, which included newspaper editors and officers on this expedition. While

²⁹ Stacey p. 16

³⁰ Labat pp. 114-115

³¹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 15 November 1884

one might expect the strongest disapprovals to come from the officer class and the strongest support to come from men of their own class, the opposite may be true. Sherlock did not cheer for the Ayottes, as he thought "they acted in a most disgraceful manner, abusing the officers very shamefully." The water police, he said, probably could have succeeded in arresting them, but the rush of men on the steamer, "forcing their way past the officers" made the police panic, "and well they might, for they seemed more like demons than men."³² If Sherlock is correct, the police did not retreat from two Canadians, but from 400. Cram found the incident humorous, and emphasized the Canadian vs. Spanish trope, but "all the same," he felt that "all on board were glad to see" that the men were fined.³³

This seems to provide further evidence of a class tendency to compensate for the lack of potential for military recognition on this expedition by at least emphasizing the hardiness of the civilians who represent the country, as emblematic products of a vital and strong country. The real or attributed language of a "conquest of Gibraltar" provides both comedy and a half-joking pleasure in seeing Canadians fight and win, in the strongest fortress in the world no less. This was not an atypical use of a certain type of Victorian racial language, in which a northern Canadian people were outnumbered by dark, "little Spaniards," swarming scorpions, who were cleared out when the voyageur decided to finally throw them off. In an interesting parallel, the *Sherbrooke Examiner* told the story of a group of five British sailors ("Tars") at Port Said who went AWOL, tipped an Egyptian boat and beat up 50 locals before being restrained. British tourists to Egypt thought that "their courage was worthy of a better cause," but couldn't help themselves and "in admiration of their pluck, forgot their breach of duty, and gave them a hearty cheer, a compliment which was paid to the erring tars by their own comrades as they approached the Alexandra."³⁴ The pleasure derived by upper class British tourists at seeing physical violence successfully carried out by the lower classes of their own people against an inferior racial other was reflected by the unexpected grin the Canadian

³² Sherlock, fifth letter, (October 8), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 29 October 1884

³³ Cram, first letter (6 October), *Renfrew Mercury*, 31 October 1884

³⁴ *Sherbrooke Weekly Examiner*, 19 September 1884

officers reserve for the Ayottes and their Jos Montferrand-type behaviour. By contrast to both the officers, the tars and the tourists, Sherlock and Cram are real workers who don't want to be fighting in Egypt and don't feel the need to win recognition as brawlers. They have agreed to come as boatmen and are not amused at the Ayottes inappropriate behaviour. For the officers and for the editor of the *Winnipeg Sun*, however, the honour won by demonstrating Canadian superiority in a contest of muscles against a large number of Spanish police outweighed any possible misrepresentation of Canadian discipline, because they were only workers. They may have been "hard cases," but they were "our" hard cases.

The other discipline problem at Gibraltar had a different dynamic. Jos Laroque received a special fine for insulting Captain MacRae. He had at this point developed a reputation as the expedition's chief drunkard, falling down the hold and breaking a rib on the first day out of Montreal. Cram identified him as being "drunk at Sydney" where he "caused some trouble" and Sherlock clarified that he was the one who "created a disturbance at Sidney by insulting a school mistress." Denison was apparently about to dismiss him, but "the men pleaded hard for him" and he was allowed to stay, explained Sherlock. Cram believed that "it was more to frighten him than anything else, and he has been very quiet since."³⁵ It is hard to know whether Cram was correct or not, but again we see that a dismissal would be a much harsher penalty than \$5 to \$7, so in the eyes of Denison, beating up the harbour police was far less serious, and potentially even a point of Canadian pride, whereas showing disrespect to an officer warranted potential abandonment in Gibraltar. Denison did not leave Gibraltar feeling more in control of the contingent or more able to persuade the men to observe better discipline. He passed his time in Gibraltar as a tourist and hoping to get some time with the Governor. When problems arose, he relied on the water police and his foremen and both of them were unable to control "his" men for him. In some ways, Laroque bothered him more than the Ayottes because he showed a lack of respect for MacRae as an officer. And he admitted in his letter to his brother that the most shocking aspect of the Ayotte affair was not

³⁵ *ibid* Cram and Sherlock

their drunken violence, which did not surprise him, but rather, it was "the kind of support one gets from the foremen." He could not believe that one of them actually tried "to get down to help these men rather than support my authority."³⁶

If Denison was a bit shaken by Gibraltar, most of the men had fond memories of the day. Deer did not write a lot at this point, but visited the fortifications and reported that with his friends, he "had a splendid day and enjoyed ourselves well." He did not mention the Ayottes and neither did Jackson. As noted, both Cram and Mackeand spoke of returning for a longer visit, so marvellous was the place and the people. In all cases, the men were given what could be seen as a positive exposure to Imperial authority, administration and military displays of British power. The correspondent who seemed most deeply affected by the stay was Sherlock, who said in more ways than one that he "never expected that it would fall to my lot to see such a glorious panorama" as he saw from the heights of Gibraltar, looking over Spain, the Mediterranean and across to Africa. As noted above, he was impressed with the colonial administration and awed by the defences, but he spent even more time describing the ocean, the fish and the jellyfish he swam with the morning they waited for the drunks to return. The Peterborough lumberman could not believe that he was swimming amidst a rainbow of fish, "ever changeable and beautiful" in the Mediterranean. Perhaps more than any other, he was also more likely to wax philosophical about the mission ahead, and as they pulled away from Gibraltar, he composed a few lines about the "many a tale" that will be "told of the voyageur band" who left "their loved, their native land," to die "for the rescue of General Gordon."³⁷

Doctor Neilson's Address to the Contingent

After the repeated instances of drunkenness and publicized "scenes of disorder"³⁸ in Ottawa, Montreal, Sydney and Gibraltar, Dr. Neilson prepared a speech for all of the men on the

³⁶ Stacey p. 160

³⁷ Sherlock, fifth letter, (October 8), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 29 October 1884

³⁸ Winnipeg *Sun*, 22 September 1884

dangers of alcohol while on the expedition which he delivered first in English and then again in French. Gathering the men up on the quarter-deck, he began with a preamble that drew their attention ahead to their impending arrival in "the historic land of the Pharoahs and Ptolemies." Touching briefly on a common discourse in many of the texts of officers, he said that Egypt was the place where "the light of civilization, such as it was, shone for the first time on the world." While that civilization had been "great, in a material sense," which they would all soon see in its astonishing monuments, it had now fallen into "a state of barbarism." He suggested that they all reflect on the fact that "we, children of the New World, descendants of various races" were now coming to "co-operate in re-opening the avenues of this ancient land to modern civilization, to the lights of Christian civilization."

But his reflections on this "fertile subject" were very brief and he told them that he had a "more practical" matter to address. Speaking on behalf of all the officers, he said it was "their unanimous opinion" that "this corps is composed of as good material as they would wish to command" and it had what was required to succeed. Reminding them of "the immortal words of Lord Nelson on the eve of Trafalgar, 'England expects every man to do his duty,'" Neilson said that in the same way, "Our countrymen tell us today, 'Canada expects every man will do his duty.'" It should be noted that he was not asking them to respond to Nelson as Englishmen, but creating a Canadian parallel to Nelson's call. The only thing that could prevent them from fulfilling their duty, which could "jeopardize the success of our expedition, to threaten our very lives," he said was "intemperance."

In his reprinted speech ("Joe" managed to obtain a copy of the talk), Neilson addressed them with the authority not as an officer but as a man of science. Intemperance was the "one great obstruction in the way to success" and "the greatest danger we shall encounter in Egypt." Its solution rested with the individual and could be overcome with "one great effort of the will." He assured the men that he would not "preach a sermon on temperance and treat the subject from a religious standpoint" which would be "going beyond my province" that was the domain of "your devoted chaplain." Also, he said there was no need for "specious arguments"

because "facts are enough for reasonable men." Speaking as a doctor, who has "never posed before as an advocate of temperance," he said that approved of it generally. Yet if it is was necessary even "in our own healthy climate" then it was "a thousand times more urgent to be abstemious in hot regions like those of the Nile."

But the argument he then presented was actually not scientific, but an appeal to national reputation. If anyone felt "himself wavering in his good resolutions," he advised, he should consider "not only his honor but that of the corps; he exposes to dishonor and ridicule the name of Canadian" and "he drags in the dirt" all of the "credit and glory he may have earned" as the result of his "discomfort, fatigues, sacrifices and exposure to danger." Labat's transcription of the talk, which was probably Neilson's source for his English letter, used more direct language to describe the imprudent man: "il compromet l'honneur du corps don't il fait partie, qu'il trainera dans la poussière, et aux yeux d'étrangers, le nom canadien, qu'il compret la glorie qu'il se sera acquise aux prix de bien des sacrifices, de bien des dangers."³⁹ The speech as it appears in his letter to the *Star* then made a brief passing mention that "the brain, influenced by strong drink, runs in the face of the direst of dangers" but these were not explained. Upon arrival in Egypt, he said, instruction would be given about "other minor local dangers, fever, sun stroke, etc." but the best thing they could do was "to become total abstainers" and at the very least to take the following pledge:

Remove your hats and raise your right hands and repeat with me: "I solemnly promise and swear that I shall abstain from the use of all spirituous liquors during my stay in Egypt, except the daily government issue, should that allowance be continued." You will now come and seal with your lips on the Holy Scriptures the solemn pledge you have just taken, and repeat in so doing, 'So help me God.'"

Neilson's narrator then reported a "hearty cheer and thanks" were given to "Dr. Neilson" for his "timely and eloquent address." Everyone "without exception" took the pledge and if they "stick to their promise" it should be the end of troubles, "for our voyageurs are naturally docile, although undisciplined." They are "reasonable" and "will submit without complaint

³⁹ Labat p. 83

to great inconvenience and privations."⁴⁰ Neilson was pleased with his speech and so was Denison, who wrote in his diary the following day that many men were taking advantage of lime juice instead of the whiskey ration, because Neilson's "lecture on temperance.... produced a good effect."⁴¹

Based on this text, Neilson appealed to scientific knowledge to legitimize a patriotic appeal to honour, prestige and reputation. His passing references to Canada's "healthy climate" and references to Egypt as a tropical land of fevers were such common tropes that they needed little elaboration. The text placed a much stronger emphasis on the damage that alcohol could do to Canada's good name than the damage it could do to the men's good health. In this sense, his use of medical language to control the men and enforce discipline over their behaviour is best read as the deployment of authoritative semantics whose true goal was an affirmation of the cultural norms that he believed would win the appropriate type of recognition for Canada, the corps and by extension, himself as one of its officers. Through his identity as an officer here, his personal interests are tied to successful completion of their task in the eyes of the British military and the British news correspondents who will be on the Nile. Neilson projects his idealized image of the docile, if undisciplined voyageur, who cheerfully submits to inconvenience without complaint. This type of language is the type of praise commonly given to British soldiers and he would like others to see such qualities in the voyageurs as well. The voyageurs do work hard without complaints so long as their cultural norms are not violated. In such cases, as we saw with the outrage over food on the Atlantic, the officers called them "grumblers" for pushing back against aspects of military culture that offend their sense of fairness and dignity.

If we consider Neilson's role amongst the officers, he has either been sent forward, or has put himself forward, on behalf of Denison and the other officers, who lack the special knowledge that he has to speak authoritatively on this medicalized behaviour. He has taken temperance

⁴⁰ "Joe" (Neilson, 7 October), *Montreal Star*, 29 October 1884

⁴¹ LAC MG29 E37 John Louis Hubert Neilson fonds, Nile Expedition diary, 6 October 1884

out of a "religious" social context and positioned it as a matter of health, despite a lack of real factual explanations for why drinking in Canada is different than drinking in Egypt. For whatever reason, Denison makes no attempts to address the men in this or any similar way concerning the purpose of their mission or his expectations for them. Thus, on the thin basis of medical "fact", Neilson effectively is positioned as the lead officer to deliver the men military expectations of discipline and attempt to give them a rationale for the imperial campaign which they are about to join. Since these loftier subjects were couched in a "lecture" on alcohol, it is not surprising that none of the men remembered this aspect of his speech and everyone universally referred to it as the temperance lecture.

Sherlock said that Neilson spoke on "the danger of intemperance in the east, and the probable effect it would have on a man raised in a cool climate." This included an emphasis of "all the dangers we may be subject to." He felt "pleased to say that the majority of the contingent" took the pledge.⁴² Deer thought it was "a very interesting lecture" on "the importance of being strictly temperate in Egypt." Dr. Neilson "explained carefully the effect that the liquor of that country would have upon those who were foolish enough to indulge in it." After this "earnest appeal," he said "many of the men" kissed the Bible and took the oath. He regretted informing the reader that "some of the first to take this oath were among the first to afterwards break it."⁴³ In both these observers, the patriotic message about Canada's reputation seems to have been secondary to medical facts about "all the dangers" and "effects," leading us to question the veracity of Neilson's self-published summary. Where in his text did he list "all the dangers" or "effects"?

There was another version of the lecture, which Labat published in *La Presse*. They are nearly identical, but Labat's is longer, thus it appears that Neilson copied his own speech from Labat's version, translating it into English and leaving out a section of the French text that concerns the dangers of lust. The other possibility is that the *Star* edited out this section.

⁴² Sherlock, fifth letter, (October 8), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 29 October 1884

⁴³ Deer p. 7

After describing how alcohol inflamed the brain, Neilson said that this in turn led to other dangers. In Egypt, "les basse classes fréquentant les *lupanars*," and the mass of the population in towns large and small have contagious diseases, "juste punition de la justice Divine pour des crimes sans nom." But "les peuples de l'Occident" are particularly disposed to these terrible diseases whose symptoms and effects he then described extensively in harrowing details that caused the men to shudder. Assuring them that he was not exaggerating, he told them of the victims he had treated, mostly young sailors at maritime hospitals who had been, for the most part been "sous l'influence de la boisson quand ils s'étaient exposé." Thus, "l'intemperence" led to "la luxure" and "l'homme qui s'enivre descend au-dessous de la brute!" The comments by Sherlock and Deer make more sense in reference to this longer text from *La Presse* than the shorter one from *The Star*. So too did the rapidity of the men to take the oath that would protect them from falling victim to such a state where they were "un objet d'horreur pour elle-même et pour les autres."⁴⁴ Disfiguring sexually transmitted diseases were only one aspect of a widespread preoccupation with tropical diseases that were based in very real concerns (Canadian voyageurs died of smallpox and enteric fever on the expedition). These concerns often took form in stylized contrasts between Canada as a "healthy" country with a "wholesome" climate and "clean" rivers, and a disease-ridden Egypt with fly-covered people living in mud houses on a sickly brown Nile. Such stereotypes were widespread amongst Europeans and North Americans and we saw an earlier manifestation of such talk in the earlier claims by certain British officers that Canadians would die like flies in Egypt.

As far as we have any record, this talk by Neilson was the sole effort made by the officer class to prepare the men for Egypt, not counting Denison's attempt to train the men to "fall in" if they wanted their grog, which was probably not very effective with lime juice. Neilson hoped to change the men's behaviour before the army could see them and he summoned all the scientific gravitas, medical horror stories and hints of Oriental danger that he could

⁴⁴ Labat pp. 84-85

muster. If Labat is correct, the men applauded "ces paroles aussi sages que paternelle." The boatmen were repeatedly called children by Neilson, Labat, Denison and others and a similar language, with different connotations, was utilized by Père Bouchard for his "enfants de Canada." His regular, consistent and varied talks were a contrast with Neilson's reactionary response to the Ayotte affair. Those who attended his regular talks, mostly francophones, learned about the Catholic mission in Khartoum, which was run by Italians with Canadians and clergymen from other countries in an international Catholic effort in Egypt and the Sudan. Many of the men on the *Ocean King* were being instructed systematically not with a story of Britain and Gordon per se, but rather of the Catholic church in Africa, although they used overlapping discourses. Each may have understood their direct interests as distinct, but they widely and generally shared an understanding of a western mission to open Africa to contemporary Christian civilization. Nowhere was this more true than in Khartoum, where Gordon was widely respected as an enemy of the slave-trade in Africa.

An Imperial Mediterranean

After leaving Gibraltar, the *Ocean King* steamed south and followed the coast past Tangiers and Algeria for three days, often as close as six miles away. As he passed the "famous city of Algiers" Neilson admired the "walled city proper and the modern suburbs beyond" and complimented "the efficient maritime administration of the Algerine Colony," with its excellent well-placed lighthouses, at least two of which were always in sight.⁴⁵ The Mediterranean was an imperial space and besides the French activity visible on shore they regularly sighted British vessels. While they were steaming to Cairo, the "Congo Conference" in Berlin was beginning, ostensibly to negotiate "freedom of the commerce" in the Congo, but it soon expanded to cover all areas "not in possession of any civilized state."⁴⁶ The newspapers began to call this the "scramble for Africa"⁴⁷ as European powers jockeyed

⁴⁵ "Joe" (Neilson, October 7), *Montreal Star*, 28 October 1884

⁴⁶ *Montreal Daily Star*, 13 October 1884

⁴⁷ *Ottawa Citizen*, 13 October 1884

for control over the continent and in France, the Khartoum Relief expedition was generally viewed with suspicion and hostility as British opportunism that threatened access to the Suez and Central Africa.

The newspapers published articles to educate their readers on what was at stake. Sir Samuel Baker explained why Gordon and Khartoum must not fall. Khartoum was, he explained to the English reader, "the centre of all that is great and the capital of everything" to the "wildest savages of equatorial Africa" who have never heard of Paris or London. It was also, he explained civilization's bulwark against "the slave hunters," who have been suppressed by the central authority. To lose control of Khartoum would cause Britain to lose face and the slavers would "again be in the ascendant." Worse than this, he hinted, the French would move in and set up "a rival colony firmly rooted at Khartoum."⁴⁸ Writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe wished to educate readers about why "the nations and Churches" were very interested in "this great land" of Africa whose "central belt" could "feed half the world." Egypt held the "cradle of the grandest civilizations of the ages past", in the valley of the Nile, and its races were some of the fittest and "manliest specimens of the human race" who were "naturally aesthetic." She imagined a time when Africa would rise up and when it would be Africa's "turn to figure in the great drama of human improvement." She painted a hopeful picture of Africa's future, acknowledged that for now, Africa was in "affliction," but that "the first shall be last, and the last first."⁴⁹ Both English and French language papers had such essays by military men and clergy and authors, all sharing a basic assumption that Africa was indeed afflicted and European influence and activity there could only be a positive force. The only Canadian who had worked in Africa was Père Bouchard, and he left a very positive impression on Labat.

Labat described the role of Canadians in Africa after hearing Bouchard's talks and observing

⁴⁸ Sir Samuel Baker, "The City of Khartoum," *Montreal Star*, 12 September 1884

⁴⁹ Harriet Beecher Stowe, "The Dark Continent: Great Possibilities of the Vast Land that Civilization is striving to Control." *Renfrew Mercury*, 3 October 1884

European imperial activity in Gibraltar and North Africa. Passing Tunisia, he reflected upon the French soldiers there who "apporteront les flambeaux de la civilisation." The colonial efforts of the French and the Canadians merged in his text at this point, and he seamlessly moved to a general discussion of "those" who have brought "progrès" to Africa and who were the "les pionniers d'une civilisation disparue." Civilization in Africa, he said, would

refleurira grâce à eux et au dévouement de nos voyageurs canadiens, oui, répétons le mot : Nos voyageurs canadiens. Braves, obscurs, ouvriers des chantiers, prêtres, hommes de science, hommes de mer, honneur à vous! L'avenir et Dieu vous en seront reconnaissants, car votre œuvre sera plus durable que les Pyramides !⁵⁰

This glorious mission of civilizational rebirth, to be recognized by God and the future, has remarkably fallen to such a diverse group from all walks of life. He marvels that "nous, canadiens, nous, enfants du Nouveau Monde, issus de races diverses" have been called "à ouvrir les avenues de cette ancienne terre aux lumières de la civilisation chrétienne."

Silver explores the missionary-supporting culture of French-Canada and its connection to positive attitudes in French-speaking Canada towards the British empire. Louis-François Laflèche was the Bishop of Trois-Rivières at this time, and he probably could have recruited more men than Hamel had he been approached, as instructed by Wolseley. Laflèche believed that "chaque nation dans l'humanité a sa mission à remplir," and Silver explains that, for him and many others, the national mission of French Canada was "la conversion des pauvres sauvages et l'extension du royaume de Jésus-Christ." The leaders of Quebec society generally supported the British empire because it promoted the spread of Christianity in general, and specifically, it provided the military protection that permitted Quebec missionaries around the world to carry out their work.⁵¹ Labat showed no evidence of a British identity, but drawing on the semantic resources of a French military tradition and his Catholicism faith, he articulated a distinct and explicit rationale for his participation in this imperial expedition

⁵⁰ Labat p. 81

⁵¹ Silver, Arthur. "Quelques considerations sur les rapports du Canada francais avec l'imperialisme britannique au XIXe siecle" *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, vol 15, no 1 (1981) pp. 55-75

with "des races diverses." For the anglophone officers, an effortless reference to their duty to the Queen or aid for Gordon, may have relieved them of any compulsion to articulate a coherent tale of mission.

The *Journal de Trois-Rivières* thought its readers would find interesting a piece from a republican paper in France that praised the French-Canadian Nile Voyageurs who have "toujours le sang aventureux de nos ancêtres qui coule dans leurs veines," who leap at the first cry of war that seizes "leur âme gauloise." Because French-Canadians are "les premiers rameurs du monde" they will be able to rescue Gordon, wrote the French author, and even though they go "sous le drapeau britannique, en uniforme anglais," they will find their mother tongue "dans les rues de Caire comme dans les rues de Montréal." The article closed saying

les bateliers du Saint-Laurent transplanté sur le Nil par l'Angleterre, ils vont ajouter un page nouvelle à l'histoire du rôle civilisateur de la race française sur la rive méridionale de la Méditerranée.⁵²

This commonplace language of racial pride in France finds expression in Labat's reflections, but unlike this commentary from a republican journal, Labat's analysis of the implications of the expedition serves his religion as well and thus carries the same sense of posterity and historical legacy, but is much more dramatic since God is the one doing the recognizing. Labat's view is not demonstrably representative of a common sentiment amongst the contingent, although it is quite likely that many would find that what he said made sense. It is rather included here as an illustrative case of how an author can reshape existing narrative resources to construct a story of this expedition that makes sense to him, in this case as a Catholic, francophone recent immigrant.

Lord Wolsley's Canoe

As noted at the beginning of the last chapter, the voyage on the *Ocean King* provided the men with an opportunity to become acquainted with one another and presented the possibility

⁵² *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 23 October 1884

of the development of a "contingent identity." In their final week on the ship, they were lucky enough to have perfect weather so the sea was "calm like a mill pond" for several days.⁵³ This permitted Bouchard to celebrate mass every day. He was very satisfied that he heard confessions and "donner la sainte communion à presque tous mes canotiers avant d'arriver à Alexandrie."⁵⁴ For all of the men, the good weather meant more shanty games, more bouts of tug of war, more letter writing and more concerts as they travelled past Malta and on to Alexandria. In the final day before arriving they also took advantage of the good weather to clean the four-fathom Hudson's Bay canoe that Wolseley had requested.

Neilson described the Hudson Bay canoe they had brought for Wolseley as being of the "Bourgeois" type. During the fur trade, the Bourgeois, as he was called by his French-speaking canoemen, was the English merchant who would not do any of the paddling himself, but would be carried to the factory or trading post by his crew. Wolseley's canoe was also to have a crew and the act of preparing and cleaning the canoe on deck caused "considerable excitement" amongst the crew led by John Prince, "chief of the Indians of St. Peter Reserve" and consisting of "five of his subjects." Prince had served Wolseley in 1870. When these men brought the canoe out of the hold it "looked rather shabby," after a voyage by train and steamer from Winnipeg to the Mediterranean. With some water, soap and "gum for the seams, applied by the cunning hand of the red man himself," the layers of coal dust were removed and its original "pristine glory" was restored and it was "once more a thing of beauty." They decorated it with the colours of the union jack "with tasteful discretion" to complete "the transformation" and proudly displayed it in "the place of honor on the quarter deck." Neilson imagined "the astonishment of the inhabitants of Cairo, of the humble fellaheen, of the dancing girls of Minyeh, of the good citizens of Assouan, Wady Halfa or Dongola, of El Mahdi himself," when they "behold this craft from another hemisphere," this undisputably Canadian symbol.

⁵³ Denison, October 6, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885 (Frederick C. Denison), Toronto Reference Library (Stacey p. 97)

⁵⁴ Bouchard, deuxième lettre, *Annales de la propagation de la Foi pour le province du Quebec*. Montreal: Vingt-Cinquième numéro, Février 1885

The symbolism of the canoe, from its origins as an indigenous technology to its association with *coureurs de bois*, voyageurs and the fur trade are deep and complex, but they also have distinct meanings for our purposes. A Bourgeois canoe of this exact type was used by Wolsley on the Red River expedition, so Melgund's offer to send him one, and his rapid reply should be understood as an incorporation of the canoe as part of the Wolseley iconography, like Gordon's fez, as opposed to a more generalized canoe-loving British romanticism. It is also important to note that in the 1880s in Canada, canoe clubs flourished as seasonal counterparts to the snowshoe clubs documented by Poulter. They served as indigenizing sports that provided middle-class British Canadians with a way of making themselves Canadian by actively participating in distinctly "Canadian" activities. Because the canoe's associations were so well-known to the British, Denison could be assured that having his own canoe on the Nile would mark him amongst the officers as "the Canadian" while also linking him in a unique relationship with Lord Wolseley. In the official diary, Denison referred to the cleaning of "the two canoes"⁵⁵ as though they were both equal. Neilson's description placed all the emphasis on Wolsley's much larger craft and then he notes in passing that "Col. Denison has also a bark canoe for his own use. It is his own private property." Neilson reserved all of his enthusiasm for the symbolic potential of Wolseley's canoe rather than the smaller craft of the Toronto alderman.

Alexandria

As they approached Alexandria, Sherlock climbed up in the riggings to get a better view and seemed a bit frustrated at the lack of reliable information that he could get concerning the objects before him. They passed an object "which some say is Pompey's Pillar, but I could get nothing reliable about it." He saw one building and "any one who has read anything of eastern countries could tell that it was a Mosque, with its immense dome, its many pinnacles and minarets, and I could almost fancy I heard the Muezzin shout his Allah il Alla! -- God is great, come to prayer." Sherlock references literary and historical sources more than most,

⁵⁵ Toronto Reference Library, Denison fonds, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition, 6 October 1884

but others also quickly drew associations between their book knowledge and the city they were entering. Mackeand said "the Winnipeg boys had formed an idea" of Egypt "from the scene shown by Fred Bryton when he played 'Around the World in Eighty Days,' in the old city hall." After landing, he concluded that "the ideas one had formed of the manner, dress and characteristics of the people" based on this local performance was "sometimes exaggerated" but not "very far astray." Others were more surprised with the dress they encountered, like Cram who said that the clothing of the pilots who led them into the bay "made us all laugh... some with pants, some with pantaloons and some with gowns hanging loose from the shoulders down." In his journal, Denison also laughed at the pilot and his crew, "dressed in the regular Arab style with the flowing gowns," who looked "as if they had jumped out of bed with their nightshirts on and just shaken themselves as a toilet." With a range of responses to an unfamiliar society, the men crossed into Egypt and found themselves in an unfamiliar cultural environment, in which they would travel and work.

They also found themselves almost immediately in a military zone. Mackeand noted that the destroyed fortifications in Alexandria had still not been repaired since the British attack in 1882, in which Wolseley also led a prominent role. Denison's first action upon landing was to report to the commanding officer at Alexandria and request that he "put on a guard on the dock to prevent our men landing." The guards were soldiers who had just arrived that morning, only to find that their first duty was to prevent the Canadians from escaping and wreaking havoc as they had done in Sydney and Gibraltar. Sherlock said that they were "real sentries this time and no mistake." The sight of real soldiers and "the gleaming of the cold steel seems to chase away all chance of exploring the city."⁵⁶ Relieved to have the contingent safely under the control of the military authorities Denison was able to check his cables. In the expedition diary, he recorded that he had been gazetted as a Lieutenant-Colonel and he "naturally was much pleased."⁵⁷ In Canada, the official publication of Denison's promotion

⁵⁶ Sherlock, fifth letter, (October 8), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 29 October 1884

⁵⁷ Denison, October 7, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885 (Frederick C. Denison), Toronto Reference Library (Stacey p. 97)

was described by the *Winnipeg Sun* as "a special case."⁵⁸

Now that they had arrived in Egypt, the Canadian press would have more regular updates about their progress. The number of correspondents dropped off as the men became busier with work, but for those who did write, such as Sherlock, the novelty of the society and culture provided him with much to write about. Cables from the War Office began to note the progress of the Canadians from this point on and reporters from British newspapers who were accompanying the expedition frequently wrote about the Canadians. Even before they landed, evidence of an ongoing interest was present and most papers, at some point in the fall, printed maps, and modified British newspaper articles to indicate where the Canadians would be working in this expedition which was "now of so much interest to Canadians, from the participation of a body of our own countrymen."⁵⁹ There was also evidence of an ongoing confusion as to the nature of Canadian participation, as the *Kingston Whig* said that "Canadian officers and voyageurs" would be greatly disappointed "if they do not after all see a bit of active service and confront a real and ugly foe."⁶⁰ That is not to say such ideas were not also shared by certain members of the contingent, such as MacKeand, who told his "dear friends in far-off Winnipeg" that the "boys of the Manitoba contingent" hope to see Egypt's "wonders of the world" and also "the wonders of a battle."⁶¹ The arrival at Egypt evoked such a response from the Winnipeg militiaman and caused Sherlock to close his letter with a promise to rescue Gordon, "we will fetch him out for you," he tells his Peterborough readers. Before closing, he said "I must tell you,"

that all the men feel now that the eyes of their countrymen not only in Canada, but all the world over are upon them, that the honor of their country is at stake, and that they all to a man are determined to do their duty as men, and leave a record that Canada may be proud of.

This is the most patriotic statement made by any of the boatmen in their letters and it clearly

⁵⁸ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 6 October 1884

⁵⁹ *Montreal Star*, 20 September 1884

⁶⁰ *Kingston Whig*, cited in *Peterborough Daily Review*, 25 September 1884

⁶¹ MacKeand, second letter (nd), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 1 November 1884

articulates a value on national recognition that goes above and beyond merely doing his job. No doubt it was predicated on the excitement of finally arriving in Egypt, in "the East", at the scene of the "action." Sherlock's spoke not of his town nor of the empire, but of Canada and he articulated a direct connection between each of them, "all to a man," acting "as men" to make Canada proud, given that its honour is at stake.

Conclusions

The crossing on the *Ocean King* provided the men with many opportunities, both socially and in formal roles, to spend time together and test each others' limits. For the most part, the men treated one another with great respect and did indeed pass time in games, concerts, religious activities and the routines of the ship in greater harmony than either the officers or the men might have expected. In terms of a group identity, much of the evidence suggests that the men most strongly identified with their regional groups and within this, with their foremen and gangs. The largest and most obvious division was between the officers and the rest of the men on the contingent, although all of the correspondents expressed positive opinions of Bouchard and Kennedy.

Denison, MacRae and Aumond appear to have been unprepared for command and certainly were not sufficiently equipped to control a group of civilian, mostly working-class men who were unfamiliar with military cultural norms and did not respect the commanders' authority. While the ocean passage was sufficiently formal to let the officers believe that they were in control, the stakes were so low during their passage that it did not really matter that they exercised at best a weak and indirect control over the men. Denison depended on the foremen to carry out his orders, and they were not always able or willing to do so. He was amazed that one foreman tried to come to the aid of the Ayotte brothers. Denison relied on harbour police in Montreal, Quebec and Gibraltar to try and control his men. The men escaped him in Sydney, bypassed the officers, complained to the ship's captain about food and caused several problems in Gibraltar. Denison made no successful attempts to win the respect of the men, to prepare them for life in a military operation or to provide some higher rationale for

their trip. Neilson attempted to address some of these points, but the message was overshadowed by the temperance plea and oath. Denison's main success was that he got the contingent to Egypt and handed them over to some "real sentries" in Alexandria, but there was no evidence of any of the bonds of loyalty that were supposedly capable of crossing class lines in 19th century Canadian militias. The ability of the contingent to present itself as a body, to stand up to criticism and tell its own story of meaning would require a strong attachment between the officers and members of the contingent that did not exist. Taken together with the strong gang identities, there was no "Nile Voyageur" identity to speak of at this point.

From the perspective of the boatmen, such concerns were secondary to the pleasures of the voyage. For most, who had never travelled on the ocean, it was the trip of a lifetime to see Gibraltar and spend a gorgeous week sailing across the Mediterranean, past beautiful villas in Tunisia and Algeria. During their time spent in leisure and travel, they did not write about Gordon or the Empire. They played games, read magazines, made music and saw the sights along the way. Only as they approached Alexandria, and Arab pilots guided them into port, did some of them begin to comment on their approaching duties. The bayonets of the guards woke Sherlock to the reality of his position and for the first time, he began to write about duty and Canada's good name.

For the officers and the boatmen, "the Ayotte incident" exposed a series of complex issues that they would need to confront on the expedition. The shifting and varied responses to their "victory" over the harbour police revealed a competing set of conflicting impulses. It is helpful to understand that first and foremost, for many imperialists and militiamen the Nile Voyageurs were a colonial disappointment. Canada was not permitted to send soldiers, but were requested instead to send labourers. There was an emerging pattern of the way middle-class Canadians talked about those workers. If they must send workers, it seemed that they felt anxious to ensure that they were the hardest, strongest and most skilled workers available, who could at least come close to being soldiers. This obviously did not exclude

their capacity for inflicting violence on those who "unjustly" attacked them. At the site of the strongest military fortress in the world, the British soldiers were polite, hospitable gentlemen living in a beautiful garden perched on the edge of an azure sea. The real combat and fighting spirit was evident in the harbour where the Canadians beat off an unfair assault by a fleet of Spanish police boats. For their strength and their underdog victory, they were cheered. But from a military culture perspective, the behaviour of the Ayottes was a disgrace. They were drunk and disorderly and they assaulted the police, who represented law and order. From the view of a worker, the police attack was not fair. Based on the impulses of racial pride and national competition, which crossed class lines, it was something to cheer. It was also a special source of pride for the francophones, such as Neilson, Labat, Bouchard and Têtu, because of the burlesque of these two French-Canadians who "conquered Gibraltar," which to turn Labat's phrase around, might be called the Quebec of the south. Such an event exposed the paradoxical predicament of the disappointed colonial elites. They could not win the type of recognition they desired, and thus, as a compensation, they enjoy the vicarious brawling victories of the lower classes, using strong fighting men as their proxies and champions, sending hardy men to represent the country on the Nile.

Such a compensatory narrative of the disappointed colonial elites finds resonance in clusters of certain infantilizing and diminishing metaphors and expressions used by the middle and upper classes to refer to workers. The men are regularly referred to as children. Neilson's temperance talk was described as "wise and paternal" and Father Bouchard is constantly talking about the men as "enfants du Canada." Explaining away the misbehaviour of the Ayotte brothers, Labat says these men are big spoiled children, who love to horse around, to fight, to laugh and to sing. At other times, as we have seen in earlier chapters, the men are referred to as plants, most commonly as trees. Canada grows men like oak trees, men are the "growth of the Canadian soil" and in this chapter there is a reference to England transplanting French-Canadians from the St. Laurence to the Nile. Such tropes overlap with a cluster of references to the health of the Canadian climate, in which they grow up to be hardy and strong. The child and plant imagery is usually meant to be complementary and positive, but

when workers are presented in a negative light, it is at times using animal imagery, such as sharks or swarming rock-scorpions. Neilson tells the men that when they become drunk, they fall below the level of brutes. In all cases, workers who are children, trees or animals are brought down in status and logically they are made subject to the tutelage, pruning and domestication of someone "sage et paternelle" who can correct aberrant behaviour and focus undisciplined strength. At least, such is the story that officers tell themselves, but its validity requires the unlikely recognition from the very men such language insults.

Therefore, attempts to discipline the men should be understood as part of an ongoing cultural struggle to define acceptable codes of conduct that would be recognized as "honourable" in the coming encounter with the British army. As they were leaving Quebec City, Lansdowne said that although they were "not going to serve as soldiers," they could still "show the soldiers that a civilian can upon occasion display many of the best qualities of a soldier." What exactly are those qualities? The Ayotte brothers displayed the strength, power and fighting abilities of the best of soldiers, and this was cheered. They lacked the order, discipline and obedience of soldiers, however and for this behaviour, they were chastized and fined and the rest of the men received a dose of preventive medicine in the form of a lecture on the dangers of indiscipline. Knowing when to cheer for the Ayottes and when to try correct them rather than encourage them was a problem faced by the officers. It characterized some of the complex tensions in an ongoing struggle over values that tried to define how Canadians should behave so that they could win honour for their country.

CHAPTER 6 - EGYPT

After nearly a month of living together in close quarters between countries, the contingent arrived in Egypt to discover that it was still another three weeks from the site where work would begin at Wady Halfa in the Sudan. Moving up the Nile, and passing through Egypt, they were fully embedded in a military campaign, seen by the British soldiers as a unit known as "the Canadian Voyageurs," or just "the Canadians." This encounter with British soldiers as "others" occurred in a country that was very different than anything the men had ever experienced before. The military campaign and the foreign setting, both defined as imperial frames of reference, re-configured the differences that were previously highlighted between identities. Protestants and Catholics were at times just Christians in a campaign against a "false prophet" passing through a Muslim country. Those considered English, Canadien-français, Irish, Iroquois, Trifluviens or Winnipeggers while in Canada or on the *Ocean King* were often simply "Canadians" in the British press or "You, Canadian" to a British officer. At other times, inter-Canadian differences were highlighted and they shaped the way participants interacted with British soldiers and with Egyptians. The Canadians were unfamiliar with both Egyptian cultural norms and with British military culture, and in both cases, they made comparisons and contrasts with what they knew from Canadian civilian life. The episode's externality recontextualized Canadian identities, if only temporarily, in an unprecedented manner.

Back in Canada, there was a continued public interest in the expedition's progress and the smallest bits of news were widely reprinted. In addition to letters from the voyageurs, who now had more regular access to the post, Canadians could also read telegrams from the War Office and from the journalists from major English newspapers who were accompanying the expedition. When the newspapers had no news to print, they would guess at what was happening, e.g. "the voyageurs are probably, by this time, on the Nile."¹ Canadians read

¹ Renfrew *Mercury*, 3 October 1884

about "the Canadians" from British telegrams and reprinted articles and they learned about Egypt and the Egyptians through Canadian voyageur letters.

The letters from the voyageurs were particularly rich at this point in the expedition because the men were in a completely novel and fascinating country and yet they were not under the stress and strain of daily work on the rapids. They were in Egypt for nineteen days, which is a very long time to "pass through" the country. The men wrote about a range of topics, including their perceptions of local customs, agricultural techniques, housing, religion, food etc. Turning to our theory and method in this situation, it will be important for the textual analysis to stay focussed on the following areas: (a) recognition grammatics that are revealed as disrespect, insult, slander, humiliation and denigration, and (b) the semantic resources that speakers used to make sense of the unfamiliar world around them, in particular, their attempts to make Egypt and Egyptians cohere to their existing pre-existing narratives of identity or to defend their reputation when it comes under attack. This period of travel in Egypt was primarily an encounter with Egyptians, not with British soldiers. That encounter will be at the heart of the next chapter, examining the way in which Canadians and British soldiers worked together on the rapids. While it is true that Canada-Egypt recognition dynamics are not the focus of this study, their experiences in Egypt with Egyptians were of key importance to the voyageurs and were a part of the complicated web of mutual recognition through which they explained the expedition to their fellow Canadians. To Canadians, Egypt had always figured prominently in the public imagination of the Nile Voyageurs. To many it added to the historical gravitas of the expedition, knowing that the Canadians were going "Off to Egypt" or to "the land of the Pharoahs," although the work on the rapids and the battles of the army would all take place in the Sudan. As well, this study cannot attempt to examine Canadian-British relations on the Nile as if the Egyptians and the Sudanese were not there. Voyageurs from "the colonies," aboriginal and settler, were in Egypt as part of a military force that Egyptians understood to be an occupying army. Lastly, the extensive Canadian commentary on Egyptians who were conceived to be different than themselves should all be read intersubjectively, as self-reflection and self-definition through

comparison and contrast.

Objects of a Curious Gaze

The voyage across ocean and sea did not forge a common identity amongst the continent nor did it enculturate the men with military norms and cure them of their so-called "indiscipline." As soon as they docked, however, the appearance of "real sentries" to keep them from exploring Alexandria let the men know that they could not operate as freely and unconstrained as they had in Sydney and Gibraltar. Ruined battlements from the overthrow of Arabi in 1882 remained unrepaired and were noticed by many of the correspondents. As this campaign was getting underway, the quay was busy with troop ships arriving from England and the *Ocean King* arrived at the same time as two other groups, the Army Hospital Corps (AHC) and the Commissariat. Neilson called them "a perhaps humbler, but certainly not less useful lot of men," for while they were in the regular army, they were not combatants. The Canadian contingent would travel with these two other groups as far as Assouan. Increasingly, starting from this point, they would be seen as "the Canadians" in the eyes of other members of the expedition, much as the Essex or the Highlanders or the Black Guard were seen to possess clear group identities. On their first morning in Egypt, as they moved from their ship to the train, "We appeared to be objects of great interest to gazing crowds of soldiers, civilians and natives, the Indian element in particular."² The "Indian element" was sometimes identified by British observers as something different than "Canadian" but most of the time, the phrase Canadian was used for all members of the contingent. A correspondent to the *Journal de Trois-Rivières* understood the stares to be directed at "nous" without distinction, saying that "les indigènes, étonnés, nous regardaient comme si nous eussions été des bêtes fauves."³ The military context, and the logistics of the campaign, began to define them as Canadians in the eyes of Britons and also, in the eyes of the Egyptians.

² Neilson, fourth letter ("Joe," 16 October), *Montreal Star*, 17 November 1884

³ Anon, *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 20 November 1884

Their arrival in Egypt gave them all the name "Canadian" within the military, and yet their membership in the expedition made them appear British to the Egyptians. As soon as they landed, they began to adopt more of the characteristics of military service. In Alexandria the Canadians were issued white pith helmets, military boots, haversacks and other military apparel, making them appear more like soldiers than originally intended. It will be recalled that when drafting the engagement papers a concerted effort was made to emphasize the civilian nature of the contingent and not make the thing "too military." Boundaries between their civilian and military were becoming less apparent and from the perspective of Egyptian civilians, the distinctions separating Canadians from the other members of the advancing expedition were somewhat obscure.

The Canadians were not the only civilians upon whom the British Army depended to get their troops to Khartoum. There was a railway line that carried troops from Alexandria, through Cairo and to Assiout, but from this point to Aswan, the Canadians and others were transported on barges pulled by the steamers of Thomas Cook and Son, the tourist company. Because of the pyramids and its antiquities, Egypt was without equal in Africa or Asia as a destination for European tourists. Based on this profitable business, Cook's tourist company controlled a fleet of steamers, a network of hotels and maintained communications infrastructure operating from Alexandria to Abu Simbel beyond the first cataract at Aswan. The Cooks' "monopoly of tourist travel in upper Egypt"⁴ ensured them the contract with the military to transport troops and equipment to Wady Halfa. They only travelled by daylight to avoid the river's ever-shifting sandy shoals, often dropping anchor in the evening at a location above or below larger towns. Working-class Canadians who would have never been able to afford a Cook's tour of Egypt found themselves packed onto cramped barges pulled by Cook steamers that only stopped in the dark in obscure locations. The men did have some limited opportunities to see some antiquities, visit bazaars and meet locals when their barges stopped in small towns to recoal, send telegrams and buy supplies. These occasions provided

⁴ Neilson, fourth letter ("Joe," 16 October), *Montreal Star*, 17 November 1884

different Canadian writers opportunities to reflect upon the similarities and difference between Egyptians and Canadians and to frequently discuss their home towns in the new light of their experiences on the Nile.

Imagined Egypt

In the voyageur texts, many attempts to explain the differences between Canadians and Egyptians drew upon exiting narratives of race and history. To help frame the racial assumptions of Canadians at this time, James Belich's *The Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict: The Maori, the British and the New Zealand Wars* is particularly instructive. A brief overview of some of the key language patterns concerning "race" that were popularly used in the British world's 19th century imperial conflicts provides a comparative study of some prevalent tropes of racial superiority.⁵ Secondly, it will be helpful to provide a thumbnail sketch of four imagined Egypt that figure prominently in the articulated expectations of the Canadian letter writers. The prevalence and usage of these discourses will then be tested and demonstrated through the observations made by the Canadian correspondents. All the Canadians remained together and travelled up the Nile, observing similar towns and markets. The examination of texts will cluster not around events but around four key writers: Neilson, Jackson, Labat and Sherlock. In Neilson's case, a couple of letters by MacKeand and Kennedy, who are also anglophone Canadian militia men will supplement his observations, as the three speak in remarkably similar ways about Egypt. As well, the section on Jackson will also include some references from Deer, both Caughnawaga men who use similar language to describe the Egyptians they meet. After an introduction of these patterns, followed by four test-cases, we will finally look at one explosive incident that occurred midway through their journey at the town of Girgeh, and the consequences not only for the individuals involved, but also in terms of the perceived reputation of "the Canadians."

⁵ James Belich, *The Victorian interpretation of racial conflict: the Maori, the British, and the New Zealand wars*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989

Victorian discourse of Race and History

James Belich's study of the New Zealand wars led to a reassessment of the dominant historiography of that country's wars between settlers and the Maori. He also raised new questions of value to scholars of the British world about the "small wars" of the Victorian era and he has provided a balanced reappraisal of indigenous resistance to imperialism. With a close reading of colonial newspaper reports of the conflicts, an explicit problematizing of "one-sided evidence" in such conflicts, Belich identifies recurring "discernable patterns" in language that reveal a set of assumptions about race in those specific wars that have been useful to scholars studying British-indigenous encounters in other situations as well. Belich found that these "components were numerous, diverse and sometimes logically contradictory" but they provided a systematic mutually-reinforcing "succession of safety nets, each filtering out a further share of the unacceptable facts and implications which had escaped those above it." The resulting patterns of speech and compensatory narratives was shared by many who had a common British heritage, whether they were military officers, colonial officials, London newspaper editors or local New Zealand reporters. Based on the assumption of racial superiority, "that the British always won battles against savages," descriptions of the war were driven by the expectation of victory, which led to an "exaggeration of real British victories and the creation of fictional ones." Frequently, Belich concluded, "the enormously powerful British expectation of victory" was such a potent force in prevailing descriptions of the war that "it simply overshot the evidence." When recognition of defeat was unavoidable, the resulting "traumatic shock" triggered the generation of "acceptable explanations." If what remained was still a set of "unacceptable implications," then defeats "were subsequently downplayed, obscured, or forgotten."⁶

Belich uses the term "palliatives" for the various "satisfying explanations which softened the blow" of defeat. Some of the most common palliatives were an exaggeration of numbers and, in cases of British defeat, an exaggeration of Maori casualties. Acknowledgements of clever strategy on the part of Maoris were rarely made. The British soldiers and press also would

⁶ Belich pp. 312-320

commonly claim that the local terrain and climate gave the natives an unfair advantage. Maoris had supposed "natural abilities" that were advantages of a "distinctively 'lower' type" such as being able to "burrow like rabbits through the high fern" and like "a rat when running ... in the bush," or being "amphibious in their habits." Another trope was the conviction that the savages had outside help, from European renegades most likely (usually these were supposedly Australian convicts, US merchants, Fenians and French missionaries). All these palliatives were both "acceptable to the British, and they were inaccurate." Belich found that British assumptions of superiority regularly proved more powerful than empirical data. The use of palliative stories dulled the pain of their damaged identities and helped filter out "incoherent" facts. If such rationalizations could not adequately explain away the uncomfortable facts that contradicted their assumptions of superiority, then "suppressive reflexes" kicked in, and "the final safety-net was to forget."⁷

While some of these patterns might seem familiar to all military encounters, Belich believed that there were particular dimensions that had their roots in the Victorian belief in the existence of races, a history of thought that "was older, more complicated, and less intentionally malign than is sometimes implied." Rather than attempt an archeology of these ideas, he sketches their operational mechanics as demonstrated by attempted rationalizations of British losses to the Maori. He identifies three main racial principles that are consistently at play: a) the conviction of British military superiority *per se*, that military excellence amongst the British people was innate. He claimed that a cluster of natural British qualities, that included "Heroic courage and hardihood," "moral fibre" and the "ordinary British spirit" were commonly used to describe British soldiers, whether they were Imperial or colonial, regulars or militia. b) supposed laws of nature lay behind the British victory over "such people as the Maori," most notably, concept of a "Fatal Impact" of race contact. Belich said it was a "basic axiom of nineteen century racial thought" that "Europeans in contact with lesser races would inevitably exterminate, absorb, or at the very least, subordinate them;" c) a core belief in racial difference, whereby there were superior (European) races and savage,

⁷ Belich p. 315-321

and where the latter had certain "natural advantages" that adapted them to the land, almost like animals, but they also had "a dislike of steady labour," possessed an "excitability" that made them poor marksmen, and most importantly, lacked the "higher mental faculties" that included advanced language skills, scientific curiosity, mechanical understanding and a capacity for military strategy. Surveying the landscape of nineteenth century racial thought, Belich concludes that "the European monopoly of the higher mental faculties was the inner tabernacle of Victorian racial attitudes. To question it was to question the whole world view." This cluster of ideas had many detailed articulations in newly developed branches of Victorian science, but Belich points to the existence of a widespread parochial "folk racism" that was muddled together with contemporary science, Anglo-Saxon romanticism, belief in Progress and philanthropy in a "web spun from many" diverse and over-lapping "strands." He found that this mutually reinforcing set of ideas created an "enormously powerful expectation of victory."⁸ In this chapter, we will test this set of assumptions, to see if there is any evidence for counterparts amongst the Canadians in their encounter with the people who lived on the Nile.

In testing these racial assumptions, I will presume neither a "Canadian" discourse (hence using four different sets of letters) nor a simple understanding of Egypt. Edward Said demonstrates the formation and operation of a totalizing conception of the Islamic Orient as an integrated body of academic knowledge and imperial power, over and against a Christian "occident."⁹ For the purposes of this study, it should be evident that we cannot presume that any monolithic conception of the "orient" exists in the range of discourses found amongst the Canadian boatmen. The voyageurs were a group of largely working class men of varying degrees of literacy whose knowledge of the Arabic "Orient" seemed to range from 1001 Arabian Nights, for the most literate, to popular stereotypes picked up by osmosis through newspapers, church sermons and other non-academic sources. The authors of the Nile voyageur letters and books were not part of the intertextual community of orientalists or

⁸ pp. 320-325

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Random House of Canada, 2003 pp. 62-72 and *en passim*

imperialists in the metropolises of London and Paris. No doubt, they were unknowingly influenced by such discourses, receiving them second and third-hand through other mediums, but they integrated such knowledge as colonists of different social rank and cultural assumptions. When Canadians spoke about Egypt, they did not think of some abstract "savage" colony, nor did they think of a generalized "oriental," but instead, they drew upon a complex set of historical and cultural references that could be grouped into different imagined Egypts.

The ancient Egypt of the "Pharaohs and Ptolemies" was an exotic and pagan world, but it was held in very high esteem as a mighty empire that had been incorporated into the ancient Greco-Roman world. For Victorians, Egypt held a special spot in human history as the "birthplace of civilization," and in London, Paris and Washington, the symbols and architectural forms of Egypt joined those of the Graeco-Roman world, lending credence to the claims by these modern empires that they were the forces of civilizational leadership in the modern age. Linked with this ancient history was the Nile's special spot in the Christian imagination as a part of the "Holy Land," associated with Moses' birth, the enslavement of the Hebrews, the Exodus and the "Flight into Egypt." Both of these "historical" Egypts, ancient and Biblical, were positive, and many Canadian newspapers made allusions to them in the articles preceding the departure of the contingent. More complex were the references to an "Oriental" Egypt that included several centuries of Arabic and Turkish Muslim culture. The fascination with romantic stories of the Orient were mixed together with assumptions of savagery and false religion that rested upon centuries of misrecognition and antagonism between Christianity and Islam. The fourth Egypt was the modernizing Egypt of Napoleon, the Suez canal, Christian missions, schools, industry, railways and tourist companies. Above all, since 1882, modern Egypt was for Canadian readers an imperial site under control of the British Army, where there was an expedition to rescue Gordon which was being "led" by Canadians. These attitudes towards the socially constructed notions of "race" and popular conceptions of history, or "civilization," provided the main sources of raw materials, the semantic resources, that Canadians drew upon to make sense of their participation in a

British campaign in Egypt and to explain the differences between the lifeworld of the Egyptians they met and their own lives at home. They looked at Egypt differently than they looked upon other parts of the empire, and they looked on Egypt differently than did Britons.

Neilson, Mackeand and Kennedy

After Sherlock's, Neilson's letters were probably the most widely reprinted in newspapers across the country. As the Montreal *Star* correspondent, he wrote under the pen-name "Joe," a common shantyman who possessed the unlikely combination of an impressive classical education, a strong command of Latin, knowledge of military matters, and an intimate knowledge of the thoughts and intentions of the Canadian officers, whom, he repeatedly assured the readers, were held in the highest esteem by all of the men. Neilson told the reader that the Canadians were "objects of great interest to gazing crowds," and in the next paragraph, he described from his train window the "fertile triangle of the Nile Delta" whose wealth, richness and "primitive but effective mode of irrigation presented itself to our gaze in constant succession."¹⁰ Aware that the Canadians were both the observed and the observers, Neilson moved constantly in his speech between Egypt and Canada, Egyptians and Canadian. As noted in the previous chapter, Neilson began his temperance speech by noting that Egypt was "the historic land of the Pharaohs and Ptolemies," upon which "the light of ancient civilization, such as it was, shone for the first time on the world." He then explained to the men that although that light had "long since disappeared," leaving the country "in a state of barbarism," as a group of Canadians, "we, children of the New World, descendants of various races," were called upon "to co-operate in re-opening the avenues of this ancient land to modern civilization, to the lights of Christian civilization." The familiar 19th century trope of civilization as a light brought by Europeans to a "dark" continent did not easily cohere with Egypt's place in Europe's historical consciousness. Therefore, on this expedition, Canadians "co-operated" with the British in "re-opening" civilization, rather than introducing it. In Neilson's interpretation, modern, Christian British civilization will enter Egypt and recognize the greatness of ancient Egypt as its equal, while dismissing (misrepresenting and

¹⁰ Neilson, fourth letter ("Joe," 16 October), Montreal *Star*, 17 November 1884

forgetting) the intervening centuries of Muslim civilization as "barbarism."

Mackeand's first impression of Egypt was of Alexandria from his train window, which he thought looked like "a shabby place, and devoid of interest" except for its "ancient monuments and that it has been so recently the scene of destruction and bloodshed."¹¹ This was, stated most succinctly, the majority view amongst the letter writers, that the "interesting" Egypt was the ancient part, and the important Egypt was the British part, with the rest being sort of "shabby" and not really relevant. The greatest objects of fascination and awe were those associated with ancient Egypt. As they approached Luxor, Neilson wrote that it was "extremely tantalizing to be within a couple of miles of Karnak, Thebes, the tombs of the kings, the sitting Colossi, and many other ancient monuments of exceeding interest and be unable to visit them."¹² Luckily there were able to do so, but only in shifts of a few at a time, late in the evening one night. Some had local guides, and Neilson was led around by lantern-light by a resident American missionary. Many of the voyageurs, "our antiquarians," were keen to see these sights and returned "astonished, delighted and most grateful to their kind guide for the marvels they had seen" in the centre of the country's tourist business. At Esneh, Neilson said that "many of the Indians and French Canadians procured wet clay and took impressions of the curious figures" at the temple there.¹³ Mackeand lamented his inability to visit the island of Elephantine which he had heard "has some of the grandest ruins in the world."¹⁴

Neilson made one comment about a mosque in Esneh with a "with a handsomely decorated minaret," but there is no indication that he went inside. Other than that, there were few references to the architectural legacy of Arabic or Turkish dynasties. When Mackeand identified defensive towers and castleworks, he felt convinced that they were "not to be

¹¹ Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

¹² Neilson, fourth letter ("Joe," 16 October), *Montreal Star*, 17 November 1884

¹³ "Joe" (Neilson, sixth letter), October 24, *Montreal Star*, 24 November 1884

¹⁴ Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

credited to the inventive genius of the present age."¹⁵ On the contrary, comments about technology and buildings of the Egyptians they saw around them regularly emphasized the contrast between the glories of Egypt's past and its current backwardness. The people of Egypt have "changed or have become degenerated through long oppression and ill-usage of a succession of conquering races," said Neilson, but they continue to use the same agricultural methods "practised by the Egyptians of old."¹⁶ At Luxor, Mackeand tried to imagine Luxor and "ancient Thebes" as "one mighty city of palaces, and the seat of civilization and the home of learning." Centuries ago, he said, "civilization was first rocked in the cradle of the Nile," but today it is a "place of lost glories" whose "ruins wonderfully contrast with the miserable mixed huts and hovels which are scattered throughout their midst." Mackeand said Egyptians were "very dirty and live in huts built of corn stalks and mud." He reacted strongly against these houses, saying that the "beautiful" scenes of the Nile were "disfigured by the abodes of the Fellahs - for the most part huts of wicker-work, cemented together by the mud of the Nile," which he called "defective architecture."¹⁷ Kennedy also reacted strongly to such buildings, calling Aswan "a wretched place made of mud with narrow lanes."¹⁸

Many of the correspondents wrote negatively about the Egyptian homes they saw, but amongst Manitobans like Mackeand and Kennedy, harsh references to "mud" were more notable. Such sun-dried mud-straw brick homes were often attached to a walled enclosure or yard for livestock open to the sky. In a land with no rain and no spare trees for construction or kilns, this time-tested technology proved effective for thousands of years. Covered with mud stucco that was sometimes painted white or blue, these adobe homes provided effective ventilation and could be made cheaply from readily available materials.¹⁹

¹⁵ Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

¹⁶ "Joe" (Neilson, fifth letter), October 17, *Montreal Star*, 18 November 1884

¹⁷ Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

¹⁸ Kennedy, letter to his wife (October 16), *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 13 November 1884

¹⁹ The word "adobe" is of Egyptian origin, being a Spanish loan-word from the Arabic *al-tub* ("the brick"), which in turn came from the Coptic *to:o:be* ("brick")

But instead of seeing these houses as an efficient peasant technology, these Manitoban observers juxtaposed the "mud huts" against the imposing stone temples and monuments built by ancient Egypt's kings and saw evidence of civilizational collapse. Mary Douglas has explored cultural understandings of "dirt as disorder" in which "there is no such things as absolute dirt: it exists in the eyes of the beholder." She organizes her study around the removal of culturally defined dirt as attempts to shape the environment "making it conform to an idea."²⁰ Like York and countless other towns in Canada before it, Winnipeg was in 1884 a fast-growing frontier town, which seemed unusually fixated on the need to demonstrate its modernity by combatting mud and dirt.

The inefficiency, delays and unseemliness of sewage work and street-paving that was taking place in the summer and fall of 1884 in Winnipeg manifested itself in the local press as an almost pathological preoccupation with "OUR MUDDY STREETS."²¹ Princess street was "blocked with earth," Albert Street was "entirely blocked up with sewer dirt," Main Street was "almost impassible" after it rained, with vehicles sunk "to the hubs" in mud.²² A visiting British scientist told the Montreal papers that Winnipeg was "the funniest place he had ever seen," because it was growing at an "astonishing" pace. Its streets were "a fearful spectacle" but he understood this would soon be replaced by "proper pavement."²³ The muddy, unpaved lanes were reported as though they represented a moral failure that the frontier city was striving to overcome. One satirist sent a letter to city council offering to accompany the voyageurs to Egypt as "Special Commissioner for the City" to study "municipal government of the various cities of Egypt and the African Territories" and discover what could be learned about "sanitary matters" and other items that would benefit Winnipeg in its "remodeling of municipal affairs." This letter from Adolphus E. Tothepoint, which the *Free Press* found

²⁰ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966

²¹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 20 September 1884

²² *Manitoba Free Press*, Various dates in late August 1884

²³ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 23 September 1884

quite amusing, was read by the council clerk "in a very subdued voice."²⁴ To Winnipeggers like Mackeand and Kennedy, mud represented backwardness and progress meant replacing dirt with paving stones. Mud houses and streets held no special romantic charm for a Winnipegger in 1884. Mackeand and Kennedy indicated an eagerness to distance themselves from such "others." If there was a pre-existent tendency for Canadians to fit present-day Arabic Egypt into a dichotomy with classical Egypt, and also to contrast it with the modern, progressive west, then such distinctions were likely sharper for Manitobans, who had heightened colonial insecurities about their status as modern.

Neilson elaborated on the "covered with flies" comment made by so many of the voyageurs, by associating it with the passivity of the Egyptian people. "The poor natives," he explained, had at some point "centuries back, thrown up the sponge, so to speak," in the battle against the Egyptian fly, and have allowed him, "without murmur, to satiate himself on their persons," feasting on their eyes and open sores. He was grateful for the blue tinted glasses presented to the voyageurs by Mr. Laurence of Montreal, which not only stop the sun's glare, but also, "as protection to our optics from these pests."²⁵ Kennedy thought the Egyptians were "a wretched lot, particularly the women. The children seem to be almost eaten up by flies." He told his wife that "if the patriarchs were anything like these people, I have lost all respect for them."²⁶

Most comments made by these writers emphasized the ways in which the Egyptians were different from Canadians. One of Neilson's first observations was that the farmers were "scantily clothed"²⁷ and Mackeand later claimed that the "natives run about without any garb save that of nature."²⁸ At the same time, he reported that "the similarity of dress by the two

²⁴ *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 September 1884

²⁵ "Joe" (Neilson, fifth letter), October 17, *Montreal Star*, 18 November 1884

²⁶ Kennedy, letter to his wife (October 16), *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 13 November 1884

²⁷ Neilson, fourth letter ("Joe," 16 October), *Montreal Star*, 17 November 1884

²⁸ Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

sexes affords no end of amusement,"²⁹ referring to the unmanly "gowns" worn by the men. Kennedy had a decidedly negative impression of Egyptian music, which he described as "peculiar," "wild" and simplistic, where "all the instruments play in unison nearly all the time" and "in minor keys."³⁰ In these examples, and many others, the differences are never neutral, but are almost always identified as inferior to Canadian norms.

One way they did interact with locals was through the purchase of their produce. Although Neilson made comments about the lack of Egyptian technological inventiveness in the past millenia, he was impressed with the quality and low prices of melons, dates, cucumbers, limes, chickens, vegetables. They were available in markets and at moorings on a regular basis, yet he noted that the Canadians would raid and steal from farmers. In one such "foraging expedition," some men brought back corn and "did not leave behind, either, a few melons and cucumbers they happened to stumble against." This is followed by a vague threat that if these men were "found out by the authorities they doubtless would be made to pay dearly for their booty."³¹ Writing as "Joe," Neilson gave the impression that the officers were unable to determine who had done this. Joe vaguely warned of dire consequences, but he did not condemn the practice as inappropriate. Mackeand said that the farmers "seem to be a peaceable race," who would arrive at "every stopping place" to barter for "water jugs, bread, fruit of all kinds, melons, etc." But he considered them "dreadful cheats" who "require much watching." They would not take no for an answer, he said, and you "cannot insult them by any means." Describing his frustration with unrelenting barterers, he explained that "in fact the only way" to communicate was to "show them hard enough or forcibly convince them that you do not wish to trade or sell." In this way, presumably through physical violence or threats of it, "they sometimes get beaten at their own game."³² The farmers sold good food at cheap prices it seems, yet the Canadians stole from them and met their aggressive bartering with aggression.

²⁹ Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

³⁰ Kennedy, letter to his wife (October 16), *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 13 November 1884

³¹ "Joe" (Neilson, fifth letter), October 17, *Montreal Star*, 18 November 1884

³² Anon (Mackeand, third letter, October 16), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 14 November 1884

The Canadians were in Egypt as river navigators, and even though their real work would come in the Sudan, Neilson reported a history-making scene when Denison's birch-bark canoe was first put into the Nile, to cross to the other side and send a telegram. We are told that this historic event left a deep impression on "the astonished natives," who "ran from their 'shadoufs' and mealie fields to see the graceful craft move swiftly over the muddy Nile." For "the first time since the world exists" did such a canoe "propelled by red men of the west, cleave the bosom of the venerable Nile."³³ Being able to "astonish" the natives with their rivercraft was a particular form of recognition that flattered the Canadians, and their presumed innate ability to handle rivers better than those who lived on them. This trope of "the astonished natives" who are stunned to watch the Canadians navigate the Nile finds its initial appearance here, with the heightened Canadian symbolism of the Toronto alderman's aboriginal craft piloted by "red men of the west." Canadian expertise is recognized by the astonished Egyptians.

In sharp contrast to the swiftness of the canoe, the contingent moved at a leisurely pace, covering approximately thirty miles each day, a distance that Neilson considered to be "ridiculously small, but seemingly quite in keeping with the people and their habits."³⁴ They were not travelling by Egyptian "native" craft, but their barges were being towed by Cook steamers. The current was strong and the steamer engines were fairly weak. In a military campaign, slow-moving steamers were frustrating, but they were ideal for the tourist business. The "ridiculous" unhurried pace of the steamers, owned and operated by British businessmen, was incorrectly identified by Neilson with "the people and their habits."

If Neilson was impressed by ancient Egypt and dismayed by contemporary Egyptians and their habits, then he was pleased to report the progress Egypt was making under French and

³³ "Joe" (Neilson, sixth letter), October 24, *Montreal Star*, 24 November 1884. Stressing the historical importance of this event, Neilson names the two most important men in the boat. "The first red men to paddle a bark canoe on the Nile were Caughnawgas, Onousawenrate as steersman, Matthew Jacques as bowman and four others."

³⁴ Neilson, fourth letter ("Joe," 16 October), *Montreal Star*, 17 November 1884

British influence. Assiout was impressive for its "Bureau de Poste, American Protestant and Roman Catholic colleges, which are as much frequented by Mohammedans as by Christians." The train which carried them from Alexandria to Assiout was wooden plank for three feet from the floor and then open to the roof "caged with iron bars, much like the cages in a wild beast show." Neilson thought this was a "good arrangement in a hot climate like that of Egypt," and was really "not far behind in comfort the third class carriages on Canadian railways." His only complaint about this cleverly built European train was the lack of drinking water, a concept that he thought would be "too progressive" for the "benighted intellect of the Egyptian railroad manager." The slowness of their pace "blunted a little" the interest in the "panorama" before us, Neilson wrote, but he assured his Canadian readers, that their "determination to overcome obstacles does not flag" and "the prospect of returning with credit and honor to our homes and families buoys us up with hope."³⁵ Here Neilson, playing Joe the voyageur, seems to indicate that the true "others" from whom they wish to win recognition are perhaps neither the Egyptians, nor the British per se, but their "dear ones" at home, whom they hope will hold them in high esteem by the way they conduct themselves on the Nile. As we saw in all the departure ceremonies, there is a strong desire to have their friends and families be proud of them that shapes all of the narratives which are presented as public representations. Praise from British military leaders will help them win respect at home. But in the letters of Neilson, Mackeand and Kennedy, no one ever imagines that the high opinion of Egyptians matters for anything at all.

Jackson's Egypt

Louis Jackson's account of the contingent's passage through Egypt is full of close detailed descriptions of many minute elements glossed over by other writers. He makes very few references to Egyptian history, Muslim history or British progress but makes repeated comparisons between Egypt and Caughnawaga, as well as other parts of Canada, giving his reader familiar reference points for the points he finds interesting, particularly related to agriculture. Early in their trip, Jackson asked to go see some catacombs, "but was told that

³⁵ Neilson, fourth letter ("Joe," 16 October), *Montreal Star*, 17 November 1884

we must get under way."³⁶ He described as best he could, the temples and colossi they passed during the day, but he was not sure what he was seeing and thought "it was a pity that we could not get the slightest information from the Egyptian crew" what any of it meant. Typically, he lamented, "we halted in some uninhabited place, where nothing could be learned."³⁷ He expressed "regret at having had to pass such famous places as Thebes and Luxor." They camped nearby for the night he said, and "there were guides waiting with candles to show us over the place but we had no time to spare and so were not permitted to wander about."³⁸ Then when they stopped near Abu Simbel, which he could see from shore, he was tasked with the job of receiving stores and distributing cholera belts. Because of these duties he was unable to join a group which came back to tell him "that I had missed something worth seeing." Although he wasn't sure of what he had missed at the time, he explained how impressive Abu Simbel was, complete with height and width measurements reflecting some later research on his part in preparation for the book. He concluded that "I was sorry that I had to stay behind to look after the stores" and cholera belts.³⁹ Deer was one of those who did go explore Abu Simbel, but even after he was home, he was not sure what it was called and described the carvings of Rhamses as "an immense figure of a man" and said his temple was "covered with carvings of the different kinds of animals."⁴⁰ Jackson and Deer were both fascinated by the temples and ruins of Ancient Egypt, but neither of them used the "birthplace of civilization" discourse to describe the significant of these antiquities.

At a certain point, Jackson said that some of the members of his gang had heard that "we would be shown the exact spot, where Moses was picked up," but no one was exactly certain where that was. It is worth noting that Jackson did not seem to consult the other voyageurs who did have names for these things as they saw them, but instead, he assumed that the Arab

³⁶ Jackson p. 9

³⁷ Jackson p. 12

³⁸ Jackson p. 14

³⁹ Jackson p. 16. "Cholera belts" were strips of flannel worn like a cummerbund that were widely used by the British imperial army, especially in India, under the mistaken belief that a chilled abdomen led to cholera, dysentery and other tropical ailments.

⁴⁰ Deer pp. 9-10

crew on their barges would be able and willing to narrate the history of the river to them. Instead, Jackson found that the Egyptian crew "seemed very averse to us, so much so, that I could not even learn their names far less any of their language."⁴¹ Like Mackeand, Deer thought that the Arabs were "extremely tricky and dishonest."⁴² Unlike Mackeand, however, he tried to learn some Arabic but could not even convince the Egyptians to tell him their names. Jackson had no explanation for their unfriendliness, and it apparently did not occur to him that despite his personal sense of Mohawk identity, in their eyes, he was just another member of the British army occupying their country.

Jackson was the only person who mentioned "mud" more frequently than Makeand, but he was fascinated with how the Egyptians used it. The gunwales of their boats were made with mud, he realized; "they appeared to be baked hard by the sun, and were water proof, as I afterwards saw several of them loaded so heavily that a great part of the mud gunwales were under water." He noticed mud huts, a Bank of Egypt made of mud (which he thinks is funny), mud baskets, mud spouts and mud irrigation conduits. He concludes that mud is used "in preference to wood, because wood is very scarce in Egypt and mud is very plentiful." The Egyptians "make the most of the mud which the Nile brings down in such quantities every year," using it not only as a general building material, but also to "manure and fertilize the whole land of Egypt."⁴³ In this context, he does not recoil against the mud streets and mud-brick houses, nor does he set them off against ancient or modern architecture. On the contrary, he thought that Egyptains cities "presented a beautiful appearance from the distance, temples, high towers and so forth all looking very white, some mud houses were two or three stories high and of blue mud color."⁴⁴ He found no contradiction between these different elements, which complemented each other.

The object of greatest fascination for Jackson was the different farming methods used in

⁴¹ Jackson p. 12

⁴² Deer p. 8

⁴³ Jackson p. 8

⁴⁴ Jackson p. 12

Egypt. One of the first "curiosities" he observed, on the train to Assiout was that the farmers made protective fencing for their crops out of "cornstalks to keep back the sand, as we make board fences against the snow."⁴⁵ Another "unusual thing" he saw was that the crops were not all planted at the same time, but gradually, as the Nile withdrew. He noted their reliance on the rich new mud, maximizing its use. Crops matured "in several stages of growth at the same time in adjoining patches" and "the crop farthest from the river of course gets the start."⁴⁶ Three months later, he was amazed to see the size of beans growing in areas that had been under water when they were ascending the Nile. As a farmer himself, he compared everything he saw. Their cows were "like ours" but blueish and with a lump on their back. He was amazed that they grazed alongside the crops without eating them. Their sheep looked like our dogs, and their dogs "look much like the Esquimaux dogs I have seen Manitoba."⁴⁷ Unlike the writers noted above, Jackson made no disparaging remarks about the farmers and on the contrary, seemed particularly sensitive to their impact on their farms. After beaching their boats on the shore past Korosko to cook supper and set up camp for the night, he said that every night, their camp "unavoidably did more or less damage to the crops, which must have caused serious loss to these poor people by whom, as I said before, every inch of the spare soil is utilized."⁴⁸

At the same time, he did consider himself and his people to be superior to the Egyptians as farmers, and regularly pointed out things that disgusted him or made him laugh. At one point, where he said the Nile was the same width as the St. Laurence at Caughnawaga, he saw a village of "small mud huts" out of which came "chickens, goats, sheep" dogs and children. The road was full of "rats dodging in all directions," more "rats at a glance than I had ever seen before in all my life."⁴⁹ At another point he saw a leper in the street, his "face a mass of

⁴⁵ Jackson p. 7

⁴⁶ Jackson p. 10

⁴⁷ Jackson p. 11

⁴⁸ Jackson p. 15

⁴⁹ Jackson p. 7

flies, a horrible sight."⁵⁰ Elsewhere he says "there were flies in the children's faces and eyes beyond description." Jackson is reserved in his judgements and does not speak harshly or critically, but his revulsion at these and other sights is clear, if understated. At other times he will say that something was "curious" or "amusing." He described one "funny sight" where a cow and a camel were harnessed together to a plough, where both yoke and plough were made from "a stick crooked suitably by nature," ploughing or rather "scratching about two inches deep and three inches wide, at a speed as I judged of one acre per week."⁵¹ When he saw evidence of labour on a Sunday, he was surprised and concluded that "the people here have no Sundays," at least not as a day of rest. His general assessment of Egyptians was one of curiosity, fascination with certain aspects of irrigation and mud construction, but in general, characterized by a disgust with their unsanitary condition and a comic portrayal of their inefficiency. For our purposes here it is important to note that although he considers the Caughnawaga to be superior, his language is completely devoid of the racial and historic discourses identified by Belich, Said and exhibited in Neilson and other writers.

There is also a complete absence of any praise for the achievements of colonial administration. Jackson mentions missions and post offices and banks, but these are part of the unremarkable backdrop. His comments on the train give us good reason to suspect that Neilson's positive assessment of the "cages," via his working class narrator, was written from the comfort of the first class cabin, which Jackson described as "after the English style." The "troop cars," however, were "lacking the usual conveniences of our Canadian cars," as they were "uncomfortably crowded" and sandy.⁵² Deer thought the cars were "very uncomfortable; they were something like cattle cars" and the absence of windows allowed the sand to blow "upon us like drifting snow, giving the men an extremely dirty and travel-stained appearance."⁵³ Neilson did not have to spend the night in these cars as did Jackson and Deer, and thus they were not very impressed with the European style trains.

⁵⁰ Jackson p. 13

⁵¹ Jackson p. 10

⁵² Jackson pp. 6-8

⁵³ Deer p. 7

Jackson and Deer saw Egyptians as fellow-farmers, although they thought that Egyptian methods and practices were backward, compared to Caughnawaga. Nonetheless, Jackson was curious about their way of life, felt sorry for the destruction of their crops caused by beaching boats and evening camps and they made an effort to speak their language. For reasons they didn't quite understand, the Arabs were very unfriendly to them and Deer considered them untrustworthy. The antiquities and the modern Egypt seemed minor in their narratives, the former was impressive but mysterious, the latter merely represented the normal infrastructure they would have expected at home. Perhaps the only cultural script that informed their expectations was a religious one, which led him and some of his men to look for the spot where Moses was placed in the reeds. Some other scattered references would lead to the assumption that the "Indians" on the contingent shared a common educational background that was strong on Bible stories and weak on classical education. Neilson asked one "very intelligent and tolerably well educated Race River Indian," for his impression of Egypt and he thought it "all very wonderful and different from what I expected to see. The whole affair reminds me very much of the pictures I had seen once in a large illustrated Bible."⁵⁴ This study must content itself with noting the complete absence of racial and "civilizational" discourses of the type identified above amongst aboriginal voyageurs without attempting to speculate as to the reasons for their absence.

Labat's Egypt

In the letters of Gaston Labat, the language of race and of civilizational collapse and renewal are insistent and frequent. More than any other writer, Labat put forth a negative portrayal of Islam and Arabs. The letters also reveal Labat's excitement at all appearances of the French language and the Catholic church. For Labat, ancient Egypt was the most impressive part of the country's history, but it was also to him a "civilisation disparue." Lower Egypt was for him, "ce grand musée des antiquités des Pharaons et des Ramsès." Luxor, he said, immediately transported him

⁵⁴ "Joe" (Neilson, sixth letter), October 24, *Montreal Star*, 24 November 1884

d'abord à Paris, place de la Concorde, ce vestibule du Jardin des dieux; ensuite à Londres, ces deux pays amis auxquels l'avenir devra l'invasion de la civilisation chez les barbares. En effet, Paris et Londres n'ont-ils pas chacun un obélisque venu de Luxor? A double titre, je salue Luxor de l'envoi de sa carte de visite grantique. Puissions-nous lui rendre sa gracieuseté par la lumière du Progrès qui flambera à ses portes pour éclairer toute la vallée du Nil... le Progrès!⁵⁵

For this Francophone from Canada now embedded amongst a British expedition, the ancient obelisk becomes a symbol that London and Paris are not rivals, but friends and partners, tasked together with bringing progress to the Nile. The impressive nature of what he sees at Luxor "transported" him to London and Paris, linking the ancient and the modern, disregarding the enormous period of Arab Muslim culture as barbaric. There was a logic of imperialism at work that understood all indigenous people as either disappearing or disappeared, hence legitimizing the conquest and settlement of other people's countries. Labat stared across this historical chasm at the temples of the past, convinced that "il n'y a que le Christianisme seul, ce roi de la civilisation, qui fera retrouver à l'Egypte la splendeur de sa grandeur passée."⁵⁶ He expressed sadness that he could not see Cairo, and hoped to do so on his return. In this remark there was no indication of knowledge as to the origins of this city, but only an indication that he wanted to find the deep well where "Joseph a été jeté par ses frères." Eating onions made him think of "les oignons du temps de Moïse" and the "sept vaches grasses et maigres de Joseph"⁵⁷ In both cases, Labat made a great effort of the imagination to project Biblical stories onto a city and food which are present before him as products of Arab, Muslim culture.

Before he had a chance to meet his first Muslim, he demonstrated an uncompromisingly sinister impression of Islam. As they trained through the lush and green fields of the Nile Delta, the mosques he saw in the towns and villages are described as "phares du fanatisme, semblent élever orgueilleusement leurs têtes vers la foudre qui les attend et servent de refuge

⁵⁵ Labat p. 94

⁵⁶ Labat p. 62

⁵⁷ Labat p. 90

au oiseaux de nuit."⁵⁸ He thought that these "gens aussi fanatiques," had no idea "du chant ni de la musique. Le seul chant que l'on entende est celui des Muezzins ou des hurleur qui annoncent cinq fois par jour l'heure de la prière," which was a chant "triste et monotone."⁵⁹

He described a scene which was meant to illustrate for the reader the fact that "L'Egyptien est fanatique et jaloux." Labat entered the doorway of a man's house uninvited, while the man was saying his prayers in the court, "en plein soleil, frapper son front contre le sol, sans doute pour réchauffer sa prière." When Labat tried to walk into his home, which he thought was a natural thing to do as "un étranger, curieux ou amateur d'études de mœurs," but the man stopped his praying and ran towards him, "hurlait, gesticulait, roulait des yeux de dogue et a dû m'envoyer à tous les diables." Labat accused him of jealousy, because his wife was inside, and in response to the man's indignation Labat "pris mon parti en brave et je donnai un coup de ceinture qui envoya promener son fez dans la poussière." Knocking a man's cap to the ground was, he said he discovered, "l'insulte la plus grave qu'on puisse faire subir à un Egyptien." He then said that this man refused to strike him back, running away "comme un chien fouetté," which proved that Egyptians were jealous and cowardly.⁶⁰ No matter how outrageous, insulting and disrespectful Labat had behaved, the man no doubt realized that he would have been in serious trouble from the locals authorities or the British army if he had struck back at a uniformed officer.

Labat spoke with ease about "types Egyptiens" and would describe them in ways that character traits were blended with physical qualities. The dark-skinned natives he saw "sont luisants comme une peau de serpent, nagent comme des poissons volants, mais avant tout ils sont voleurs comme Mercure." Egyptian women were as beautiful as ancient roman statues, but he was sure that they would "nous conduiraient en enfer." His assessment of Esneh, after passing the lamenters of a funeral ("semblables à des hurlements de loups") was

⁵⁸ Labat p. 87

⁵⁹ Labat p. 171

⁶⁰ Labat pp. 104-106

digusted and dismissive: "Rues sales, bazars dégoûtants, recoins infects, scènes publiques honteuses."⁶¹

As noted above, Labat saw the presence of French and British commercial, military and religious activity in Egypt as the rekindling of civilization in the land of its birth after centuries of the darkness and fanaticism of Islam. To serve as one final example from his letters, his encounter with a French mission in Luxor illustrates not only these themes but their relevance to his readers in *La Presse*. When he landed in Luxor, he heard many languages and "naturellement," he sought out those speaking French. To his astonishment, he met two French-speaking Egyptian boys who were converts to Catholicism. None of the negative stereotypes applied to these two, who were not types, but people with names: Georges Pierre and Georges Croix. "Fasciné par ces voix d'anges vivant dans cet enfer égyptien," he wanted to learn more about them and they took them to meet the Franciscan priest who ran the mission in Luxor. For Labat, these "deux jeunes néophytes du christianisme" represented a "victoire obscure mais éclatante," by Père Francis, "d'une de ces valeureux soldats du Christ qui on entrepris de planter la croix du Calvaire sur le globe entier." This man had built a church and a congregation and converts, founded a school "en outre, il a collecté douze piastres en tout pour la Propagation de la Foi. La vigne est aride, mais elle prospère, grâce surtout aux bonnes âmes de la ville de Québec," who should not forget, he tells his newspaper readers, that over in Egypt there is a Catholic school, a priest and students "qui demandent des livres chrétiens." To Labat, this was the best explanation for why Europeans were in Egypt. While several miles away, "la mosquée froide et mercantile enseignant les vices et la rapine à ses renégats," here at the Franciscan mission and school, "dans un oasis perdu, deux jeunes lys, fleurissant sous la lampe du sanctuaire et aspirant sans cesse à la rosée du Ciel." It is clear, he said, that "la civilisation porte ici semence."⁶² Labat's complete disregard for Muslim culture, was matched only by his belief that Christian missions, supported by Quebec, would convert the population and renew their civilization..

⁶¹ Labat p. 99

⁶² Labat pp. 94-95

Sherlock's Egypt

If Neilson and Labat reflected fairly predictable scripts of a history of degenerate racial history, of civilizational decline, barbarism and renewal under European tutelage, we have seen that that script was not evident in the language used by Jackson. John Sherlock is different than all of these writers. For a skilled worker and labourer he is well-read and was certainly the most prolific of all the Nile correspondents, writing a greater volume even than Labat. In English-language newspapers, his articles were also the most widely reprinted. Sherlock maintained a low-level patriotism, usually evident when signing off his letters, and he was fairly neutral in his assumptions about racial characteristics, as was Jackson. He provided very colourful descriptions of the scenes he saw and people he met. He is also the first writer we have examined who actually arrived with a positive, romantic fascination with Arab Egypt.

In surveying his attitudes towards the various imagined Egypts, it is clear that Sherlock was impressed with the temples and antiquities to the extent that he was permitted to see them. At Luxor, he said that only three men were allowed out at a time and therefore "I had to wait my turn until 10 p.m.," when he and two friends paid a local to get them some lanterns and guide them through one of the smaller temples near the shore and to show them a large obelisk. He was amazed with this smaller temple, but it was too late, too dark and other men were waiting, so he did not have time to see "the greater temple" at Karnak which was "two miles off."⁶³ His descriptions of these sites are not informed by any reading he has done on ancient Egypt however, and he has to guess as to whether these are deities or kings, and imagines he is viewing a political history of monarchs. At Abu Simbel, whose name he didn't quite hear correctly, he spoke of their "astonishment when we gazed on the stupendous figures cut out of the solid face of the sandstone cliff." He's not sure who these "kings" were, but he did his best to estimate the size of the carvings (40 to 60 feet tall) and told the reader that "I got twenty men to stand on the palm of one of their hands." He was fascinated with the interiors, with "figures cut in relief" and ceilings that were "all frescoed and the colors

⁶³ Sherlock, seventh letter, (October 20), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 20 November 1884

clear and very well preserved." He apologized to his readers for his inadequate description of the temples of Rhamses and the Queen, these "wonders of the ages long past" which "stupefied me with astonishment." He saw European graffiti dating back to 1806 and concluded that "no doubt the story of all these things has been told again and again by those who have had more time and more ability than your humble correspondent can pretend to."⁶⁴ Sherlock's descriptions were like Jackson's, in that he was awed by the sheer beauty and scale of the temples and humbled by his inability to make sense of them, other than appreciating their great age, presisting in defiance of "Father Time." Consequently, he had no imperialistic reflections to make and he did not attempt to fit the builders of these ruins into a racial theory.

Although he was the most prolific writer, Sherlock made no references at all to any stories of the Bible. He did however, display a school-boy's fascination with "the East." From the train he tried in vain to catch a glimpse of Alexandria, but all he could see was "lanes and alleys, and alleys and lanes," catching only a glimpse of the "countless hordes of wretched, ragged, rascally ragamuffins, with here and there a bright spot among them in the shape of an Egyptian dandy, brilliant with his Oriental gaudiness." Cairo, similarly, was seen from afar, but he thought it looked wonderful, with "fine looking buildings, flat roofed, in the centre of beautiful gardens," including mosques and towers. The "groves of date, palm, locust" and many other unfamiliar trees that looked so "deliciously cool and shady" after their long ocean voyage, made him "sigh in remembrance of our own dear piny woods in Canada."⁶⁵

Sherlock was particularly taken by his first opportunity to walk around in a marketplace, in Assiout. The dense streets and the large mud wall surrounding the bazaar immediately made him think of "Arabian Nights, with its magical descriptions." He never imagined as a boy that he would be some day able to "view almost literally the description of that wonderful book."

⁶⁴ Sherlock, eighth letter, (October 27), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 December 1884

⁶⁵ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

The market was both confusing and fascinating, full of "screaming and yelling and jawing and, if I could understand, I supposed, swearing too" and it made him think of "the glories of the far famed Donnybrook Fair," including expectations of a brawl at any moment, so unaccustomed was he to the noise. It was like "the story of Babel and the confusion of tongues," he said, with "fruit venders screaming out the nature of their stock in trade, our men, French, Indian, English, Irish, Scotch and Canadians all haggling, squabbling and swearing in their respective patois." It also seemed "not unlike an American arcade," with its constant solicitation to buy their goods from "little stalls that you would imagine a ten-dollar bill would clean out." While other correspondents said the markets were dirty and disgusting, he thoroughly enjoyed them, never portrayed the vendors in a negative light, and took any opportunity he could to walk around the bazaars. He was also curious about mosques and at one point expressed disappointment that there was not enough time for him to visit one.⁶⁶ In another situation, when staring off into a fortress on a desert hill-top, he began to write down the lyrics to a popular song called "The Arab Maid," that were part of a wave of orientalist music hall titles written in this period : "Oh, give me but my Arab steed / My sword and the falchion bright/; and all that sort of stuff."⁶⁷

Like other correspondents, Sherlock was taken aback by the mud houses, but rather than interpret them as signs of a degenerate people, he thought they demonstrated the poverty of the peasants. He noted the diversity of building styles and techniques, but thought that because the people, their dogs and livestock all live in "the same dusty, dirty, dingy enclosure" it is clear what a strong hold

plague, cholera and a legion of other diseases has in these miserable, filthy hovels, or of the holocaust they make of the wretched *fellaheen*, as they call the peasants here. Hundreds, mayhap thousands, are periodically swept away by pestilence. No record of their lives, no memorial of their deaths, they die like the dogs surrounding them, unknown and unwept.

He noticed that some houses "are far better," with two stories, balconies, domes and "pillared

⁶⁶ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

⁶⁷ Sherlock, eighth letter, (October 27), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 December 1884

arches" over doorways. As they moved south, he thought "the natives seem to be getting poorer" and noted that only "the aristocratic quarters" had their homes decorated with a thick coating of mud.⁶⁸ In other words, he was not pre-occupied with mud, nor did he make illogical contrasts between adobe fellaheen houses and imperial stone edifices. He correctly recognized that the different building styles reflected social power and status. At the same time, he had empathy for the peasants, who died nameless and unrecorded, unrecognized and forgotten. He was also the only one to identify differences in clothing with wealth, saying that the "better class and merchants" had a dress that was "most picturesque," while "the laborers or fellaheen is something less than scant and more than ragged, and in fact many that I saw were all but stark naked." Many of the Canadians seemed shocked that so many Egyptians were "all but stark naked." Unencumbered by complex theories about racial degeneration and civilizational collapse, Sherlock stated the obvious, that nakedness here indicated low-class status.

Like Jackson, Sherlock made many comparisons and contrasts between life in Egypt and Canada. When the train stopped once at a particularly dry spot in the desert, he said that "if I ever get back to Peterborough" and hear someone complaining about filling the watering cart "in our dry season there," he would tie a millstone around his neck and toss him in "the deepest pool of the Otonabee." The inefficient threshing techniques he observed and described in detail were not recommended to the "farmers of the County of Peterborough and suburbs" who should "save your dimes and buy a good thresher from Peter Hamilton" instead. He called their irrigation technology "rude machines" but acknowledged that "the wheel is not unlike our elevators in Canada."⁶⁹ A parched cemetery brought to mind its Peterborough equivalent, contrasting the "dusty-looking, bare and hard" Egyptian graves with those at home covered in "green sod" and flowers, concluding that "the contrast was certainly not in favour of our present neighbours."⁷⁰ Like Jackson, his unfavourable comparisons were

⁶⁸ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

⁶⁹ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

⁷⁰ Sherlock, eighth letter, (October 27), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 December 1884

not malicious. Indeed, he regularly marvelled at the beauty he saw around him, especially the trees, desert and sunsets.⁷¹

He also reflected positively on situations where he did get to meet local officials. The governor of Soohag ("one of the big bugs of the town") invited several boatmen to his "palace," where they passed through "great iron gates across a fine paved court" and seated on raised divans to be served "cigarettes and cups of coffee, about a tablespoonful in each." After much chatting "in a sort of mixtherum gatherum," of smiling, smoking and "shaking hands with our host; who was certainly most courteous and gentlemanlike in demeanor," they "departed on our way rejoicing." Out of this pleasant scene, Sherlock came upon a ferryman who had been beaten up by several of the Canadians, some of whom "had no money, and more that had would not pay." When he refused to take them over, "some of the roughs threw the ferryman into the canal, took possession of the boat and ferried [sic] the lads over." A few "were decent enough to pay, but more were better pleased to act the 'dead beat.'"⁷² As with the scene at Gibraltar, Sherlock seemed dismayed by the way the "roughs" conducted themselves. His narrative regularly moves back and forth between positive, or at least benign portrayals of the Egyptians, and scenes of conflict he observes.

Even when he used the the Victorian language of assessing types by physique, Sherlock spoke positively about Egyptians as "very fine, noble looking specimens of humanity, straight as an arrow, broad-chested, square-shouldered and erect in carriage. They are the finest developed men in chest and shoulder I ever saw." None of them "stoop, but their legs are very spindly." At the Aswan market he saw many nationalities "the stately Arab, the lithe and active Nubian, the Jew, the Gentile, and the Greek, and many nationalities besides." He considered the Greek traders to be cheats, and said the Nubians are "not bad looking, but both men and women would hardly be presentable at a levee of our Governor-General at home, as their court dress would only consist of a strip of cloth wound round the loins." He

⁷¹ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

⁷² Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

said the boys selling fruit were clever (rather than thieves) and felt sorry for the poor shepherd children who always seem to be "tending their flocks of poor miserable skinny goats which live on wind pudding and seed I think, for I cannot see anything they they can feed on." All in all, he assesses them "not a bad featured race and if decently clad would pass master very well." There are some "pretty good looking women," but they usually "hide their faces when we approach, especially if any of their masters are in sight." He told his Peterborough readers that they were "erect in carriage and sprightly, and not ungraceful in their movements," and he imagined that if they were to appear back home, "there would be fair numbers of the adolescents struck vitally." Sherlock sadly informed his readers however, that slavery was still in practice in these parts, and that most of the men and women he sees are slaves. He learned this while talking to "the interpreter at our camp," who had personal knowledge of two brothers sold to a railroad contractor the previous week for \$30.00.⁷³ None of the other letter writers asked such questions, nor seemed to strike up conversations with the interpreters.

One final observation will suffice to demonstrate another aspect of the conflict he saw around him, this time in the context of the British presence in the country. Earlier, he had been speculating as to which men were labourers and which were slaves, and concluded that at one plantation in lower Egypt the men were "freemen, I think, yet the overseers thrash them" brutally. At one point he saw

a diminutive white commissary lambasting a native that stood six foot four, a fellow big enough to crush the very life out of the little miserable atom of humanity, if he had only the pluck, but the great slabsided hulking coward ran away even as a little child would. It made me grind my teeth with rage to see the little white crab so brutal and the Egyptian giant so cowardly.⁷⁴

Sherlock's anger towards the situation naively assesses the exchange as though it existed between two free men, as though the "thrashing" and "lambasting" were taking place on a Canadian farm, rather than under a military occupation. This labourer has learned through

⁷³ Sherlock, tenth letter, (November 2), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 5 December 1884

⁷⁴ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

experience that the "white crab" has white law and imperial power behind him and one does not strike a white man. The man hit by Labat and the ferryman beaten by Canadian roughs saw the Canadians as British and reacted accordingly. This can only be regarded as "cowardly" if one forgets about empire.

The Girgeh Incident

Beyond what we see in these letters from the most prolific correspondents, there were several other hints at disrespect and violence between Canadians and Egyptians. For example, one correspondent casually mentioned that the men amused themselves by throwing their hard tack at the Egyptians on the shore.⁷⁵ Jeremiah Johnston of St. Peter's, when interviewed in Winnipeg upon his return said that Egypt was the "meanest [country] in creation; and as for the people, they are as bad." In particular he thought the men were "a cowardly lot" who "daren't attack a fellow unless they are three or four to one. Then they will fight like fiends."⁷⁶ He spoke with the voice of experience, apparently having faced similar odds as the Ayottes. The nonchalance with which such incidents are reported, indicate that physical violence between the Canadians and Egyptians was likely more widespread than can be seen from the letters of the most regular correspondents.

At Girgeh, such an incident of conflict ended with an Egyptian farmer dead in his field and three Canadians fined for firing revolvers that caused his death. On Sunday October 12, the boats stopped at in late afternoon at the town of Girgeh where Denison went into town to buy some supplies. Three voyageurs wrote about the events that day, based on second-hand accounts. Sherlock, writing about 24 hours after the event, explained that many men went ashore here, "some amused themselves by bathing and visiting the villages near, and others before the sun set made for the mountains, a mile or so away, and not a few, I am sorry to say, to steal melons from the poor natives." Early in the evening, he said, "shots had been heard" coming from "the direction of the melon patch." The next day, he heard that "a native

⁷⁵ Anon, *Journal de Trois-Rivières*, 20 November 1884

⁷⁶ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885

had been shot." Apparently, he said, "while some of our fellows were stealing melons the natives attacked them," striking one Canadian with a hoe, and while he was "struggling in the grasp of three or four" locals, "his companion fired at one of the peasants who fell." Sherlock said the contingent was addressed by Denison the next day and he said that "if there is any truth in the report" then at Aswan he would "hand the man over to the military authorities." This was all Sherlock could tell, and he warned the readers "not place too much dependence on what is as yet only a report."⁷⁷ Mackeand explained that after many nights on the barges, they "were always glad of the halt at night which enabled them to take a run on shore." In general, "the boys used to have a good time with the natives every night ashore," until October 12th when

an altercation occurred between the voyageurs and the natives, and the latter crowded our boys so that one of them drew a revolver and shot one of the natives. This unfortunate trouble had the effect of restricting the liberty of the whole; and now only three men of each gang are allowed on shore at once each evening.⁷⁸

He quickly passed on to other things they were seeing or doing, raising this incident to explain restrictions on their movements that were made from this point onwards. The final description of the event appears in Deer's book. He said that some of the men

were looking for melons in one of the gardens when they were chased by Arabs and a scuffle ensued, in which one of the Arabs was killed by a revolver shot from one of the voyageurs. At our next stopping-place Colonel Denison received a telegram regarding the affair, and tried hard to discover the offender but without success; he was therefore obliged to be content with imposing a fine of thirty-five dollars on each man who was on shore that night, besides demanding all the revolvers in the company.⁷⁹

In all three accounts, there was some variation on the story of a fight (struggle/altercation /scuffle) in which a Canadian pulled a gun and killed a native. Mackeand offered no clue as to the cause of the fight, but the other two believed that the Canadians were stealing melons and the farmers were trying to stop them.

⁷⁷ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

⁷⁸ Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

⁷⁹ Deer pp. 8-9

Denison's records indicate that he was absent during the incident, in the town of Girgeh. While Deer saaid that the Colonel didn't find out about the death until receiving a telegram the next day, further up the river, Denison wrote in his diary that he heard the rumours at 9 p.m. His journal entry for the afternoon and evening chart his progress by the hour from telegraph office to butcher to coffee shop and several other places until he returned at 9 p.m. when "it was reported to me that one of our men were [sic] missing, and that an Arab had been shot." Aumond and MacRae "could learn nothing about [the] Arab."⁸⁰ The following day, no mention was made of the incident in the diary, but in his order book, he reported giving two orders to the men on October 13, the first of which was delivered as an address to all the men:

I must again caution the Canadian Voyageurs to conduct themselves properly when allowed on shore. To treat the Egyptians with kindness and respect. Not to touch any crops growing on the banks or anything belonging to the natives. I am sorry to hear a rumour that a native has been shot (and will probably die) by one of the Canadian Voyageurs. Any soldier committing any offence of this description is liable to Drum-head Court Martial and to be shot. I must again remind you that now that you are on the Nile that for any offence you are under military discipline and subject to the "Army Discipline Act" the same as a soldier. If this rumour prove true the man will be found out and I shall hand him over to the military authorities to be dealt with. But I trust it is not true. I would be sorry to think that any Canadian would so disgrace himself and the honour of his country as to commit such a cowardly offence.⁸¹

The second order was directed towards the foremen and gave protocols for guarding the gangplank and shore leave. It directed the foremen to "exercise more control over their gangs and I trust that the men will support them and report any man committing an offence whether belonging to their own or any other gang." Taken together, these two orders lead me to believe that Deer's version is closer to the truth and that Denison likely only found out about the incident the following day by telegram. It seems likely that he pulled away from Girgeh at 5:30 am in ignorance, having received no intelligence from his foremen, and then tried to

⁸⁰ Toronto Reference Library, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885, Frederick C. Denison, 12 October 1884

⁸¹ Toronto Reference Library, L22 Order Book - Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885, Frederick C. Denison, 13 October 1884

cover that ignorance by backwriting his diary. The alternative would be to assume that he left town at dawn without conducting the investigation and reporting that would be required in such a situation.

His talk to the men the following day, was more than just an appeal to show "kindness and respect" to the Egyptians; it was a threat to deploy the full force of military discipline. While Melgund intentionally changed the language of the engagement forms to ensure that the men *would not* be submitted to the rules of military discipline, it also seems likely that if Denison were to hand the men over to British authorities, they would not think to ask about any such altered terms of engagement. They would assume the men should face punishment under military discipline, "the same as a soldier." The extent to which they were civilians vs. soldier had shifted, said Denison, now that they were "on the Nile." He also appealed to personal and national honour. Drawing upon the commonplace formula that the men would win honour for themselves and credit for their country, or some such variation, he spelled out its inversion, that such a cowardly killing would bring dishonour to self and country.

Denison made no visible efforts to contact authorities about the matter after the 13th and he made no further mention of it in his diary until a week later, when a mailboat turned around to deliver a special letter from Brigadier-General Grenfell, the commander at Aswan, demanding "full particulars of the killing of a man at Girgeh (a native)." Grenfell had heard of the shooting from the Governor of the district. Upon receipt of this request, they stopped the steamer and held a "Court of Enquiry" on October 20th, over which Denison presided as President, including officer representatives from each of the two other groups on the barges with them, the Army Hospital Corps and the Commissariat. They began with the assumption that "a native while concealed in his corn field had been killed by a bullet fired at a wooden image by some troops practising." They then examined two Canadians, who "admitted having fired at a clay image which had a bank in rear of it, and a corn patch beyond, but stated they were certain all the shots struck in the bank." Others "stated that some shots had been fired during a melee with some natives, but that it was done to frighten them, and that

no one was hit." The "target practice" theory seemed to have been accepted and when Denison arrived in Aswan, he reported to Grenfell, presumably to brief him,⁸² but nothing was done and no punishment was handed out.

Around this time, Denison had a falling out with Dr. Connolly, the commanding officer of the Army Hospital Corps, with whom the Canadians travelled. Connolly and his men would have been at Girgeh and one of his officers was asked by Denison to serve on the Inquiry. Evidently, Connolly was not satisfied with how Denison handled the matter, and later Denison wrote a letter "reporting Dr. Connolly for interfering with my comd. in writing letter re Girgeh affair & explaining my men's conduct there."⁸³ When Denison met Wolseley for the first time on October 26th, he explained the situation and on Wolseley's suggestion he fined each of the three men "who were firing at Girgeh at a mark and accidentally shot a native" a fine of £5 each and had the money sent to his relatives. Denison was worried that "all sorts of tales went home about this affair."⁸⁴ The order book said that Murray Matheson, Thomas Davis and William Morrison were fined £5 each "for firing their revolvers near Girgeh which resulted in the death of a native."⁸⁵ The men, likely under Wolseley's advice, were not prosecuted under full military discipline, but were instead punished by pay deduction, which had been the method suggested to Melgund by Rice and Lambert. Sending the money to the family was likely Wolseley's idea. While this would seem to have been the extent of the matter, the officers of the contingent were in fact very worried that the event, in combination with other examples of "indiscipline" to date, would tarnish the reputation of the contingent in Canada and Britain.

⁸² Toronto Reference Library, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885, Frederick C. Denison, October 12-20, 1884 (Stacey pp. 100-103)

⁸³ *ibid* 3 November 1884

⁸⁴ Toronto Reference Library, L22 Denison Family, Unbound papers, Folder no. 7 - Frederick Charles Denison Military 1884-1896 (II), Letter Lieutenant-Colonel F. C. Denison to Lieutenant John Denison, R.N. 27 November 1884. (Stacey pp. 157-158) This letter should be dated 27 October 1884, since this event predates the order book entry November 3 and since Denison met Wolseley on 27 October 1884.

⁸⁵ Toronto Reference Library, L22 Order Book - Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885, Frederick C. Denison, 3 November 1884. The men were respectively from Peterborough, Ottawa and Ottawa, each from a different gang.

The Canadian voyageurs have become insubordinate

News of the shooting spread quickly. Deer reported that when they stopped to re-coal a few days past Girgeh, in the town where the district Governor lived, "we were stoned by a party of five hundred Arabs, and some of our men badly hurt."⁸⁶ The timing and location of this violent anti-Canadian attack matches the timing and location of the message sent from the Mudir of Girgeh to General Grenfell at Aswan. The day after this stoning, Neilson wrote his fourth and fifth letters in quick succession, the former making no mention of Girgeh. At this point, the officers did not know who had been involved in the shooting, but Neilson's fifth letter planted the seeds of a more elaborate explanation from "Joe" if required, making the veiled reference to the "foraging" expedition for corn, melons and cucumbers. It threatened dire consequences if the culprits were caught.

The same day that Neilson wrote this letter, the *Globe* indicated that the British papers carried news of the "Alleged Insubordination of the Canadian Boatmen in Egypt." Despatches from Cairo, "assert that the Canadian boatmen are unruly, and refuse to obey their officers."⁸⁷ Two days later, on the same day that Denison presided over the Court of Inquiry, an Aswan correspondent from the *Morning Post* sent a despatch reporting that "the Canadian voyageurs attached to the Egyptian relief expedition have become insubordinate, often flatly refusing to obey the officials in command and are threatening to become a serious hindrance to the progress of the expedition."⁸⁸ Once the boatmen had begun their work, such complaints of their "insubordination" would continue, but in this case, before they had even begun working, these telegrams were a consequence of the shooting. A British war correspondent Alexander Macdonald, later recalled a conversation he had with Kennedy and Neilson who "expressed their strong indignation at certain statements which had appeared in a London papers about them," making reference to one article that claimed "that the Canadians, when coming up the river, were armed with either a bottle of rum or a revolver,

⁸⁶ Deer p. 9

⁸⁷ *Globe*, 18 October 1884

⁸⁸ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 20 October 1884 and *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 October 1884

or both." Kennedy did not tell Macdonald about Girgeh, he only expressed his outrage that another journalist would write things which were "utterly untrue" based "upon mere hearsay evidence" about a group that had travelled "from their distant western home to serve the Queen and country on the Nile." Neilson and Kennedy told him that "the eight or ten revolvers possessed by the 360 Canadian Voyageurs when they landed at Alexandria were soon afterwards taken from them, and that with few exceptions the men were teetotalers."⁸⁹ It appears that Macdonald believed these claims.⁹⁰

Hearing the news that the voyageurs were "giving a great deal of trouble by insubordination" was not surprising, said an editorial in the *Winnipeg Sun*, "after the scenes witnessed at Montreal and Sydney." It thought that few of them "knew anything of the strict discipline of military service" but it hoped they had "sufficient common sense to obey the orders of their superior officers, and not bring contumely [contemptuous scorn, outrageous insult] upon the country which they should delight to honor."⁹¹ The only scenario the editorialist could imagine was that the men were unrealistic, ignorant and inexperienced. Soon enough, they would fall into line and behave like soldiers.

The killing of the farmer at Girgeh, whose name is not found in any of these records, led to a mob stoning, demands for reckoning from a Governor and a General, conflict between Denison and officers in the British Army Hospital Corps, press speculation in Britain and Canada and newspaper editorializing at home. This swell of negative attention paid to the

⁸⁹ Alexander Macdonald, *Too late for Gordon and Khartoum: The testimony of an independent eye-witness of the heroic efforts for their rescue and relief*, London: J. Murray, 1887. Macdonald felt compelled to write a book about the expedition, because the newspapers only relied upon telegrams, rather than letters. Telegrams were "unsatisfactory as a medium of of information, for they comprise only a synopsis of the most current events." This was, he thought, a defect of the "journalism of the present day."

⁹⁰ When it suited Neilson's purposes he could tell entertaining stories of the men's legendary drinking powers. "I was remarking not long after to some of our Ottawa district French Canadian friends that I had just seen two hundred Government camels en route to Wady Halfa, and among other things told them of their remarkable powers of endurance which was said to be such that a camel could work for seven and even eight consecutive days without eating or drinking. Baptiste Terreau then said 'Joe Laroque can drink for eight consecutive days and do no work; and he'll repeat the job as often as you like, I'll bet.' " "Joe" (Neilson, sixth letter), October 24, *Montreal Star*, 24 November 1884

⁹¹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 21 October 1884

Canadians caused several of the officers to rally around the men and defend them, and the good name of Canada with which they were all inextricably linked. Neilson was the most active in the attempt to weave a story to put a good face on the potentially damaging Girgeh incident. On October 24, he wrote another letter to tell his readers what really happened in the melon patch. His worker-narrator began his letter with a general plea for understanding and an attempt to reframe the true meaning of the voyageurs on the Nile.

None of us are Angels

Joe suspected that Canadian readers "may have heard unfavorable reports" circulated by "individuals unfriendly to us and our expedition." We have been misrepresented, he claimed, by these "injurious and false impressions."

None of us are angels, but on this occasion the large majority of us wish to do well, to gain credit and honor for ourselves, and satisfy our employers. Some of the more turbulent and thoughtless may compromise the honor of the whole it is true, but the sins of the few should not be saddled on the many who frown on misconduct.⁹²

There was nothing in the content of the two potent sentences that was incorrect, and the tone of the second sentence in particular was reflected in the letters of the boatmen generally. This was not the way a worker would write, however, and Neilson strategically deployed certain phrases and ways of speaking while pretending to be a common boatman. What we note first of all is a clear assumption that groups will be judged by the actions of their members. There was an automatic link between "honor of ourselves" and "honor of the whole," that confirmed an expectation of group representation leading either to credit and esteem or dishonour and "contumely." There was a plea for the public not to judge the whole contingent harshly because (a) none of us are angels (b) the really bad ones don't represent us and (c) our enemies have been misrepresenting us. Joe's plea then moved in a surprising direction, however, by shifting the expected focus from a larger question of Canada's reputation to a focus on satisfying his employer. While he is worried about the contingent's reputation, the idea of representing Canada seems to have been taken out of the equation. For

⁹² "Joe" (Neilson, sixth letter), October 24, *Montreal Star*, 24 November 1884

the most part, up until this point, the editorials, news stories, speeches, toasts and letters home from voyageurs have repeatedly assumed that the contingent would "represent the country in Egypt," for better or for worse. This letter shifts those expectations by using the language of a worker who is just trying to satisfy his boss. The familiar trope of national representation which was present since the first days of recruitment, "to gain credit for themselves and win honour for their country," has been reframed by Joe as "to gain credit and honor for ourselves, and satisfy our employers." While Denison warned the men that they were subject to military discipline, just like a soldier, this text separates the role of worker and soldier. Neilson asked Canadians to adjust their expectations concerning the Nile Voyageurs. As workers, they are not capable of winning honour for the country they are only capable of satisfying their employers. By the same logic, if they perform poorly, they will make their employer unhappy, but they are not capable of ruining the country's reputation.

Remaining within these parameters of "satisfying the employer" he then turned to the lingering question, outstanding since the earliest days of recruitment, concerning "the efficiency of our men as boatmen." Slipping out of character a bit, Neilson reassured the reader that he talked with "nearly every individual man in the corps, whom I had reason to suspect of incapacity" and he finally concluded that only about 3% of the men had "limited experience as voyageurs," and these were mostly from Manitoba. This was a very generous assessment of reality, but Neilson's purpose here was to send a positive impression of the contingent and he reminded the reader that it was unavoidable that a few "of this class" should have "slipped in" given the circumstances.

After this preamble, in which he assured the public that voyageurs were rough fellows, but they were skilled, they obeyed orders and they were trying to do their best, he explained the shooting. The explanation was a confusing description⁹³ of two different incidents, one in

⁹³ Neilson's version of events differs from what is found in the English press, but he is also contradicted by Sherlock, Deer and Mackeand. His timelines, details and tone do not even match up with the version presented by Denison in his diary and order book. A point by point demonstration of this assertion would be possible but a presentation of Neilson's narrative demonstrates this case in a general sense.

which "two young fellows named respectively Davis and Mathieson" came upon "a curious stone figure near by, put up perhaps as a fetish, or scare crow." Since one of them "carried a small revolver in his pocket" they thought it would be "good fun to try a few pot shots at this image," and after a bit of that they "they returned to the barges, quite unconscious of having done any harm." One of their bullets, apparently, went into the next field and accidentally killed an undetected farmer. Joe said there was a second incident in which a group of soldiers and voyageurs "stumbled on a melon patch" and soon got into an "altercation" with the "natives" who "did not wish to be plundered without remonstrance." In the struggle that followed, "the natives were worsted." If we assume that the combined accounts of Sherlock, Deer and Mackeand provide the simplest and most credible version of what happened, and if we then assume that the "target practice" story was a fabrication told by Davis and Matheson, then it appears that Neilson has created a second story of a gunless battle in the melon patch. He likely imagined that if the "truth" got out, his readers would interpret it as a mixture of the other two stories, the first being a tragic accident and the second, an example of typically non-angelic but non-fatal violence, much like the Ayotte incident, in which the "the natives were worsted" by the Canadians. He then creatively described timelines of when the officers learned of these matters and how effectively they responded, demonstrating to the readers that they were always in control of the situation. He also informed the reader that the Mudir of Girgeh reported the killing, he claimed that "considerable excitement existed in that locality over this outrage" and he asked the army to "bring the guilty parties to account." Apparently, "this accusation created great surprise and indignation among us all." A board of inquiry discovered "the facts as related above" and concluded that the "killing of the man appears to have been purely accidental." The two men were not arrested but were "under surveillance" pending further investigation at Wady Halfa. The second incident "has not been brought officially to the notice of the authorities, but was severely condemned."⁹⁴ Thus, after telling Canadian newspaper readers that the voyageurs don't really represent the country in Egypt because they are workers, and after warning readers not believe the lies that some of the English papers were printing, Neilson then

⁹⁴ "Joe" (Neilson, sixth letter), October 24, *Montreal Star*, 24 November 1884

fabricated his own version of the story just to be safe. Throughout, he was motivated by a desire to counteract negative press coverage that might reflect poorly on Canada.

The reaction of Canadian officers, like Neilson and Labat,⁹⁵ and also Mackeand (who spoke as though he was an officer),⁹⁶ who all denounced "false" reports of Canadian insubordination should also be seen in the context of some very puzzling British press reports praising the Canadians at the exact same time.

London Oct 12 - Gen. Wolseley is confident that the reported difficulty of the boats passing the cataracts is magnified, and that low water will be an advantage. The Canadians think nothing of the rapids. The native boatmen are deserting.⁹⁷

Cairo, Oct 14 - The Canadian contingent has arrived at Wady Halfa. The voyageurs have aroused great admiration for their skill and pluck. They traverse the rapids as if it were child's play. Gen. Lord Wolseley says he is charmed with their achievements.⁹⁸

On October 14th the contingent was at a small village two days north of Luxor. They saw no rapids until they reached Aswan on October 21st, they first met Wolseley on the 26th and their first day "traversing the rapids" was October 27th. These scenes are fabricated and characterize much of the misleading telegraph news transmitted from the front. This immediately brings to mind Belich's findings of a triumphalist mentality in press reports, where the expectations of victory were so high, that they "overshot the evidence." The public grew accustomed to contradictory telegrams (several times that fall Gordon died and

⁹⁵ On the *Morning Post* commentary, Labat wrote "On nous attaque, nous nous défendons.... Donc supprimez les mots: *insubordination*, *désobéissance*, et remplacez-les par les mots *blagues et lazzis* des Voyageurs Canadiens. (p. 114) He minimized the power of the reports to hurt them. "Allons! les gars, le cœur haut et que ni les reporters ni le Nil ne fassent mentir la vieille réputation des canotiers canadiens!" (p. 115)

⁹⁶ "Ninety per cent. of the voyageurs are in favor of order and discipline. The conduct of the Caughnawaga Indians and of the Three Rivers contingent has been exemplary... from the Ottawa region there are a few... who have given us trouble." Denison fined one man, telling him "that on the Nile he was a soldier, and as such liable to trial and punishment by court martial." Anon (Mackeand, fourth letter, October 20), *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 22 November 1884

⁹⁷ *Montreal Daily Star*, *Peterborough Daily Review*, 13 October 1884

⁹⁸ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 15 October 1884. *Renfrew Mercury* 24 October 1884

captured Berber on the same day). In this context, it is notable that no one bragged about these two imaginary scenes of Canadian prowess, but they responded with indignation to negative telegrams.

These two scenes are particularly informative because they articulate the image of an ideal-type Canadian boatman. Belich identified the repetitive and formulaic nature of many battlefield news items, in which evidence was secondary in importance to a repetition of scripted cultural expectations. Fitting the same category, these telegrams are future news, correctly read as expected outcomes. The Canadians were brought in part because the British did not believe they could rely upon Egyptian and Sudanese boatmen, and the first telegram "proves" that this was a wise decision. The second telegram informs the reader that "skill and pluck" will be the criteria by which the Canadians will win admiration and charm the General. Whether this fake news was generated by the War Office or by overzealous reporters (and Belich found they used the same racial and military tropes), this represents a British conception of the idealized form of the Canadian worker on the expedition. Their skill is supposedly of such a specialized nature, that it justifies the expense of bringing them across the ocean. Pluck meant a resourceful courage and daring in the face of difficulties, usually associated with a sense of "spirit" and "intelligence." Inferior races did not possess pluck. Wolseley saw such pluck as part of the colonial character of Canadians, and it was something he expected in the voyageurs. Aspects of the "militia myth" emphasized the resourcefulness that came from a frontier life which made Canadian officers superior to over-civilized over-drilled British officers. What these workers could bring to Egypt was the pluck of a Canadian and the special skill of a worker. In the next chapter, it will be important to identify to what extent Canadian skill, pluck, hardiness, discipline, courage and other qualities are recognized by the British press and army.

Wady Halfa

Passing the first cataract at Aswan via a short train line, the men finally arrived in Wady Halfa after almost three weeks on the Nile. Kennedy and Bouchard rejoined the group at this

point, both returning from Cairo and for one final time, the contingent was assembled together before being scattered in different gangs along the Nile for the rest of the expedition. Here they were inspected by Lord Wolseley on Sunday, October 26. He stayed for only a few minutes before departing, but Labat said "Le général nous a salués comme étant de vieilles connaissances."⁹⁹ If he said anything to them it must have been brief, because none of the men thought it worth recording. Wolseley had a few words with Denison before leaving, during which the General gave Denison instructions regarding the Girgeh situation. The voyageurs quickly moved along to camp at the foot of the second cataract where their work would begin Monday morning. Although one would not guess it from his journal, this point also effectively marked the end of Denison's command over the contingent as a whole, for from this point onward, individual gangs were assigned specific boats and regiments and moved forward with different army commanders. From this point on, they would cease to be together as a whole, but rather, they would become integrated into the different units of the British Army.

Conclusions

Wolseley asked for Canadian boatmen because he could not trust Egyptian and Sudanese boatmen. The most obvious amongst several reasons for this was that the local inhabitants were not eager and keen to work in the service of the forces occupying their country. The arrival of the Canadians in Alexandria recontextualized the contingent as part of the British military campaign in the eyes of the Egyptians, at the same time that it made them feel more "Canadian" since that was how the British addressed all of them and since they found themselves in a foreign country, where their regional differences paled in comparison to the differences between Canada and Egypt.

The men may have been wearing blue tinted sunglasses, but they didn't all see the country through the same cultural lenses. A complex set of assumptions, including discourses of race and history, could be clearly seen in the way that different members of the Canadian

⁹⁹ Labat p. 119

contingent described the same reality in very different ways. The scripts used by Neilson, Mackeand and Kennedy overlapped considerably with the one used by Labat, and to a large extent they articulate the ideas found by Belich and Said, albeit in popularized forms, and in Labat's case, with a Catholic and francophone variation. These texts have a clear sense that Egypt's glory was past, the current Muslim Arabs were basically squatters, and that Europeans are returning civilization to the cradle of its birth. This is their narrative justifying participation in the imperial campaign on the Nile. For Jackson and Sherlock, however, the popular conceptions they bring to Egypt are much thinner, respectively based on Bible stories and 1001 Arabian nights. They do not articulate the findings predicted by Belich and Said. Both view the land primarily through the eyes of fellow-farmers and fellow-workers and they are still quite critical and judgmental at times, but without using the same racial and civilizational discourses. Jackson tried his best to learn the language, find out the names of the Arab crews and he visited local mosques. He regrets the damage done to crops by their nightly camps. Sherlock has thoughtful reflections on poverty, violence, class distinctions, colonial violence and he was enthralled with the marketplaces and the beauty of the Nile. Neither of them shared Labat's fierce prejudices, which he articulated in crude scripts of racial types and civilizational degeneration, speaking of infected markets and calling minarets lighthouses of fanaticism. The tropes used by these various correspondents formed coherent wholes for each speaker, but they only partially overlapped one another. In general, they did not share a common set of semantic resources. It is impossible to identify a "Nile voyageur" discourse, let alone a Canadian discourse, and thus the texts do not all strongly cohere with any scripts of Victorian racial theory or academic Orientalism.

Through these different ways of talking, it is clear that there were no master narratives that guided all the Canadian experiences of the Nile. Yet it is clear that amongst all the men, from different perspectives, there was a pervasive, undeniable lack of respect for the Egyptians. The criteria of disrespect varied, but the outcome was very similar. In this sense, during the three weeks they steamed up the Nile, the men learned about Egypt, but they did so through the lenses of an imperial campaign. Had Jackson visited Egypt in 1880 as a traveller, he

might have encountered other boatmen who were not so reluctant to give him their names or help him learn a few words of Arabic, but now the Canadians were part of an occupying army. Canadians brought a mixture of pre-existing stereotypes and they learned new ones from the British who had already been in Egypt for some time. As they travelled in a context of systematic violence in the form of a column advancing through the country, their encounters between Canadians and Egyptians were almost doomed to be characterized by violence and disrespect. Relying on one-sided evidence, we have no way of knowing what exactly the Egyptians thought of the men in the contingent, but based on a few violent incidents, it is clear that the Canadians were just another part of the British military expedition that was pushing through their country, abusing their people and property along the way. Indeed one of the conclusions we must reach from looking at the fallout from Girgeh is that some of the Canadians saw nothing wrong with stealing and pillaging. And when a Canadian killed an Egyptian, the consequences in terms of material punishments and condemnation by peers and superiors were both minimal. The price of abusing Egyptians was low.

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine in depth the various types of disrespect involved here. Edward Said is understandably credited with popularizing the idea in cultural studies of "the other." His approach has been widely adapted beyond Middle Eastern studies to describe a range of colonial relations with "the other" that are exoticizing, violent and coercive, especially through the exercise of specialized knowledge. To use such an approach in this study would be inappropriate because the Canadians do not share a common knowledge-power discourse, be it orientalist or otherwise. They also find themselves enmeshed in a web of mutually interdependent power relations, as Aboriginal peoples and settler colonists, participating in an imperial campaign. Belich understands that the efforts at denigrating the other are a way to prop up oneself, that racial ideals are "not just images of others, but of one's self and one's own society" and "two sides of the same coin."¹⁰⁰ Given that each gang identity had different regional, class, language and religious identities, their

¹⁰⁰ Belich p. 327

interactions with Egyptians were similarly predicated on different assumptions of what constituted "one's own society." Winnipeggers seemed much more eager to denigrate the Egyptians as "muddy" than were other contingent members. This assertion of superiority over and against another evokes the intersubjective relations implicit in Hegel's master/slave dialectic which Honneth revisits as a struggle for recognition. If one was to pursue a deeper analysis of the ways in which the Canadians disrespected and misrecognized Egyptians, Honneth's recent rehabilitation of the notion of "reification" might prove useful.¹⁰¹ These recent developments in Honneth's thinking hold the promise of expanding even further the analytical potential of his core theory of recognition, which already possesses a conception of the "other," via Mead, which is robust and expansive enough to support an analysis of non-coercive "other" relationships of the type that best characterize Canadian/imperial relations that lie at the heart of this study and which must remain our key focus.

Indeed, this study, perhaps like the documentation and responses to the killing at Girgeh, turns its attention away from the unfortunate farmer, nameless to history, and focusses attention on how the shooting altered the sense of who the Canadians were as a group. It could be argued that the behaviour of these men in the melon patch demonstrated the reification of the locals, but it is also fair to argue that this was perhaps how some of these men would have behaved in Ottawa, where a similar incident might have occurred. The difference is that on an imperial expedition in Egypt, such meaningless violence is fraught with questions of national representation. Even though the British papers didn't specifically mention the killing of an Egyptian farmer, their generalized charges of Canadian indiscipline, disobedience and insubordination that arose from this incident created a collective sense of outrage and indignation amongst many members of the contingent, especially its officers, who looked incompetent if they commanded insubordinate men. The resulting set of

¹⁰¹ Building on his theory of recognition, Honneth draws our attention back to the original meaning of reification as "thing-ification" that characterizes an instrumental attitude towards self, others and nature that is best characterized as a "forgetfulness of recognition." In this sense, reification is pathological, a type of misrecognition in which others are rendered as things, overlooked as beings deserving of recognition. See Axel Honneth, Judith Butler, Raymond Geuss, Jonathan Lear, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008

fabricated stories, proclamations of insult and perceived misrepresentation in narratives of injustice and defensive pleas for understanding were an indication of the sharp sensitivities to British criticisms, especially amongst the officers. The defensive reflexes also revealed the true audience that mattered to the men, the truly significant other from whom they sought recognition: fellow Canadians. None of them wrote to the British press, which was the source of the libel, they wrote home instead, to reassure their fellow countrymen that they were not behaving like barbarians, they were being good workers, despite what the English papers were saying. In all of this, the death of the farmer faded away before the drama of saving the good reputation of the contingent in the eyes of their fellow Canadians.

Perhaps the greatest implication for the way the contingent was and would be understood, were the emergence of a competing set of narratives about the connection between the men's behaviour and Canadian honour that hinged on their role as civilian workers. When it suited Denison and other officers, to control the men through the threat of court martial, they were told that they were just like soldiers and would be subject to the same punishments for indiscipline and disobedience. In practice this was a bluff and the men underwent no court martial. Even these three men were fined in the manner foreseen by Melgund when he crafted a non-military engagement form. The other competing narrative, most clearly articulated by Neilson's narrator Joe was that the men never presumed to represent the country, they only hoped to win credit and honor for themselves and to satisfy their employer. They were not serving their Queen, they were employed by her. Joe surrendered any claim to represent Canada and thus he and his drunken, brawling, indisciplined colleagues were less of a risk to Canada's reputation. From the moment the contingent was organized, there was public confusion concerning its status as a quasi-military force that existed in a a fuzzy grey zone between worker and soldier. If Neilson's risk-averse logic, dislodging the workers from any claim at national representation positive or negative, was a story that would grow to have public resonance, it would make it very difficult to celebrate the Nile voyageurs as national heroes worthy of commemoration and remembrance.

CHAPTER 7 - THE SUDAN

The six month contract signed by the Nile Voyageurs included travel time from Winnipeg to Quebec to Alexandria to Wady Halfa, and then making the same return trip after their work was done. This meant that only half of their contract time was actually spent working. The British soldier's nickname for Wady Halfa, "Bloody Halfway", was fairly accurate in terms of the actual time it took Canadians to get to that town, and then to travel home from it again. Their first day of labour began on the second cataract of the Nile on Monday October 27th. Their arrival in Wady Halfa the day before was auspiciously marked by an inspection from General Wolseley, who wrote in his journal that the Canadians were "a rough-looking lot, but I hope I shall get plenty of work out of them. They won't funk this river at all events."¹ This chapter examines that period, roughly from November 1884 to January 1885 when the men did their work and explores how the men described it themselves and how they were recognized by members of the British Army and British war correspondents.

This chapter will begin with a brief overview of the role of the press in wartime and the general course of the campaign. We will then turn to an examination of the work that was done by the Canadians on the Nile, both the actual mechanics of the labour they performed in the boats and how they adapted to the working conditions and culture of the army. The next section will focus on the various ways in which British soldiers and journalists criticized and praised the Canadians for the work they were doing and the different ways in which they recognized them as fellow-Britons or exotic others. These dynamics of mutual recognition were complicated by ways these Nile experiences were refracted, being represented in the British press, then reprinted in Canadian newspapers, which were often sent back to the men by their families, which would often spur further responses from Canadian letter writers. The

¹ Garnet Wolseley, *In relief of Gordon: Lord Wolseley's campaign journal of the Khartoum Relief Expedition, 1884-1885*, Adrian Preston, ed. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970, pp 48-9 The OED defines "funk" at this era to mean To flinch or shrink through fear; to 'show the white feather', to be afraid of something, to evade or shirk it

final section of chapter deals with the decision that the voyageurs faced in January to either return home, according to the terms of their contract, or re-engage. A majority returned home, and their descent of the Nile and return to Canada is covered in the next chapter. Those who did re-engage worked another month, advanced with the River column and witnessed the Battle of Kirbekan. Their return to Canada will also be addressed in the next chapter. In brief, this chapter will examine how they worked, what sort of recognition they won for it, and the choices they made to leave or stay, at a time when Gordon's fate remained uncertain.

The Wartime Press

Canadians read about the war in the Sudan via telegrams, reprinted stories from the war correspondents of the major British newspapers or letters from Canadian correspondents. In reaction to any or all of these, a newspaper might print an editorial comment, or reprint as "current comment" / "echo du jour" any of the opinion pieces from other newspapers. An intertextual reading of these sources shows that the Canadian newspaper readers did not give equal credence to these diverse and different source types. Telegrams, which were usually printed on the front page, were notoriously unreliable and since they were often issued by the War Office there was widespread suspicion that they were intentionally inaccurate. For example, on November 4, different news items reported that Gordon had been killed, that he had been captured, and that he had won a significant battle.² Later, the *Peterborough Review* commented that while the telegraphic news from the Nile "cannot always be relied upon, [it] has at least the value of variety." They then cited examples of Gordon dying and coming back to life, the Mahdi "expired" and then engaged in "renewed activity," leading 3,000 to their deaths "while at the same time the information is given that his followers are leaving him because he will do nothing." This editorial gives us some idea as to how people were reading the news when it said "People may complain a trifle of the unreliability of the despatches, but they cannot grumble for lack of variety, unless they claim that these contradictory reports

² *Winnipeg Daily Times*, *Peterborough Daily Review*, 4 November 1884

are becoming monotonous."³ But even if the content of the news was unreliable, to the extent that the cables could be trusted, they gave an immediacy that often disrupted the reader's chronological understanding of events in comparison with the voyageur letters. Canadians could read on October 8 that the voyageurs had landed in Alexandria, and only one week later would they see reprinted the letters mailed from Gibraltar in September, which contained news of the events at Sydney. While a telegraph could sent news around the globe the next day, the Canadian letters travelled by steamer and reached Canada the slow way with a delay of about 4 weeks on average..

By contrast, the articles of the British war correspondents were telegraphed to London, making them both more immediate and more susceptible to military censors. War correspondents were still relatively novel. In the Crimean War, the period between composition and publication was measured in weeks,⁴ but on the Nile Campaign, the letters were deposited by the "special correspondents" at the telegraph office and could appear the next day in England. Canadians were told that the "English papers were sending out their best correspondents."⁵ Wolseley was accused by his critics of bringing along the press as a means of self-promotion, but it became clear that he could not always count on the press to represent the expedition in the best light. Given the relative novelty of this situation, and the military control of the telegraph lines, the correspondents were vulnerable to military control. English papers confirmed for their readers a "long-cherished belief" that letters from special correspondents "have been woefully garbled and distorted by military censors." As proof, the papers reprinted copies of original letters which had been submitted to telegraph offices and also mailed to England, side-by-side with those which had been "'Burked' by the censors" at the telegraph office because they contained criticisms of military officials. Thus, although the press could quickly reprint detailed letters from its correspondents at the front, they

³ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 10 December 1884

⁴ William Russell's letters for *The Times* took about two weeks from delivery to press, dependent on a mixture of early cables and ships from the Crimea to London.

⁵ *Globe*, 15 September 1884. These included "Messrs. Cameron, of the Standard; Burleigh of the Telegraph; O'Kelly of the News and Melton Prior of the Illustrated London News."

"urge[d] the public" to believe the mailed letters rather than the telegrams, since they could not manage to otherwise get the letters cabled out of Egypt "without mutilation."⁶ As a further interjection of military control, the press reports late in the expedition, after the fall of Khartoum, were mostly written by military officers. In early February, there were headlines that Wolseley was "Suppressing the Press," removing non-combatants from the front and ensuring that correspondents were "stopped from communicating with their papers."⁷ When the correspondent of the London *Daily News* was reported missing, Wolseley "at the request of several newspapers," officially appointed officers as correspondents to prevent further loss of life.⁸

Letters from Canadians were slower in finding their way to press, but suffered none of the "mutilations" of formal censorship. There was an isolated report that the military was "choking off letters" and that "General Wolseley has forbidden any Canadians to write for the press"⁹ but Canadian letters, often critical of the British military in a variety of respects, continued to be written, mailed and published without noticeable interruption during this period. These caveats will guide our assessment of these three types of "news from the front." For methodological reasons, this chapter will draw upon Canadian letters and books and articles published after the return as similar types of sources. Oral interviews given by voyageurs upon their return to Canada in March will not be used in this chapter except for some aspects of chronological concordance. For example, the written accounts of Jackson and Deer, published immediately upon their return will be used in this chapter, whereas the verbal accounts of what it was like to work with the British army, which were given to reporters in Canada, will be treated in the next chapter. In the former case we are dealing with written accounts that resemble the conventions of the letter writers, and which were likely based on some rudimentary diary notes, while the interviews in Canada were marked by both the conventions of oral culture and of a journalistic intermediary.

⁶ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 11 December 1884

⁷ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 10 February 1885

⁸ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 23 February 1885

⁹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 2 December 1884

Wolseley's River Campaign

This project will address the military tactics and strategy of the Khartoum Relief Expedition's progress from Wady Halfa to Khartoum only in very general terms and in the broadest strokes. According to Adrian Preston, Wolseley's underlying assumption about the campaign was that "the mere appearance of his force would overawe the Madhi's forces." Such a "facile appreciation" of the determination, skills and strategic resources of the Sudanese led Preston to conclude that if the Mahdi had chosen to block the retreat of Wolsely's advance column, the General's defeat would have been "as humiliating and complete as that of Hicks Pasha."¹⁰ When it became known that Khartoum fell on January 26th, less than two days before the arrival of the advance guard, there was a great outcry that Gordon had been sacrificed due to the procrastination of politicians and the incompetence of the military commissariat. Butler articulated "the story of Too Late":

What other words can sum in shorter and sadder sentence the history of the Great Nile Expedition? Too Late in its grand conception - too late in its immense effort, tried upon a theatre of unexampled magnificence - too late in its labour, its trials, and its suffering - too late in all, even in the glory that remains to one name, and the sorrow that belongs to an entire nation.¹¹

Using Belich's criteria of analysis, we would see the "too late" chorus as a palliative to numb the humiliation of Britain's military defeat at the hands of Africans, something so unimaginable that other explanations needed to be found. No detailed analysis of the expedition's progress will ever find that missing 48 hours, but rather, it seems most likely that at whatever date the expedition would have managed to arrive, Gordon would have been killed two days before that time. Wolseley's campaign of "overawe" lacked the element of surprise. It was easy to place lookouts along the cliffs of the Nile Valley, making it impossible for an invading army to arrive unannounced in the northern Sudan. With a large volume of official military records and voyageur letters, it would be possible to plot the movements of different voyageur gangs along the Nile, practically to the hour. Luckily, such work has already been done to an adequate degree by Stacey. This said, however, a basic

¹⁰ *ibid* p. xxxiii

¹¹ Butler, *Campaign of the Cataracts* p. 7

outline of the nature of Wolseley's plan is necessary to understand the context in which the Canadians did their work and the decision which they faced as the end of their contract term approached.

In the northern Sudan, between Aswan and Khartoum, there were in 1884, five major "cataracts" of the Nile,¹² but as the men discovered, British maps of the area were inadequate and dozens of other sets of rapids were encountered between the major cataracts. Instead of flat water between the cataracts, they found long cascades of rapids that ran through rocky outcrops, with numerous channels and islands. To complicate matters, the Nile was falling rapidly as they advanced so that from week to week, the cataracts would change significantly. Wolseley's plan was to move the expedition up to Dongola, which would be established as a staging ground past the third cataract. From there, the Nile turned south, east, north, east, south and then west in a wide sweep of rapids that included the fourth and fifth cataract. Since the river route was long, slow and difficult, Wolseley planned to send his first strike force across the desert, bypassing the wide S loop of the Nile. Meanwhile, a river column would follow the Nile around from Dongola to Berber, where there were steamboats that could travel the flat water to Khartoum. The desert column would leave the river at Korti and make the short but more dangerous journey across the open desert to end up on the Nile halfway between Berber and Khartoum. The major task for the Canadians was to guide the boats up through the rough water between the 2nd and 3rd cataract so the troops could arrive at Dongola. From here, the soldiers would cross the desert, while the the Canadians would stay with the river column that took the slow and winding climb to Berber.

After some experimentation, the commanders soon settled on a "fixed station" system of work that scattered the voyageur gangs along the length of the river, often up to "one hundred

¹² The geography of the upper Nile was altered construction of the Aswan High Dam at the site of the first cataract and Lake Nasser stretches from here to beyond the second cataract. Old Wady Halfa was relocated further south to the terminus of the lake. The construction of the Merowe High Dam flooded a great deal of the Nubian valley in an between the fourth and fifth cataracts.

THE MAHØ'S DEFEAT.

Less than Two Thousand British
Troops Rout Ten Thousand
of the Rebel Forces Near
the Abu-Klea Wells.

A Fierce Hand-to-Hand Fight, in Which Eight Hundred Arabs Perish by English bayonets

The British Loss Much Less and
Caused by the Unruly Con-
duct of Powder-Burned
Camels.

A Report Current in London To-
Day that Gen Stewart Has
Occupied Metemneh.

**The Government Telegraphs Public
Congratulations to Lord
Wolsely and General
Stewart.**

Lord Wolseley's Official Report of
Gen. Stewart's Decisive En-
gagement on Saturday.

[Special despatch to The Times.]

LONDON, Jan. 22.—A report is current that Gen. Stewart has occupied Metemneh. This rumor lacks official confirmation, but it is generally believed as Gen. Stewart pushed forward the greater part of his forces immediately after the victory on Saturday near Abu Klea wells.

It is highly probable also that all the rebels who had been stationed at Metemneh left that point to take part in Saturday's engagement and it is thought unlikely they rallied and made a stand at Metemneh so soon after the decisive defeat.

The Government has telegraphed public congratulations to Lord Wolseley and Gen. Stewart.

A FRIENDLY SIEGE.

KORTI, Egypt, Jan. 22. The Sheik of the Kablyia tribe came to Korti to day. He had heard of the British victory and he promised Lord Wolseley to provide him with lots of camels.

PIPING UP DEAD ARABS.
LONDON, Jan. 22.—The battle between General Stewart's troops and the Arabs was fought at a point in the Huesaniijih desert 23 miles northwest from Metemneh, and near the caravan station of Sufoha. Gen. Stewart's force consisted of about 1,500 effective men. On the approach of the Arabs, who were estimated to number 8,000 or 10,000, Stewart formed his troops in a hollow square, with the field pieces at the corners, the invalids and provisions in the centre. The Arabs made their attack in a tumultuous rush, directed principally upon the side of the square held by the Hissars. This side of the square was broken at one time during the fight. The officers attribute this disaster to the unruly conduct of the camels which got powder burned and became uncontrollable. The line was speedily reformed, and the discipline of the men was splendid throughout the action.

A STEADY AND DEADLY FIRE
was kept up by the Hussars and mounted infantry, while our artillery maintained an enfilading fire, which piled the dead Arabs up in heaps. The space in front of the British right flank was a veritable slaughter-trail and when the Arabs were finally

MAP OF THE SOUDAN SHOWING THE SCENE OF THE BATTLE.

miles distant" from each other for weeks at a time.¹³ The arrangement of the gangs in a series like this formed a kind of conveyor belt to transport the army up the river. For many boatmen, being stationed in one spot, enabled them to learn the particularities of one set of rapids. It also meant that the British soldiers they met were for the most part constantly changing and that the limited number of Canadians they worked with was constant. In most cases, they were working with gang colleagues from the same regional and language group, frequently men they had known for years. One boatman wrote that he had a hard time finding out what the others were doing, "scattered as we are along the river, miles apart."¹⁴ In this way, the organization of the campaign tended to reinforce gang identity. There was no such thing as a common Canadian camp where the men would retire to in the evening. The close association the men experienced crossing the Atlantic, on the Mediterranean and passing through Egypt was not to be repeated after their arrival in Wady Halfa.

Mounting a Rapid

When the contingent was first announced, some Canadian newspapers expressed their disappointment that the Canadians would be going as boatmen, saying that they would not win much glory packing supplies over the rapids like "army mules." An examination of the type of work done by the Canadians between the second and third cataracts reveals that their skills were so specialized that they were often in positions of authority and it was the soldiers who were toiling and labouring under their command. This relationship was based upon the gradually earned recognition that, given the nature of the work, the Canadians were the experts, and the British soldiers were inexperienced and unskilled labourers.

The Nile expedition used modified "whaler boats" that were either 32 feet long or 50 feet long and which were generally filled with supplies, six soldiers to row and a Canadian in the

¹³ LAC RG10 Indian Affairs, Vol. 6829, File 503-4-1, Reel C-8547, Neilson to Denison, January 21, 1894.

¹⁴ Correspondent, *Ottawa Free Press*, 2 January 1885

bow and stern to steer the boat up through the rapids.¹⁵ On the stretches of flat water between rapids and on a few of the minor rapids, sails would be used, but in the strong white water, the boats ascended by power of the oarsmen and other tow-lines (hawsers) which were handled men on the shore. The London *Standard* correspondent explained that at the larger

Figure 7-1 Towing the Whale Boats with Troops through the First Gate of the Second Cataract (by Melton Prior, *Illustrated London News*, 29 November 1884)

rapids, there was often a greater concentration of troops, labour and resources, the boats were unloaded and portaged by camel train or else could be pulled up with more "concentrated labor." It was at the many smaller and "the nameless rapids between" where the men had "to work, and work hard." The first step was for the "foreman voyageur" to walk the bank "to prospect" and then "he and his colleagues consult." The Canadians "almost always agree, and never argue," and then they would instruct the soldiers where to stand with their tow-lines. The crews of up to five boats might be needed in the strongest currents, and they would be

¹⁵ Sherlock, ninth letter, (October 29), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 4 December 1884

placed at a spot above the rapid, where they would "pay out" upwards to 100 yards of hawser. The labour on the shore could be provided by British soldiers, Egyptian soldiers or by the "Dongolese" from the area. Most of the time, each boat would contain a "Canadian, with paddle or pole in hand" in the bow with another Canadian at the tiller. When all was in place, the Canadians with their oarsmen would "shove off into the stream"

and then "haul away" is the frantic cry... Should the boat swing broadside to the torrent she may fill or sink, or the strain may prove too much for the rope and men pulling it, and down stream she goes to a very uncertain fate. ...or the boat may come in contact with a rock and her frail timbers be pierced; for with her heavy load the slightest touch is sufficient to tear a hole that takes hours to repair. And while "haul away" is being shouted - "not in jerks please" (not always as polite as that), "but hand over hand," language is heard and expletives are used, to which the Nile banks are entirely unaccustomed."¹⁶

In such dangerous situations, lives were quickly lost and expensive equipment was frequently sent to the bottom of the Nile at the slightest error. Canadians with years of experience working in rapids earned a special degree of respect that disrupted the expectations of British military officers that they should be the ones in command of the boats, especially where civilians were concerned. Unfortunately, it was only after several accidents had occurred that roles were clarified, and even then, recognition of Canadian expertise by British officers was neither universal nor automatic. The Caughnawaga boatman Louis Capitaine was the first voyageur to drown on the Nile and his death was symptomatic of the reluctance amongst British officers to give the voyageurs authority to control the boats.

"Our Peculiar Sphere"

Col. Alleyne, who was a member of the "Garnet Ring" of Wolsley's favoured officers and who had served with him on the Red River expedition, was given charge of a select group of boatmen from Caughnawaga to do a test run to Sacramento. Wolseley wanted to assess

¹⁶ *Winnipeg Sun*, December 29, 1884, citing *London Standard* 13 November 1884

the feasibility of the route, before launching the entire army up at once.¹⁷ At one of the rapids near Gament, Louis Capitaine "accidentally drowned" in the words of the official telegram.¹⁸ Sherlock heard that he got on "the wrong side of the tow rope and got knocked over."¹⁹ One despatch stated merely that he "fell overboard," and "despite his frantic struggles to reach shore, and the efforts of his comrades to rescue him, was swept away shrieking for help." His death, readers were told, "cast a gloom over his companions."²⁰ Because he was the first voyageur to drown, announcements of Capitaine's death were widely reprinted in Canadian newspapers, but the only detailed account of his death is found in the book by James Deer.

According to Deer, the accident happened to a boat "in charge of Peter January, who was supposed to steer while Louis Capitaine, another of our Indian boatmen, was to manage the bow." Lord Perry, the officer in the boat "took the tiller in his own hands and announced his intention of steering the boat." Neither of the voyageurs challenged this action and January moved to the bow, meaning that "Capitaine was displaced altogether, and was, in consequence, extremely sulky and bad--tempered." After moving along in relatively calm waters, at noon they came upon "a very swift rapid." All the boats made it through safely, leaving only "January's boat" which "was not steering very well."

Capitaine stepped to the bow with his paddle to assist. Being so angry he was probably careless and thrusting his paddle too deep into water the force of the rapid threw him over the bow and about ten feet clear of the boat. He sank twice, then called loudly for help ; they threw him some of the oars, a life

¹⁷ Years later, Jackson would tell Moffat a version of events in which the whole expedition hung in the balance, based on Wolseley's inability to trust Jackson's judgement. In this narrative, much of the British Army waited at Alexandria to see if Jackson and his men succeeded or not. If they had failed, this army would have passed through the Suez canal, landed on the Red Sea coast and crossed overland to Berber. Jackson's men succeeded but this pause for a "test run" caused a one month delay, said Jackson, as the army could only begin their passage through Egypt after Jackson had completed the test run. If only Wolseley had trusted us in the first place, Jackson lamented....

¹⁸ The text of the telegram from the War Office sent 3 November 1884 "Voyageur Louis Captain accidentally drowned 30 Oct. Inform Canada." (LAC RG 25 A-1 vol. 35, Colonial Office Correspondence August - October 1884) led to some confusion as the newspapers mistakenly understood it to refer to "Captain" Louis Jackson, whose premature death and obituaries occurred in several Montreal newspapers and were echoed in the *Peterborough Review* and elsewhere.

¹⁹ Sherlock, tenth letter, (November 2), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 5 December 1884

²⁰ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 7 November 1884

belt, and a rope, none of which he could reach as the whirlpool caught him again and he sank once more. When he came up for the last time an oar was thrown to him, and he caught it by the blade but disappeared immediately taking the oar which, he held upright, with him. We never saw him again, and thus another of our Indian friends was taken from us.²¹

Deer's book is short, and he glosses over many events. This incident, however, is narrated in precise detail. By naming Perry and describing the particulars of the situation, it seems clear that Deer held Perry responsible for disrupting the proper order in "January's boat." Deer acknowledged that Capitaine's resentment at being "displaced altogether" impaired his judgment. A journalist from the *Montreal Star* went to Caughnawaga when the telegram was received a few days later and reported that Capitaine was remembered both as someone with "remarkable skill as a river man" and "a supreme contempt for such a thing as danger" who was "daring at times even to the verge of recklessness." The reporter speculated that his death "was probably a result of this feature in his character."²² Deer does lend some credence to this speculation, but feels that Perry was the primary cause of the accident. Perry took command of the boat, this unexpected "displacement" of Capitaine cause him to "sulk" and be "angry." Then Perry failed to properly steer the boat, and in response to this danger, the "reckless" Capitaine became "careless." It is also worth noting here that the way in which Deer expresses a pan-Indian identification, connecting the death of Henderson from St. Peter's to the death of Capitaine from Caughnawaga.

This incident was part of a more widespread pattern in which British officers in the boats assumed that they should be in command, even though they knew nothing of river navigation. January and Capitaine were frustrated but compliant whereas other voyageurs refused to listen to men such as Perry. Sherlock narrated a scene in December where William Harris, one of the voyageurs in his gang was ordered to do something by the officer from the Essex regiment, "but he, knowing his business best, did not obey it." After being ordered to comply a second time, he called for more rope to be let out as requested, but when the

²¹ Deer pp. 11-12

²² *Montreal Star*, 3 November 1884

soldiers failed to keep it taut, being "quite green as to all this kind of work," Harris' boat was smashed against the rocks, losing valuable food, ammunition, rifles, kits. The other Canadian in the boat, Jack White, stripped off and swam back through the rapids, but the rest of the men had to be rescued, placing even more men in danger. Sherlock complained about the unnecessary complications created by such officers in situations that were already difficult enough.²³ It is not necessary to dissect the particular blend of racial superiority, presumed military rank, class privilege or imperial/colonial dominance that guided such behaviour of junior officers in such cases. It is sufficient to state that such attitudes were widespread amongst British officers and the conditions of the Nile made such behaviour very costly. When senior officers realized this, the Canadian civilian working class men, of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, were eventually formally recognized as the legitimate experts and authorities in this domain through direct orders from Wolseley.

For many of the officers, the presumptions of superiority to the Canadians led to conflict and tension. Often, they would tell correspondents that Canadians were not listening to them. Once again, but for different reasons, there were press reports of "Canadian insubordination" in the British press. One British correspondent, writing after the war, gave a typical example of a young officer "a most intelligent fellow, but rather bumptious" who had "a collision with a boat-load of Canadian Voyageurs." When the reporter Alexander Macdonald met him, he "was boiling over with indignation at their disobedience to his orders. 'Why,' said he, 'I ordered them to land at such a place, and they refused to do so. I am going to report them to the commandant.'" In response to this general situation, explained Macdonald,

Lord Wolseley, with his knowledge of Canadian human nature and his own kind consideration for everybody, had issued an order placing the Canadian Voyageurs in a position independent of officers, for while in charge of boats none of the latter were allowed to interfere with them at all.²⁴

At the time, however, other correspondents filed stories based on such complaints from the

²³ Sherlock, fourteenth letter, (November 28), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

²⁴ Alexander Macdonald, *Too late for Gordon and Khartoum: The testimony of an independent eye-witness of the heroic efforts for their rescue and relief*, London: J. Murray, 1887 p. 100

officers, claiming the Canadians had "been insubordinate and have disobeyed their officers, and thus retarded the expedition," which prompted Kennedy to write to several Canadian newspapers in late November "to contradict these statements through your widely circulated papers" because "they are wholly untrue."²⁵ This was in fact how many of the officers perceived the situation, given their presumptions of command.

The content of Kennedy's 'contradiction' only further obscured the very real power struggle over control of the boats, a struggle that the voyageurs eventually won only after notable scenes of conflict and mutual resistance. In the same way that Jackson described the death of Capitaine, Sherlock described the death of a fellow boatman from Peterborough, John Faulkner as the fault of incompetence and "arrogance" of the British officers. When Faulkner's boat was "in the very worst part of the fall" and "the pull of the line on his boat was terribly heavy," the rope was given "too much slack" out of "some carelessness or mismanagement." The boat swung out side-ways "in a terrific current," which ripped out the whole of the bow "and the boat fell off into the heavy swirl." White, being a very good swimmer, jumped into the water, but even he barely survived this time. As the boat became swamped, Faulkner followed White, but he was swept away. He "swam for a long time, but failed to reach the shore and was lost." The "cursed carelessness of the men on the ropes," wrote Sherlock

combined with the meddlesomeness of some of the officers, who can't help bossing what they don't know anything about, has murdered - by jove there is no other name for it - ten men already, three soldiers, one Negro and six Canadians.

At this point in the expedition, in early December, Sherlock was particularly frustrated with this "interference" that resulted in bad decisions made by "some mistake, or 'know everythingness' of somebody [...] all caused by the prigs of officers setting up their judgement against that of the Canadians in charge of the boats."²⁶ This type of officer was fictionalized by Shaw in the form of a "Lieut. B.," who was the officer in his boat, a recent

²⁵ Kennedy letter (20 November 1884), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

²⁶ Sherlock, fifteenth letter, (December 10), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 14 January 1885

subaltern, who "was young, painfully young ; not so much in years, for he was about the same age as myself, but in knowledge of the wickedness of the world." Mocking the young man's privileged upbringing "by a careful mamma and adoring sisters in the precincts of a quiet home," with private tutors, Shaw grants that he was "a decent fellow," but his "exalted ideas of his importance as an 'officer and a gentleman' ... made me weary."²⁷ Another Canadian, writing to the *Globe* asked his readers to "imagine a boy three months from school giving orders to Canadians and interfering with a boatman who thoroughly understands his business." This writer then explained that once the orders were given to obey the Canadians while in the boats progress had improved, since "officers are not allowed to interfere with the duties of the boatmen. Had it been so from the start there would not have been so much loss of life and property."²⁸ Another voyageur later stated that things began to improve after such orders were given; the officer in the boat "did not needlessly interfere or try to show his authority."²⁹ The obedience of such officers to Canadian voyageurs was hardly automatic. Despite clear orders from General Wolseley, the cultural assumptions held by such officers as those described by Sherlock, Shaw and others made it difficult for them to recognize the authority of the voyageurs over matters of navigation.

This was a widespread sentiment articulated by many of the men when they had an occasion to speak frankly, and Sherlock was the most articulate and frequent correspondent to address this struggle between officers and voyageurs. In the wake of Faulkner's death, Sherlock continued to critique "these majors and captains" who "like to show off."

They strut, and fuss, and shout and give foolish orders and commands. They like to stand on a high rock and, with glass in eye, they pose like so many bones and banjo players, and nearly all the wrecks and disasters have occurred through these popinjays interfering in a matter they haven't the slightest knowledge of.³⁰

²⁷ Charles Lewis Shaw, "Random Reminiscences of a Nile Voyageur," *Toronto Saturday Night*, 23 December 1893

²⁸ Anonymous (Egerton Denison) *Globe*, 27 January 1885

²⁹ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

³⁰ Sherlock, fifteenth letter, (December 10), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 14 January 1885

The recurrence of the language of "interference" and "meddling" show a clear sense that the boatmen held no respect for military rank when it came to river piloting. They understood their role as the experts in this domain and did not intend to obey British officers who were guided by a sense of privilege rather than experience. Instead of these "popinjays" Sherlock said that the Canadian foremen should have been put in charge of all critical decisions in the rapids and then the officers should have "exercised their proper authority in causing their men to obey the foremen." Then, things would have gone smoother, with "fewer wrecks and fewer deaths among them and ourselves."³¹ One week later, Sherlock struck a more positive tone, joking that he had become "wonderfully inflated" with "the pride of office." In actual fact, he said, he found himself "looking round at my shoulders, right and left," still "surprised" at the lack of challenges

since I got command of my ship, in which my duties are to steer through all difficult places, see that the men row in good form, have the ropes properly fastened, in fact we are the autocrats of the Nile expedition - in theory, and General Wolseley's orders were very strict that there should be no interference with us in our peculiar sphere.

It took several weeks, but finally, he felt secure that he was in "command" of his particular sphere. While there were still some officers who tried to "have a finger in the pie somehow" he told his readers that he "always obeyed their orders so long as I felt they were right." Otherwise, "I just did what my own judgement dictated." Such conditional obedience was how Sherlock openly asserted his independence from the officers. "At first," he said, officers "showed considerable anger toward me," but when "they began to see that I knew what I was about and their manner entirely altered." Now, he said, they will always "take me out of my boat and consult me" regarding each of the "bad places" and he was happy to report that "I had my own way as far as was right for me to have," which led to much safer passages.³² Sherlock was very clear about the "peculiar sphere" in which he got "his way," not exceeding that domain, and acknowledging that such command went "as far as was right." A boatman from Winnipeg named Pierce wrote that they had "sole charge of the boats and both officers

³¹ Sherlock, fifteenth letter, (December 10), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 14 January 1885

³² Sherlock, seventeenth letter (December 16), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 22 January 1885

as well as the soldiers have to obey us in every and all cases." They have invented the expression that "We are little captains for a cent," and he lets his friend in Winnipeg know that "in fact we are called captain and proud some of us feel of the name." With good reason he says and "it is no joke," given their responsibility for "three tons of freight as well as our live stock, and such a mean river!"³³ Sherlock and Pierce feel the situation seems a bit comical, but they both exhibit genuine pride in the authority they won over the boats.

This idea of a limited sphere, in which the Canadians were the recognized experts, was similarly expressed in some oral histories of Louis Jackson, collected by Moffat in 1906. In one such representative scene, the Royal Engineers learned to appreciate the skills of the Canadians, who won their begrudging respect. Writing in a mocking tone of Trigonometry, Esq. and Mathematics, Esq, two officers who made up the "best wits of Royal Engineers and gentlemen from the schools, who knew the ways of hitching tackle and pulley-blocks to things," Moffat related Jackson's story of a steamboat, that went crashing down the Dal rapids, due to the failure of some complicated plan created by the Engineers. The boat was saved by a voyageur, who jumped to the wheel and actually ran the rapids with the steamboat. From this point on,

when the Royal Engineers had drawn up some neat plan with compasses and squares for doing a certain thing with a boat, and had proved by the books that it could be done, and agreed that it should be done forthwith, then some one would usually say, just at the last, as by an afterthought: "I suppose we might as well have in one of those voyageur chaps, just to see what he thinks of it!"³⁴

But it was a struggle to win the respect of certain officers who did not easily take orders from a Canadian who seemed in their eyes of lower status as colonials, in military rank, in social class, in book learning and frequently, in race as well. The hard facts of lost life and property showed them that their pre-existing criteria of esteem were of no value in the rapids, where what mattered most was skill and experience in river navigation. Belich talks of the "two-

³³ Tomas Pierce letter to TW Booth (December 16), *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 12 January 1885

³⁴ Moffat p. 172

way struggle" between cultural "preconceptions" and "evidence," noting that "preconceptions did not always win; sometimes the evidence was simply too blatant."³⁵ The eventual recognition of Canadian expertise by British officers was such a case, although as noted, the authority of the Canadians existed in a specific and limited context of a "peculiar sphere," and the evidence of Canadian skill was buttressed by the not inconsiderable "fact" of a direct order from Wolseley.

A Military Strike

If certain officers in the British army were forced to adjust their preconceptions when circumstances rendered such notions incoherent, the same was also true of the voyageurs, many of whom spoke and behaved as though they were working a regular contract even though they were on a military campaign. For many of the men who were habituated to the customs of working-class culture, the context of an expedition challenged their assumptions of what constituted fair and reasonable working conditions. One incident which illustrated this was an attempted work strike. For September and October, as they travelled across Canada, over the sea and up the Nile, the men were not "working." Sherlock noted that they were "all so soft after our long holiday" that their hands were badly blistered when they finally began to work on Monday, October 27th.³⁶ At the end of that first week of active labour, the men were surprised to learn that they would be expected to work on Sundays too. On the first Sunday on the job, a large number attempted to stage a strike at this perceived injustice.

Denison recorded the incident in his order book. When Aumond told him that "the men would not work on Sunday," Denison went and "saw the foremen" to say that if the men were not on their way in half an hour "I would fine them all." The foremen offered a not-very-military response that personally "they were willing but the men objected." Thirty minutes later, Denison reported that most of the men had moved off, except for 12 or 13 of them who

³⁵ Bellich p.321

³⁶ Sherlock, ninth letter, (October 29), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 4 December 1884

were each fined three dollars. "I do not expect to hear this objection again."³⁷ Denison's dismissive handling of their grievances and his habit of talking to the foremen rather than addressing the men directly is reminiscent of his handling of the "strike" over food conditions on the *Ocean King*. On the same day, Cram began to write a letter to his brother, saying that he had some spare time for letter writing given that "all the men on our camping ground, except two boats' crews have rebelled against working on Sunday."³⁸ Since he was not one of the group who was fined, we can assume that Cram joined the majority and returned to work when threatened with a fine, but his "rebellious" lasted long enough at least to finish his letter. Labat joked that "nos Canadiens se sont montrés plus catholiques que Rome" by not wanting to work during "le jour du Seigneur." He believed that they finally got back to work when Bouchard "a levé leurs scrupules," persuading them that it was not a sin to work on Sundays.³⁹ These three sources, including Denison's list of those men fined, shows that there was a work stoppage in protest of Sunday work on November 2, first Sunday of the contingent's period of active work, and that it while it was probably isolated to one camp, it involved many gangs and was not limited by language, religion or region.

Charles Lewis Shaw wrote about this incident twice as part of the larger body of stories about the Nile expedition that he had published after 1893. As with all of his stories, or "yarns" as he called them, the details and names were bent flexibly to serve the needs of storytelling, but his commentators insisted descriptions and basic incidents were all quite "true." After the publication of Shaw's first few stories in the Christmas serial of 1893, Denison told *Saturday Night* magazine that he thought Shaw's stories were interesting and "very accurate. He draws on his imagination at times, of course, but we must expect that." His description of work in the rapids was "very life-like" at the same time that it was amusing. Denison "was so pleased," that he sent copies of the Christmas issue to "different English officers high up in

³⁷ Toronto Reference Library, L22 Order Book - Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885, Frederick C. Denison, 2 November 1884

³⁸ "Voyageur" (Cram), November 2, Renfrew *Mercury*, 26 December 1884

³⁹ Labat p. 108

command of that expedition."⁴⁰ After his death, a colleague praised him as the best of western Canada's "tellers of tales and spinners of yarns." Although his stories "are touched up with the brilliant pigments of a gloriously fertile imagination," those "tints serve to intensify into actual nearness, the days which we can never see."⁴¹ Shaw's stories will be used in this sense, not as chronological evidence, but as authentic examples of the discourse and cultural assumptions of the time, especially in his frequent portrayals of encounters between British and Canadian characters and military and civilian characters.

In the second, more fully developed version of the strike story, he used the character of Jim McBurney, who figured prominently in the *Saturday Night* stories. The McBurney character, is portrayed as a tough, "wild", "devil-may-care" figure whose namesake was James Burney, a Winnipeg contingent member. Shaw may have become friends with Burney on the expedition, but they did not work together. Shaw was part of MacKeand's gang of "lawyer voyageurs" and militia officers, which Denison reported to be the most incompetent gang in the contingent. Burney was part of an experienced Winnipeg gang. The character McBurney personifies Shaw's idea of the rough Canadian working man, and the narrator Lewis is good friends with him in the stories. The narrator Lewis is more of a "real voyageur" than Shaw actually was on the expedition, and part of this legitimization is the inseparable nature of Lewis and McBurney. Lewis told his readers that the only strike in which he had ever participated was "of sufficient importance to hold up the progress of a campaign in which almost half a continent was at stake." McBurney was credited with starting it, as he suddenly asked his fellow boatmen, "Say, what day is this anyway?... It strikes me that there are more days in a week in this country than is usual in a Christian land."⁴² When they all agreed that it was Sunday, McBurney stopped working and said "I'm d----d if I hired to work on Sundays." All the Canadians in that spot gathered together "and held an indignation meeting"

⁴⁰ *Toronto Saturday Night*, 20 January 1894

⁴¹ University of Toronto, Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room, Writings of Charles Lewis Shaw, Vol. III. Edmonton *Bulletin* (clipping, undated)

⁴² The language here is very similar to a comment made by Jackson, when observing the farmers working in Egypt "I made up my mind that the people here have no Sundays," Jackson p. 12

where they decided that if they had to work for seven days per week, "there should be a corresponding increase of pay," or the army could just "linger around and watch crocodiles", or the campaign could wait "until we came up in the time six days travel per week would reasonably allow." In this yarn, these terms were laid out to the British officer in command of this rapid by a "deputation of united workmen" led by McBurney, "the spokesman" who had fortified himself with "a huge quantity of nerve-stilling tobacco." When presented with the demands of the strikers, Col. Grenfell "laughed amusedly" at the boatman. "A strike! A strike! For heaven's sake, men, who ever heard of a strike on a military expedition, of hours or of Sundays?" When he asked McBurney if he was 'in earnest' McBurney explained that

while he might not understand the ethics of military expeditions still he was somewhat strong on strikes and while he didn't wish to restrain the progress of the British empire or delay the capture of Khartoum or endanger Britannia's prestige in the Mahommedan world, still there were generally four Sunday's in every month, and Sundays under a civil contract were not working days if signed between Christians. We wouldn't mind working on Sundays under the circumstances, although we had been brought up differently, but we wanted to be paid therefore.

Grenfell laughed "loud and long" and told them to go get in their boats, assuring them "You will get your pay for Sunday work."⁴³ In this story, Shaw took liberties with the character names, the timing and the locale, and he told a story that pumped up the vivid contrast of cultural clash and the perceived disrespect. His phrase, "an indignation meeting" is a comical but effective description of a key stage in Honneth's description of how individual insult can be translated into political action and the struggle for recognition. The "indignation meeting" is where the men gave voice to their grievance and constructed a semantic bridge that to connect their isolated feelings of disrespect into a sense of solidarity, and a set of demands. The language of pay and "Christian/Catholique" sensibilities are a small part of the sense of grievance they feel at having their normal cycle of work violated. The contract they signed made no mention of Sundays and since they were always used to having a day of rest, this felt like a deception. They were indignant at the thought that they had been tricked or were being taken advantage of. The idea of extra pay was a tacit acknowledgement by the men that

⁴³ Charles Lewis Shaw, "Siftings" column, *Winnipeg Telegram*, 7 May 1908

they likely could not get Sunday's off under the circumstances, so as a compromise, they wanted more pay, which would restore their dignity by maintaining the same rate of pay, the same quantified value of the skills for which they were rightfully proud. In the story, Shaw restores their honour by having the officer promise them more pay. In reality, Denison threatened to fine the men for striking.

In the designation of a distinct sphere of the voyageur, it should not be assumed that all the Canadians were capable of filling that role adequately. Shaw was neither a soldier nor a skilled worker. Like the rest of the law clerks from Winnipeg, he was playing voyageur, in that he came under false pretences, passing himself off as an experience river pilot. It is unlikely that he (or his narrator Lewis) would have felt indignant and disrespected upon learning that they would be required to work Sundays. His eager participation in the "strike" is supposed to be slightly comical, and somewhat out of character, this being his only strike. Shaw wrote another version of the story, where the negotiation happened when Shaw and "John Doyle" faced an "aristocrat." That version of the story began with Shaw bragging to a "union man" that he and a group of Canadians once went on strike and held "the British lion by the throat and talked business to him." He bragged that their group of thirteen had the British "where the hair was the shortest."⁴⁴ His bravo-filled identification with the workers has less to do with "strikes" and more to do with making a stand against a British aristocrat-officer. His temporary and contextual identification with the workers was possible because he knew them, trusted them, was in the same boat so to speak, and through the British eyes, they were all "Canadians" or "voyageurs." For a range of reasons, including his own pre-existing disdain for pompous aristocrat-officers, Shaw identified with the men as he latched on to the discourse of the strike that they deployed to compensate their sense of injury and injustice. This made for good fiction for Shaw the writer, even if Shaw the boatman was not among those most highly praised for his work.

⁴⁴ Charles Lewis Shaw, "Imperial Hold-Up," *Saturday Night*, 15 November 1902

Making Sense of Insubordination

Periodic reports continued to be published in British newspapers claiming that the Canadians were insubordinate. Since such comments were often printed without detailed justifications or details, it was difficult for readers to ascertain the cause of such stories. The previous chapter identified the Girgeh murder as the first source of such stories. The frequent and pronounced tension between army officers and voyageurs for control over the boats was most likely the fuel for subsequent British press reports of Canadian insubordination, but the true causes were never clear. A few of the voyageurs commented on such negative reports. Sherlock said that certain articles, some in "the Morning Post especially," had "grated on their feelings considerably," and charges of "insubordination were particularly galling."⁴⁵ A correspondent for the *Globe* expressed frustration that "some of the English press men are running us down."⁴⁶ The strongest letters defending the men against such charges, however, came from the Canadian officers who were in charge of the Nile Voyageur contingent.

From Kennedy's perspective, the only basis for such falsehoods was the Sunday work conflict. The short-lived strike would probably not have been mentioned in the press were it not for Kennedy's attempt to address more generalized reports of "insubordination." None of those reports ever mentioned the matter of Sunday work. Kennedy, however, wrote to the *Winnipeg Times* on November 20 to "contradict" claims that the Canadians "have been insubordinate and have disobeyed their officers." Instead of addressing the questions of control of the boats, he stated that the origin of such false claims was the work stoppage. He acknowledged that "on a certain Sunday at a station on the Nile some of them did decline to work," but when they were persuaded it was "a labour of necessity" they returned to work understanding that "the expedition must not be delayed."⁴⁷ In seeking to minimize the work stoppage, Kennedy brought it to public attention, falsely believing that it was the likely cause of slanderous critiques.

⁴⁵ Sherlock, fourteenth letter, (November 28), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

⁴⁶ *Globe*, 27 January 1885

⁴⁷ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

A preoccupation with bad press about the Canadians is evident in the family letters of Frederick Denison and his younger brother Egerton, who paid his own way to Egypt and then got attached to the voyageurs under his brother's influence. They both rejected the "insubordination" claims with a particular vitrol and vehemence, attributing them to yellow journalism and the pettiness of certain British officers. They depended on their older brother George to combat misinformation on the home front. Egerton expressed gratitude that George "contradicted" the "ridiculous" *Morning Post* correspondent. He assumed an army officer named Lt. W.F. Peel, who they had rubbed the wrong way ("Fred sat upon him once or twice"), was behind the story. Peel was very rich and Egerton speculated that he "had probably paid for the article," which was nothing but "skittles."⁴⁸ Fred thanked George for "denying" that article, whose author was either "a knave or a fool." The correspondent in question, named Greigson, had said that the Canadians "carried bowie knives & were all drunk," which was more of an exaggeration than a falsehood, but it enraged the Canadian officers. Since Greigson wrote this article on October 25th, before they arrived in Wady Halfa, Fred concluded that it had been an invention, "not an atom of truth to it," rather than attributing it to Griegson's second-hand reports of the shooting at Girgeh. Griegson's article in the *Post* was sparse on details, claiming only, as noted in the previous chapter, that Canadians had become insubordinate, did not obey their officers and were becoming an impediment to the expedition. Fred was convinced that Peel had "a jealousy of us" and lied to Griegson, "pulling his leg", "stuffing him" and "loading him up" with stories about the Canadians. Fred told George that he had given Peel "rather a bad snub."⁴⁹ If Griegson's source is an officer, however, it was more likely Connolly, the commanding officer of the Army Hospital Corps, with whom the Canadians travelled through Egypt and who was in Girgeh at the time of the shooting. Denison did not include Connolly in his Board of Inquiry, Connolly wrote a letter to his superiors about his views on "the Girgeh affair" and in turn, Denison wrote a letter "reporting Dr. Connolly for interfering with my comd."⁵⁰ The *Post*

⁴⁸ Letter Egerton Denison to John Denison, 13 January 1885, Stacey p. 178

⁴⁹ Letter Fred Denison to George Denison, 17 January 1885, Stacey pp. 181-182

⁵⁰ Toronto Reference Library, L22 Diary of Nile Expedition 1884-1885, Frederick C. Denison, 3 November 1884

article then appeared a few days later, before Denison had even met Peel. Denison may have lost track of which officers he had alienated in what order, telling George how Peel was the likely culprit, after they had a fight over coffee rations at one of the rapids. Finding out that "all the coffee for 400 men had stupidly been kept by Peel as the ration of 90 men - he had no right to keep it anyway," Denison told his brother George, that then, "I pitched into him." The ferocity of his spats with Connolly and Peel seem somewhat puzzling to the reader, until he tells his brother George in exasperation that "Any military man would see the absurdity of putting a junior Lt. over a Col & three captains."⁵¹ Denison's fundamental grievance is likely not about coffee rations but the perceived unfairness that a mere Lieutenant has been given command over himself, McCrae, Aumond and Egerton.

Was the decision to put Peel in command over the cataract at which Denison was stationed an error in military judgement, or rather was it evidence that the British army did not take Canadian militia ranks seriously? Denison's recent promotion to Colonel was, after all, an improvised resolution to a crisis of jealousy, in which Major Denison felt threatened by Colonel Kennedy's last-minute inclusion. On the expedition, Denison expected to be treated like a Colonel, and he was consequently annoyed and angered when British officers did not treat him with what he considered the respect due to his station. The position of the Canadian officers on the expedition, however, was an uncertain one. When they arrived in Alexandria, Denison expressed his sense of relief that he could finally hand his men over to the authorities, but in fact, his influence and prestige began to decline from that moment onward. When travelling from Montreal to Wady Halfa, as imperfect as the situation might have been, he was indisputably in command over a certain group of men. After Wady Halfa, however, the contingent was dispersed. The voyageurs were split into small groups and spread out along the length of the river. Some were stationed at rapids under the command of British officers and others embedded in regiments as they ferried them between point A and B. The dance of "authority" between the voyageur and their commanding British officers has been outlined above, but the Canadian officers were no longer visible or relevant to the Canadians

⁵¹ Letter Fred Denison to George Denison, 17 January 1885, Stacey pp. 181-182

in their daily work. Once Denison had brought the voyageurs to the Sudan, he was not really in command of anyone anymore. Canadian officers certainly did not fit in the sphere of the workers, and they self-identified with the other officers, but Denison was frequently disappointed to discover that British officers did not recognize him as one of them. A British Lieutenant had more authority than a colonial Colonel. Denison's frustration at these insults is palpable in his letters to family members. Shaw could laugh and even brag about his ability to play voyageur, because he (and his *Saturday Night* readers) "know" that he is actually of a superior social status. He is a lawyer slumming as a worker. For Denison, the stakes of role confusion are much higher when faced with the possibility that he is "playing soldier," not as a lark, but from the position of an inferior reaching beyond his station. In Denison's eyes, it is no laughing matter when officers he considers to be equals "interfere" in his command or when those he thinks are of lower rank are placed in command over him and they commandeer his coffee.

Another Canadian officer who defended the voyageurs from British press criticisms was Labat. Being a junior officer, who was a late addition, serving as an aide to Neilson, Labat did not seek out recognition of his status from the army, and thus, his reaction to the negative stories about Canadians took a different tack. Labat believed that the British press were judging the Canadians by military standards of conduct. He admitted that they didn't behave like soldiers, but that was just their character. To explain, he told the readers of *La Presse* about the Ayotte brothers at Gibraltar, as discussed above, citing it as an example of the voyageurs' reckless and carefree personalities and their tendency to work hard and play hard. "Est-ce là ce que vous appelez de l'insubordination, ô reporters de mon cœur?" he asked. If so, he thought they should "Donc supprimez les mots: *insubordination*, *désobéissance* et remplacez-les par les mots blagues et lazzis des Voyageurs Canadiens."⁵² The humourless British press could not, in Labat's view, handle harmless jokers like these men.

These three different attempts by the Canadian officers to refute the claims of

⁵² Labat p. 114

insubordination in the British press all reflect a common desire to have the Canadians seen in a good light at home. Their personal identities have become at least temporarily fused with the contingent, so this is understandable. It will reflect poorly on them if "their men" come home with a bad reputation. Kennedy, the Denisons and Labat all come up with different narratives, however, to brush away the charges of insubordination. In all three cases, they avoided a discussion of the very real struggle between voyageurs and officers that *did* appear to be insubordination in the eyes of the officers that Sherlock called "popinjays." Rather than acknowledge the power struggle in the boats as the contextual insubordination that was happening on the expedition, they blamed it on a particular incident (the strike), a misunderstanding of character (the laughing voyageur) or personal conflicts (interfering British officers and knave journalists). In retrospect, we are able to line up the chronologies of articles and events whereas it was rather confusing for participants in the expedition to "reply" to charges made in an article that was written over a month ago. The articles were first telegraphed to England, printed, mailed and then sent by steamer back to Egypt and carried up the Nile to the Sudan. It is understandable that the officers may have confused the chronology of events with the asynchronous arrival of British newspapers. Nonetheless, we must conclude that the charges of insubordination were based initially on the shooting at Girgeh and subsequently on the many conflicts over control of the boats, they were not due to the reasons Kennedy, Labat or the Denison's imagined. The set of "denials" to British press criticism is reminiscent of the situation in September when many editorialists were insulted by supposed remarks in the British press that Canadians would die like flies in the Egyptian heat. In both cases, the actual root cause of the British "critique" was never really clear to the indignant. This did not stop them from expressing their outrage and reading into the situation their own various explanations for supposed attacks on Canadian qualities. In September, Canadian hardiness was insulted, and in this case it was, for the officers, an accusation that Canadians were undisciplined. All the Canadian officers seemed blind to the possibility that, as Sherlock explained, the men refused to obey officers who didn't know what they were talking about and this made many of those officers angry. In other words, they were insubordinate, until the command came down that they were to be obeyed in their "distinctive

sphere." The Canadian officers were likely blind to this point because their own personal narratives of military values made it difficult to see things from Sherlock's perspective. It was challenging for them to coherently defend the Canadians given own identification as soldiers, using the semantics of officers. They were not able to draw upon Sherlock's language to explain the "insubordination" charges. That type of story would have required them to take sides with the men against the "popinjay" cadre, from whom the Canadian officers frequently sought recognition and with whom they identified categorically. They seemed incapable of defending the men with a worker's story, praising their achievement of wresting control of the boats away from incompetent officers, which increased the safety and speed of the expedition. Instead of using such a narrative, and using it to decode the word "insubordination," all the officers, each in their various ways, insisted that the Canadians were actually compliant and obedient and it had all been a misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

Watching Canadians Work

A majority of the British press coverage of the Canadians was positive and these reports were eagerly reprinted in Canada. The correspondents of British newspapers were often stationed at specific cataracts or they travelled with regiments and they regularly commented on the work done by the voyageurs. In the manner which they identified the competence of the boatmen and in the fashion in which they cited them as authorities on the river and the boats, the British press affirmed and tacitly recognized the authority of the Canadians in their sphere of expertise. Using these reports, together with letters from Canadians, it is possible to construct an image of the praise given to the Canadians on the rivers and the type of credit that they received for their work.

One of the most common complaints of the voyageurs was that they didn't like the Nile compared to Canadian rivers. Butler reported Alexis Decouteau telling him that you "see no rock until you strike it; then you put the pole down on one side and you find twenty inches of water, then you change it to the other side, and, lo! there is no bottom at ten feet. Ah! it

is a bad, bad river!⁵³ Interviewing Canadians on one of the rapids, a correspondent from the London *Standard* said they complained about that water "being muddy, makes the rocks invisible - a strong contrast to their own clear rivers, where rocks and stones can be seen ten feet down." Quoting the men's phrase, "Nile work they call 'a dirty job.'" ⁵⁴ Sherlock wrote that it was "a dangerous bad river to work on" because sharp rocks were invisible due to the "muddiness of the water;" the "basaltic looking mass will show its face for a moment ere it is again engulfed in the stream."⁵⁵ They also frequently critiqued the boats. From the first day that Melgund was recruiting in Caughnawaga, Louis Jackson seemed skeptical of the idea of whaler boats with keels.⁵⁶ Many boatmen preferred flat-bottomed boats in the white water because they were more responsive. The *Standard* said the Canadians "complain" that the boats "are unsuitable for the work to be done."⁵⁷ They were also quoted as saying that the whalers were "not nearly strong enough for the service, and their construction with keels was a mistake."⁵⁸ Elsewhere "the Canadian voyageurs" say the boats were "flimsy affairs" and their keels rendered them "unmanagable when they should be under complete control."⁵⁹ Many later acknowledged, however, that since the boats were also outfitted with sails for travel in the flat waters between rapids, the keels were necessary, especially since the boats carried enormous loads of supplies. Concerning both the water and the boats, the Canadians were the recognized experts on such matters.

They originally thought that their work was not very difficult. Beginning on the second cataract, which was just past Wady Halfa, Sherlock said that if that was the "worst", then "hurrah for Canada! for we can walk through them in good style."⁶⁰ According to the cable despatches "The Canadian boatmen speak lightly of the reported obstructions and difficulties

⁵³ Butler, *Campaign of the Cataracts*, p. 232

⁵⁴ Winnipeg *Sun*, 4 December 1884, citing London *Standard*, 13 November 1884

⁵⁵ Sherlock, sixteenth letter, (December 14), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 16 January 1885

⁵⁶ Stacey p. 83, Report on Nile Voyageurs, Melgund to Lansdowne, 3 October 1884

⁵⁷ Winnipeg *Sun*, 4 December 1884, citing London *Standard*, 13 November 1884

⁵⁸ New York *Times*, 5 November 1884 and Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 10 November 1884

⁵⁹ Peterborough *Examiner*, 11 November 1884

⁶⁰ Sherlock, ninth letter, (October 29), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 4 December 1884

of the cataracts of the Nile."⁶¹ In their first week of work the "difficulties they encountered were so slight as only to provoke their laughter."⁶² Jos Laroque wrote home to his brother in mid November to say that "Nous ne sommes pas surchargés d'ouvrage" and if work does not become more difficult " nous n'aurons assurément pas sujet de nous plaindre."⁶³ Duguay, writing at the same time, was surprised at a compliment from Colonel Butler, that the Canadians had accelerated the pace of the campaign, because "nous trouvons que l'ouvrage ne nous a pas forcés. Il nous a seulement procuré un délassement."⁶⁴ From the *Standard* correspondent, readers learned that "the Canadians say" the boats were too heavily laden and "The Canadians are of the opinion that" the army should advance 10 boats at a time to properly space out the voyageurs and minimize risks of collision.⁶⁵ The confident expert workers were, for the most part, now respected by the British press as the logistical and technical experts on this crucial portion of the expedition.

The army had made some progress before the Canadians showed up, but once the voyageurs arrived at Wady Halfa, the pace of the expedition picked up and the praises for the boatmen were glowing. In the first week of work, the Peterborough *Examiner* reprinted Cairo despatches to London under the title THE CANUCKS "COME IT' OVER THE CATARACTS. It lauded the "Canadian voyageurs" as "capital workers" who had already managed to get 120 boats over the second cataract, who expected the next stage to be "plain sailing," and who were "in good health and bear[ing] the climate admirably."⁶⁶ The London *Standard*, whose coverage of the war was the source most widely reprinted by Canadian newspapers, said that "the troops are loud in their praise of the skill and bravery of the

⁶¹ Winnipeg *Daily Times* and Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 29 October 1884

⁶² Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 15 November 1884, citing the *Canadian Gazette*

⁶³ Jos Laroque letter (Novembre), *L'ère Nouvelle* de Trois-Rivières, 19 Decembre 1884

⁶⁴ Duguay letter (16 Novembre 1884), originally in *La Minerve*, cited in Têtu p. 135

⁶⁵ Montreal *Star*, 21 November 1884, citing the London *Standard*, 5 November 1884

⁶⁶ Peterborough *Examiner*, 6 November 1884. The *Examiner* showed great interest in the expedition at this time, but as a weekly rather than a daily, it was often reprinting what was "old news" even by Canadian standards.

voyageurs, characterizing their ascent of the Nile cataracts as mere boys' play."⁶⁷ These soldiers said that without the "discretion and coolness" of the Canadians "it would be impossible to get the boats up the Nile. They are of the opinion that without a Canadian at the helm disaster would be almost certain to any boat."⁶⁸ The Peterborough *Daily Review* gave the title CANADIAN SKILL to a cable that related the story of a boat manned by Canadians that plunged down a "terrible current" after its hawser snapped. The "remarkably skillful steering" of the voyageurs saved the boat and this "feat is regarded with general admiration by the officers in command of the expedition."⁶⁹ *La Presse* also reprinted this story in full, but modified the last phrase to read "Les officiers de l'expédition admirent le sang-froid des Canadiens."⁷⁰ Perhaps the most widely reprinted report ran as follows:

Specials from correspondents in Egypt unite in praising the Canadian boatmen. They state that they are thoroughly equal to their work, and are systematic and untiring in their labours. It would have been economy of both life and money if there had been 1,200 Canadian boatmen engaged instead of 400⁷¹

The Associated Press confirmed that "everyone has a good word for the Canadians" who were "splendid workers and right good fellows" who "bear fatigue well."⁷² This is just a sampling of a general chorus of praise for the skills of the workers arising out of observations of their work in November, the first month of their work.

What emerged at this point was a consensus view, shared by the boatmen themselves, the British soldiers and the correspondents, that the Canadians were doing an excellent job and were being seen doing so by important people. When Duguay wrote home to family members, he said "Si vous aviez vu nos canadiens, vous en auriez été réellement

⁶⁷ Peterborough *Examiner*, 13 November 1884, see also New York *Times*, 5 November 1884

⁶⁸ New York *Times*, 5 November 1884 and Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 10 November 1884

⁶⁹ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 11 November 1884 and Peterborough *Examiner*, 20 November 1884

⁷⁰ Montreal *La Presse*, 12 November 1884

⁷¹ Originally from the London *Standard*, 5 November 1884. Reprinted in the Montreal *Star*, *La Presse*, *La Minerve*, Peterborough *Daily Review*, *Globe*, Winnipeg *Sun*, Winnipeg *Daily Times* at various times between 21 and 26 November 1884

⁷² Toronto *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1884

orgueilleux," and thought it important to add that "les officiers en charge en sont ébahis."⁷³ Kennedy insisted that they were working "to the perfect satisfaction of Lord Wolseley and the officers of his staff who had been brought into contact with them." This was a critique of uninformed reporters and an assertion that recognition of Canadian skill was undeniable by those who actually met the men rather relying on second hand accounts. They have "astonished the English officers," Kennedy said, using a remarkably similar phrasing to Duguay, and as proof, he produced a letter that Wolseley had written to him on November 8th, praising the Canadians.⁷⁴ Newspapers were pleased to hear that "Lord Wolseley a défendu aux Canadiens" from criticisms in the English press.⁷⁵ While the credit was appreciated by all associated with the expedition, officers like Kennedy seemed more preoccupied with the need to use the praise of their work in the rapids to counteract certain negative impressions from reports of their behaviour up to that point. In this vein, Labat described the letter written by Wolseley to Kennedy as "la reconnaissance du souvenir." The praise of this "valeurux soldat" should, he hoped, "réduire à néant toutes les sottises que certains écerelés ont écrites sur l'organisation et l'administration des voyageurs canadiens."⁷⁶ His reference to the critiques of how the organization was managed reveals that like Denison and Kennedy, he was also sensitive to past negative press that reflected poorly on those in charge of the contingent. After mixed reports about the men and their behaviour from Montreal to Wady Halfa, now that they were finally at work, they were being recognized by British soldiers and correspondents in an unreservedly positive manner, to the apparent pride of the voyageurs and the Canadian newspapers, and to the relief of the Canadian officers.

Once they were past the first set of cataracts there were reports that "the Canadian boatmen are experiencing more difficulty in getting the boats up the cataracts than they anticipated."⁷⁷ One correspondent said that at Wady Halfa, the voyageurs were asking Wolseley "where the

⁷³ Duguay letter (16 Novembre 1884), originally in *La Minerve*, cited in Têtu p. 135

⁷⁴ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

⁷⁵ *La Presse*, 2 December 1884

⁷⁶ Labat p. 119

⁷⁷ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 18 November 1884

cataracts were" and saying that "rapids like those of the second cataract in America would be considered as 'smooth water only.'" Further up, Foreman Graham told the correspondent that while the Nile "weren't exactly difficult, it was hard work." By Ambigol he "guessed it was a big job," and at Tangur he pronounced the Bath-el-Hajar emphatically to be 'a verty dirty piece of water.' " What struck the Canadians as they went on, was the continuous nature of the rapids. Graham explained that Canadian rapids were much bigger, but "once over them, we have stretches of smooth water, whereas on the Nile here the rapids come one on top of the other, far too thickly for comfortable navigation, and the shores are terribly bad to work upon."⁷⁸ The positive representations of the voyageurs and their work continued, and if anything, the gravity of the dangers that they faced became more prominent in the coverage of their work. One newspaper correspondent warned his British readership that they should "expect to hear of many serious mishaps before the expedition arrives at its destination." Although there was a small danger of "action of the enemy" the men on the expedition "run a considerable hazard of death by drowning." The easy work was past and in the opinion of this correspondent, who "had experience in eight campaigns with British troops, I must pronounce this to be by far the most arduous undertaking that I have accompanied."⁷⁹ By Christmas eve, "tous nos voyageurs sont fatigués," wrote Labat. "En effet, plus nous avançons, plus le péril, les maladies et les privations augmentent."⁸⁰

Sherlock was the most consistent of the voyageur correspondents and he described the stress and intensity of that dangerous work. They would find themselves "within a hands breath of destruction," Sherlock said, "and then with one fierce pull for dear life the danger is past without as much as a puff in us to give an hurrah." He imagined that for onlookers it was a sight to remember "for a lifetime; to us, the actors in the wild drama, it is life or death."⁸¹ Even those who paid homage to the skills of the men, he seemed to be saying, really had no idea how it felt to be in the thick of a rapid. He wrote of the "great strain on both mental

⁷⁸ *Winnipeg Sun*, December 29, 1884, citing *London Standard* 13 November 1884

⁷⁹ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 24 November 1884, citing the *London Standard*

⁸⁰ Labat p. 139

⁸¹ Sherlock, ninth letter, (October 29), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 4 December 1884

and physical powers." He tried to explain to his readers that the "fearful responsibility of having a number of lives to account for in an ever dangerous and ever trying position can never be realized in theory, you must be part and parcel of the matter in hand to know anything about it."⁸² As the voyageurs faced the same arduous tasks day after day for weeks on end Sherlock began to see the Nile as a relentless, devouring monster:

Everywhere, the wicked looking waters seem to struggle to overwhelm you, and as with set teeth and strained muscles you cross into a comparatively smooth eddy, you could almost imagine that you hear the surging tide yell with disappointment at being robbed of the prey almost within its grasp"⁸³

Unlike a soldier, who entered the battlefield to achieve a victory over his enemy, Sherlock imagined the Nile as a terrible river monster from which one can only hope to escape, but which one can never defeat. This was more than just a poetic device. The language was tied to a particular understanding of the work at hand. Although part of the military expedition, the voyageurs required different skills, faced different dangers and operated under a separate framework for prestige and honour, with different esteem criteria. Sherlock thought highly of his colleague Peter Pheland, from his hometown. Phelan is "wonderfully cool and courageous, and never shows the white feather," not because he is ready to face the enemy in combat, but because he "can't swim a stroke" and yet never flinches in the face of the unforgiving rapids.⁸⁴

The Skills of a Boatman

The question of different qualities possessed by the voyageurs and "Tommy Atkins" came up frequently in Sherlock's letters and was evident in the language used by correspondents as well. It has been noted above that the relationship between army officers and the voyageurs was an inversion of the normal military hierarchy and to a certain extent the common soldier also filled a very different role when the campaign was in the rapids. While the voyageurs were working-class men and civilians that the Canadian newspaper editors

⁸² Sherlock, fourteenth letter, (November 28), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

⁸³ Sherlock, sixteenth letter, (December 14), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 16 January 1885

⁸⁴ Sherlock, fifteenth letter, (December 10), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 14 January 1885

presumed would be of second-class to the fighting men, being mere "army mules," they were in fact not labourers and the heavy lifting, portaging, pulling and rowing was done by the soldiers. Even the Royal Engineers, who all took a mandatory rowing course as part of their training had a rough time of it, but the "soldiers of the line know nothing whatever about boating,"⁸⁵ Sherlock noted that "every little cut festers in this clime," and soldiers had rope burned and oar-blistered hands, "'poor devils they must find a great difference between handling a rifle and pulling an oar."⁸⁶ Sherlock wrote warmly of the soldiers, but also described how "the safety of your life and load" depended on soldiers who were

sometimes so stupid with weariness that nothing but strong language can waken up and enliven them, and they get enough of that when they are slow in hauling up the slack. If the tow rope is not kept taut your boat is apt to go over a dozen times a day, and in many places a man has small chance of his life if the boat gets sideways in the current."⁸⁷

He felt things were improving by the end of November as "we all have our crews pretty well trained now."⁸⁸ Speaking of the crews as "ours" Sherlock saw the soldiers as unskilled labourers at his disposal and he understood his work to be as much mental as physical. The soldiers could not always be counted upon, and almost daily, "a boat comes to grief, generally through the inertness of the men pulling on the tow rope" or "'rowers losing their presence of mind in a bad place." With "traps set for you" on all sides, "the man who can't use his eyes and his brains as well as his hands," he concluded, "is little use here." Yet he spoke of the soldiers, most of whom, "never pulled an oar or a rope in their lives," as unable and unprepared to perform the tasks required. He imagined the soldier's only preparation as "his morning drill all skewered up like a roast turkey, or a parade about ten yards in front of his sentry box."⁸⁹ We will recall from the opening days of recruitment that there was a certain discourse, overlapping with the tropes of the militia myth, that the British army officer was a dull creature and that men like the shantymen, who were descendants of the voyageurs, had natural abilities which were lacking in soldiers, who "know only how to perform evolutions

⁸⁵ *Montreal Star*, 21 November 1884, citing *London Standard*, 5 November 1884

⁸⁶ Sherlock, fifteenth letter, (December 10), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 14 January 1885

⁸⁷ Sherlock, fourteenth letter, (November 28), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

⁸⁸ Sherlock, fourteenth letter, (November 28), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

⁸⁹ Sherlock, sixteenth letter, (December 14), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 16 January 1885

in which they had been drilled."⁹⁰ When asked, the Canadians always spoke very highly of the common English soldier, "They are a splendid lot of fellows - the best I ever met," said some upon their return. "They will work from daylight till dark and never complain, although it is regular slavery, and they are green to river work. They are a jolly, willing, fine-spirited lot of fellows, and that is what we all think of them."⁹¹ These opinions, framed in the particular sphere of river work, rather than in the area of battle, frequently speak of the soldiers as cheerful, tireless and never complaining. By contrast, the Canadians were regularly seen to be grumbling about the "filth" they were fed, complaining about the "bad river", criticizing the "flimsy" boats and telling the reporters the cataracts were a "dirty job." In working side by side with the soldiers, the contrast was accentuated between the compliant, drilled, disciplined, never complaining, cheerful soldiers and the insubordinate, independent-minded, quick thinking, cool-headed, skillful, grumbling Canadians.

The praise of Canadian voyageurs, however, was predicated on the demonstration of a very specific set of technical skills and qualities of character. Those individuals who did not live up to those standards were not considered to be real voyageurs. The *Standard* correspondent travelling with Graham's gang, estimated that amongst their contingent, there were about "eighty at least" who had "no experience at all." The journalist pitied the soldiers who would be "tugging desperately at an oar" in a dangerous rapid, with the "the consciousness that the individual in charge is a 'duffer,' and will probably fail at the critical moment."⁹² The largest group of "duffers" was Mackeand's gang, which included Shaw and other urban professionals and militia men from Winnipeg. One regimental officer wrote to the *Army and Navy Gazette* at the end of December to say that, as "you saw in the newspapers," a number of the Canadians "were not voyageurs at all" but clerks, bankers, and lawyers. This officer had several of men of this description and they "ran my boats on every rock they could manage." He estimated that 40% of the Canadians fell into this category and thought that whoever

⁹⁰ *Montreal Witness*, reprinted as "current comment," *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 30 August 1884

⁹¹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885

⁹² *Winnipeg Sun*, 29 December 1884, citing *London Standard* 13 November 1884

organized their recruitment "should be hauled over the coals for it."⁹³ Such a critique constituted a second category of criticism against the Canadians. The first type, which reported that they were undisciplined, insubordinate and disobedient, ceased when the men began to demonstrate their river skills and it became apparent that those same skills also allowed them to be fearless, quick-thinking and courageous in the rapids. The language of this second category assumes a voyageur type and singles out certain individuals who fail to manifest those skills and qualities as "not real voyageurs at all."

In light of the changing and varied attention given to the voyageurs, a talk by Mr. John M. Cook of Cook and Sons tourist company at the Royal Geographic Society in London on January 5th, 1885 is an effective final word on the varied impressions given in the media concerning the voyageurs. Cook told his audience that after travelling on the Nile for 16 years, he had never been beyond Wady Halfa. He decided to follow the expedition and was met with "met by the astonishing fact that nobody knew anything of the portion of the Nile to be traversed between Wady Halfa and Dongola." He then expressed his initial critical stance towards the idea of bringing Canadians to the Sudan, rather than hiring local boatmen. He told his audience that he had "been obliged to modify that opinion" and thought highly of the Canadians who proved themselves worth the cost of their recruitment and he mentioned that a Canadian had skillfully brought him down the rapids.⁹⁴ This talk inspired a *Globe* correspondent in London to seek out Cook and ask him to elaborate on his comments concerning the Canadians. Cook told this reporter that he felt obliged to state his opinion publically because previously, he had been one of those who had spoken against using Canadians. When he first saw the voyageurs at Assiout, they "confirmed my first impressions. The discipline was not good and not a few of the men made an unwise use of the liberty that was given them." But "when the men once got to work the discipline was excellent"; they were "really first-class boatmen" and he felt the British government was "well repaid for the cost incurred." Although he had sworn never to travel the cataracts in a

⁹³ *Montreal Star*, 10 March 1885

⁹⁴ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 21 January 1885

boat, when he saw Jackson, "the chief foreman of the Canadians", he felt he had "nothing to fear". Describing the descent, as Jackson passed through treacherous stretches without touching a rock, Cook said that an Egyptian pilot in the boat, who had sailed up and down it all his life, "expressed to us his utter astonishment at the way in which these Canadians, who had never seen the river before, and who knew nothing of the difficulties of the work, managed their boats, and invariably took the right course." The only exceptions, he said, "were chiefly those who had come out more for the fun of the thing than anything else,"⁹⁵ In Cook's explanation we find a wide range of common themes articulated in the British press about Canadians, all of which were reprinted in Canada: criticism of the very idea of including Canadians in the expedition, criticism of their unruly and undisciplined behaviour, astonishment at their river skills and then, an acknowledgement that several of them were 'duffers,' playing at being voyageurs, who had come along "for the fun of the thing."

These accounts articulate the winning of recognition by the voyageurs in two aspects of their status on the expedition: their authoritative command while in the rapids and the particular qualities which win them both criticism and praise depending on the context and the observers. First, we have seen that the roles of soldier and civilian shifted in a manner unprecedented on such an expedition. After a month of work, often characterized by conflict with commanding British officers, the Canadians could finally say that they had both trained the soldiers who they directed as a labour force, on the oars and the ropes, and had managed to win control of "their" boats from the officers. Sherlock could laugh about being the Canadians as "autocrats of the Nile" in their "peculiar sphere." In the rapids, the soldiers were labouring not soldiering. The cataracts were a job site on which the common British soldiers did the hard labour, waded chest-deep in the water, hauled on the lines, pulled at the oar and portaged goods. To some extent, every voyageur acted as a foreman to the soldiers, directing them, and their officers, and making the key decisions about navigation. The Canadians were few in number and placed strategically as pilots. But they played a much more active and critical role than is usually associated with a foreman or an officer, because in the worst

⁹⁵ *Toronto Globe*, 27 January 1885

spots, the Canadian boatmen were always in the most dangerous positions, performing the tasks that none of the other members of the contingent could perform. When British officers and soldiers acknowledged the Canadians to be the authorities within their domain of expertise, this was the primary recognition won by the Canadians, a pre-requisite to the successful completion of their task. The voyageurs successfully carved out a distinct sphere of operations, over which they ruled, and they managed to convince an initially reluctant officer class to recognize their superior status in that bounded space.

The secondary recognition won was both from the army and the press, who were full of praise for the skills of the voyageurs who controlled the boats in a way that "amazed" the officers and "astonished" Arab boatmen. Observing the Canadians operate within their sphere, commentators like Cook were willing to admit that their earlier doubts about using Canadian boatmen and their negative opinions about their lack of discipline were wiped away when they saw how effectively the men were able to get the boats up the rapids and advance the expedition. This secondary recognition of their ability to do their job was inseparable from the primary recognition of their status as authorities in the rapids. That is to say, the men won high praise, but praise based on the limited sphere of workers, which was based on a very different set of criteria, skills and qualities than those that are praiseworthy in battle. They are recognized as excellent boatmen, but that does not win them the same time of "credit" that a soldier can win, it wins them a different type of credit. A soldier could win honour for their country on the battlefield, this was an established norm, but could a boatman win honour for his country in the cataracts? This was uncertain, given the unprecedented nature of Canadian participation in such an international expedition. It was also evident to many observers, such as Cook, that the men were both undisciplined and fearless, insubordinate and adaptive thinkers, and that the same qualities which were frowned upon in one context made them irreplaceable in another situation. In a letter to Melgund, Denison grudgingly admitted that "some of the 'hardest cases' make the best men on the river."⁹⁶ He was writing about the Ayotte brothers, who had caused him such headaches at

⁹⁶ Denison to Melgund 12 December 1884, Stacey p. 165

Gibraltar, but who were amongst the most skilled men on the river. The British press had little to say about the Canadian officers, who played no discernable role once they had delivered their men to Wady Halfa but they were effusive in their praise for the voyageurs, based on a specifically non-military set of esteem criteria. In other words, when the British press said that the officers wished they had 1,200 Canadians instead of 400, they were thinking of men like the Ayottes or Jackson, not men like Denison or Kennedy. Recalling the range of initial impressions and expectations in the Canadian press when the expedition was announced, the way in which the contingent won credit as civilian worker (rather than soldiers) also raises many questions about national representation before Empire.

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Voyageurs as Representatives of Canada in the Empire

An analysis of the complex web of mutual recognition involved in the skilled civilians negotiating a separate sphere of independence within the military campaign does not, in itself, address the question of national representation which is key to this study. A national dimension would have been absent if, for example, the Thames watermen had been engaged instead of voyageurs. The relationship between the army and the watermen would have included some sort of negotiation over civilian and military roles, but the participation of voyageurs from Canada further complicated such dynamics with questions of national representation. Previous chapters have identified the characteristics of competing narratives of Canadian identity. Canadians spoke differently concerning the supposed British character of Canada, which often played out in the abstract political debates over "imperial federation" and "independence." There were noted preoccupations in the Canadian press with the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of the expedition to represent Canada abroad. There was much evidence of competing regional identities which seemed frequently more pronounced than any sort of pan-Canadian identity or an imperial identity. But perhaps most importantly, the opening chapters outlined the settler colony's watertight linguistic distinction between "Canadian" and "Indian." The first half of this chapter has focussed on how the Canadians were uniquely seen in their role as skilled workers, in a military context. The texts of British commentators examined already in this chapter, even though they were talking about the

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men's river skills, where characterized by a rather indiscriminate use of the words "voyageur" and "Canadian" in an interchangeable way. All of the above-mentioned facets of Canadian identity, the competing narratives and contested categories of belonging and group solidarity were glossed over the boatmen were just "Canadians" to the a majority of the British members of the expedition. Sometimes British observers would differentiate between Indians (using various phrasings) and Canadians, but often they would not. As noted above, Cook was full of praise for Jackson and he mistakenly called him the "chief foreman of the Canadians." To understand why the effusive praise for the work of the Canadians on the Nile might have been problematic for some Canadians, it is necessary to look at some of the ways in which Canadians were recognized by British participants on the expedition and represented on the public record, not in just terms of their status as workers, but also in terms of the way they represented "Canadianess" in the eyes of the British and therefore, the story they told about the place of Canadians in the British empire.

A Babel of Accents

There is much evidence that colonial subjects throughout the British empire "selectively imagined" themselves to be British in their own local identity formation.⁹⁷ Whether or not such "Britishness" was recognized by ethnic Britons from Britain was another matter entirely. It was noted by all Canadian observers that the voyageur contingent was very "heterogeneous" in terms of "race," ethnicity, language and religion. Neilson's temperance speech, as recorded by Labat addressed the voyageurs as "children of the New World, descendents of various races". Also noted already was Sherlock's impression of their first bazaar, being "right in" the "story of Babel and the confusion of tongues" with the fruit sellers yelling in Arabic and "our men, French, Indian, English, Irish, Scotch and Canadians all haggling, squabbling and swearing in their respective patois."⁹⁸ While the Canadians could recognize the different races and "tongues" within their own group, the British saw

⁹⁷ Lowry, Donald, "The crown, empire Loyalism and the assimilation of non-British white subjects in the British World: An argument against 'ethnic determinism.'", *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol 31, number 2, May 2003. pp 96-120

⁹⁸ Sherlock, sixth letter, (October 16), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 November 1884

them as part of a greater diversity of peoples that had been called together in an unprecedented manner for the campaign.

Col. Fred Burnaby, the famous military adventurer and best-selling memoirist, joined the expedition of his own initiative and was welcomed by Wolseley. The Nile campaign would be his last as he died at the battle of Abu Klea in January 1885. When he had first caught up with the expedition, he recorded his initial impressions in a letter:

there is a strange mixture of people here - Arab camel-drivers, black Dongolese porters, still blacker Kroomen, Red Indians, Canadian boatmen, Greek interpreters, men from Aden, Egyptian soldiery, Scotch, Irish, and English Tommy Atkins - a very babel of tongues and accents."⁹⁹

Burnaby associated race and role, he sees the Canadians as distinctive a group, comparable perhaps to the Arabs or Dongolese. The Red Indians stand on their own as a unique group from the Canadians and the three "British" ethnicities are differentiated by category and sequence from the colonial Canadians. Col. William Francis Butler, part of Wolseley's ring of officers and Red River veteran, considered himself an expert on Canadians and in his most popular book, *The Campaign of the Cataracts* he mentioned Nile voyageurs frequently. When he did, however, he focussed his attention on Aborigines like William Prince from St. Peter's and French-Canadians such as Alexis Decouteau. He praised the Canadian boatmen, calling them his "colonial cousins." He often spoke of their participation as part of an ethnically diverse expedition, frequently marvelling at the way in which different races from around the world, could work together in a common purpose, in this case to pull boats up the Nile cataracts:

Again the great brotherhood was clear enough – the four quarters of the world, plus a sont-wood stump, had vanquished the Nile at Dal, and while red man and black, yellow, brown and white, straightened stiffened fingers, or wrung glistening foreheads, their variously uttered words of mutual praise and approval showed how keenly the scattered children of the earth will join hands to fight the Great Mother in her angry moods.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Michael Alexander, *True Blue: the life and adventures of Colonel Fred Burnaby, 1842-85*, London: R. Hart-Davis, 1957, p. 189

¹⁰⁰ Butler pp. 190-191

First of all, Butler employs a very different metaphor for labouring in the Nile than Sherlock. Bualter's military image of a "brotherhood" who was "fighting" and "vanquishing" Mother Nature, has completely different connotations than Sherlock's metaphor of the river as a ravaging monster that they were striving to escape, rather than conquer. Beyond this violent gendered view of the natural world, Butler is celebrating the cooperation of races in service of the Empire. This scene is iconic for Butler, illustrative of a narrative that he shares as part of Wolseley's ring. The attraction for Butler in seeing such different people working together, for him and for Wolseley, to rescue Gordon, reveals the underlying imperial race fantasy upon which this particular expedition was designed. In such a narrative, the harnessing of the various skills, talents and capacities of troops and workers from Asia, Africa and the Americas, from "friendly tribes" and "colonial cousins" was the particular genius of the empire. Bringing together the standing reserve of labour from different nationalities under British command manifested and reinforced Butler's sense of the imagined community of Empire that was diverse, yet loyal and devoted to its colonial master. The Nile Expedition was an idealized Empire in microcosm, as understood by Wolseley and Butler, a reunion of the loyal races they had met on previous campaigns, including Canadian voyageurs, Kroomen from West Africa and others from around the world, all of whom pulled together under the sage management of British officers.

One of the rare texts from the campaign that celebrates the ethnic sameness of Canadians and Britons was a widely reprinted article by the London *Standard* correspondent who was travelling with Graham's gang. He described the voyageurs' strong, coarse language, rich with the "adjectives and expressions" of "American backwoods and Canadian lumber rafts".

Yet here are the names of our five Canadians: James Graham, foreman, as complete a Scotchman in type, and cautious disposition, although not assuredly in tongue, as ever the Land of Cakes itself produced. Anthony Milks, a handsome Anglo-Saxon, with soft blue eyes and brown hair, of the true old Viking stock. Robert Simpson, another Scotchman in descent; and William McNair and James Elliott, although they never saw Ireland, as evident sons of Erin, in appearance and manner as may be found between Dublin and Cork.

These "Americo-Britons", who were all of "magnificent physique", he held up "as specimens of the best of our race" and just as good as the "Frenchmen and Indians."¹⁰¹ To some degree, this seems an affirmation that Canadians are British, despite their accents. Yet the fact that English readers might have been surprised ("Yet here are the names...") to find Canadians with British names would seem to indicate that the popular imagination of Canada was something more exotic. The author feels a greater affinity with these men, of "our race", transplanted in the soil of the Americas. One would presume, therefore, that he cannot identify in the same way with the "Frenchmen and Indians" who also fall under his generalized term "Canadian" elsewhere in his article. Thus, he is not saying that Canadians are British, rather, he is expressing his astonishment to find a group of British Canadians, marked by the uncanny accents of a long-lost tribe.

Canadians and Indians

The article describing the "Americo-Briton" voyageurs was one of a kind, and it was vastly outnumbered by glowing praise of the Aboriginal boatmen from Canada. Both the soldiers and the press placed a high value on their contributions and presence. There was a certain status to working with them, and the Red River veterans in Wolseley's ring, ensured that they worked together with them. Col. Alleyne chose to command Jackson's Caughnawaga men and Col. Butler took with him Prince and the men from St. Peter's. In *The Campaign of the Cataracts*, Butler's description of the Saulteaux mixes his respect for their technical skills with detailed descriptions of their exotic qualities. Prince and his men sat "in old Indian fashion, cross-legged on the ground", and soon felt "at home in this strange land" when Butler produced whisky and tobacco, the "keys to unlock the tongue of a Redman."¹⁰² While Butler knew that the St. Peter's men were excellent boatmen, he derived a certain satisfaction from having a skilled Saulteaux pilot in his boat that would have been hard to duplicate with an equally skilled British-Canadian pilot.

¹⁰¹ Winnipeg *Sun*, December 29, 1884, citing London *Standard* 13 November 1884

¹⁰² William Francis Butler, *The Campaign of the Cataracts: Being a personal narrative of the Great Nile Expedition of 1884–5* (London: S. Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1887, 2nd ed.), pp. 143–144.

Alleyne's boats made one of the first ascents and it caught the attention of the *Standard* correspondent. As the engineers were ascending, Jackson's men "shot the rapids with great velocity, to the immense astonishment of the natives and Egyptian soldiers." This image, "of the North American Indians thus navigating British troops up the cataracts of the Nile is one of the most singular ever witnessed in a campaign." He said that they shot the rapids, "the voyageurs shouted out to the upgoing Canadians that the river was extremely difficult above."¹⁰³ One would assume that the "upgoing Canadians" were also Caughnawaga, but one cannot be sure given the imprecision of the language used by the correspondent. At another set of rapids, "Colonel Alleyne and his Indians" were "shooting the rapids" in "Canadian style." The correspondent thought that the "effect produced on natives and Egyptians by the display was most excellent." Watching "them rush into the boil of the Ambigol cataract ... rowing harder and harder, as if the current itself were not carrying them quick enough to apparent destruction", a Dongolese boatman cried "with bated breath that 'God was great' "¹⁰⁴ The amazement of local boatmen was previously mentioned by Cook and Jackson himself seemed amused at the locals whenever his gang shot a rapid. "The natives came rushing out of their huts with their children, goats and dogs and stood on the beach to see the North American Indian boatmen."¹⁰⁵

In one of his yarns that depicts the Caughnawaga men shooting rapids, Shaw portrayed Col Burnaby and Lord Beresford placing bets, "Two pounds to one, that they make it." Shaw said that "British officers to a certain extent treated the voyageurs in the same manner as jockeys, and their special favorites were the Indians."¹⁰⁶ So great was their fascination with Indians, that it coloured the perception British officers had of Canada. In another of his stories, Shaw used British confusions between "Canadian and Indian" on the Nile to illustrate the "ignorance displayed by the majority of both officers and men regarding Canada and Canadians." The young subaltern in charge of his boat, Lieutenant B, was introduced as

¹⁰³ *Montreal Star*, 21 November 1884, citing the *London Standard*, 5 November 1884

¹⁰⁴ *Winnipeg Sun*, 29 December 1884, citing the *London Standard*, 13 November 1884

¹⁰⁵ Jackson p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ Shaw, "Random Reminiscences of a Nile Voyageur", *Saturday Night*, 23 December 1893 p. 30

someone who was overeducated, wearisome, inexperienced and who was coddled by his womenfolk. He struck up a conversation with the narrator, says Shaw, in an attempt to get some tobacco out of him. "By the way, Canadian," he began, "I've noticed you speak English very well. How did you manage it in Canada?" Taken aback, Shaw told Lieut. B. that he "managed to pick it up" through his work as a "guide for English hunting parties." When the officer asked about the "splendid shooting in Canada," Shaw described conditions in Toronto and Winnipeg and told him that, when one went to Hamilton mountain, one went "loaded for bear". The officer noted, "You must have a jolly, strange life, you Canadian Indians." Shaw's narrator "gasped for breath. Shades of my ancestors! The man took me for an Indian because I was Canadian." Instead of correcting Lieut. B., Shaw continued to "play Indian," describing his life roaming the Rocky Mountains and doing the sun dance in Montreal. When told to "Sing me an Indian song, like a good fellow," Shaw at first demurred, but then sang the song of his *alma mater* in Greek, which Lieut. B. found impressive. Shaw imagined the "horror of the venerable and learned dons of old Trinity" to hear their "Greek iambic being taken for a Cree war song" echoing in "the Nubian Hills."¹⁰⁷

The brunt of Shaw's joke was the English subaltern, formally of a higher rank than the civilian boatman from the colonies, yet less educated and worldly. The "horror" felt by Shaw, his ancestors, and his college dons was surpassed only by the depth of the Englishman's ignorance, for he imagined that Canada was a vast "Great Lone Land" populated by Indians. The narrator felt wounded at this misrepresentation of Canada, but saw no harm in his subsequent misrepresentation of "Indians", who were given no speaking roles in Shaw's stories. Shaw expected the colonial reader to see that he was a clever lawyer, who had come along to "play voyageur" but who was also able to improvise and "play Indian" well enough to fool a British officer. For his anglophone Canadian audience, Shaw's comic frisson sprang from the supposedly ridiculous idea that Britons confuse "Canadians and Indians". The story is less a document of an actual conversation than an expression of Shaw's Canadian identity *vis-à-vis* Englishness and Aboriginality. The "Canuck" posing as an Indian is indistinguish-

¹⁰⁷ Shaw, "Random Reminiscences of a Nile Voyageur", *Saturday Night*, 23 December 1893 pp. 26-27

able from the real thing in the eyes of Lieut B. There is no "real" Indian present, he is absent as a speaking character in Shaw's tales, but the narrator can convincingly fake his way through an Indian song.

An interesting parallel was reported by K. I. Inglis in his book *The Rehearsal*, a study of the New South Wales military contingent that came to the Red Sea coast of the Sudan after Gordon's death. Australian soldiers were "startled to find some Englishmen so ignorant of their land as to believe that only Aborigines lived there: 'Blimey, Bill; these "Walers" are white blokes!!'" Inglis attributed the shock of the Australian soldiers upon hearing such words from a British soldier to the "tender colonial nerve" touched upon "by confusion, earnest or jocular, between black and white".¹⁰⁸ Gillian Poulter has documented the ways that many anglophone Canadian men engaged in cultural practices of "indigenizing sports," such as snowshoeing, lacrosse and canoeing, as a part of the development of a unique and distinctive colonial identity in Canada.¹⁰⁹ Shaw's pride in his ability to so effectively put on an Indian persona confirms the Poulter's findings that the formation of a settler identity in Canada in the late 19th century included the competence to demonstrate proficiency in "Canadian" ways, which were easy to master and could be used to fool someone from England. While the narrator "Lewis" demonstrated his Canadianness by being able to fake being Indian before the British officer, the writer "Shaw" used the yarn itself as a way to don fake war paint, in the way that Deloria says that US rebels did during the Boston Tea Party. Europeans have used their imagined Indians as vehicles for their own fantasies, says Deloria.¹¹⁰ Being temporarily Indian allows Shaw's character to more effectively and less dangerously critique ignorant British arrogance, in a way that would have been less humorous and more pointed coming from a frontier lawyer. Shaw wants his audience to know that he is not intimidated by a British soldier, that he has no need for recognition from

¹⁰⁸ K. I. Inglis, *The Rehearsal: Australians in the Sudan, 1885*, Sydney, Australia: Kevin Weldon and Associates, 1985 p. 95.

¹⁰⁹ Gillian Poulter, *Becoming native in a foreign land: sport, visual culture, and identity in Montreal, 1840-85*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009

¹¹⁰ Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian*, Yale University Press, 1998

this subaltern and he uses racial misrecognition as a plot device to this end. Instead, Shaw seeks recognition from the reader as someone clever enough to play voyageur, play Indian and fool the officer, with relative ease. He is counting on a temporary shock of national misrepresentation in his readers and he is drawing on a presumed pool of shared frustration with such "imperial" ignorance of Canada. Behind all such role-playing there are narratives shared between writer and reader that articulate the cultural superiority of settler to aboriginal life. There is an assumption that settler society has subsumed aboriginal culture, which stands now as an empty shell in reserve as another resource for Canadians to draw upon as cultural capital. The story's target is the presumed cultural superiority of the metropole over the colony, and playing Indian is the disguise Shaw's narrator wears to subvert such ignorant pomposity. The colonial is able to don the mask of those he has colonized to resist the misrecognition of the imperialist. And yet this yarn is not one of complete confidence and triumph. The narrator Lewis grumbles to his readers and avoids conflict whenever possible. He is truly disappointed and shocked at the Lieutenant's mistake and the misrecognition at the heart of the story must have been plausible for reader, or else the joke would not have worked. Behind the dramatic insult and the more cutting, resentful critique of the Lieutenant there was a deep colonial anxiety that, to paraphrase the narrator, sometimes Britons "take us for Indians because we are Canadian."¹¹¹

Being Canadian on the Nile

Even if there was a tendency of the army officers and correspondents on the campaign to call all the voyageurs "Canadians," obscuring the group identities that existed between them, it is clear that between each other, these identities were in no way weakened or minimized as a consequence. In general, the voyageurs seemed quite indifferent to British conceptions of them, unless they felt that the British papers were misrepresenting them or the British

¹¹¹ A very similar scene of a British officer mistaking Canadians for Indians appears in *The Silver Maple*, a novel by Marian Keith. When two officers placed a bet as to whether or not a nearby Canadian voyageur was Indian or "white", the Canadians strung him along, speaking Scots Gaelic and pretending it was an Indian language. "Dan played upon their ignorance of the western half of the Empire, which was deep enough to begin with, and made it abysmal." Marian Keith, *The Silver Maple*, Toronto: The Westminster Company, 1905

officers were meddling in their rightful business. Instead, the voyageurs sought recognition from each other, they didn't struggle to win recognition from the British as Canadians. They competed as gangs for bragging rights and the honour of outperforming one another, which reaffirmed existing Canadian group identities.

Shaw spoke of the persistent "clannishness of our kind", by which he meant the tendency among the Canadians for regional groups, gangs, and even subgroups to associate exclusively within themselves.¹¹² As noted at the outset, the gang boundaries were regional, and also tended to align themselves along linguistic and ethnic lines, notably in the Ottawa gangs. In many cases, the men had worked together as a team before the expedition. As a newcomer, Shaw found that river work was characterized by "pitiless rivalry." He described scenes of men cheering each other on, and also jeering other gangs with "ironical laughter."¹¹³ Jackson described the boat captains in his crew "talking about who made the best run and each boasting to have the best boat."¹¹⁴ Sherlock bragged that "the Peterborough boys showed well to the fore - made their runs quick and good, without damaging their boats in any way."¹¹⁵ Sherlock was the most likely amongst commentators to make patriotic Canadian references, saying, for example, that "we go at it again like tigers, for get up we will, or Canada will know the reason why." In the next breath, however, he could add "Our Peterborough boys all show up in good form, and do credit to the town and county in which they were raised." This competitive clannishness was an arena of regional honour and local bragging rights *between* Canadians, which is very different than those who felt the need to win recognition *as* Canadians from the British.

Jackson also displayed pride in personal accomplishment ("I had the honor to start in boat No. 1 with Col. Alleyne", "I had to get a line out only once"), but he was also is a consultative leader, who gathered his pilots together to discuss the handling of the boats and

¹¹² Shaw, "Captain Robinson and the Nile Expedition", *Winnipeg Tribune*, 15 September 1905

¹¹³ Shaw, "Random Reminiscences of a Nile Voyageur", *Saturday Night*, 23 December 1893 p. 30

¹¹⁴ Jackson p. 21

¹¹⁵ Sherlock, ninth letter, (October 29), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 4 December 1884

the particularities of given channels. While even the men within a gang vie for boasting rights, the internally cooperative nature of a gang was also stressed on many occasions.

I was well aware that these [other] voyageurs would have more trouble than I had. They had not only larger loads but soldier crews, whilst I had my Caughnawaga boys with whom I had worked from youth up and who promptly caught at a sign from me, while the soldiers had to be talked to, and, although having the best of will, could not always comprehend the situation.¹¹⁶

He was describing a community of lived practice and years of shared work. Their common experience had its own specialized language ("promptly caught a sign from me") that emerged out of mutual trust and cooperation in dangerous situations. This was not something that could be quickly and easily replicated by the other voyageurs, let alone between the "green" English soldiers and "the Caughnawaga boys" who had all worked on the Lachine rapids together "from youth up." The coordinated action made possible by such strong local identities developed over time saved many lives. Deer himself was saved from drowning by the quick, coordinated efforts of his fellow gang members.¹¹⁷

This pride in sub-Canadian group identities on the Nile was acknowledged by none other than Wolseley himself. As noted above, when Kennedy had been troubled by negative press about Canadian "insubordination," he asked Wolseley to write a letter in their defence. On November 8th, within the second week of their work on the Nile, Wolseley wrote to Kennedy to express his certainty that "the Canadian voyageurs would do credit to the provinces from which they severally come." He hoped that "they may carry back with them across the Atlantic a pleasant remembrance of the expedition they have come to help and assist on this great historic river."¹¹⁸ Once again demonstrating his understanding of what one correspondent called "Canadian human nature," Wolseley did not presume that all of the men were motivated by Canadian patriotism, but rather that they sought to bring credit back to their provinces.

¹¹⁶ Jackson p. 28

¹¹⁷ Deer pp 15-16

¹¹⁸ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 3 January 1885

The strong regional identities affirmed by the men expressed themselves in a variety of ways. Sherlock said they were all "lapsing into idolatry, for news worship prevails" on days when the Canadian newspapers arrived. As he was writing, over a dozen men were "in devout attitude worshipping the deities of their respective localities." The *Peterborough Review* was his "Jupiter Tunans" he said, but there were "other gods than ours" and the rest of the men "fall down before and worship" dailies from Ottawa, Winnipeg, Toronto, Lindsay, Montreal and Bobcaygeon.¹¹⁹ Their thirst was not for news about Canada in general, but for news from their towns and counties.

On several occasions, the expedition pushed the men into interactions across their group boundaries and in most cases, this was documented with expressions of surprise and encouragement that, against expectations, men from different backgrounds could get along well together. This was first evident on the *Ocean King*, where several correspondents thought it was really noteworthy that everyone was so good-natured and friendly. They expected trouble or at least division, but saw instead only a few squabbles, some friendly competition at Tug of War and some harmonious exhibitions of group singing at concerts. The lines for many group identities intensified in the competitive atmosphere of the rapids, so that when the men did show respect across certain group lines it was considered surprising and noteworthy.

Bouchard wrote about a night that Kennedy and himself were walking between camps and found themselves lost in the desert and completely disoriented. They had walked for hours and it was starting to get cold. They could not stop at the Arab villages they passed because "ils n'aiment pas les Européens" and they could not lie down in the sand for fear of scorpions, so they resolved to walk all night if they had to, just to keep themselves moving. Bouchard realized they had exhausted all their human resources by this point. "Il faut prier," he said to Kennedy, "Vous êtes protestant, vous ne croyez pas en la puissance de la Ste

¹¹⁹ Sherlock, thirteenth letter, (November 16), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 22 December 1884

Vierge; moi j'y crois, et je vais dire un chapelet à cette bonne mere." Kennedy thought this was a good idea, and encouraged him to do so, "votre prière sera peut-être entendue." While praying, Bouchard said "j'ai pensé au Canada," fearful that he'd die in the desert and never again see the "pays ce que je suis devenu." Done his rosary, they walked for a bit, and soon stumbled across the next British camp at Gemai, 12 miles from where they started. Colonel Kennedy, founder of the Orange Lodge in Winnipeg and officer of a temporary Free Mason Lodge on the *Ocean King* laughed and congratulated Bouchard, saying "Votre prière a été entendue!"¹²⁰ Bouchard tells us this story to praise Kennedy's generosity and lack of expected Protestant intolerance, but from multiple accounts, it seems that both of these men were "popular" with everyone, highly regarded *even* from those in "other" groups. Duguay wrote about how happy all the French-Canadians were when Bouchard caught up with the expedition again at Wady Halfa, where "Le soir, il met pied à terre pour serrer la main à tous les canadiens, par qui il est adore." Duguay said that amongst such a mixed group ("un composé"), even those "qui ne sont pas de la croix de Saint-Louis," would after a meeting with "ce bon missionnaire, s'ecriaient le cœur plein de joie : ça c'est un bon Père!"¹²¹ When Duguay refers to those who are not in the Order of Saint Louis, he personally is referring to Anglo-Protestants, and he expects his reader finds it unusual to hear them praising a priest.¹²² Hence, culturally defined group identities are not blurred, but rather the circumstances and characters enabled their respectful mutual recognition. This sometimes surprised the subjects involved, who had preconceptions that such group identities were by definition incompatible.

The persistence of Canadian practices while on the Nile was something the men would often write about, given the oddity of their displaced circumstances. Halloween "was observed by the Canadians in camp as best we could." Since there were "no cabbages to steal" they did

¹²⁰ Bouchard, troisième lettre, *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi: Pour la Province du Québec*, Montreal: d'Imprimerie canadienne, 31vingt-cinquième numéro, février 1885, p. 95

¹²¹ Têtu pp. 133-134

¹²² The Cross of St. Louis was a military decoration for French soldiers. As mentioned previously, Duguay, who wrote a few letters for *La Minerve* had fought in Italy as a Zouave. He seems to be using the decoration as a recognizable sign of francophone identity, rather than a strictly military identity, since certainly none of the francophone Canadian bucherons would ever win such an honour.

their best by knocking over each others tents, stealing blankets, switching around haversacks and other pranks. "The sport of the celebration" became evident only the next morning, followed by many "amusing explanations."¹²³ Christmas was very unusual "under Egyptian skies," Cram later recalled. He remembered that they had "nothing to give the day a Christmas touch ... as is common in Canada." Frequent references associated the holiday with Christmas pudding. Denison reported that "one of our men said our Xmas pudding was made of 'currents and cataracts' "¹²⁴

Perhaps one of the more fascinating examples of Canadian cultural practice on the Nile was the formal report filed by Labat of the miraculous power of "l'Aviron de Sainte Anne." In his thirteenth letter, dated Christmas day 1884, Labat documented the miracle in a letter to Bouchard which began by noting that the faith in the Blessed Virgin was strong "parmi les Canadiens," and that their mothers had bid them to pray to St. Anne when they were in trouble. "Un jour, un brave batelier" evoked her name when he found himself in great danger, wrote Labat. When the voyageur's smashed apart in a terrible current, he grabbed a paddle and jumped into the rapids, crying out "*Bonne Sainte-Anne des Canadiens, sauvez-moi!*" Passing through two kilometres of turbulent water, he arrived safely on the riverbank and exclaimed "L'aviron de la bonne Sainte-Anne m'a sauvé la vie." A few days later, he saw one of his companions about to perish in a dangerous rapid and having nothing else at hand, he tossed him the paddle, calling out "Prends l'aviron de la bonne Sainte-Anne et ne crains rien." The second man was saved as well and they decided, said Labat, "d'emporter l'aviron miraculeux au Canada et de le placer devant la statue de Sainte-Anne de Beauré."¹²⁵ Unfortunately, reported Têtu in his biography of Bouchard, the paddle never made its way to the basilica.

This is a sampling of the various ways in which Canadian group identities were expressed

¹²³ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 6 December 1884

¹²⁴ Letter Fred Denison to George Denison, 17 January 1885, Stacey p. 183

¹²⁵ Labat pp. 137-138

on the expedition and they are all characterized by inter-group or inter-Canadian references, drawing upon narratives and engaging in intersubjective relations with other men in the gang, with men in other gangs or with their friends and family in Canada. Africans and Britons were merely part of the background environment in these specific "Canadian" behaviours. In general, this was a characteristic of the men who were skilled rivermen. By contrast, Shaw's stories regularly include British officers who are misunderstanding and underestimating Canadians, usually as an expression of his general lack of warm sentiments for the empire, whose representative characters are frequently quite condescending and groundlessly superior in their attitudes towards colonials.

Like Shaw, Denison was keenly aware of what the British thought of his Canadian ways, but he had a very different way of being Canadian on the Nile: in his canoe. When Denison heard that a canoe was being brought from Manitoba for Wolseley,¹²⁶ he ordered his own private canoe. He did not think he should have to pay for it and justified its usefulness to Melgund saying that he used it to visit posts, "take the sick to Hospital &c" since all the boats were otherwise needed at the front.¹²⁷ Even from the passing references he makes in the official journal, it seems that the canoe was both a useful tool and a status symbol. Denison seemed to enjoy being seen in this distinctive possession that was undeniably Canadian. In Egypt it was first used to cross the river and send a telegram, and then, with this two "canoe men" he padded to the Governor's palace for coffee. Once the voyageurs were at work, he continued to keep two unnamed Canadians as his personal canoe men and with them he would run errands, fill up the canoe up with vegetables, meat and coffee, pay social visits and exercise the freedom to move about relatively unencumbered by the burdens of command or

¹²⁶ Wolseley's *bourgeois* style canoe, four fathoms in length was mentioned as the *Ocean King* approached Alexandria, because the men were cleaning it with great anticipation for the eventual presentation to Lord Wolseley. It apparently got put on the train for Assiout on October 8. After this point however, it is never mentioned again in the diaries or letters of Denison, Wolseley or any of the Canadians. Most probably, it was never presented to Wolseley, certainly not at their initial meeting in Wady Halfa. If the canoe did not get lost or damaged or abandoned for its impracticality, it is quite likely that the gum binding it together did not survive the Egyptian heat. The smaller less authentic Toronto canoe that Denison brought was probably wood rather than birch bark and stood a better chance of survival in the heat, train travel and the barge.

¹²⁷ Denison to Melgund, 12 December 1884, Stacey p. 165

responsibility. At times he would take a camel up stream, sending his men to paddle the boat up, as he found it tended to move faster going downstream. Having dinner with British officers was obviously something quite important to both of the Denisons, based on the detailed lists of names of those they had met that can be found in the official diary and in letters. Denison would frequently arrive for such dinners in his canoe. At another time, he said that "I went on to the Bab to see Lord Beresford in canoe but missed him."¹²⁸ Using the canoe as a calling card is an example of how Denison proudly displayed his Canadianness as a mark of distinction. The boatmen did not seek British acknowledgement of their Canadian skills, or holidays, or songs or miracles. Denison did not operate in their particular sphere however, and he sought recognition as an equal amongst the British officers, wanting to be seen as a colonel like other colonels. But he also wished to identify himself with the special distinction of being Canadian, and a rare native Canadian watercraft was one of the ways he positively marked his difference different from the other officers. Honneth's two types of recognition were sought by Denison from British officers: the first was a respectability as an officer and the second was esteem as a Canadian, in a canoe.

The End of the Contract

By the middle of January, the Army had not advanced as far as they had hoped and the contingent from Canada was at a crossroads. The British government was obliged by the terms of the engagement signed with the men, to return them to their homes in Canada by March 9th. Leaving a week for travel in Canada and four or five weeks to return from Dongola to Halifax, the Canadians expected to end their period of work in late January. It was clear that they would need to advance at least until mid-February or even March to reach Khartoum. Some more work would be required to get the last of the supplies to Korti from which the desert column could launch its attack, and then many voyageurs were still wanted to help the river column wind its way around and up to Berber. A special appeal was made to the Canadians to consider re-engagement at a pay increase of 50%, which was \$60 a

¹²⁸ Denison, *Official Diary of the Nile Voaygeur Contingent*. See especially entries on 15, 28, 30 October and 1, 3 November 1884, Stacey pp. 101-108

month for the average boatman. After months of dangerous, exhausting labour in difficult a difficult situation, the men were faced with the decision of pushing on with the expedition, or returning to Canada. While their attempted Sunday strike quickly folded under the rules of military expeditions, the boatmen now found themselves in a very different situation than the soldiers, for their engagement was bound by the terms of a civilian contract. This time, if the men wanted to leave the job, even though Gordon was still in peril, the army would not compel them to stay.

Deer said that the officer in his boat, Lord Avonmore was eager to get to the front. He "wanted eight of us Indians to go with him, but none of the party would agree to go." Colonel Alleyne assured them that "none of us would be forced to go to the front" but he also asked them to stay with the expedition. Only four out of 56 from Caughnawaga decided to stay.¹²⁹ Denison wrote to his brother that he was very disappointed at the small number of men who were willing to re-engage. Out of almost four hundred, only 70 had agreed at that point. "I have only got 6 Indians," out of the whole group he lamented, "I wish I had more." While the ones who agreed to stay are "all good men," he thought that "a lot of good boatmen are going home."¹³⁰ The final number who re-engaged was only 89 and almost all of the most experienced men from Trois-Rivières, Caughnawaga, Ottawa and Peterborough went home again, including almost all the francophones and Aboriginal men, as noted above. The Winnipeg contingent, which was the least skilled and experienced, and which contained the most militia men, was strongly represented in this group. Denison tried to prevent Kennedy from re-engaging and he forbid Mackeand's gang from proceeding with the river column. Cables informed Canadians that three-quarters of the men were coming home before news broke that Khartoum had fallen.

No doubt each man had personal factors to weigh and his own personal set of criteria to help him decide, but it is fair to say that many of them saw the expedition as a job and they were

¹²⁹ Deer pp. 16-17

¹³⁰ Letter Fred Denison to George Denison, 17 January 1885, Stacey p. 183

not sufficiently motivated to work beyond the terms of their contract. They had families waiting for them, and jobs or farms. A correspondent from the *Chronicle* reported that the Canadians "thought this is a very indifferent country to fight for. But they also think it will be an endless shame if it is given up now that they have come all the way here to secure it."¹³¹ This voyageur was not expressing an imperial sentiment or a desire to save Gordon, he just thought it would be a shame if his work was all for nothing in the end. Some men explained their reasons for returning once they were back in Canada. On the train ride from Toronto to Winnipeg, boatman Haight told a reporter that the men who had come back home, himself included, "thought they could earn more money than when in the service of the Imperial Government."¹³² The Peterborough *Daily Review* interviewed several of the men after they had returned and Welsh and Matheson "complained of the officers," both British and Canadian. They "frequently tried to interfere with their work when they had no right to" on the river. Concerning their own officers, they said "that if they asked a civil question of Capt. Aumond, or say any of the officers except Colonel Kennedy, they would either get an uncivil answer or none at all." They complained that officers "did not treat them as men." The reporter thought that these complaints were "trivial" but said that when trivial things are "frequently repeated" it leads to "general dissatisfaction." The men told him that "it is owing to that dissatisfaction with the officers that more of the men did not remain."¹³³ These men offered no other reason against re-engagement. The strong resentment and the feelings of disrespect they experienced made use of the same language found in the earlier conflicts with British officers, where "interference" was the word used in indignation to describe officers who did not recognize their "rights" as pilots. The nature relations with the Canadian officers was not surprising, but such harsh language only appeared in print after the men returned home, now that they were talking to local newspaper writers whom they knew and trusted. The comment of the reporter about the "trivial" nature of the insults demonstrates that even though a material cause is not at stake, the struggle for recognition and the insistence on

¹³¹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 6 December 1884

¹³² *Globe*, 9 March 1885

¹³³ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 9 March 1885

respect was so strong, that it was one of the significant push factors that led some to decide against re-engagement.

Even those who stayed were not exactly brimming with enthusiasm about the chances of victory nor were they necessarily driven by any sort of imperial duty. McLaurin was very doubtful of their chances of success, even in December. "The expedition so far is not so successful as anticipated," he wrote. The boats, which were expensive, were not properly designed to withstand the rough treatment they got and "every day" he saw boats on shore being repaired, "if not entirely abandoned." Regularly, boxes of provisions were lost, "floating down the current," and the end result was a "great loss both of life and property." He was certain they wouldn't get to Khartoum for another year, only to find Gordon dead, and he imagined him eating his "last crust" with a "last look towards the north for succor which never came."¹³⁴ Even with such a dismal, hopeless prediction, McLaurin was one of those who re-engaged.

Sherlock also did not hold out too much hope, and yet he re-engaged. On January 14, he heard conflicting rumours of Khartoum and Gordon being saved, but "the big bug's faces are long, and their conversations are all in whispers." He said that "nearly all" of the voyageurs would be going home soon. "The men are tired of the country," was his simple answer to the low re-engagement numbers, "and do not wish to remain any longer than the term for which they signed articles." Only Sidney Blade and himself from the Peterborough group decided to stay, and Sherlock consulted Kennedy on the decision. The Colonel "wished and advised me to go on and his opinion is that a couple of months more will wind up the affair one way or the other." Until recently, he would have said no, but the worsening state of affairs changed his mind:

I have been thinking that the expeditionary ship has sprung a leak somewhere, and is built of the same sort of stuff as the never to be forgotten spongy whalers, and as rats are said to desert a sinking ship, I would rather go down with flag flying and drums beating than have that stigma on me.

¹³⁴ McLaurin (December 1, 1884), *Ottawa Free Press*, 2 January 1885

In saying this, he does not wish to "cast any slur on the boys who are going home." Jumping to their defence, he says they "fulfilled their contract, and no one has a right to expect or exact anything more than that from them." The work completed to date is not something that a "mere looker-on across the ocean can appreciate or understand." They have "earned their rest and I hope that they will not be forgotten."¹³⁵ What is not apparent from his explicit text is that in his previous two or three letters, Sherlock increasingly expressed a sense of comradeship with the common soldiers in his boats, and looking at the continuity of letters before and after this decision, he felt a sense of responsibility to these men who gave him the nickname "The Duke." Sherlock did not stay for Gordon, or to see "active service," but because he couldn't abandon the men, leaving them with his leaky boat.

Ultimately it should not have been surprising to anyone that over three quarters of the men went home despite the fact that Gordon was still in peril. Despite what some of the confused newspapers had thought, they did not go on the expedition as a demonstration of imperial loyalty, they went as workers on a contract. As one Ottawa riverman had said in front of Lambert's office, working for the Queen was pretty special, the biggest boss he'd ever worked for. The men had, as Sherlock noted, fulfilled their contract, done a very good job and now their work was done. They had families to get back to and obligations and commitments made to real bosses. Even though Denison realized this, he still seemed disappointed and surprised that so few would stay. He wrote to his brother George that those returning home at this point will not "get the same credit in Canada as those who stay behind and see the campaign out" because the public won't be able to tell which ones "go home through business arrangements" and which ones "are afraid to stay on account of the climate."¹³⁶ The climate and work were unpleasant and dangerous but there other complex factors that the men weighed. It is not certain that the "credit" which was so important Denison at this point meant the same thing for them.

¹³⁵ Sherlock, twentieth letter, (January 14), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 26 February 1885

¹³⁶ Letter Fred Denison to George Denison, 17 January 1885, Stacey p. 183

Canadians at the Battle of Kirbekan

By the third week in January, the Canadians were split into those who were returning home in January, who will be addressed in the next chapter, and those who would re-engage and continue onward with the river column. As noted above, Sherlock felt particularly committed to his position in the boats. By December he professed to being one of those who has had the "romance" and "enchantment" about the Nile burned or frozen "out of him pretty thoroughly." Cursing this "devil of a Nile," he then went on to describe the death of Falkner from Peterborough which was the cause of his angry critique of the officers outlined above. He then explained to the reader his growing attachment to "his boat," which he beached for the first time, for repairs. He turned it over to find the cause of its constant leaking, but finding no particular holes, he concluded "she was just one big leak, a sort of a floating sponge."¹³⁷ He later joked that he sent Gordon a letter: "I have sent him word that 'I am coming', and the 'the camels are coming,' and 'the grand fleet of sponges are coming'" and if that does not set his troubled heart at ease, well I don't know what will"¹³⁸ This affectionately named fleet of sponges began to ascend the river column in late January towards their first military encounter, the Battle of Kirbekan. Because this study highlights the cultural spheres of civilian and military cultural norms, and because we have seen how the soldiers and officers operated in the work sphere, it is instructive to see what roles are played by Canadians when a battle is underway.

After the Canadians split ways, Sherlock was attached to the 18th Royal Irish until they reached Korti. They dubbed him "the Duke" and christened his boat "The Maid of Erin," names which stuck even after they said farewell to join the desert column. Sherlock felt appreciated by the soldiers, "I like my crew and they like me, we get along splendidly." They were "a little obstinate some times" but easily make amends and, most importantly, he said, "they have confidence in me and that's half the battle." By this time in the expedition, there was a mutual recognition of roles that allowed for effective and respectful work. In contrast

¹³⁷ Sherlock, fifteenth letter, (December 10), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 14 January 1885

¹³⁸ Sherlock, sixteenth letter, (December 14), Peterborough *Daily Review*, 16 January 1885

to his earlier clashes with officers, he was full of praise for the kindness of the regiment's officers, who "treated me with.... consideration" as if he was their "equal in rank," "deferring to my judgement in all matters pertaining to the navigation" and placing "the greatest confidence in me." As a boatman, however, Sherlock was not their equal and could move between ranks with an unusual fluidity, being respected by the officers and treated as a friend by the soldiers, amongst whom, he said "I am like the company's dog welcome in every tent" and offered "the lion's share of everything."¹³⁹ Relations between all the voyageurs in the River column became closer with the soldiers, especially as they ascended between the fourth and fifth cataract and became more concerned with attacks from the enemy. Cram wrote from the fourth cataract less than a week before the battle, saying they had seen no fighting, but "we expect it every day." He thinks that those who left when the contract was finished "struck it rich by returning, for we have not had anything but hard labour since we started." In addition to the hard work, they were worried about the attacks so everyone must sleep in the square. They were protected by the soldiers who, after working all day, also had to sleep with their ammunition on and do sentry duty. "I think they are pretty well tired of Gordon and the Expedition," he believed.¹⁴⁰

Foreman McLaurin wrote a letter to the *Ottawa Free Press* about the only battle seen by members of the Nile voyageur contingent, a battle at Kirbekan. The fourth cataracts and the river above it was the worst they had seen yet he thought, and all the voyageurs "look forward to an early departure home." McLaurin was on an island with a group of voyageurs, Denison and Alleyne, scouting out a passage through the rapids, when they came under fire. They got in their boats and left quickly "without firing a single shot, being without arms" and "felt all over to see if we were dead or not." When they returned, the troops prepared themselves to march the next morning, February 10th. McLaurin was a captain in an Ottawa militia unit, so he was one of those curious to see a battle. The voyageurs were ordered not to leave the zareba "but a few managed to get away and went up and saw the fight." As one

¹³⁹ Sherlock, twenty first letter, (25 January 1885), *Peterborough Daily Review*, 5 March 1885

¹⁴⁰ Cram, third letter (5 February 885), *Renfrew Mercury*, 20 March 1885

of these, he described the manoeuvres, volleys and firing of various camel corps, artillery and infantry regiments from a safe spectating distance. After three hours of "hard battling" the Mahdi's forces slacked off on their firing and then Royal Highlanders and the South Staffordshires "charged the enemy over high boulders at a breakneck speed" and were "killing them in all directions" and captured "their flag." Then with the Black Watch, they "charged and bayoneted the enemy in all directions." While all the voyageurs stood well back, McLaurin said that Denison "stood beside the cannon and assisted materially in sending some splendid shots into the enemy's ranks." When the battle was over, "the voyageurs rushed out of the Zareba and made for the battle ground" where they collected "valuable momentos in the shape of guns, knives, swords, etc." But McLaurin found the scene suprisingly unsettling.

It was an awful sight to us Canadians who had never seen a battle. I can assure you, to see the dead and injured in hundreds lying about was something awful; and especially at the fort where Gen. Earle was killed.

After they had buried the dead, back at camp the Canadians gathered "in little groups talking over the events of the day," hoping they would face no more such dangers in the rapids, "knowing the Mahdi's followers lurk in rocky holes anxious to peck off any unwary soldier or Kenuck who wanders away too far." The Canadians were unarmed and observers, hoping not to get shot at while they did their work on the Nile. McLaurin reported that some of the Canadians were "anxious to be armed and permitted to take part in the next battle" but they had been told that Wolseley wanted them "for boating purposes, and not to fight," and so they were commanded to "stand back and look on."¹⁴¹

Unlike the voyageurs, Denison was given permission to participate in a battle and got himself attached to Col. Allyne's regiment. He proudly wrote to George about his "first time under fire in this campaign," the day before the battle, when McLaurin and he were shot at while surveying a navigation channel. "I am glad to tell you," he informed his brother about the battle the next day, "that I did not mind being under fire in the least, though I knew the

¹⁴¹ Alexander McLaurin letter (11 February 1885, Ottawa *Free Press*, 25 April 1885

danger." He also told his brother, however, that the sight of so many sudden deaths affected him. While McLaurin's remarks are triggered by the battlefield as a whole, Denison was stopped by the sight of the bodies of General Earle, Col. Eyre and Col. Coveney. Seeing such men dead before him, "I thought that sometimes military glory is gained at too great a cost."¹⁴²

Shaw's version of the story has him visiting the battlefield at Kirbekan the day after the fighting. He was shocked by the carnage, said he'd stick to a "peaceful avocation" and "as long as men would take a shilling a day for that sort of thing I would be a most willing tax-payer." Like McLaurin he describes them sleeping in the square, contrasting their safety with the poor soldiers who have to sleep "with a hundred rounds of ammunition." As they "stood to their arms" at dawn, "I would gather my blanket closer around me for my beauty sleep, lazily look at the four walls of British bayonets girding myself and the other Canadians." As they strolled the battlefield, Burney called him over to a primitive fortification with three dead Sudanese inside it, "lying in the position in which they had died," with spent cartridges around them. They were "apparently of the same family, father, son and grandchild; the three generations had fought and died together." The youngest was a "little boy" dead from "a terrible thrust from a bayonet" that left "a hideous wound in his little chest." The boy was still grasping a spear, while his father held a Remington and his grandfather a sword. Burney covered the boy's face and said it was a "damnable shame to come here with their Martinis and murder these poor devils who never did them any harm." When Lewis tried to explain the need to rescue Gordon and Khartoum, Burney cut him off with an impatient declaration of "Gordon be ----."

These people are men like you and me; look at them now, look at that little boy they were fighting for what any man would fight for, their religion and their home." He stooped and turning around looked over the hopeless, weary waste of black rock [...] With a wave of his arm more eloquent than words can express, the voyageur said in a low tone, "And, my God, what a home"¹⁴³

¹⁴² Letter Fred Denison to George Denison, 12 February 1885, Stacey pp. 192-194

¹⁴³ Charles Lewis Shaw, *Toronto Saturday Night*, 23 December 1894, p32

As Shaw's archetypal shantyman, Burney/McBurney can damn Gordon and the entire campaign more effectively than the narrator. McLaurin, a militiaman was shocked at his first sight of battle which he thought was "awful." Even Denison, who had practically begged to be allowed to go to front, was having second thoughts of the price of "glory." But here, with this story, Shaw has gone further, recreating a memory of the battlefield that challenged the narrative of war as honourable and glorious. In particular, his focus on the dead Sudanese family, placed in a heroic pose, defending their religion and home, "what any man would fight for," is a serious critique of the righteousness of Wolseley's imperial force. They are painted as invaders.

With the exception of Denison, who was not a boatman, the Canadians were forbidden by Wolseley to participate in battle, so irreplaceable were they that, unlike a soldier, he could not afford to lose one of them. Wolseley defined the spheres of soldier and riverman, for the mutual benefit of each and the success of his goal. While the need for this was not immediately apparent in the rapids, soon the British officers and soldiers were praising the work of the voyageurs. When the field of "active service" finally presented itself, however, singing the praises of the charges and bayoneting at Kirbekan was more problematic for the men. From the outset, the men articulated their desire to avoid the "military aspect" of the expedition and even with the self-selected sample of those who re-engaged, there are few eager to glorify war after Kirbekan. At the time, the men did not even realize that the point of the entire campaign was already lost. Gordon had been killed January 26th which was being announced in headlines of western newspapers five days before the battle of Kirbekan. A rapid descent was made, pulling back to a position of safety at Aboudom, where Wolseley reviewed the troops and especially thanked "the voyageurs for the interest taken in the expedition and the great skill and courage they manifested in making the ascent and descent of the treacherous current."¹⁴⁴ Britain's plans were still uncertain in the wake of Gordon's death and Wolsely presumed there would be an autumn campaign, which he invited all the Canadains to

¹⁴⁴ McLaurin letter (9 March 1885), *Ottawa Free Press*, 25 April 1885

return for. Some military presence would be maintained in the south of Egypt and the north of the Sudan and for this, Wolseley asked some of the Canadians to stay through the summer, offering them twice the pay they originally signed up for. McLaurin said that the remaining voyageurs "held a council among ourselves to see who would stay," but they all agreed to return to Canada.

Impressions in Canada

While Canadian newspapers carried many news stories via telegraph from the Nile, British newspapers and voyageur correspondents, there were few editorials and commentaries, compared to September and March, once the first group arrived back in Canada. Readers of the newspapers received a great deal of information about the voyageurs but there was little editorial comment. The areas where the greatest commentary occurred concerned obituaries as news would arrive home about the death of a voyageur. The *Sun* noted in November, after the first two drowning, that more should unfortunately be expected as the work was "not a trifling matter" and likely spoke for many when it said that further news "will be awaited with anxiety."¹⁴⁵

One editorial from February looked back on the entire experience and said that if there were any Canadians who "who expected to be participants in some scrimmage with the enemy" then they must be

terribly disappointed. The only consolation left to them has been the fact that their experience as boatmen has given them the post of honor in the boats under their charge and positions of considerable independence.¹⁴⁶

They won honour as boatmen and they were in charge of the boats, but in the eyes of this editorialist, their domain is a subordinate domain that can at best hope to win second-class honours, as some consolation to the disappointment of not seeing active service on the battlefield. These cultural attitudes articulated by such members of Canada's colonial elites

¹⁴⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 10 November 1884

¹⁴⁶ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 5 February 1885

were shared with professional British soldiers. In his diary, Wolseley wrote about the drowning of three soldiers attempting to ascend the second cataract before the Canadians arrived:

I hate men dying so. How much better to die nobly fighting with all one's nerves strung up and full of that sentiment of loyalty to Queen and of patriotism which fills me with a sort of pride in myself when I am being shot at and fighting for my country.¹⁴⁷

To Wolseley, drowning in a rapid was not a noble death, at least not for a soldier. A noble death, associated with loyalty and patriotism required "being shot at." Wolseley highly valued the voyageurs as skilled navigators because they got his soldiers to the battlefield, to the real field of action. He articulated widespread cultural values that men working with paddles could win minor honours compared to the glory that could be won by men fighting with guns. Even within these parameters, a key question still remained unresolved in this unprecedented situation. Should drowning deaths by such skilled and courageous men be spoken of as "noble" deaths or are they tragic accidents and misfortunes? The way in which the men are remembered is closely tied to the type of credit they are recognized for.

Even at this early stage, the idea that the men were dying senseless deaths already had some popular currency. The *Toronto Telegram* wrote a widely reprinted editorial under the title "A Long Journey Only to Die." Noting that four men had died already, it said that more would come and not even all soldiers "were killed in battle." Foreign countries had "many foes" besides the "enemy in the field", including climate, disease and other misfortunes. The editorial tried to put such deaths in a perspective by saying that even if the men had all stayed at home in Canada, "it is reasonable to assume that some out of four hundred would have been stricken down by death or disease."¹⁴⁸ Such a perspective removed the special esteem of serving on an imperial campaign and asks the readers to consider the men as doing their work over there. Since the death of a worker on a railway or in the forest is not considered a national issue in the newspapers of 1884, since it is so commonplace, the idea of drowning

¹⁴⁷ Wolseley, *In relief of Gordon* p. 12 Entry from 15 September 1884

¹⁴⁸ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 3 December 1884

in the rapids in Egypt seems like "a long journey, only to die." The concept struck a chord with Rara Avis of Winnipeg who wrote a poem with the same title and expanding upon the editorial's central message.¹⁴⁹ The editorials and the poem begin a process of questioning that will become more robust in March. It asks if the service and even the death of a Canadian worker on an imperial campaign can be meaningful and memorable?

Conclusions

While working on the Nile, the Canadians sought and received recognition in their capacity as expert navigators and in their identities as Canadians. The former was won through interaction with British Army officers of all ranks. This primary struggle for recognition asserted what the boatmen referred to as their "rights" to manage the boats without "interference" from arrogant "know-nothings" from the officer cadre. The voyageurs, therefore, were not merely "toilers" but were treated as skilled experts who were eventually entrusted with the authority to make the decisions that were implemented by the soldiers. An understanding of the context in which this type of recognition is granted is the key to any analysis of the legacy of the contingent. The directive to obey the Canadians effectively carved out a space within the military expedition in which an alternative command structure, based on a different set of esteem criteria, inverted the expected place of the Canadian civilians in the hierarchy of a military expedition. In a rapid, Peter January should have been able to command Lord Perry to step away from the tiller. After a few tragic mistakes, recognition of the voyageurs command of the boats was formalized by command of General Wolseley. Once all of the men were through the rapids, the traditional chain of command reasserted itself. While in the rapids, voyageurs "had to be obeyed." Within this framework, the men were generally pleased with the work. A secondary struggle was the competitive behaviour between gangs for the honours, and bragging rights, for which group was the fastest and most effective. It was in many ways an affirmation of regional identities and there is little to no evidence of any expression of a pan-Canadian identity, despite the fact that many Britons regularly generalized all contingent members as "Canadians" or "voyageurs"

¹⁴⁹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 24 December 1884

in an indiscriminate manner. The voyageurs showed a relative indifference to what the British thought of them as Canadians, with some notable exceptions.

The findings above are voyageur-centric in terms of recognition, but there were other people in Canada, including Canadian officers and other social leaders who saw the Nile Voyageur expedition as a groundbreaking experiment that held the promise of further developments in imperial relations. It was in this context that the charges of "insubordination" were taken most seriously. Neilson, Kennedy, Labat and Denison took a strategy of "denial" whenever the British press said that the Canadians were being insubordinate. It was sometimes acknowledged that the same qualities which may appear insubordinate in one situation demonstrate confidence and independent-mindedness in another. As Denison wrote, the hardest cases are usually the best men on the river. Hence, the defences made by Canadians to charges of insubordination were frequently statements of superiority of the Canadians, claims of skill and British incompetence taking the form of compensatory narratives.

The most significant finding is that on the whole, Wolseley, his senior officers and the army in general were effusive with their praise of the skills of the voyageurs. The ultimate disappointment with this praise on the home front was that the praise for Canadians was in a subordinate sphere. They were the best they could be in a lower domain. The two domains are not "different but equal;" the civilian sphere was inferior in the credit and honour that could be won. This categorical hierarchy, this pre-existing conception prevented the Canadians from winning national honour no matter how well they did and no matter how highly they were praised for it. There are repeated references to the fact that they should expect to win credit for themselves and their town, country or province. Or as Neilson reframed the proposition while they were in Egypt, they would win honour for themselves and satisfy their employer (the Queen). They will *not* presumably have the opportunity to win honour for Canada. This is a level of honours open to soldiers but not workers. The barrier preventing a worker winning national honour was reinforced when the British reserved their highest praise to their "favourites", the "Canadians" from Caughnawaga and St. Peters.

When Wolseley defended the Canadians' right to have complete authority over their sphere of expertise, this also placed cultural limits on the type of recognition available to even the very best of those in a lesser domain. The boatmen did not share these cultural values. They were not at all disappointed that they did not have the chance to "get shot at." They expressed sympathy with the dead on all sides. They did not speak of nobility when they spoke of the battle at Kirbekan. They did not feel they had missed an opportunity to express loyalty and patriotism. At other times in their letters, the voyageurs did speak of pride in their work, they boasted about their achievements, their speed, their ability to avoid disasters, but they never once lamented the fact that they were not permitted to fight. As the men finally returned home, the articulation of competing sets of esteem criteria will become evident when words must be spoken and editorials must be written to welcome the men back to their communities and to speak on the meaning of the whole experience for the men, for their towns, for Canada and for the empire. The stories of meaning that people can coherently construct around the Nile Voyageurs, delimit the scope of possibilities which exist for their public remembrance or forgetting.

CHAPTER 8 - CANADA

The dramatic events that occupied the newspaper headlines in February and March 1885 significantly affected the way that the first group of Nile Voyageurs were received when they returned. The world learned of Gordon's death in the first week of February and for two or three weeks after that there were public discussions and uncertainty about the role Canadian soldiers would play in the Sudan. In the first week of March, a majority of the Nile Voyageur contingent returned to Halifax, almost exactly six months after their departure. They then travelled by train to their respective communities. A week after they were home, rebellion broke out in the Northwest and the Canadian militia, under command of General Middleton, was sent west into battle against Louis Riel and his forces. The shock of Gordon's death, the question of active service in the Sudan and the reality of military conflict on the prairies did more than just distract the public's attention from the returning voyageurs, it also brought questions of Canada's role in the empire, the state of Canada's militia and the cultural value of soldiering to the fore. To understand how the Nile Voyageurs were variously recognized and understood by Canadians upon their return, it is necessary to explore the immediate climate and the state of public debates leading up to this period. Like the first chapter, this one bookends the narrative by returning to the sphere of public discourse concerning Canada's place in the empire and the appropriateness of the voyageurs as national representatives. News of the voyageurs was greatly overshadowed in February by the devastating reports of Gordon's defeat. Canadian offers of military service poured in, prompting the War Office in London to consider, for the first time, using colonial troops from its settler colonies. News of such Canadian offers prompted a rapid response from New South Wales, which sent a fully equipped military contingent to the Red Sea. The political decisions and the divided public debate in Canada was much more complex than commonly understood in the historiography.

Canadians for the Sudan

When the Nile Voyageurs returned to Canada, there was no shared understanding of whether or not they represented a meaningful and emergent aspect of Canada's role in the empire. To some they were emblematic of Canada's eagerness to help Britain in whatever capacity was needed. To others, their representation of the country was problematic for a variety of reasons. Some believed the unprecedented nature of Canada's involvement presaged a more active role for Canada in imperial affairs, while for others it was just an isolated incident that was a matter of local pride, but not really representative of a new national direction. This was the result of an ongoing debate between the many various views expressed on Canada's future in the empire, ranging from "independence" to a more active and engaged role for Canada, perhaps along the lines of an imperial federation.

Macdonald and the Empire

While the Nile Voyageurs were in Africa, many Canadians were uncertain about where their prime minister stood on these issues. There has evolved in Canadian historiography a consensus view that Macdonald was reluctant to commit Canada to any imperial defence matters. The Sudan affair is frequently cited as the best example of this, and Macdonald is portrayed by Morton, via Berger and Stacey as being eager and able to stifle nascent imperial sentiment and keep Canada out of such unnecessary imperial entanglements. At the time however, Macdonald was not seen in this light in the Canadian press, and near the end of 1884, the Canadian public was not quite sure where Macdonald stood on questions of imperial defence and the newly emerging idea of imperial federation and all it might entail. Even those who supported strengthening ties with the empire were worried that federation was the wrong project at this time. The *Halifax Chronicle* was sure that in Canada, the anglophones and "the Quebec French-speaking people of Britain" all favoured "maintaining the empire," whose flag "symbolizes for them liberty and civilization." But they warned that sentiments could change quickly, as happened in New England when "a slight tax" that was a "trivial trampling on their self-importance" turned loyal subjects against the crown. The "demagogues and charlatans" promoting imperial federation were likely to "bring about

disunion more quickly than they anticipate." For the sake of harmonious imperial relations, the *Chronicle* argued, the federationists should either back off or prepare for "a longer courtship."¹

Macdonald travelled to England in November to be decorated by Queen Victoria as Knight Commander of the Grand Cross, Order of the Bath (G.C.B). While in London, Macdonald was a popular dinner guest and he spoke at a banquet hosted by the Lord Mayor of London where he expressed pride that Canada was "was no longer a cause of trouble and weakness to England." He "looked forward" to the day when

some form of confederation would be brought about between England and Canada. If a great confederation should be made of England and all her colonies, he thought any power which comes into collision with England would be obliged to count on the resistance, not of England alone, but of all their auxiliary kingdoms.²

Such statements were not without context, because a few days later, Macdonald and Tupper attended a conference at Westminster Palace which had been called to establish "a permanent society to promote the idea of Imperial Federation." The conference billed itself as a remedy to a perceived "disintegration movement" that was gaining ground in Canada, Australia and elsewhere. Macdonald addressed the group citing Canada as the federal model to emulate. It had once been a series of "scattered provinces, we were in some degree a weakness and in some degree a 'worry' to the mother country" but since Confederation we "consider ourselves an addition to the strength of the Empire." Macdonald affirmed that "loyalty" was more than just "sentiment", it was the realization that "the best interests of the Dominion, political and material, are forwarded by our connection with the greatest empire the world ever saw." Pragmatic and conciliatory, he signalled his agreement with everything that had been said, especially ""that we ought not to commence too early in laying down any cast iron rules or by submitting to the colonies any cut and dried formula." On matters of military and defence, Macdonald said that whenever

¹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 8 October 1884

² Montreal *Star*, 11 November 1884

the flag of England was insulted, in case England was engaged in foreign war, the sympathies of the people -- the sympathies of the Government and Legislature of Canada -- would be with the mother country, and I do not think there would be much fear of apprehension in the minds of our people that they will be hurried into all the dangers of war by undue action on the part of the mother country. I believe that England will not, without great necessity, enter into a foreign war. We believe that the whole policy of England is opposed to aggressive war, and in another war the people of Canada would be quite prepared to take their share of the expense and duties.³

Macdonald made several speeches of this nature while in London which, according to the *Winnipeg Sun* were quickly "ridiculed" by eastern Canadian newspapers. Most contentious were Macdonald's assertions "that Canadians are prepared to bear their share of the expense of any just war in which the mother country may be engaged." The *Sun* sarcastically expressed doubts that England would ever engaged in "any but a 'just' war" and if she did she would not be "willing to admit it, and it would be rather a delicate matter for Canada to tell her so." The Sudan came immediately to mind and the *Sun* asked "Would Sir John be willing, for instance, that Canada should send her share of men and money to relieve general Gordon," or engage in campaigns in South Africa or India? If so, they doubted he would find "many sympathizers in Canada." The paper was very critical of the direction Macdonald was headed. Luckily, he was "pretty safe" making "speeches on the subject of Imperial Federation, as he is never likely to be held accountable for them," but they warned him to avoid "unguarded utterances" that "raise expectations which are not likely ever to be realized."⁴ The *Sun* clearly saw Macdonald as championing Imperial Federation, and they expressed fears that expending Canadian men and money to rescue Gordon would be both unpopular and unjustified. The *Sun* was not thinking about the lives of the Nile Voyageurs when it spoke of Canada sending "her share of men" to rescue Gordon. It was talking about Canadian involvement as a future possibility rather than a contemporary reality and it using the word "men" to mean soldiers, not the Nile Voyageurs, several of whom had already died by this date.

³ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 4 December 1884

⁴ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 8 December 1884

The novel appearance of the Imperial Federation movement, and Macdonald's prominent spot at its inaugural conference, spurred many newspaper editorialists to articulate their views on the future of Canada in the empire. For the Peterborough *Daily Review* the idea of federation was a natural reflection of the spirit of the age, as smaller political units were federating together, not only in the colonies, but in Germany and Italy as well. It disagreed with the suitability of the common metaphor of a young man growing up, gaining his independence and establishing his own household. Instead, they pointed out that frequently children "enter into business with their parents." Membership in a strong empire not only served Canadian material interests, they wrote, but brought about "a most liberalizing and broadening effect upon the minds of British citizens all over the world," which could be seen by comparing US newspapers that were preoccupied with domestic politics to Canadian newspapers, which "devote considerable space to matters of interest in the various parts of the Empire, that is, the whole world." The empire allowed Canada to see the whole world as its domestic politics. And yet, even such a strong defender of this "broadening effect" of empire, which it viewed as "the world's surest guarantee of peace, civilization and evangelization," did not favour Canadian military involvement in imperial matters. They were cautious of any sort of Imperial Federation through which Canada would be "drawn into entanglements in which they have no direct interest (e.g. the Soudan war)."⁵ Curiously, like the *Sun*, the present involvement of the voyageurs did not seem relevant to these questions and the hundreds of voyageurs in the Sudan was not considered an "entanglement" in that war.

As evidence of an external view, the US journal *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* spoke of the momentum that the federation movement was gathering in late 1884 and said no British politician would "hazard his reputation by advising the dismemberment of the empire." It said that Macdonald was "in favor of a closer political union between Canada and the mother country," having long realized "that the ties binding Canada to the home empire, must be

⁵ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 26 November 1884. The perspective articulated in this editorial raises questions for future research on the 19th century imperial and evangelical roots of a particular strain of 20th century Canadian multilateral internationalism characterized by an ambivalence concerning imperial military entanglements.

drawn tighter, and made stronger, if an ultimate and speedy separation is to be prevented."⁶ The paper would be correct in asserting that Canadian politicians also stayed away from advocating independence, and in this respect they did not reflect the diversity of opinions

represented in the popular press.

In one *Grip* cartoon, the Liberal opposition leader, Blake, is shown in a state of indecision, on the corner of Independence Street and Imperial Federation Avenue. Public opinion, the police officer, wants him to move along and stop loitering on the corner, while Honoré Mercier is encouraging him to walk down Independence Street. (fig 8.1) Macdonald is not in the picture, since *Grip* takes it as self-evident that he has

Figure 8.1 - On the Corner (*Grip*, 13 December 1884)

walked so far down Imperial Federation Ave that he is out of the frame.

Summarizing all the discussions in the "eastern papers" that have come out of Macdonald's imperial federation speeches in London, the *Sun* noted the discussion of the "kindred questions of independence and annexation," with the latter having no real advocates. Independence was a "growing sentiment" however, but it had not yet "entered the realm of practical politics."

There seems to be a sort of undefinable, indefinite idea that our present condition cannot long be maintained; that we must draw closer to, or further apart from, Great Britain. There is an idea that we are getting to be too

⁶ Current comment, *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 11 December 1884

important a people to be a mere colony, treated, to be sure, with much consideration, but prevented from entering the great conference of nations without a "May-I-please" to the mother country. We want something; what, is not very clear.

Federation had its advocates, but it had "responsibilities which many shrink from," whereas independence was seen as "radical and its wisdom questionable." They did not predict an outcome nor clearly state their preference, saying only the future would unfold slowly without any "violent agency" but instead, through "mutual consent of the mother country and the colony."⁷ This was a fair assessment of the mood at the time in the anglophone press, which had begun to settle into two opinions about Canada's future. Most noteworthy was the location of a language of self-respect at the core of even the most temperate and balanced assessments. There was a growing consensus amongst all editorialists that, as the *Sun* said, Canadians were too "important a people to be a mere colony." Amongst those for whom national identity was a key part of their personal identity, this was a struggle for recognition from Britain of Canada as an equal, rather than a "burden" or a "mere colony." Federation and independence were the two most promising strategies to achieve that type of recognition. Public debate about Canada's destiny tended to focus on these two future scenarios, and generally, most politicians were critical of independence, which seemed a more radical departure from the status quo.

A key difference between these two scenarios was that the federationists required British recognition of Canada as partners in empire. Such recognition-dependence was a sensitive issue, as evident in a fiery exchange between the two other Winnipeg newspapers, the Conservative *Daily Times* and the Liberal *Free Press*. A writer in the London *Telegraph* had tried to explain to readers that Canada was "faithfully reproducing the best features" of England. To make her "loyalty secure," Canada only asked for "a return of that honest affection with which she regards the great country from which she sprang." The *Times* thought this was a "true sentiment, one that will be subscribed to by a vast majority of the

⁷ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 19 December 1884

Canadian people," who "naturally" felt both "loyal to our own country," and "a part of that great empire which encircles the globe and in whose glories we have a right to share." The *Times* "desired" the strengthening of feelings of "the strongest affection" since "we are all of the same household." But the editor of the *Free Press* thought it was "sickening that this is the only impression we have been able to make even on a friend, such as the *Telegraph*." Englishmen must consider Canadians to be a "contemptible lot of milksops and clowns ... when they talk thus." The *Free Press* editor resented this image of Canadians as people who "spend our time in singing 'God save the Queen,' and watching like dogs for crumbs of patronizing sympathy from the Imperial table." The phrase "honest affections" seemed distasteful, because it was "spoken of as though we were spaniels or pet stock of some kind." Canadians they said, had ""established free institutions in spite of ignorant British opposition, aided and abetted by sycophantic lick-spittleism in their own midst." No thanks to such "cringing toadies," Canadians "are made to appear in the eyes of the British people as a poor, mean spirited herd of backwoods boors."⁸ It was clear that the *Free Press* resented British interference but it resented even more the shameful neediness of their fellow Canadians who depended on British approval. At the same time, they displayed that they too were concerned about misrepresentation and how Canada appeared "in the eyes of the British people." The *Times* was incredulous at such a response from their rival paper and reprinted verbatim the above quotes under the headline "HOPELESSLY DEMENTED." Such "filthy and insulting language" from their Reform rivals did not need a critique, but just a reprinting, for "such foulness brings its own punishment." They found the *Free Press* commentary so incomprehensible ("our neighbour takes a good deal of dog in his"), they found themselves simply quoting their rivals, stating that it "offends the feeling of warm, loyal affection for the old land" and shaming them for making such "insults by a rudeness that is simply shocking!"⁹ The deployment of a range of semantic resources to characterize the recognition dynamics at stake here illustrates the operation of at least two broad narratives of Canadian identity that were competing in the anglophone media. The metaphor of the household, with the parent-

⁸ Manitoba *Free Press*, 5 January 1885

⁹ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 6 January 1885. Citing the London *Telegraph*

child relations that were so "naturally" applied to the colonial relationship were strategically interpreted to favour both independence and federation. The imperial solution required a mutual recognition of Canada as an equal, of the father treating his son like an adult, deserving a seat at the imperial table. The *Free Press* resented the colonial dependency implied by such paternalistic recognition and it switched metaphors from father-son to master-dog to represent the neediness of colonial Canadians seeking British approval, begging for scraps from the Imperial table. This was the tenor of the debate in the press in Canada in January 1885, on the eve of the return of the voyageurs. These debates provide the context of competing narrative structures of imperial recognition that we need to understand as Macdonald makes a flippant remark about the Sudan and as the voyageurs are publically feted and quickly forgotten.

Macdonald's speeches in London caused a mild sensation amongst Canadian newspaper editors. Many were not sure whether to take his remarks about imperial federation at face value. The Glasgow *Herald* identified Macdonald's speech as duplicitous, saying "no one is so loyal when in England and no one so colonial and patriotic when in Canada." The Winnipeg *Daily Times* heartily approved of their assessment, saying that "the Canadian of whom this can be said is all that can be desired."¹⁰ Grip's editor, J.W. Bengough, who was a habitual critic of Macdonald, interpreted the London speeches in a cartoon where John Bull was pleased with Macdonald's fine words about the empire, while Miss Canada knew that a Macdonald promise was no guarantee of anything. (Fig. 8.2)

¹⁰ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 3 January 1885

Figure 8.2 – Our Promiser Abroad (Grip, 6 December 1884)

For our purposes, it is not necessary to determine what Macdonald really meant. What is important is that the ambiguity of his statements, made in the seat of empire, led to much debate. Macdonald wore his GCB star and ribbon at a banquet held in Montreal by the Conservative party to celebrate his 40 years in political life. Here too, he discussed defence from an imperial perspective, critiquing those promoting the idea of independence. Canadians wanted no more independence "except the independence that we have." Canada was completely sovereign in its domestic affairs and if it was ever attacked, "the mighty powers of England on land and sea are used in our defence." With independence, Canada would have to have "an army, a navy, a diplomacy" and would have to bear "the enormous

cost of walking alone." As far as Canada defending the empire, Macdonald said that England "will never go to war" unless it is "in defence of her own honor," and in that case, "the young men of this country" and its Parliament will "vie with the whole of our people in coming to the support of the Mother Land (Loud cheers)."¹¹ In the winter of 1884-1885, in a polarized public debate over the emerging question of independence, Macdonald consistently defended Canada's imperial connection, appeared to many to be a champion of the new imperial federation movement and espoused the political rhetoric of a willingness to support Britain militarily. This concerned many editorialists, who feared Canadian "entanglement" in imperial wars, but others took them at face value. The events of February would take these questions out of the realm of the abstract.

The Death of Gordon

While Khartoum fell in the last week of January, it took several days for details to reach Wolseley and it was only on February 5 that the newspapers of the world revealed, with shock and disbelief, that the Mahdi's forces had captured the city. If an analysis of British press coverage of the war itself was the subject of this study, the news preceding this week would likely provide a clear vindication of Belich's theory of a triumphalist racial narrative in Victorian depictions of war between English soldiers and "lesser races." In late January, Canadian and English papers wrote about Stewart's victory at Abu Klea as if the war had already been won. Newspapers printed stories of their expected outcome despite the absence of any real corroborating evidence. *Punch* magazine ran a front cover cartoon titled "AT LAST!" that depicted the happy scene of Wolseley greeting Gordon. The following issue showed a crest-fallen Britannia, at the gates of Khartoum, over-run by black bodies, with the lament "TOO LATE!" This week of false euphoria was evident in all newspapers in Britain and Canada. Although the desert column had seemed doomed, thought the *Winnipeg Times*, "English soldiers have a habit of getting out of these little meshes, and the Soudan is not likely to prove any exception." They had already begun to "honor to the brave fellows who

¹¹ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 19 January 1885

are so nobly maintaining British prestige on the sandy wastes of Upper Egypt."¹² The *Sun* announced that the "Mahdi's Cause Conceded to be Lost." The editorial said this all justified the cost and expense of the expedition and although the Mahdi has "greater numerical strength", it was "quite evident that they will prove powerless against the superior arms and

Figure 8.3 - This comic predicted incorrectly and went to print the day that the public learned of the fall of Khartoum (*Punch*, 7 February 1885)

Figure 8.4 - This became the national lament in Britain, as it appeared that the army had arrived just two days "too late" to save Gordon. (*Punch*, 14 February 1885)

discipline of the British troops."¹³ These two Winnipeg papers falsely believed the war was effectively over and their editorials lavished praise on English soldiers, but they made no mention of the men from their own town who had risked their lives to carry those soldiers to the front. The voyageurs were forgotten in this moment of false victory.

Leading up to this period, war fascination was so high in Canada that it became an easy

¹² *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 22 January 1885

¹³ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 29 January 1885

target for *Grip* magazine, which suggested that Gordon should subscribe to Canadian country papers, such as the Parkdale Whooper and the West Toronto Junction Real Estate Chronicle, so he could access the "immense amount of latent military talent in this country." Luckily Wolseley was not listening to these amateur strategists or else he "would have been dead long ago."¹⁴ *Grip's* mockery spoke to a preoccupation with war all out of proportion with any practical experience. But in late January, after a few days of "a terrible silence,"¹⁵ with no news at all coming out of the Sudan, came word that the city had fallen and Gordon was dead. The shock was immense and it was imagined that the political implications would be profound for the empire. Canadian papers reprinted the predictions of the *Times* of London which said that "the fall of that solitary figure holding aloft the flag of England in the face of hordes of the sons of Islam" will be the talk of "every bazaar of Cairo and Calcutta" resulting in "a long and deliberate abandonment of respect for the British Government and its officials by the followers of Islam." The newspapers in France were apparently describing it as "a terrible blow to the prestige of England, and as likely to shake the foundation of of British rule in India."¹⁶ The response in Canada was a wave of offers from Canadian militia men volunteering for "active service," in greater numbers than the previous year. Within days of the announced fall of Khartoum, Canadian papers began to regularly monitor the growing number of "Canadians for the Soudan." Col Van Straubenzie advocated "choosing only the most efficient men to be picked from various volunteer regiments in all parts of the Dominion, who have served at least one full term." Colonel Williams, M.P. also offered his services and those of "a regiment selected from the Canadian militia."¹⁷ There were not any single regiments capable of offering their services, and 'careful selection' was a euphemism for excluding from consideration the majority of militiamen. The Governor General forwarded all requests to London for official consideration by the War Office.¹⁸ Other offers clearly wished to represent a region or group. Colonel Tyrwhitt, the member for South

¹⁴ Toronto *Grip*, 24 January 1885

¹⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 27 January 1885

¹⁶ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 10 February 1885

¹⁷ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 9 February 1885

¹⁸ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 9 February 1885

Simcoe offered to organize a regiment and there were rumours in "official circles" that a Canadian artillery battery would be participating, noting that the officers "expressed their willingness to go into active service."¹⁹ Lt Col Osborne Smith wanted to "raise a force of Manitobans" and Captain Pouliot, son of a late member for Temiscouta, wrote to Lansdowne offering to raise a regiment of "French-Canadian volunteers for service in Egypt or elsewhere." Pouliot was described as having "several years service in Italy," a veiled reference to the Zouaves, and he "went to the Northwest with the Mounted Police in 1873," the first year of the force's creation.²⁰ *L'Ere Nouvelle de Trois-Rivières* said that Pouliot, who lived in that town, had offered to the Governor General "de lever un bataillon canadien dans la province de Québec et d'aller au secours de Gordon en Egypte." The paper saw this as proud confirmation that "Nous sommes bien décidément les dignes descendants de cette race de preux chevaliers, qui, au temps jadis, allaient ferrailer pour le sourire d'une belle ou le premier caprice venu."²¹ While not an expression of imperial devotion, putting Gordon in the category of a slight provocation in this writer's eyes, an imperial campaign was the obvious and unproblematic arena for the *soldat candien* in this writer's eyes. Many other groups, like the Guelph artillery corps, offered their services and by mid-February, the public was told that over 400 offers had already been received and that applications were still "pouring in."²² Van Straubenzie also received offers from several Montreal officers. The *Globe* said that the War Office was considering all of these offers, but their acceptance was "very improbable"²³ There were rumours of a "coloured regiment for active service in the Soudan" supposedly attributed to Mayor Moberly of Collingwood²⁴ but this offer was later denied by the mayor. As late as March 18th, a "chief of the Ojibway Indians," giving a speech in London, was reported as offering a regiment, saying that "if called upon his people were ready to rise

¹⁹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 12 February 1885

²⁰ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 10 February 1885

²¹ *L'Ere Nouvelle de Trois-Rivières*, 13 February 1885

²² Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 16 February 1885

²³ *Globe*, 11 February 1885, reprinting excerpts from the British papers

²⁴ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 16 February 1885

immediately and march at a day's notice for the defence of the British Empire."²⁵ The diverse nature of these offers makes it difficult to generalize as to the motivations of these men. What is most important for this study is that there was a flood of offers, which generated discussion in Canada and England about military service and Canada's role in imperial defence less than a month before the first group of voyageurs returned to the country.

In the francophone press, there were no expressions of imperial enthusiasm or a desire to encourage loyalty by sending troops, but the phenomenon elicited discussion. The key organ of Catholic nationalism in French-speaking Canada, *La Verité*, wrote a stirring eulogy for Gordon and a fiery condemnation of "la barbarie musulmane." Europe must "écrase le pouvoir du Mahdi," they wrote, calling all countries to help England in this task. The conflict, it said, evoked memories of the crusades, and they noted that "On parle d'organiser un régiment canadien pour aller au Soudan," although they neither promoted or discouraged such talk.²⁶ *La Presse* deliberately downplayed reports of French-Canadian volunteers, saying that "le nombre des Canadiens-français qui iront combattre le Mahdi, si on insiste à demander leur concours, se chiffrera tout au plus par quelques unités." They cited one reported case in which a captain had offered to lead a regiment, but, "n'est pas un capitaine de milice, mais simplement capitaine d'un club de raquettes."²⁷ *La Minerve* thought that French-Canadians had nothing to do with "la querelle de la reine Victoria avec le Mahdi" and was sure that those few who were eager to volunteer were merely "animés par cet esprit d'aventure, par ce besoin d'activité qui caractérisent nos nationaux." This narrative was used in September as well and it allowed the observer to take a sort of vicarious pride in the adventure-seeker while liberating him to be one of those who "ne pas trop regarder aux causes et à faire la guerre pour la guerre," as *La Minerve* put it. If he fought for Britain, he was not really fighting for Britain, but just being an "enthousiaste Canadien." They thought Canadian participation would be "superflue," since Canadians did not have the number nor

²⁵ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 18 March 1885

²⁶ *La Verité*, 14 February 1885

²⁷ *La Presse*, 20 February 1885

the experience to have a real impact. Using a different argument, *La Presse* said that Canada was not a place where you could "facilement organiser des compagnies de soudards prêts à guérrayer pour des causes quelconques." There was not enough "sang canadien" that it could be spared to "couler dans des querelles qui ne nous regardent pas." While Canadians did have "des chapitres glorieux" in our military history, the battles were always for "la defense de nos frontières ou le service d'un intérêt général." They argued that England's imperial war policy served English rather than Canadian interests, and in this case, urged neutrality for Canada, given that France and England were divided over Egypt. How "monstrueux" it would be, they imagined, if "Canadiens et Français se trouvassent face à face sur le champ de bataille," slaying one another "pour le plus grand avantage de l'Angleterre!" Canada, they said, was young and had limited resources. It should focus on attract immigrants "pour enlever les bras à l'agriculture," not on sending 'la partie virile de la population *jourer au soldat* dans les cinq parties du monde." In case anyone forgot, the Nile voyageurs, they reminded readers, would soon be coming home and it was "évident qu'ils en ont assez des sables du désert et de la politique anglaise."²⁸ *La Presse* disagreed with the other two papers from Quebec cited here because they said that Canadians generally only fought when they needed to defend themselves and if anyone had any doubts they could ask the returning voyageurs, whom they evidently expected to be fed up with life in the English army. The editors of Labat's collection of letters, in a commentary in that volume, expressed the opinion that the voyageurs did such a fine job - "une prouesse hor ligne" - that it exempted Canada from the responsibility "de lever un armée pour partir en geure."²⁹ Like *La Presse* they opposed sending troops, but they cited the voyageurs as evidence that Canada had already played its part and should not be expected to do anything else.

²⁸ Both commentaries of *La Minerve* and *La Presse* were part of a survey of francophone Canadian attitudes towards the deployment of troops in the Sudan in the largest French-language newspaper in the USA, *Le Courrier des Etats-Unis*. *La Presse* was so pleased with the positive way they were represented that they reprinted the entire article, including their own quotes, on 23 February 1885.

²⁹ Labat p. 194

The Canadian offers of active service were the subject of much discussion in the British press, which were widely reprinted in English-language Canadian newspapers. The *London Mail* reported February 8th that "the patriotism of Canadians" and their "deep interest in the reverse to British interest" found practical expression in Williams' offer, which was "highly approved of by the members of the House of Commons." At such news, the *Pall Mall Gazette* said that "no body of men will ever receive a more cordial welcome" than Canadian militia, and if they were to come it would "reinvigorate public sentiment here" more than "almost anything else." The *St. James Gazette* was a bit cooler though, saying that colonial help would always be welcome but that Britain was "not so reduced as not to be able to garrison our own fortresses." They were a bit insulted at the idea that they would *need* Canadian troops, and if they did, it would only be for garrison duty, to relieve regular troops for the front.³⁰ This reference to "garrisoning our own fortress" was tied to early reports that the offer of Col. Williams to raise troops "has been accepted in a way." Apparently, the Canadian militia men would not be "sent to the scene of war" but would instead "be placed on garrison duty in England, relieving the regular troops" so they could travel to the front. The Peterborough *Examiner* was sure that the War Office "means to pay a compliment to our loyalty," but "it must be confessed that doing sentry-go in an English barracks" would not give the Canadians any "opportunities of distinguishing themselves."³¹ The *Toronto Telegram* thought that although "Canada has no interest at stake in the Soudan," surely a couple of Canadian regiments could be raised and "given an opportunity in the field to show of what stuff they were made." Realistically, they said, the Canadians would stay in Ireland, Gibraltar or Alexandria, while "British troops in garrison at these points went to the front to do the fighting." Canadians who "enlisted for glory or adventure would be apt to be disappointed" therefore, since there was "no glory in garrison duty."³² Disappointment was also something felt by Canadian editorialists as well apparently.

³⁰ *Globe*, 11 February 1885, reprinting excerpts from the British papers

³¹ Peterborough *Examiner*, 13 February 1885

³² Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 17 February 1885, citing the *Toronto Telegram*

Some in Canada searched for possible connections between the voyageurs and the prospective soldiers. The Winnipeg *Daily Sun* thought that "the visit of the Canadian voyageurs to Egypt, and the encomiums heaped upon them, appear to have led to a regular mania for service in the Soudan." But the soldiers were different than the voyageurs, who were "selected because they were 'regulars' in the line of service which they were called upon to perform."³³ This sharp distinction between civilian and military roles managed to both critique the Canadian militia, which is not 'regular,' and to highlight the recognition the voyageurs won in their particular "line of service." Lord Lorne, the former Governor General of Canada seemed a bit more confused about such distinctions. Asked by Col. Williams and others to use his influence in London to secure a spot for Canadian troops on a renewed campaign Lorne wrote to *The Times*. Lorne's public letter advised acceptance of Canadian regiments in the Sudan campaign because he thought that it was only "an act of justice to give them the right to prove their devotion." Specifically, he thought that they would "prove valuable coadjutors as *voyageurs*."³⁴ Based on the analysis of the last chapter, the suggestion that Canadian militia men could serve as voyageurs would have proved disastrous. The apparent impracticality of such an arrangement can only be understood as Lorne's desire to satisfy two conflicting colonial narratives. On the one hand, Lorne thought he was defending Canada and its desire to send soldiers to win recognition for Canada. On the other hand, he could not bring himself to recognize Canadians as equal partners in a campaign. Therefore, he searched for some subordinate role, as assistants or "coadjutors" and he alighted on the most readily available precedent, the voyageurs, without having any real understanding of their work. In a commentary on this letter and its impact, the *Sun* said that Lorne's suggestion that "a Canadian corps" should be deployed with "the second expedition" is "not regarded as altogether complementary to the Canadian forces" because he "distinctly states that they should be utilized only as voyageurs." This led to "a discussion in the papers" in London in which regular army officers claiming knowledge of the Canadian militia "write condemning

³³ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 11 February 1885

³⁴ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 16 February 1885

it as purely a paper army, lacking in training and badly officered."³⁵ The *Sun* began with the suggestion that the voyageurs might have whet the appetites of Canadians for military service but one week later, they expressed their disappointment that the only role Britons wanted from Canadians was the role of voyageur.

Canadian ambivalence towards the "voyageur" image came face to face with a prominent *Punch* cartoon that depicted Canadian military offers to London during this period. *Punch* and *Grip* readers were accustomed seeing Britannia giving maternal instruction and imperial protection to Miss Canada. The cartoon "Kith and Kin" (fig 8.5) depicted Canada, outfitted with snowshoes, buckskin, and a rifle. *Punch* depicted a loyal imperial recognition based on the same two characters but while Britannia was unchanged, Canada was both militarized and indigenized, along the lines described in Poulter's work. Both elements of this national representation brought forth the criticism of the editor of the *Globe*. In the image, the writer saw Britannia looking at Canada "with a smile, in which are blended condescension, surprise, and a little contempt." Canada was "a youth tricked out in the habiliments of an Indian brave, who assures the dignified lady that he will stand by her should she be in any difficulty." Perhaps the poorly drawn mouth of Canada, which looks like a moustache, may have led the writer to imagine her to be a man, despite her womanly shape and cartoon conventions. What was quite clear, however, was that the writer did not like this representation of Canada "tricked out" as a brave and eager to fight. It blamed "all the proffers of services made by colonels, majors, and captains who desire to become regular army officers" for giving Britain the wrong impression of Canada. Their efforts to put together regiments of Canadians "said to be desirous of fighting for the Empire in the Soudan, in Afghanistan, or anywhere" have misled the Imperial Government "to suppose" that there are thousands of "passionately loyal"

³⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 19 February 1885

FEBRUARY 21, 1885.]

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.

87

KITH AND KIN.

Canada (to Britannia). "IF I CAN BE OF ANY ASSISTANCE, COMMAND ME." (And so say Victoria and New South Wales.)

Figure 8.5 - Kith and Kin - Miss Canada as voyageur-snowshoe club-militia figure. (Punch, 21 February 1885)

Canadians "impatient to shed their blood in any part of the world in the services of the Empire." On the contrary,

Canadians are loyal and patriotic and brave, but they are also a common sense people, who do not love fighting for its own sake or prefer the life of a soldier to the peaceable pursuits in which they are engaged. Did duty call they would all be found ready and willing to make any sacrifices that might seem necessary, but they do not think it is a duty to go to Africa to bring the Soudanese under subjection to Egypt, and so prepare the way for the payment of usurious interest upon Egyptian bonds held by British and French speculators.³⁶

Previously in August of 1884, when the *Toronto World* claimed that the Soudanese were only defending their homes, it was widely criticized for making disloyal sentiments. At that time, the *Globe* said the war should be supported because it was "to save and not to conquer." The paper has clearly changed its position over six months, but it seems to have taken this misrepresentation of Canada as a "tricked out Indian brave" eager to fight that brought them to articulate their opposition to sending soldiers abroad. Notable are similarities with the opinions expressed in *La Presse* above. The language of Canada as a people who do not love war was also expressed by the *Pioneer Press*, who asked "the Dominion authorities" not to give "the war spirit any pronounced encouragement." Like *La Presse* it felt that "Canada has such a small population" that it can "ill afford to have thousands of her stalwart militiamen rush off to take the chances of the cruel war in the Soudan."³⁷ These three papers articulated a narrative of Canadians as a people reluctant to wage war abroad at the same time that they have raised questions about the justice of the current campaign in the Sudan. Such language formed part of the public ambivalence that greeted the voyageurs on their return in March.

New South Wales and Victoria were mentioned in passing in the caption of "Kith and Kin" because the Canadian offers were soon followed by similar offers from Australia. The offer from New South Wales represented a much stronger public desire for service than the offers from Canada and was accompanied by a fundraising campaign to cover the costs of their

³⁶ *Toronto Globe*, 9 March 1885

³⁷ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 11 March 1885, citing the *Pioneer Press*, undated.

volunteers.³⁸ The Secretary of State for War, Lord Harington, favoured "acceptance of offers from Canada and New South Wales," but since "the War Office authorities oppose the proposition" it was sent to cabinet. The press reported it as "probable" that these colonial offers would be declined "owing to the opposition of the Duke of Cambridge and other

Figure 8.6 - In contrast to the Kith and Kin image, which highlighted Canada's distinctive qualities, here all the colonies are the same as Britain, and they are all indistinguishable. Note that figures 8.3-8.6 follow sequentially in successive weekly issues. (*Punch*, 28 February 1885)

officers."³⁹ "Now comes news of an offer from Australia," wrote the Peterborough *Daily Times*, on February 16th, seeing in such offers as an encouraging development. It said that "even if 'Imperial Federation' is not immediately to be carried out," these colonial volunteers proved that "there is little encouragement for the idea of some leading Reformers who favour

³⁸ K. S. Inglis, *The Rehearsal: Australians at war in the Sudan 1885* Adelaide: Rigby Publishers, 1985

³⁹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 14 February 1885

the disruption of the British Empire."⁴⁰ This optimistic reading of the multiple requests for service warmed the hearts of imperialists in Britain and in the colonies. *Punch* followed its Canadian-centred "Kith and Kin" cartoon with a cartoon titled "My Boys" (Fig 8.6) the following week that imagined all the colonies marching together. The *Ottawa Citizen* described it as "a capital cartoon", "clever in conceptions and admirable in execution", which "represents the British lion standing on an eminence and before him are marching in military array a solid column of lesser lions", two of which were labelled Canada and Australia.⁴¹ The two cartoons utilize co-existent yet seemingly contradictory sets of imagery that describe the same colonial parent-child relationship. The first emphasized difference, with Canada represented as an exotic, indigenised colonial other, while the second visual narrative emphasizes commonality, homogeneity and shared identity.

The scene of Canadians and Australians marching together did not come to pass. Approval was given to the New South Wales contingent to proceed to the Red Sea immediately and vague remarks were made about the possibility of Canadian participation in a fall campaign. The British Cabinet accepted the advice of the War Office and declined Canadian offers, but accepted the enthusiastic and self-financed offer of troops from New South Wales. They landed at Suakim and much of their time was spent doing guard duty and railway construction, but some members participated in a few minor skirmishes. In response to this decision, some Canadian newspapers expressed disappointment. It was perhaps jealousy that prompted the *Sun* to reprint a jab from the London *Advertiser* that it was only fair for New South Wales to pay for its own contingent, since "a great many people were sent to New South Wales at the expense of England."⁴² Trying to explain Canada's rejection, some blamed the Nile Voyageurs. The London *Mail* explained that many of the "so-called Canadian voyageurs were not Canadian voyageurs at all, but young Englishmen who had emigrated to Canada, and who joined the expedition for amusement," and apparently the War Office

⁴⁰ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 16 February 1885

⁴¹ *Ottawa Citizen*, March 13, 1885, discussing cartoon in *Punch*, 28 February 1885

⁴² Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 11 March 1885

feared "a similar state of things would have occurred" with Canadian regiments. The contingent from New South Wales, on the other hand, was believed to consist of "a large number of retired short-term British regulars," and the colonial government there

made it clear that its corps would be composed principally of old soldiers, and not of raw colonial volunteers or equally raw English immigrants. It was not, however, until a searching inquiry had been made regarding the Australians that the war office agreed to accept their services. The refusal to employ Canadians is regretted by the general public, but it is felt that the crisis is far too serious to admit of experiments.

The disappointment over Canada's rejection by the War Office led to public criticism of the voyageurs as not real Canadians and not even good boatmen. The *Winnipeg Sun* reprinted this report together with Lorne's recommendation that the Canadian soldiers should be used as "coadjuncts" doing voyageur work, with the headline "Canadians: How an Englishman regards their use in Egypt."⁴³ Not only were the voyageurs less than soldiers, but according to these views, they harmed the chances of Canadian soldiers hoping to serve. According to this report, the Canadians were rejected for not being Canadian and the Australians were accepted because they were not really Australian. If this seems somewhat illogical, it should be understood that the guiding assumption amongst London's military advisors was that colonial troops were unreliable and would constitute an "experiment." The language used to explain the acceptance of one colony and the rejection of another, which made no reference to financial costs, revealed categorical differences between "English" and "colonial" that ran counter to other popular discourses of a common British identity across the empire.

There was no singular message communicated in the Canadian media at this time. There were reports of many volunteers. In the francophone press, there were no advocates for sending troops and no strong opponents to volunteers going, but different arguments were put forward as to why (French-)Canadian troops would most be quite unlikely. In the English language press, many hoped that Canadian soldiers would have a chance to see battle to test their manly qualities which would reflect positively on Canada. Others, like the *Globe*,

⁴³ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 19 February 1885

opposed the idea of sending troops. During this period, the opinions of the Canadian prime minister were neither sought nor given in the press. There is also no record of Macdonald's private thoughts in February. By mid February, it was reported that Canadian troops had been rejected by the War Office. The Queen expressed "her warm and grateful feelings to the Colonies for their proffered aid, which is most satisfactory."⁴⁴ Gladstone also thanked the colonies and claimed these various offers "proved the attachment and loyalty of the colonies to the British throne" and predicted they would strengthen "the bonds uniting the great empire."⁴⁵ A great deal of public discussion occurred around the mere *offer* of troops from Canada to the extent that it eclipsed the news and discussion of the *actual* services rendered by the voyageurs, a majority of whom were by this time crossing the Atlantic. By the end of February, through the Canadian press, readers in Canada had received several messages beyond the polite thank yous from the Queen and Gladstone. They had learned that many in Britain held a low opinion of the Canadian militia, whose offers of assistance had been refused by the War Office. They heard that even defenders of Canadian soldiers could only imagine them as second-tier adjuncts, doing guard duty at garrisons, or perhaps serving as "voyageurs." They also heard repeated the claims that many of the voyageurs were not really voyageurs, and that some of them not really even Canadians. For those seeking recognition for Canada as an equal participant in empire through military representation, the month of February was a great disappointment. The hopes expressed by some in 1884 that the voyageurs represented an initial step towards wider participation in imperial campaigns were contradicted by events five months later. Even the army's praise of the voyageurs seemed to confirm that, in British eyes, Canadian colonists occupied a subordinate role in the empire and that things worked best when "real Canadians" filled "Canadian" roles, like being voyageurs.

⁴⁴ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 19 February 1885 and elsewhere. See LAC MG 26A - Sir John A. Macdonald fonds

Reel 1566, Vol 155 p. 63270 Feb 19/85, Bramston J, Nile Expedition Colonial Aid (pamphlet), Colonial Office to the High Commissioner for Canada, 19 February 1885

⁴⁵ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 23 February 1885

The Return of the Voyageurs

As noted in the previous chapter, most of the voyageurs, including the most highly skilled boatmen from Caughnawaga, Trois-Rivières, Ottawa and St. Peter's chose to return home to Canada at the time their contracts expired. These men gathered in Wady Halfa and then travelled through Egypt to Alexandria, by boat to Queenstown under supervision of Captains Aumond and Egerton Denison. At Queenstown, Egerton stayed behind to travel and Aumond was the sole officer to return with the men to Halifax. From this point they travelled westward by train, gradually diminishing as each group left for their respective home towns. There are very few letters documenting the trip from Wady Halfa to Halifax, but at each stop in Canada, reporters interviewed the men about their impressions of the trip. A brief chronology of the trip home and their final reflections on the experience can be gleaned from these interviews. The middle section of this chapter traces their return trip to Halifax and the ways in which they were greeted in their communities.

Wady Halfa to Halifax

By January 15th, the men had returned to Wady Halfa, where Deer said "we were sorry to find about fifty Canadians sick in the hospitals."⁴⁶ Their time in Wady Halfa was their last day with the army and many of them spoke with enthusiasm to Canadian reporters about a "United Services Athletic Sports" day in Wady Halfa before their departure. Some of them brought back a copy of a small newspaper created by some army printers there, "a three column folio called the *Wady Halfa Gazette*,"⁴⁷ that commemorated two days of "athletic sports and holiday fun of all kinds, the officers and men of all services taking part" on January 26th and 27th, frequently pitting the Canadian voyageurs against the British soldiers. Jackson "had the satisfaction to see two of my Iroquois carry off the first prizes for running,"⁴⁸ namely Solomon Angus in the quarter mile and Angus Mailloux in the obstacle race. James Clarke of Ottawa was second in the quarter mile, second in another race to "the

⁴⁶ Deer pp. 18-23

⁴⁷ *Montreal Star*, 5 March 1885

⁴⁸ Jackson p. 34

fastest runner in the Gordon Highlanders." In the Steeplechase, he "put on a fine spurt near the end, and won" but was disqualified, which was something disputed by himself "and many of his friends." The Tug of War "was won easily" by a mixed Canadian team who beat in succession a series of other teams, including the Naval Brigade and the 19th Hussars. The Wady Halfa *Gazette's* sporting news noted that "the Canadians came near turning the Tug of War into a quarter-mile Race." The newspaper recorded a division in all of the events between competitions for "natives," which meant Egyptian soldiers and events for "Europeans and Canadians." All the voyageurs were lumped together as "Canadian," making them different than Europeans by nationality but the same by racial categories, which apparently compensated for their civilian status. It might be tempting to look at the victorious pan-Canadian tug-of-war team, with settlers and métis, anglophones and francophones, easterners and westerners as evidence of a newly forged "Nile Voyageur" identity. This would be reading too much into a sports event. On their return trip home, there were many examples, in behaviours and speech, of the vitality of their deeply entrenched regional identities.⁴⁹

After three months of working apart from one another in separate gangs, the voyageurs reconvened shortly for a celebration of sorts with the sports in Wady Halfa and then they began to descend the river for the return trip home. A majority of this group were from Ottawa, and some of their seasonal cultural norms emerged as their Nile steamer deposited them all in Assiout, which had a large market and many wine vendors. Shaw joked about the "gentle, loving, playful nature of the riverman on his return from the drive, when he receives his pay."⁵⁰ Describing this scene, Labat wrote that "pour la première fois depuis longtemps, les voyageurs sont contents" because they were finally free, and "la liberté c'est la vie du canadien." If this liberty was "abusent peut-être" this was forgivable because "on a souffert

⁴⁹ For a historical overview of the rivalry between French-Canadian and Irish gangs in the Ottawa lumber trade, see Michael S. Cross, "The Shiner's War", *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol LIV No. I, March 1973

⁵⁰ Shaw, "Random Reminiscences," p. 33

trois mois et qu'on revient de l'argent en poche."⁵¹ Deer noted that many of them "abused" their freedom "by getting intoxicated." On the train ride from Assiout to Cairo those who had been drinking "commenced fighting in the cars" and "two poor fellows, one a French man and the other an Irishman, were thrown beneath the train and killed."⁵² Their deaths were "le résultat de la liberté que je mentionne plus haut," said Labat.⁵³ When Léon Pilon and William O'Rourke fell from the moving cars, their friends rushed to tell Aumond, but a Montreal *Star* reporter heard bitter reports from several men that the Captain ignored their concerns and that he would not even wire back for their bodies at the next stop.⁵⁴

Immediately after this unfortunate incident the men had a day in Cairo, which was clearly a highlight for many of the voyageurs. On Wolseley's orders, they were entertained at the Government's expense "as a reward for their splendid services in surmounting the Nile troubles."⁵⁵ Hosted by Père Bouchard and the wives of the colonial administrators, they were given a banquet after being driven around Cairo by "about seventy teams" which took them to see "all the lions."⁵⁶ In Halifax, the *Globe* reporter described their visit to the Mohammed Ali mosque which the voyageurs "gazed at with mingled wonder and admiration." They removed their boots and "in stockinged feet the Canadians walked fearfully and wonderingly over the holy floors and through the jaspered gates" of "this sacred edifice."⁵⁷ D.S. Haight of Winnipeg told a reporter about the "fine programme" the government arranged, including a pipe and a quarter pound of tobacco. Haight climbed up the top of the Great Pyramid with a group of others and "we cut our names in the stones where there were thousands of names

⁵¹ Labat p. 176

⁵² Deer p. 24

⁵³ Labat p. 177

⁵⁴ Montreal *Star*, 4 March 1885

⁵⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 4 February 1885

⁵⁶ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885. According to Jackson, these were: Kass el-Nil Bridge, Kass-el-Nil Barracks, Abdin Square and Palace, The Sultan-Hassan Mosque, the Citadel, the Mohammed-Ali Mosque, the Native Bazaar, the Eshediah Gardens, Gizeh and the Pyramids.

⁵⁷ Toronto *Globe*, 5 March 1885

of foreigners who had made the ascent."⁵⁸ Another voyageur said their day in Cairo was "the most pleasant of all the days spent in the Orient."⁵⁹

But if Cairo was a highlight, the men all agreed that the "greatest hardships and worst treatment"⁶⁰ they endured during the entire six months was on their passage from Alexandria to Queenstown aboard *The Pooneh*.⁶¹ The Canadian newspapers received reports that when they reached Ireland to transfer to the *The Hanoverian*, they engaged in a "mutiny." A cable reported that "The Voyageurs Become Obstreperous Again - They Get Up a Mutiny." Details were sparse, apparently owing to officials trying to "have the facts suppressed," but it was believed "that the voyageurs became intractable and showed signs of mutiny," causing the officers of the boat to panic. The *Pooneh* sent a distress call to the Naval Station which despatched "a gunboat carrying a strong force of marines and infantry" to help the crew of the *Pooneh* suppress the rebellious Canadians.⁶² As soon as the men landed in Canada, reports of "the mutiny" at Queenstown were "totally denied by all." The voyageurs said that one voyageur waved a whiskey bottle at the crowd, causing them all to laugh, which scared "the timid natives, unused to Canadian boisterousness." The locals called for "some city soldiers, at whom the voyageurs laughed the louder, because they could have swallowed the lot."⁶³ Other men called reports of a mutiny "rubbish" and "grossly exaggerated." They admitted that Queenstown "was painted red, but no harm was done to either person or property." The men went on "a little 'tear' resultant on being kept so long in confinement"⁶⁴ To the reporter who talked with the men, there was a straight forward logic to this. "The boys were treated as though they were regular soldiers, and consequently kicked."⁶⁵ The word

⁵⁸ *Globe*, 9 March 1885

⁵⁹ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁶⁰ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁶¹ *Winnipeg Sun*, 10 March 1885. The *Pooneh* was a steamer on the Peninsular and Oriental Company line. Queenstown, Ireland is today called Cobh, near Cork.

⁶² *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 20 February 1885

⁶³ *Montreal Star*, 4 March 1885

⁶⁴ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885

⁶⁵ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885

"kicked" had been used by some of the voyageurs in September to refer to the two Manitobans who changed their minds in Sydney and decided they weren't going on the trip. "To kick" was the civilian's decision not go along with certain things. If a soldier "kicked" when given a command they would be charged with insubordination, desertion or mutiny, but a civilian could not be guilty of these things if they were not formally under military discipline. From the perspective of the voyageurs, a day's visit to Queenstown for food and drink was only fair and reasonable, especially after being poorly treated, and they refused to comply with any attempts to confine them to the ship. They clearly understood that they should not be treated like soldiers and refused to recognize the legitimacy of military commands, especially since the campaign was over. The usage by the press of language like "mutiny" and "insubordination," however, shows that many outside observers had always only ever judged them by military criteria.

To explain their behaviour in Queenstown, the men felt it necessary to describe the harsh conditions they suffered while on the *Pooneh*. Interviewing Chief Prince and D.S. Haight on the train, a *Globe* reporter learned that from Malta to Queenstown, the men were kept in the hold of the boat, below deck. The food they were given was inadequate and "not fit to eat," while better food was available for sale for those men had money. "We were treated more like animals than human beings," said Haight, who said "We blame Capt. Denison for the hardship in this respect." Prince agreed with him. The men told the reporter that they had heard Denison talking to the officers of the *Pooneh* and he "referred to the Voyageurs as 'river hogs.'" For such an insult, they threatened him "with violence." Physical indignities and verbal disrespect fuelled their outrage and discontent. Haight told the *Globe* reporter that they "rebelled on the *Pooneh* for the neglect which they had received."⁶⁶ Deer said that the English soldiers "were treated very well, but the voyageurs were treated like so many dogs." They were "thrown into the darkest part of the ship and served with hard tack and tea not fit to

⁶⁶ *Globe*, 9 March 1885 The reporter had confused the Denisons. It was Egerton who called the men river hogs to the *Pooneh* officers, but the reporter assumed they meant Fred and wrote that "the Voyageurs who threatened the ex-alderman of Toronto with violence." The men clearly said "Captain" Denison. Colonel Frederick Denison was between Korti and Kirbekan at the time the men boarded the *Pooneh* with Egerton..

drink."⁶⁷ The *Winnipeg Sun*, interviewing men after their return home heard virtually identical stories about their time on the *Pooneh* being "horrible"; they "can find nothing too hard to say against it." They described being "stewed down in the lower hold, dark and damp, worse than sheep." Fourteen men were placed in a single room with a 10 foot table, sleeping in hammocks over the table. By contrast, the soldiers lived on the second decks and got both sunlight and "first class rations." On the first day, they were ordered to scrub the decks and when they were refused their grog was cut off, followed by their bread the following day, but still they would not clean the decks. This created "ill feeling, which was continued all through to Queenstown." The men were deeply resentful, feeling they "were treated worse than dogs" and "the men all blame" Captains Denison and Aumond for "their neglect of them."⁶⁸ Alexander Morrison also complained about Aumond and said the "trouble at Queenstown" was simply "due to the anxiety of the men to go ashore and get a square meal" after so many days without proper food.⁶⁹

After enduring such poor conditions and poor food, the voyageurs were determined to get off the *Pooneh*. Years later, Mr. Alaire Legault would tell an Ottawa *Citizen* reporter about his memories of their stop in Queenstown when "the men insisted on going ashore" and the captain tried to stop them by arming his soldiers with revolvers. However, "we were armed too," Legault said, and they pushed their way ashore, where they got into a conflict with the Irish constabulary. He said that they tried to arrest the three "ringleaders", who he named as "Joe and Fred Ayotte and Fred Laroque." The three "got loose, attacked their captors and threw them into the sea." The three then went off to Cork and came back the next day with black eyes as evidence of their "melee" there.⁷⁰ Perhaps Legault has combined the events of Gibraltar and Queenstown in his story, for in Gibraltar the Ayottes pitched the Spanish police into the sea and Jos Laroque was fined for drunkenness. Or perhaps they Ayottes consistently

⁶⁷ Deer p. 28

⁶⁸ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885

⁶⁹ *Montreal Star*, 6 March 1885

⁷⁰ *Ottawa Citizen*, 19 February 1938

threw police officers into the water, like two Jos Monferrand characters tossing Shiners into the Ottawa River. Legault's story was likely an embellished amalgam of different events but it was in keeping with the other versions of the Queenstown stop and it was plausible because these individuals were all present and such behaviour was consistent with past behaviour. Deer also reported that "some of the drinking men" went to Cork, began fighting and two of them were arrested and "locked up until the next morning."⁷¹ This prisoner report may have also been confused with another story about two English soldiers who were held as prisoners below deck. They were guilty of "insubordination" and would be serving seven year sentences upon their return to England. The "sympathy of the Voyageurs was aroused in favour of those men" who then got in a fight with a naval officer, which apparently would have increased their sentences to twenty years. When some of the voyageurs heard of this, they could not let such a penalty "go unchallenged" so "a number of stout Canadians," rushed the prison guard, got his key and "set the redcoats at liberty." They then quickly dressed "the free men" up as voyageurs. At this point, they defied the captain's orders, and went to town because the Canadians "wished to set foot upon the soil of old Erin." Together with the newly freed prisoners, they brushed aside the gangway guards, "rapidly strode down to the pier and were soon lost in the labyrinths of the town." This was the story told to a *Globe* reporter in Halifax, but others "deny it straight up and down," and instead explain the whole situation simply as the fact that "the men forced their way from the Pooneh ashore" which was something they had "no compunctions in doing on account of the bad treatment they had received while on board."⁷² Two Peterborough men later confirmed that some of the voyageurs helped two prisoners to escape. One of the prisoners was arrested in Queenstown "for being drunk" and brought before a Magistrate, who "thinking he was a Canadian, allowed him to go in consideration of his services on the Nile." They said the two men got onto the Hanoverian and unofficially emigrated to Canada⁷³

⁷¹ Deer p. 28

⁷² Toronto *Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁷³ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 9 March 1885

To try and resolve these various reports into one assessment of what-really-happened would be the wrong approach, given that each of the hundreds of participants connected to the so-called "mutiny" had a limited view of events, each transmitted via the semantics of their own life histories. Nonetheless, the voyageurs generally agreed that the *Pooneh's* officers had no right to command them let alone abuse them. The voyageurs "knew" that a drink and a square meal were their fair due. Once the natural constraint of the ocean was removed, they asserted their rights, brushing aside attempts of the crew, Canadian officers and local authorities to stop them. They made no threats of vengeful violence, except against Egerton Denison for calling them 'river hogs,' a blatant disrespect that evoked powerful outrage. Out of these basic common points, we can detect the emergence of a champion strong man narrative, of the voyageurs as fighters and conquerors. In these few quotes, we see from the perspective of the working-class men, both the grammar of disrespect and the struggle for what is their fair due as well. We also see the impulse to construct a heroic narrative that bridges the isolated feelings of insult into a group identity, taking the form of a story that will resonate with others who find themselves laughing and cheering in solidarity at such behaviour when it is told as a rebellion, liberation and conquest over the countless officials, officers, policemen and upper-class boors who insult and abuse working-class people on a daily basis. Mr. Legault's story, told in his 78th year, certainly takes creative liberties with events, but what he remembers is the struggle and he paints its grammar with a simple clarity that does not even try to justify their behaviour by referring to the poor living conditions. Legault takes pride in his identification with these men, the Ayottes and Laroque in particular, and at its core, he remembers the voyageurs triumphant victory over the weak, ineffective English navy and Irish police. That story was already evident in the accounts told on the first day the voyageurs landed in Halifax and it was a narrative that challenged and contradicted the "mutiny" story in the papers.

When they left Queenstown, one paper reported that 286 men got on the boat, with some uncertainty about the status of the two liberated English prisoners, who may have made it to

Canada and were reported to be "on board the train" travelling from Halifax to Ottawa.⁷⁴ Another paper reported that 10 stayed behind, "se paient une promenade en Angleterre"⁷⁵ Exact numbers cannot be ascertained because Aumond did not keep accurate records. He did not conduct a roll in Aswan, Alexandria, Malta or Queenstown. He did not "notice" that Pilon had died until he got to Malta. His financial records were still being adjusted in 1888 and in general he was accused by the men of being neglectful of his duties towards them. He was questioned by Melgund on his return to Ottawa concerning police or military involvement and the "mutiny." Melgund asked Aumond if anyone tried to "liberate prisoners" to which Aumond said he had heard no complaint about such a thing. Incredulously Melgund asked him "You don't mean to say that men were drunk all the time from Queenstown to Halifax?" to which Aumond replied "yes" and pleaded his powerlessness to control their purchases in Ireland.⁷⁶ Aumond's neglect of his duties concerning the men meant that they were basically left to their own devices as they crossed the Atlantic on the *Hanoverian*. This was by all accounts a more comfortable and civilized passage in terms of the way the men were treated by the ship's crew, but the voyage was said to be characterized by both rough weather and some serious fighting between gangs. Just as the drinking in Assiout led to fighting on the train, drinking in Queenstown led to violence between gangs on the *Hanoverian*.

Although newspapers had no sources of information for this and none of the men were writing letters any more, the details of this crossing are found in Deer's book, which he published shortly after his return. Soon after they had left Ireland, he said

a small party of the French on board attacked about the same number of Indians, but were badly defeated, the Indians getting decidedly the best of it. We afterwards asked the English the reason that the French had attacked us, and were told that it was jealousy, as they knew that we had done better work on the Nile than they did.

⁷⁴ Toronto *Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁷⁵ *Ere Nouvelle* de Trois-Rivières, 3 March 1885

⁷⁶ LAC, RG 19 G-19 vol 29 Governor General's Military Secretary - Nile Expedition, Minutes of meeting between Aumond and Melgund, 14 March 1885

The night before docking at Halifax, "the Ottawa French men came again to beat the Indians" said Deer. "There were about one hundred of them and only about twenty of us. They got sticks and broke in our door, beating some of our fellows until they were nearly killed." During their two hour stop in Halifax, "our foreman asked for a separate car for the Indians as he heard the Frenchmen say that they would kill some of us before we got to Montreal." The conductor couldn't do this for them, but instead put them in the "mixed train," which worked until Moncton, "where we found the Frenchmen waiting for us." At this point, Deer says, the conductor put a box car in between the two groups, "and gave Jackson a key so that we could lock our doors." The ride was uncomfortable and "the French" were "all the way trying to burst into our car and threatening our lives."⁷⁷ Describing the fighting that led to the deaths of Pilon and O'Rourke and then the violence on the Hanoverian and the Canadian train, Deer is very clear in his identification of the men as "an Irishman," "the French" or "the Ottawa French" and "Indians." These group identities are central in Deer's eyes and they are characterized by internal unity. The inter-gang violence is, to Deer, neither based on prejudice nor a desire for domination, but rather, a competitive jealous rivalry over bragging rights.

Halifax Dock

There was no band or ceremonial guard to greet the return of Canada's first contribution to an international imperial campaign. The men arrived at two o'clock in the morning and filed through the immigration shed to a waiting train. There was a crowd of onlookers, however, despite the early arrival time. Lambert was officially sent by Melgund to receive the men and guide them back on the train. As the steamer approached, "the sturdy Canadians flocked on the steamer's decks" to wave to "friends on the pier" who could be seen due to "the brightness of the night." The *Toronto Globe* reported:

⁷⁷ Deer pp. 28-30

When the ship had been safely docked the bronzed, weather-beaten stalwart heroes of the Soudan poured over the sides of the vessel in their joy to once more step on the soil of Canada and feel the ecstatic pleasure of being on their native heath and within a few days' journey of home.⁷⁸

This long descriptive article painted a picture of the men as exotic, heroic adventurers who were eager to tell their travellers' tales to the crowds. It was a scene "as odd as it was interesting" to see the men bring their "goods and chattels" into the immigration shed where they "dumped them indiscriminately on the floor, in costumes that rival a modern drama in variety." Wearing "coarse and dirty clothing," pith helmets, turbans and fezzes "of every possible colour and shape," with "sun-burnt cheeks and shaggy hair, and unshaven faces, their appearance was nothing if not unique." The reporter said that it was "so profound a pleasure" for the voyageurs "to talk with real Canadians" gathering around them, "the sturdy Voyageurs laughingly related their experiences in the land of the Pharaohs to eager throngs."⁷⁹

When asked about the work they said it was hard going up from the second cataract to Dongola, but coming back down was "easy as rolling off a log." Paraphrasing, the reporter said that it was when ascending that "the powers of endurance were needed, and when all the energies of the men were brought into active play."⁸⁰ One man on the train later expressed his opinion that "we had a hard time." The work was extremely dangerous because the river was "awful bad for whirlpools and when a man gets into one of these whirlpools, I tell you, he goes down." The boats were not sturdy enough, built of "very thin pine", and they were "too sharp in the stem and stern" and with "too much keel," making them unresponsive. On top of that, they were "too heavily loaded."⁸¹ This was a common complaint made by the men, that the boats were "decidedly too frail," to the point that their "sterns would be torn

⁷⁸ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁷⁹ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁸⁰ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁸¹ *Globe*, 9 March 1885

out" leading to death and damage.⁸²

It was the non-technical aspects of their work, however, that they most wished to explain. It was noted, in editorials cited in the last chapter and upon their return here, that the voyageurs could be proud of winning authority and independence in their sphere of expertise. "The voyageurs had sole command of the boats, and had to be obeyed," wrote the *Globe*, "often commanding British officers to wade out and pull on the tow rope, tolerating no impertinence from them."⁸³ The reader is presented with what should seem an upside-down situation, of British officers obeying the orders of shantymen and river pilots from Canada. As we saw in the previous chapter, some officers could not accept this arrangement easily, despite clear direction from Wolseley. In Halifax, several voyageurs complained "bitterly of the arrogant manner in which they were treated by the British officers in command" and the "air of authority assumed by the English officers in charge," which was "especially annoying to the men." One man gave an example of a trip of 80 miles between Sarass and Dahl which took 21 days "owing to interference of officers totally ignorant of the country." Some other officers were praised for letting the voyageurs do their jobs. They named one bad officer and one good officer, where the latter "did not needlessly interfere or try to show his authority."⁸⁴ The annoying "interference" on the part of "arrogant" officers was perceived by the voyageurs as a type of misrecognition, in which the officers failed to acknowledge their expertise and their authority of when the boats were in the rapids.

They were asked for their opinions of Egypt and "the Arabs are given a hard name by the intelligent sons of Canada," who called them "filthy," "detestable" and "depraved." The Arab men were said to be "despicable cowards" individually but "collectively they are ferocious as a pack of wolves" which was something that "raised the blood" of the "loyal Voyageur." To give an example "of their hatred, an Arab convicted of poaching water melons was

⁸² Peterborough *Daily Review*, 23 February 1885 (cables from Queenstown)

⁸³ Montreal *Star*, 5 March 1885

⁸⁴ *Globe*, 5 March 1885

promptly ushered into the next world by a bullet from a Canadian's rifle."⁸⁵ In his boastful bravado, the unnamed voyageur who said this to the reporter effectively discredited the "target practice" story which Denison's inquiry accepted, and affirmed the version presented by Deer, McKeand and Sherlock by inverting it and misrepresenting the victimized farmer as a criminal. In an interview in the *New York Times* with three men who arrived independently in that city on another steamer, F.C. Miller, told the reporter that they "can't tell anything about the killing of a native by some voyageurs while going up the Nile." The "parties who did the killing where not found," despite a thorough search, they said. "None of us," he said, "saw the native killed."⁸⁶ Now that the expedition was over, the men spoke openly of the matter leaving no doubt that the farmer had been shot by a voyageur and that Denison's Inquiry did not identify who was responsible. Some men were fined, but the testimony of Miller here indicates that the real culprits were never detected. The men described the women in Egypt as unsanitary and "slovenly." Obscure references where made to prostitutes in Wady Halfa and one of them told a "good story" in which a Canadian chased a woman and only when he "threw his arms around 'her'" did he discover "she" was a man.⁸⁷ The teller and hearer thought the story amusing and "good" because "men and women look exactly alike to one not used to the customs of the country" and presumably a Canadian chasing and grabbing a woman who turned out to be a woman would not be worth mentioning. If this behaviour was considered normal it might explain why some voyageurs encountered groups of men who came at them like packs of wolves. When the *Winnipeg Sun* reprinted much of this *Globe* article it left out sections critical of British officers, the shooting of the "melon thief" and these references to sexual activity with or assault of Egyptian women.

The men being interviewed were clear in their contempt for Egyptians, or Arabs (they rarely said Sudanese), but they spoke very highly of Cairo. Their experiences there were quite

⁸⁵ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

⁸⁶ *New York Times*, 9 March 1885

⁸⁷ *Toronto Globe*, 5 March 1885

fascinating to the reporter too and very few Canadians would ever have had the opportunity to visit the pyramids in 1885. The men possessed valuable coinage from these experiences, socially and literally, as they were "generously distributing" among the Halifax "spectators" coins that they brought from "the musty vaults of Pharaoh's Cave." In the interior of the pyramid, they claimed that they found and "eagerly pocketed" coins that had been "placed in this sepulchral storehouse years before the advent of Christ." This money may have been a few spare piastres from their day at the bazaar, or more likely, they were scattered in the vault by their guide just before their arrival, but this mattered little to the curious Haligonians who gratefully accepted this exotic oriental coinage from the voyageurs. They also showed them their souvenirs which included. Finely crafted necklaces, bracelets collars,

...a Dongolese terrier named Backsheesh, Oriental parrots, and birds of different varieties, with nick-nacks in tortoise shells and pictures of various kinds, were also among the many odds and ends with which the Voyageurs had their valises and trunks closely packed.⁸⁸

With such trophies and tales from their travels to the east, the voyageurs carried themselves like conquerors.

The *Globe's* portrait of the laughing, sun-tanned, scruffy, colourful group, full of bravado, with tales of Egyptian adventure, haversacks of treasure and a menagerie of oriental animals was part of a language that glorifies heroic strong-men, evident in a series of tropes that have recurred throughout this study, running as a counter-narrative to the disappointed recognition of the fact that the voyageurs weren't soldiers. This narrative of the voyageurs as conquerors, which often seems told in half-mocking jest, was evident from the first days of recruitment. The physique of the men drew praise and many were sure they would terrify the Arabs. The Manitoba men caused a drunken disturbance at Sault Ste. Marie, they were reportedly fighting on the boat in Montreal they terrified the people of Sydney. Printed reports of these events took a humourous tone and the reader was expected to cheer them on. Labat praised and defended the men as simple, powerful, hard drinking, laughing heroes throughout his

⁸⁸ Toronto *Globe*, 5 March 1885

narrative, but especially in his depiction of the Ayottes as the conquerors of Gibraltar. As noted previously, even Denison was conflicted between disgust towards such indiscipline and, to use Stacey's phrase, "sneaking pride" in the Ayottes victory over the Gibraltar police. Here on the dock, stories about conflicts with the "despicable" Egyptians were followed by the above-mentioned tales of "painting the town red" in Queenstown and liberating the unjustly detained English soldiers. This semi-heroic narrative of the "conquering voyageurs" existed alongside the dour disappointed language of the voyageurs as "hard cases," whose unfortunate "indiscipline" and "insubordination" seemed directly proportionate to their usefulness in the rapids. Looking at the speakers who deploy both of these narratives, it becomes apparent that these are two ways of making sense of the voyageurs from the perspective of the middle-class Canadian colonial elites. As noted at Gibraltar, Sherlock and Cram thought the Ayottes were behaving poorly, "worse than devils" and deserved to be punished. On the return trip, Deer would refer to "the drinking men" to describe the fighting on the Egyptian train and it clear he disassociated himself from the trouble-makers in Queenstown as well. But if not all the working-class men thought the Ayottes were very good representatives, then why was this image frequently evoked by Canadian observers?

Everyone knew that a good proportion of the voyageurs were shantymen, with the largest single group of men coming from the Ottawa Valley. In popular lore, the archetypal shantyman was Jos Montferrand (1802-1864), who worked as a voyageur for four years with the Hudson Bay Company before he began working in the timber trade. There are many similarities between his status as a folk-hero and the representation of the voyageurs as champion fighters of indomitable strength and endurance. Gérard Goyer and Jean Hamelin have noted that Montferrand has yet to find his biographer and what exists in the historiography is fragmentary. In their biographical sketch they draw attention to a common 19th century interpretation of what Montferrand meant to French-Canadians. Wilfrid Laurier, who published the first collection of Jos Montferrand stories in 1868 said

The secret of this popularity is that Joe Montferrand combined all the features of the national character, each as completely developed as humanly possible. In him undaunted bravery, muscular strength, thirst for danger, resistance to

fatigue – the distinctive qualities of the race 50 years ago – were heightened to an almost miraculous degree. In a word, Joe Montferrand was the most truly Canadien of all Canadiens ever known.

In their analysis of the social and political status of French-Canadians in this period, Goyer and Hamelin identify in Laurier's remarks a compensatory narrative for those who identified with a French-Canadian nation and felt restrained and controlled by an Anglo-British administration, institutions and ruling class.

Unable to realize their visions, French Canadians, between 1840 and 1880, built a symbolic country in their ideology, their legends, their literature, and their art. In the struggle they continued to wage against the English and against nature, French Canadians found hope and greater self-respect in the Montferrand legend.⁸⁹

Their emphasis on the legend as a compensatory narrative of self-respect raises the possibility that anglophone Canadians, observing the Nile Voyageurs as they occupied a clearly low-status position on a prestigious British military expedition, toyed with both the form and the content of this legend as a way to make sense of the voyageurs. Anglophone Canadians utilized the semantic resources of this pre-existing narrative form of the Canadien bucheron hero who fought the Anglais and the Irish gangs and they transposed it onto the Nile voyageurs who went abroad as Canadian voyageur conquerors who could never be intimidated by anyone who showed them disrespect: Irish police, Spanish police, Egyptians and even arrogant, interfering, condescending British officers, who they managed to gain authority over, if only for a limited time and in a limited sphere.

But there were certain members of the newspaper reading public who found any such suggestion of the voyageurs as conquerors to be completely unacceptable. Reading the *Globe* account from the Halifax pier, a writer who identified himself as "A CANADIAN," felt compelled to respond to many aspects of this article. The letter writer thought that "the conduct of a certain number" of the men was "not above reproach." He was critical of public

⁸⁹ Gérard Goyer and Jean Hamelin, "Montferrand, Joseph," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online*, <<http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?BioId=38728>> [retrieved 1 December 2011]

drunkenness and thought that the reported story of the murder of an Egyptian by a Canadian for stealing melons was "not a very gallant act." He chastised them for the lack of "modesty or self-deprecation" they showed when bragging about their work. What was of greatest concern, however, was the lack of respect shown by the men towards their officers. While "no one can deny that the officers of the British army may sometimes prove rather arrogant," he said that it was mostly the "inferior officers" who were most arrogant, and only "a small proportion of them." The real problem was, he wrote, that "non-military men often call by the name of arrogance that which often is but strict military discipline, without which an army would become a mere mob." Making references to their trip "the rather discreditable affair at Sydney" onward, the writer argues that the men did not know how to act like soldiers, much to the detriment of "the honor of the Canadian Contingent." This was a harsh criticism and quite a different tone than the exuberant portrayal provides by the *Globe's* reporter. More than this, however, it was a list of the ways in which they did not behave properly according to a military code ("gallant"), expectations of "strict military discipline and obedience," and the criteria for esteem by which a soldier was judged. He concluded stating that if a Canadian military contingent for the Sudan was to be selected the men should realize it will be a serious affair, with military discipline and not "a lark, where every man may do as he likes."⁹⁰

Community Receptions

The conclusion of the campaign led to much political acrimony in England and led Gladstone to resign over his perceived mishandling of the affair which led to Gordon's death. In Canada, the popular response to the voyageurs was generally very positive, however, and they were feted in their respective communities upon their return. In the months to come, the voyageurs would be publically thanked for their services by Wolseley, the Queen and the British Parliament, and medals were eventually sent in the mail to commemorate their

⁹⁰ Letter to editor, *Globe*, 12 March 1885. This letter writer was extremely well-informed as to the progress of the expedition, given the details he mentioned and it is likely that this was Denison's brother George. The former also signed his letters "CANADIAN."

service on the Nile. But the most immediate public recognitions of their efforts took place in the towns where they were recruited. The Montreal *Star* thought that the voyageurs had accomplished their work and won "hearty expressions of approval" from Wolseley "and from all the critics." They have reflected great credit upon their country," the paper thought, "and their countrymen ought to give them a hearty reception on their return."⁹¹ Each reception was unique and saw the articulation of different narratives of meaning to explain the significance of the work the men had done on the Nile.

Since late February there had been news of a planned reception for the men when the train stopped in Quebec City. The Snowshoe Clubs of Levis" planned a "grand demonstration and reception" for the voyageurs.⁹² The men from Trois-Rivières detrained there and then travelled along the north shore. In their own town they were greeted by the St-Jean-Baptiste Snowshoe Club with a rousing cheer of "vive la Canadienne!" The group proceeded to city hall where they were given a warm reception, with speeches. The reporter said that as the crowds gathered around to greet the men, it reminded him of the return of the Zouaves.⁹³ Comments were made about the men's piety, but there was no talk of the Queen or empire.

The reception was a much bigger affair in Caughnawaga, where they began planning a month in advance.⁹⁴ When the train stopped in Montreal at Bonaventure station, Deer said they were greeted by "a large crowd, among whom where many well-known faces and friends from home."⁹⁵ The *Star* described the greeting as "touching in the extreme." As with their departure, the press seemed preoccupied with the presence of women and other family members. The men "appeared fairly overcome with delight and gave free scope to their emotion, and tears flowed freely," a circumstance which, in the view of the reporter, was

⁹¹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885, citing the *Star*

⁹² Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 28 February 1885

⁹³ *L'Ère nouvelle* de Trois-Rivières, 10 March 1885

⁹⁴ *L'Ère nouvelle* de Trois-Rivières, 13 February 1885

⁹⁵ Deer p. 30

"contrary to the general idea of Indian stoicism". They "heartily kissed all the women of their tribe" and "exchanged warm embraces with the men." In another reference to the fight on the train mentioned in Deer's book, the paper noted that the Caughnawaga gang had been split up and Jackson and several of the others had gotten off the train at some point and would be arriving later.⁹⁶ After breakfast provided at a nearby hotel, some of the men returned with their families while others "drove through the city in a large wagon."⁹⁷ The following night there was a grand feast in a lavishly decorated Exhibition Hall in the village with a procession that included the Six Fusiliers brass band and the Tuque Bleue snowshoe club of Montreal. There were toasts and speeches by community leaders, visitors from the city, and some of the voyageurs.⁹⁸ Lord Melgund was invited, but sent his regrets.⁹⁹

The banquet hall was described as beautifully decorated with great care and the voyageurs "looked the very picture of health and their appearance in the military and naval uniforms which they wore back from the East was picturesque in the extreme." The *Star* reporter estimated that over 500 people were in attendance, including many from the city. The chair was William McLea Walbank, the land surveyor contracted by Indian Affairs, with Jackson and his men seated on the right and various city dignitaries and Grand Chiefs Jocks and his family on the left. At another table, the vice-chair was Grand Chief Williams with foreman Delisle and his gang on the right and other voyageurs on the left. The sequence of the toasts were to the Queen, The Army and Navy, Sir John A. Macdonald and the Indian Department, Jackson "and the Caughnawaga Contingent to the Nile", the Grand Chiefs, Visitors, "Snowshoeing and Lacrosse, our National Sports", Agriculture, "the educational progress of Caughnawaga," "the Ladies," the press and the chairman. The word "Canada" was not mentioned and the men were not referred to as the Canadian contingent, the Canadian voyageurs or the Nile voyageurs. Walbank praised the "returned voyageurs" and "severely

⁹⁶ Montreal *Star*, 6 March 1885

⁹⁷ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 7 March 1885

⁹⁸ Montreal *Star*, 9 March 1885

⁹⁹ LAC RG 07 G-19 vol 32 folder "Vol. 44 - Misc. Materials Aug 1884 - Feb 1885

censured" anyone who criticized the men for returning before the end of the campaign. They fulfilled their contract he said, and "pointed out that the Indians ... had to return by the 1st of May to swear personally as to their status if they wished to secure their share of the land of the reserve when it was divided." He apologized for Lord Melgund's absence and read a letter on his behalf that was "extremely laudatory." The *Star* said that Deer's response to the toast to voyageurs was "unique." He made a few short and straightforward remarks about Egypt being "a very poor country" with some good soil near the river but mostly sand. He said simply that they were "all glad to get back and find our friends well."¹⁰⁰

This grand ceremony of public recognition was the most formal and, given the size of the village, was the one most whole-heartedly embraced by the locality of any of the voyageur groups. The ceremony made no attempt to claim that the men had won glory for Canada, but on the contrary, framed their identification as the "Caughnawaga Contingent." The dockside speech from the *Ocean King* in September had articulated their mission in the framework of a Mohawk-Crown alliance and while their toasts acknowledge the political reality of the Canadian state, the identity of the contingent and what they achieved was framed here in a Caughnawaga national narrative that assumed a bilateral recognition from Britain that was incidental to Canada. They successfully won recognition from the Army and the British public, widely praised as the best of the boatmen, and never mentioned as those being insubordinate, mutinous or undisciplined. While the other members of the Canadian contingent complained about the British officers and the Egyptians, Jackson in his narrative, was much more discreet and diplomatic, aware as he was that, unlike Deer, who discussed more frankly the faults of the British officers and the abuses of "the drinking men," Jackson served as the spokesperson and representative of his people. Deer concluded his book much like he closed his speech, saying they were all just glad to see family and friends again and "well-pleased that the Egyptian Expedition was over."¹⁰¹ Jackson on the other hand framed his story more positively and closely tied to a national identity, speaking for all "his men,"

¹⁰⁰ Montreal *Star*, 9 March 1885

¹⁰¹ Deer p. 30

who were

well pleased with what we had seen in the land of the Pharos and proud to have shown the world that the dwellers on the banks of the Nile, after navigating it for centuries, could still learn something of the craft from the Iroquois Indians of North America and the Canadian voyageurs of many races.

Jackson was no "grumbler" and he expressed his "satisfaction at the handsome treatment accorded us by the British Government." If the British need our "assistance in the proposed Fall campaign in Egypt, they will be freely given."¹⁰² In the language used at the banquet and in Jackson's book, we can see why it would be a mistake to interpret the phrase "Canadian and Indian" as a discourse of power through which the settler society excluded and marginalized First Nations. Jackson deployed the same semantic distinction as a means to articulate his Mohawk nationality and articulate his claims of a direct relationship with the crown. While in Egypt, the British used the term "Canadian" rather indiscriminately, but back in his village, Jackson speaks of his "Caughnawaga boatmen" who are "Iroquois Indians" who travelled together with the "Canadian voyageurs of many races." All of the colonial discussions about imperial federation versus independence were of little concern for Jackson whose Caughnawaga identity gave him a separate narrative to make sense of his relations with the imperial government. For this reason, the recognition accorded to Jackson and his men at this banquet by the residents of Caughnawaga was unreserved and unambiguous.

The same cannot be true for the Ottawa contingent. As early as late January, when it was known that the men would be returning, there was talk in the papers about a reception¹⁰³ The Governor General did not organize the celebration, but was glad to hear a reception was planned and he offered to make a contribution to start a fund for it.¹⁰⁴ A mayoral proclamation was made followed by an announcement of the Governor-General's support and

¹⁰² Jackson p. 34

¹⁰³ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 31 January 1885

¹⁰⁴ LAC RG 07 G-19 vol 32 folder "Vol. 44 - Misc. Materials Aug 1884 - Feb 1885

the formation of a "reception committee" of twenty-three prominent citizens, including aldermen, senators, MPs and businessmen, all listed by name in the *Citizen*. Several musical bands offered their services as did the Frontenac and Canadian Snowshoe clubs.¹⁰⁵ On the 5th of March, a *Citizen* editorial promoted the event, calling for a "large turnout," but felt compelled the following day to rebuke those trying "to throw cold water on the movement for giving the voyageurs a cordial reception." The paper insisted "they will be cordially greeted. If it was the proper thing to give them a good 'send off' on their departure, why should they not be the recipients of some attention on their return home?"¹⁰⁶ One must assume there was a considerable whisper campaign about the appropriateness of celebrating the voyageurs if the *Citizen* felt compelled to publish such a statement. Even for those promoting the event, it was seen almost as a civic duty rather than an expression of spontaneous and genuine enthusiasm. If public opinion over the Nile Voyageurs was mixed, it might explain the ad in the paper the following day for commemorative photographs of the boatmen "at special reduced rates."¹⁰⁷ If there was any ambivalence towards the way the voyageurs represented the country before the empire, then those writing editorials and making speeches were polite enough to keep them to themselves. Public statements made that day frequently evoked the language of winning glory for Canada and showing loyalty to Empire. The *Ottawa Free Press* cheered them enthusiastically:

Hurrah stout hearts, well and bravely have you done your duty, though at times it has been hard and perilous, cheerfully and fearlessly have you faced the danger, and overcome it! Welcome home, an honour to your cherished country which proudly salutes you and totally delights to honour you.¹⁰⁸

Indications of ambivalence were therefore muted as the men arrived and were feted, the atmosphere was very positive.

¹⁰⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 March 1884

¹⁰⁶ *Ottawa Citizen*, 6 March 1885

¹⁰⁷ *Ottawa Citizen*, 7 March 1885

¹⁰⁸ *Ottawa Free Press*, 7 March 1885

On Saturday March 7th, "half the population of the city" seemed on the streets and gave "three hearty British cheers" as the train pulled in. The Frontenac Snowshoe club lined the platform, illuminating it with burning calcium lights. When the men had finished greeting their friends they formed a procession which was led by two musical bands, sleighs carrying the reception committee members (all named in the newspaper again), followed by "the voyageurs, on foot," the Hull Band and the Frontenac Snowshoe Club. The parade made a large loop from the train station west on Queen St., then East on Wellington past the Parliament Buildings, then through the market and back across the canal to the Drill Hall, where a luncheon banquet had been prepared. "The Frontenacs formed a guard to keep the crowds back" while the men enjoyed their lunch and then listened to speeches. Melgund praised the men, and spoke of "the interest with which their actions had been watched in this country." He referred to the recent praises of Mr. Cook, and said that while certain people "have tried to Pitch Hobs in the expedition" the work could not have been done better.¹⁰⁹ Another version of his speech appeared in the *Toronto Mail* and was no doubt a more condensed overview of the longer talk. This summary reveals some clear statements of what type of recognition Melgund expected to see at the conclusion of the expedition.

They had done well for Canada, and had distinguished themselves nobly. (Cheers.) Their career had been followed anxiously, and reports of their success had been received with the utmost pleasure, as every report had praised them. (Cheers.) Those who had regarded their services with disfavour at first had afterwards admitted that they were worth all the money and a great deal more. (Great cheers.)¹¹⁰

We have no way of knowing if Melgund truly believed the first of these three statements, but the other two would be difficult for him to defend with evidence. It is a very appropriately polite speech that articulates Melgund's hopes and expectations for the men and gives no hints of any ways in which any of them might have been disappointed. Mr. Mackintosh of the organizing committee echoed Melgund's remarks and said the men had "returned covered with glory, and he was glad to see that the sentiment for the empire was so strong in Canada."

¹⁰⁹ *Ottawa Citizen*, 8 March 1885

¹¹⁰ *Peterborough Daily Review*, 7 March 1885, from a report from the *Toronto Mail*

No one is recorded as cheering for this portion, and he then said he'd stop his speech and keep it short because no doubt the men were eager to see "the girls they had left behind them. (Cheers)."¹¹¹ Six more members of the reception committee were identified and their patriotic speeches described. The bands played into the "wee small hours," when "God Save the Queen" was sung and "the weary voyageurs and their friends" returned "to their homes."¹¹²

The Ottawa reception was bigger and louder and more formal than any others but with this size and scope came evidence of several disconnects. Press coverage of the preparations and the reception seemed to pay more attention to the prominent citizens on the organizing committee than to the voyageurs, who seemed to be given no opportunity to have even one of their own members address the crowd. The messages preserved therefore are primarily those of Ottawa's elites and in general they followed an official script that was patriotic and positive. There is evidence above that prominent citizens had mixed feelings about the reception. So too did some of the voyageurs apparently, since several of them skipped out on the whole affair. It was estimated that about 160 of the men arrived at the Union depot, but as they wound their "circuitous route" through the streets of the city to the drill hall, only 120 arrived, "many of them hurrying straight home."

In Peterborough there was a very active committee organizing a reception for the 11 returning men, to be held on the same Saturday night as the ones in Caughnawaga and Ottawa. Based on a telegram sent from Halifax, they expected the men to arrive in Peterborough on the 6:45 pm train and the *Review* announced that they would be greeted by town council, the fire brigade band, the City Band, the Lacrosse club and a portion of the 57th Battallion. A parade route through the town was planned, ending up at the roller skaing rink with a banquet. But because they were held up in Ottawa "settling with the officers" they did not arrive on Saturday "and the arrangements for the reception were therefore abandoned." They arrived Sunday morning and even though their train was at 5:30 am, there were still "a

¹¹¹ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 7 March 1885, from a report from the Toronto *Mail*

¹¹² Ottawa *Citizen*, 8 March 1885

few people at the station" to greet them. Instead of a parade, however, "their entry into town was a quiet one, the day precluding any demonstration." The Sabbath-observing people of Peterborough evidently could not have gotten out the bands or made any speeches at the roller skating rink on a Sunday. It would seem that the desire to publically celebrate the return of the men and their accomplishments was not strong enough for them to reschedule to a weeknight or the following weekend as there is no mention of a banquet in either of the two Peterborough papers at any time in the following weeks.

Although there was no reception, they did seek out two men, John Welsh and Murray Matheson, for their views on the trip. They both gave "the same account" of the work and the death of Peterborough native John Faulkner as Sherlock's letters. The men said some of the stories of "uproarious conduct" were "either fabricated or greatly exaggerated." Such denials often sit side by side with admissions of the same behaviour. The two men went on to explain how the soldiers were indeed liberated on the *Pooneh*, for example. At times, newspaper sensationalism and the tropes of the working-class wild-man may be exaggerating some of the stories, and the high tolerance for violence and "uproarious conduct" amongst some individuals lead to different assessments of the the severity of the same situation. The same was true of conflicting opinions over officers, although there was an increasing tendency for men in this wave of returnees to criticize the Canadian officers once they were back home. Welsh and Matheson "complained of the officers" saying "if they asked a civil question of Captain Aumond" or any of the Canadian officers except Kennedy, they would "either get an uncivil answer or none at all, and that they did not treat them as men." The reporter called the complaints of the two men "trivial," but admitted that when such things are "frequently repeated" it leads to "general dissatisfaction." It was "owing to that dissatisfaction with the officers that more of the men did not remain." In sum, the two men told the reporter that despite the troubles and hardships they were "well satisfied with the trip" and "would not have missed it for any amount of money." They were, however, "sorry that they did not arrive here on Saturday night" since so much work had gone into preparing a

reception.¹¹³

A local Peterborough poet, William Telford, prepared a poem for the reception that never happened but it was printed in the *Review* after the weekend. The poem praised the "brave heroes of the Nile" and portrayed the worry turned to relief on the part of family members awaiting their return. Telford felt it necessary to state that they won glory, even though they were civilians.

You were not called to face the foe, with rifle, lance or swords
To stand like targets to be shot by bloody Arab hordes;
Though not exposed to shot or shell, to steel or Snider ball,
Your daring skill with boat and oar brings praise from one and all.

Like Wolseley writing about "being shot at" and Denison's thrill at being "under fire," this writer understands that glory is possible when being attacked, "*though*" praise can be won another way, for their "daring skill." Most important for him is who has praised them:

Your dangerous voyage and your success has spread both far and near,
General Wolseley and his gallant troops sound out your praises clear,
The British people, British press, applauds you through their fyle,
Justly you may feel proud to-night, brave heroes of the Nile.

He paints the voyageurs as representatives of Canada who will continue to aid Britain however they need it, even though the manner of assistance is uncertain in the wake of the refusal of troops for the Sudan:

Our Canada is young, my boys, and little known to fame,
Your deeds in Egypt will impart fresh lustre to her name
If Britain needs your aid again, when she makes her appeal
You will stand forth to wield the blade, yes, either wood or steel¹¹⁴

Telford's play on the double sense of 'blade' was clever, as such things go, but an unstable metaphor if one hoped to imply that these two roles - civilian and soldier - were ultimately equally valued. Canada is so unaccustomed to fame, that it will take any sort of it that it can get, he seems to imply. Few will equate a paddle to a bayonet, however. Worst still is some

¹¹³ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 9 March 1885

¹¹⁴ Peterborough *Daily Review*, 9 March 1885

sort of hybrid image, where one imagines a boy with a wooden sword, playing at being soldier, perhaps like the local Peterborough militia battalion, which Britain would not accept for service.

The first group to leave home and the last to return were the Winnipeg contingent. A member of Winnipeg City Council who happened to be in Ottawa for the initial meeting of their reception planning committee informed his eastern friends that Winnipeg had already set aside \$200 for a "demonstration to the contingent" and that "several societies had postponed their annual celebrations in order to give *éclat* to the occasion."¹¹⁵ As they headed north from Toronto to catch a steamer for Thunder Bay, a reporter from the *Globe* got on the train with some of the Manitoba contingent and had a chance to talk to D. S. Haight, already cited above in his depiction of some of the events of the *Pooneh*. He also told the reporter that the real reason many of the men came home at this point was that they thought they could earn more money than when in the service of the Imperial Government."¹¹⁶ Haight offered to take the reporter up to the second-class car where he could meet "the Indians" and get introduced to Chief Prince, whom the reporter described as "a powerful-looking man" who "wore an Arab fez, which made him look like the Mahdi himself"¹¹⁷ Prince's race was the most likely reason for such a surprising remark made about a man who had just been part of an expedition against the Madhi. What the reporter was really saying was that Prince looked even more foreign and potentially hostile than he might normally, since he was wearing such an exotic hat. But in all pictorial representations, the Mahdi wore a white turban. He would never wear a fez, which represented the rule of the Ottomans through the Khedive, against whom the Mahdi fought. The figure most commonly shown with a Turkish fez in this period was Gordon but the *Globe* reporter's racial categories would hardly lead him to say that the fez made Prince "look like Chinese Gordon himself." While Prince and Haight were both "Canadians" in British terminology while on the Nile, Prince became less Canadian and more

¹¹⁵ *Ottawa Citizen*, 4 March 1885

¹¹⁶ *Globe*, 9 March 1885

¹¹⁷ *Globe*, 9 March 1885

Indian the further west the train travelled, and for the first time, the men seemed separated in different classes of transport.

The Manitoba group pulled into an empty Winnipeg train station because they appeared "much to the surprise of many, who did not expect them to arrive for another twenty-four hours." There were no bands, town council, speeches or snowshoes awaiting for them at the station. They went to have breakfast at a local hotel and then many went home, with no public ceremony. The *Sun* reporter interviewed a couple of the men, "most of whom are from St. Peter's," after they had finished their breakfast. Jeremiah Johnston and Alex Kennedy said they did not regret going at all, but "by Judas, we are glad to get home." As the men were eating their breakfast, the planning committee, with its \$200 budget, was just beginning to meet, when they heard that the men were already in town, they went to find them, but realized that most had been "scattered over the town" and it was "next to impossible to get them together, so that any formal reception could be given."¹¹⁸ The committee finally agreed to cover their breakfast and buy them their train tickets to St. Peter's. The mayor and councillors got to the station just before the men were to leave, and while they were "assembled in the waiting room" at the depot, town council welcomed them "home again to their native country." After some mutual kind words of rote praise, "three cheers were then given for the voyageurs" who boarded their train and started for home.¹¹⁹

Each of the returns was quite different in character. In Trois-Rivières, there was not an elaborate banquet and speeches, as in Caughnawaga and Ottawa, but there were bands and a large crowd gathered to warmly welcome the men home. There seemed no coherent story about either empire or a French-Canadian identity, other than the somewhat tenuous links to the Papal Zouaves, who were soldiers not boatmen, and who fought for something dear to Canadian culture, their religion. The British context of the expedition did not create any difficulties for townspeople wishing to celebrate the achievements of their men. The empire

¹¹⁸ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885

¹¹⁹ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 11 March 1885

was a tolerated fact, but it was a narrative of little resonance that was not utilized to give meaning to their experience. In Caughnawaga, we find perhaps the most coherent public ceremony, where there was a general agreement amongst all that the people of Caughnawaga were allies of the Queen and would respond to her call in a reliable, consistent and recurring fashion, as they had for over a century. A "Canadian" narrative had no resonance here, and the federal government was a tolerated fact of life. Also absent in their speeches and toasts were any attempt to contrast or complement civilian and military roles, and not shaded disappointment in their civilian status. Ottawa held the largest gathering, which is not surprising given its site as the capital and the large number of men from this area. The ceremony, however, was martial and imperial and nationalistic and it completely excluded the voices of the voyageurs, many of whom preferred to go home rather than listen to the speeches at the drill hall. Those who did stay were reported to cheer more references made to the girls who were waiting for them than for talk about patriotism. In Peterborough the men came too late, and cultural codes denied them of a Sunday celebration, but no substitute banquet was held the following week. In Winnipeg, the same town council that decided against holding an official departure ceremony in September, found itself unprepared because they didn't carefully monitor the men's itinerary. The St. Peter's group received some polite words from a city council scrambling to find voyageurs to congratulate. From these welcoming ceremonies, the local communities each expressed, through their behaviours and speeches, how they made sense of the entire Nile Voyageur experience as observers. The way they recognized the men, or failed to formally recognize them as the case may be, gave hints at the possible ways that the men would or would not cohere with the varying narratives of national identity articulated by the people in their communities. The ways in which the men would be remembered, by their cohesion with shared narratives of meaning, was already evident. But narratives of meaning, the semantic patterns of identification and solidarity, and even the cultural values which underpin the criteria for esteem in different contexts, none of these are fixed. They are constantly in flux, in negotiation and in a state of struggle. Indeed, colonial Canada stood on the brink of a struggle arising out of grievances and putting forward demands for recognition which were driven by a moral outrage at perceived

disrespect and injustice. When the St. Peter's men went home to their community, they had one week of peace before the Northwest was rocked by news of the establishment of Riel's Provisional Government and the cutting of cables to the east. Before the country had any time to even attempt to settle the "Nile Voyageurs" into any cultural expressions of national meaning, the most violent, divisive and polarizing event of the period reframed everything.

Assessing the Value of the Voyageurs

While some shantymen were criticized for drunkenness or indiscipline, they were generally considered to be strong, skilled workers. Some were charged, however, with outright incompetence and many of these reports were circulated in Canada at the time the first group was returning. Several British officers published articles claiming that some Canadians "were not voyageurs at all" but clerks, bankers, and lawyers. The *Star* reprinted one report that was deemed to be "very severe on the Canadians":

It was my bad luck to get hold of eight of this gang, and the result was, which might have been expected, they ran my boats on every rock they could manage; made me track mile after mile of rapid which I afterwards found Indians and voyageurs sailed and rowed through.

These faux-voyageurs were primarily the "lawyer voyageurs" of Winnipeg and their friends, many of whom were militiamen. Thus, those who seemed most to resemble those Britons from whom many in colonial Canada sought recognition as an equals were exactly the type of men that the British officers did not want, wishing instead they had been given "Indians and (real) voyageurs." The above letter writer, who was published in *Army and Navy Gazette*, estimated that there was

about 40 per cent of the Canadians who are not voyageurs at all, and considering the tremendous responsibility they all have, I think it is a crying shame on those who were entrusted with the recruiting of these men ever to have sent them out here, and I certainly am of opinion that they should be hauled over the coals for it.¹²⁰

Since this was a critique of Lansdowne and Melgund's recruiting efforts, it was not surprising

¹²⁰ Montreal *Star*, 10 March 1885

that they swiftly responded in defence of the qualifications of the Canadians. Their defence was more data than defiance, however, as Melgund presented competing statistics. Faced with charges that the Canadians were not really even Canadians but were instead "broken-down Englishmen who went for amusement," Melgund insisted that 50% were "first-class picked men," 25% were "good" and 25% were "indifferent."¹²¹ By mid-March, with more updated numbers he reported that out of 382 men, 28% were excellent, 26 individuals were inefficient and the rest were good.¹²² As people were trying to come to some understanding of how to make sense of the Nile voyageurs now that their trip was over, it seemed that the public debate had shifted to the contingent's degree of incompetence.

The War Office's final report on the Nile Voyageur contingent said that all but 45 did work that was "admirable", whereas Jackson's gang was "excellent". It refrained from ranking the different gangs, but stated that "the Indians were best adapted to working the many rapids" and proved invaluable.¹²³ In the eyes of British officers, Egyptians, Canadian commanding officer Lt.-Col. Frederick Denison, and even other voyageurs, the gangs from Kahnawake and St. Peter's were clearly the most skilled boatmen. Criticisms were at times directed towards boatmen from Winnipeg, Ottawa, and Trois-Rivières, but none were made against those from St. Peter's or Caughnawaga.¹²⁴ After the expedition, the *Montreal Star* acknowledged, "[N]o matter what is said about the Canadian contingent as a whole, the general opinion seems to be that the Indians acquitted themselves in a manner highly creditable to themselves and gave every satisfaction by their performance."¹²⁵ Generous in its praise, the *Star* maintained the sharp distinction between Canadian and Indian, even when the British frequently obscured it, and even when such confusion would benefit the name of Canada to have a little Indian credit rub off onto "Canada." Instead, the distinctions remained

¹²¹ *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 18 February 1885

¹²² *Winnipeg Daily Sun*, 10 March 1885

¹²³ "Report of Brigadier-General F. W. Grenfell, 4 July 1885", Stacey, *The Nile Voyageurs*, pp. 219–220.

¹²⁴ "Denison to Melgund, 17 October 1884", Stacey, *The Nile Voyageurs*, p. 150; Butler, *The Campaign of the Cataracts*, p. 143.

¹²⁵ *Montreal Star*, 8 March 1885

and they were a "credit to themselves," but not to the country.

There were no complaints ever directed towards the working class men from the lumber districts of St. Maurice or the Ottawa Valley. They were occasionally the source of some disruptions on shore leaves from Montreal to Wady Halfa, but their work on the Nile was solid. The editors of Labat's book, gave their own interpretation of the success of "their" voyageurs, which the reader would be safe in assuming were all francophone Canadiens. The expedition, they said was situation where "«des Kanucks» savent en remonter à «Jack» dans son propre métier." While some thought that the English soldiers "ne voient pas les Canadiens d'un bon œil, en un mot qu'ils sont jaloux de leurs prouesses," and that the English thought they could perhaps do without the Canadians, this was not the case. They wanted to tell the reader that Canadians were both needed and seen in a good light by the English, who ruled the waves, they said, "mais pour la navigation des rivières, ils peuvent encore apprendre quelque chose des Canadiens."¹²⁶

The Winnipeg *Sun* tried to make sense out of the "hostile criticism" being printed in the British press and ultimately had to admit that their local group was part of the problem. The London *World* called the voyageurs "one of the most useless and costly experiments" in the expedition, calling the men "lazy and insubordinate," "unclean in their habits", "unruly in their behaviour," and the cause of "perpetual trouble" on their way home. They were unnecessary and their departure was "an intense relief to those who were placed over them." This was an exaggeration and "extremely rough language" thought the *Sun*. The men were neither lazy nor unclean, but the editor admitted it was possible they were insubordinate being unaccustomed to "a rigid discipline." Responding to the critique in the *Army and Navy Gazette*, that many of them were "no voyageurs at all," the *Sun* admitted that, based on ""the character of some of the Manitoba contingent," this was "substantially correct, and it is a disgrace that it should be so" since it was a distraction from "the really excellent work" done

¹²⁶ Labat pp. 193-194

by most of the voyageurs

which was fully recognized and appreciated not only by Lord Wolseley, but also by the correspondents of the English newspapers. It is a great pity that on the first occasion on which Canadians for their special qualifications have been called upon to do service for the Mother Country anything should have occurred calculated to cast discredit upon the country, or upon the wisdom of the brave general at whose instance they were engaged for the Soudan campaign.¹²⁷

The *Sun*, one of the original critics of the expedition, was now disappointed with these false voyageurs, who had been selected by Kennedy, with criteria that were evidently too lax. The paper worried that their inclusion had diminished the credit won by the real voyageurs and had tarnished the reputation of both Canada and General Wolseley. No mention was made about Manitoba winning its "share of the glory" which had been a concern for the paper in September.

Surveying the Canadian and British response to the Voyageurs upon their return, an unnamed writer in the *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, felt the need to defend the reputation of the voyageurs because the Canadians "have not received the full credit due to them for the part they took in an expedition" that was both dangerous and disastrous. Not only were they deprived of the praise they deserved, but "they have been spoken of as having done it as having been insubordinate and of little use." Instead, they "showed all the high skill which was expected of them." They always "rendered implicit obedience to" the officer, or what they would have called "the head man" in charge of a station, but they didn't feel bound to "follow the bidding of any captain or lieutenant who thought fit to give them directions on his own account," which the author thinks was as it should be. They are praised for the "pluck", "courage" and "good-will" and seen as not just skilled but also "men of considerable intelligence." For proof, he cites Jackson's book as an "excellent account" of the experience. The voyageurs performed work that was beyond the skills and training of the blue-jackets [sailors], they were excellent carpenters and fine writers.

¹²⁷ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 18 March 1885

In every way, then, these brave, zealous, and skilful Canadians worked admirably, and surely they merit different treatment from that which they have received. They did, in most thorough fashion, all they were sent out to do, and something over and above. As a reward, they have been first depreciated and then politely ignored.

The author thought that this was a campaign in which "much that was glorious was marred," and one of these things has been the memory of the Nile Voyageurs. He imagines that it is perhaps because they "had no one to puff them, and did not know how, or did not care, how to puff themselves" that the Voyageurs have not yet received "that recognition which is most justly their due."¹²⁸ Based on comments and observations made by the author, it seems likely he was a British officer who worked with the Canadians and directly experienced the campaign until its end. He writes with the expectation that men such as this might not even be seeking "recognition" and "credit" but if they were, they might need a champion to "puff them." This was not something that many of them would have expected from their commanding officer, Col. Denison, who was damned with faint praise in any letter or book that mentioned him, and who according to his own diary, seemed incapable of either controlling the men or developing the bonds of mutual respect considered desirable in both a militia setting and a work gang. He did not even learn the craft of self-promotion from Wolseley, Butler or his older brother by writing a book about the experience. His true feelings might not ever have been so harshly expressed as Egerton's, when he called them "river hogs," but Denison made no public attempts to "puff up" the voyageurs in the public imagination. It must be admitted that Wolseley never missed an opportunity to praise the voyageurs, writing positive letters in December to respond to negative press in the *Morning Post* and then in April, he wrote from Cairo to praise the Canadians and their work, despite "unfounded statements" in various English papers. The troops were very satisfied "to find the Canadians represented on this Expedition, and sharing with them their privations and risks. At a time when English, Irish, and Scotch soldiers are employed, the presence with them of Canadians, shews in a marked manner the bonds which united all parts of our great

¹²⁸ "The Voyageurs on the Nile," *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, No. 1,553, Vol 60, 1 August 1885, p. 142

Empire."¹²⁹ Wolseley was a busy man, however, and while gracious and appreciative in his correspondence, could not be expected to undertake the role of "puffer" for the voyageurs, who never did find their a champion or storyteller to weave them into a narrative of meaning.

Macdonald, Between Insurrections

In the Canadian historiography of the Sudan crisis, a single letter written by the Prime Minister has been cited by prominent historians as perhaps the sole document necessary for understanding this event. A consensus version of Canada's stance towards the Sudan war emerged which has been trusted by succeeding generations of historians not particularly interested in revisiting the subject. But the consensus view of Macdonald's March 12th letter to Tupper about Canadian involvement in the war is highly problematic and needs to be revised, and considered in the broader context of what came before and what came after the writing of this letter. One month after the War Office refused the offer of Canadian troops for the Sudan, Macdonald wrote a letter to his High Commissioner in London to try to discourage him from continuing to promote the idea of Canadian participation in this conflict. Tupper had been making public speeches which claimed that Canada wanted to prove "her readiness on every occasion and at every time to give her zealous support to whatever is necessary to maintain the prestige of the greatest Empire upon which the sun has ever shone."¹³⁰ Understandably, Macdonald wanted to put a damper on such excessive talk. Tupper continued to promote the idea of sending Canadian troops to the Sudan, even after the War Office had closed the door on this possibility. In response Macdonald tried to reason with him:

We do not stand in the same position as the Australasia. The Suez Canal is nothing to us, and we do not ask England to quarrel with France or Germany for our sake. The offer of those colonies is a good move on their part [New South Wales], and somewhat like Cavour's sending Sardinian troops to the

¹²⁹ Toronto Public Library, Broadsides and Printed Ephemera Collection, Baldwin Room, Wolseley to Lansdowne 13 April 1885, Cairo

¹³⁰ LAC MG 26A - Sir John A. Macdonald fonds, Correspondence, Reel 1566, Vol 155 p. 63271, copy of *Canadian Gazette*, 3 March 1885 (Charles Tupper at the Annual Dinner of the Associated Chambers of Commerce, London)

Crimea. Why should we waste men and money in this wretched business? England is not at war but merely helping the Khedive to put down an insurrection and now that Gordon is gone, the motive of aiding in the rescue of our countrymen is gone with him. Our men and money would therefore be sacrificed to get Gladstone and Co. out of the hole they have plunged themselves into by their own imbecility. [sic]"¹³¹

The importance of this letter has been exaggerated and its proper context has been misunderstood. It will be helpful to briefly review the consensus interpretation of this quote and then to explain why it is only one small and relatively insignificant component constituting our understanding of Canada's role in this imperial conflict.

Donald Creighton explains that Macdonald had a conception of the Empire evolving into a "league or alliance of Great Britain and the 'auxilliary kingdoms' of Canada and Australia." Eventually, he hoped that Canada would be a "source of strength" to the empire militarily, but the militia was still too weak and Sudan did not seem to be an important cause at this stage. Like all things, "haste would be perilous," and he did not wish to commit Canadian troops too early to the wrong cause. With this strategic approach, Creighton said, Macdonald "remained unsympathetically aloof from the mood of belligerent patriotism which seemed to be sweeping the Dominion." Macdonald is portrayed as more patient and rational in contrast to Tupper, who Creighton sees as possessed by a more emotional and sentimental imperialism.¹³² In *Canada and the Age of Conflict*, Stacey refers to this letter and sees it as evidence that, to Macdonald's credit, he saw that "the crisis caused by Gordon's death was really emotional rather than military."¹³³ Explaining the popular appeal of "imperialism in English Canada" in the late 19th century, Carl Berger said that Laurier "reluctantly bowed" to imperialism by sending troops to the South African war, which was an indication of the "growth of imperial sentiment" since 1885 when "Macdonald dismissed suggestions for

¹³¹ Joseph Pope ed. *The Correspondence of Sir John Macdonald*. New York: Doubleday, 1921, Macdonald to Tupper 12 March 1885, p. 338

¹³² Creighton. *John A. Macdonald: vol II - The Old Chieftain*. p. 409-411

¹³³ Stacey *Canada and the Age of Conflict* p. 43 In saying it was "emotional not military" Stacey did not feel the need to explain this unusual distinction and it is beyond the scope of this study to unpack such a complex puzzle.

Canadian military involvement in the Sudan with a quip."¹³⁴ Desmond Morton, in his *Military History of Canada* quoted this letter as evidence that Macdonald had no "interest in imperial defence matters."¹³⁵ Laura Silver is one of the many historians who trusts that Morton got it right, leading to her expression of the consensus view that when the "ultimate test of manhood" presented itself with the Sudan war, soldiers "could have been sent were it not for Prime Minister John A. Macdonald's" reluctance to get involved in this "wretched business."¹³⁶ Silver had trusted Morton, who had leaned upon Berger, Stacey and Creighton and their cumulative faults led her somewhat astray.

Taken together, these interpretations present a distorted image of the situation. First and foremost, they all ascribe to Macdonald powers which were not his. Canadian troops were not refused by the Canadian Prime Minister, they were refused by Gladstone's cabinet on the advice of the War Office. Secondly, to the extent that these interpretations presume causality, the chronological sequence of events is incorrect. Macdonald wrote this letter a full month after the War Office announced publically that Canadian troops would not be required. It should not be read as a record of decision, but an after-the-fact rationalization of a *fait accompli*. He is directing Tupper to give up on a lost cause, while adopting a reflective tone to explain why Canada had no interest in pursuing this matter, safe in the knowledge that it had already been decided. If London had asked for Canadian troops in mid-February instead of rejecting them, a different chain of events would have unfolded and this letter would not have been written. Third, the statement from Macdonald has little or nothing to do with either a "mood of belligerent patriotism" or a relative domestic popularity of imperialism. The public mood was fragmentary, shifting and complex, as shown in this chapter. As well, imperialist thinkers like Grant and Parkin were not eager to see active service. Conversely, the men who did wish to go shoot people in a war in the fall of 1884 and in February 1885,

¹³⁴ Carl Berger, *A Sense of Power*, p 5

¹³⁵ Morton. *Military History of Canada* p. 109

¹³⁶ Laura Silver, "Canada Fit for War: Image and Development of the Canadian Soldier, 1870-1914," *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 23: 2007/2008, p. 12

said that they would be willing to go to "Egypt or anywhere" and would be eager to do any type of work required of them, so long as it involved soldiering. Those actually eager to fight in the two instances, somewhat surprisingly, did not speak of empire and country. Instead, many saw fighting in wars as a way to win credit, honour and to prove their manliness. As we have seen, even some voyageurs joked that participating in the expedition would increase their chances of getting married when they got home. Creighton exaggerated the existence of a homogenous "mood," while Berger minimized it and gave far too much weight to intellectual ideas of imperial federation, which were not strong motivators for those who wanted to fight. Similarly, measuring the mood of Canadians does not change the fact that this was a decision made in London. Fourthly, this letter was private and did not at all align with the public persona Macdonald projected throughout the winter of 1884-1885. To say aloud what he said in this letter would make him sound more aligned with the editorial board of the *Globe* than the defender of empire that he was. It is incorrect to read this letter as meaning that Macdonald wished to dampen public imperialism when in fact many in the press were attempting to dampen Macdonald's imperial enthusiasm. Morton's interpretation that Macdonald was uninterested in imperial defence matters is a misreading of the letter taken out of the context of his public statements during this period. In fact, his reference to "money and men" reveals the extent to which Macdonald was content to use the imperial connection to keep Canada's defence costs marginal, as Buckner has pointed out.¹³⁷ The final reason that these prominent Canadian historians have misread this letter is that, like Macdonald, they have assumed that Canadian soldiers are historically significant and workers are not, and thus a single private letter with no policy impact about not sending soldiers is more important than dozens of letters written by actual Canadian participants in the Nile expedition. In other words, to the extent that they used this piece of evidence to draw conclusions about Canada and the Sudan conflict, they all focussed on a fragment from the Prime Minister and completely forgot about the Nile voyageurs.

¹³⁷ Philip Buckner, *Canada and the British Empire*, p. 70

Macdonald's letter to Tupper is indeed a very revealing document that deserves a fresh re-read. At its simplest level, it should not be read as a statement of policy on defence, imperial relations or external affairs, but rather, it is a simple directive to his over-enthusiastic High Commissioner to let sleeping dogs lie on this issue and stop raising unrealistic expectations. Macdonald was relieved that Canada was not asked to send troops because he knew the Canadian militia was not ready for such a mission and he did not want a failed military experience to sour the public appetite for imperial partnerships of a more elevated and prestigious level that he imagined in his own particular imperial vision. The Sudan was not worth wasting Canadian lives over, in other words. The most important observation to make at the end of this study is that Macdonald seems to have completely forgotten the voyageurs. He thought the war in the Sudan was a "wretched affair" and it was not worth "wasting men" on it. Why did he not say "more men"? Had he forgotten the Canadians who had been dying there at a rate of two per month? Macdonald may have forgotten about them altogether in this moment. To give him the benefit of the doubt, he might have thought that the affair was a worthy cause in September, but was now "wretched" after the death of Gordon, who he calls one of "our countrymen." Macdonald's understanding of "country" is revealed here and Morton excluded that part of the quote in his analysis. Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of this quote, for those studying empire and settler societies, and in particular for students of the "Northwest Rebellion", is that Macdonald reveals through his language usage, that he categorizes the war in the Sudan as an "insurrection." The use of words such as "mutiny," "insurrection," "loyal tribes" and "rebels" are part of a larger racial imperialist discourse that understands the subjects of empire as sub-national peoples, who do not really have countries, armies or wars. Such a discourse does not recognize colonized peoples as capable of anything other than "loyalty" or "disloyalty." Britain fought wars against the USA or the Prussians and insurrections against the Sudanese. It is noteworthy but not surprising that Macdonald employs the same language.

Shortly after Macdonald penned his letter to Tupper, another "insurrection" broke out, but this one was in the Canadian Northwest. The death of Gordon led to a groundswell of offers

from militia officers who desired to fight in "Egypt or anywhere." How many of those men, freshly rejected by the War Office, turned west a few weeks later to fight the Métis instead of the Mahdi? How many of the journals, letters and newspaper accounts of the "Northwest rebellion" contain references to Gordon, the Mahdi or the Egyptian campaign and what insights might be gleaned from this? Might it be possible that the six months of intense newspaper coverage of the Nile expedition, following the progress of the Nile Voyageurs, might have reinforced tropes of race and imperial conflict, increasing their ubiquity as semantic resources to be utilized in the fight against Riel and his allies? In early January, Riel was reported to be active in the Northwest again, and he was portrayed as a legal counsel, "advising the half-breeds to make a demand upon the Government for compensation for the whole Northwest." He returned from the US to strategically set up a treaty negotiation system, with fees paid to "extinguish the half-breed claim."¹³⁸ At this point, Riel was portrayed in the papers as a sane, cunning lawyer. Soon he would be represented through a very different set of race metaphors.

In the House of Commons, as a way of discrediting the forces of resistance in Saskatchewan, Macdonald called Louis Riel a "sort of half-breed Mahdi" whom the Métis look up to "with a sort of superstitious regard."¹³⁹ Making such a comparison implied that the Aboriginal fighters in the Northwest were analogous to "rebellious" Sudanese tribes against which the British had recently been fighting, supported by the Nile Voyageurs. The Liberals later reminded Macdonald of this quote. Blake listed the many grievance of the Métis and Indians which were ignored by the government, and which caused such "disappointment" that they sent for Riel as their champion, who was "their El Mahdi, their Stuart, their Rochejaquelon." Laurier said that if Macdonald was going to compare Riel to the Mahdi, he had to realize that a leader cannot bring a people from a state of peace to a state of war unless there were already "deep-seated and long-felt feelings of grievances." He said that although we "know

¹³⁸ *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 8 January 1885

¹³⁹ *Official report of the debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger, 1885), 26 March 1885, p. 764.

little about the Mahdi," what is known is that he brought the Sudanese, who had been "suffering for years and years from most despotic rule," into rebellion "by promising to relieve them from the state of suffering" they were in.¹⁴⁰ Macdonald compared Riel to the Mahdi, positioning the Canadian federal government as analogous to the British empire, battling savage tribes in the desert, who were led by fanatical religious leaders. Blake and Laurier spoke of the Mahdi in more heroic terms, battling against an Oriental despot, presumably Macdonald, playing the role of the Khedive. In both cases, however, Riel found himself unfavourably linked to an enemy and fanatic who had declared holy war on the British empire. The Nile Expedition did not only lend its metaphors and semantic resources to the struggle of the Canadian state against the Riel and his forces. Several members of the Nile voyageur contingent, most notably some of the Winnipeg militiamen returned from Egypt and continued west to the front in Saskatchewan. The "Winnipeg Light Infantry" included several voyageurs "just back from the Gordon Relief Expedition up the Nile fell readily into the ranks."¹⁴¹

Those who Re-engaged

The group of seventy-six Canadians who re-engaged ascended the Nile until the battle of Kirbekan and after a limited ascent of the Nile past this point, they were given the word to begin a rapid retreat to Korti, where they reconvened with Wolseley and the bulk of the assembled troops. The Canadians were asked to re-engage again, as the termination of the entire campaign had not yet been decided, but all of the Canadians opted to go home. General Brackenbury thanked Col. Denison and the Canadians "for their courage and energy in sharing the dangers of the campaign,"¹⁴² and the men began their return trip home. Unlike the first group, this reduced band did not travel as one body, since many of the men became ill and were hospitalized, leaving in small clusters at different times. The voyageur

¹⁴⁰ *Official report of the debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa: MacLean, Roger, 1885), 6 - 7 July 1885, pp. 3084, 3121

¹⁴¹ William Briggs, *The making of the Canadian West : being the reminiscences of an eye-witness*. 2nd ed. Toronto, Ontario 1905, p. 153

¹⁴² *Peterborough Daily Review*, 9 March 1885

correspondent for the *Globe* noted in December that no one would be stopping in Dongola because "the smallpox has made its appearance there."¹⁴³ Unfortunately for several of the soldiers and the voyageurs, it had spread to other villages along the upper Nile as well, and the disease claimed the lives of Solomon Bigeault of Ottawa, John Sherlock, the voyageur correspondent for the Peterborough *Daily Review*, Patrick Leonard, Daniel McLean and Col. William N. Kennedy, all of Winnipeg.

There were very few examples of newspaper editorials or comments that tried to make any sense of the death of the 16 Canadians who died on the campaign. Was it glorious to drown in a rapid? Wolseley said that he "hated" to see men die thus because they had none of the opportunity to win glory that was available on the battlefield when "being shot at." After the first couple of deaths on the Nile, the Toronto *Telegram* mused that "It is a long journey to Egypt only to die."¹⁴⁴ This seemed a more poetic way of saying the same thing, that drowning was "only" dying, which is something that a shantyman could have done on the Ottawa river. The word "only" implies that "dying" is something less than "dying in battle." One can die for one's country on the battlefield, but not apparently in a rapid. Rara Avis wrote a poem, using this line as its melancholy refrain (eg. "And widowed and fatherless echo the cry / 'Tis a long way to Egypt only to die.") It has nothing of glory and honour about it, but is only sadness of family, "the hearts that you love" and "friends of youth" who are all overcome by sadness.¹⁴⁵

The men died in a far off land, dislocated from any demarcated physical space that is often a key component of memorialization and commemoration. Henderson was buried at sea, two fell off the train, several disappeared in the Nile and others died in hospitals of fever, dysentery or smallpox. In a letter from voyageur Pierce, he talks about the deaths he sees around him. George Fletcher of Manitoba drowned, he said, and it was "all the soldiers' fault"

¹⁴³ *Globe*, 27 January 1885

¹⁴⁴ Winnipeg *Daily Times*, 3 December 1884, reprinting Toronto *Telegram*

¹⁴⁵ Winnipeg *Daily Sun*, 24 December 1884

for mishandling the line and sending him down the chute, where "poor George went down in one of the boils and was never seen." He found the body of a Caughnawaga (Capitaine or Morris) in the river and buried him on the shore. He also found the body of a drowned soldier and had to bury him too. "I don't want to pick up anymore," he wrote.¹⁴⁶ Even those who were buried in Egypt were in unmarked graves, which if they were in the vicinity of the second cataract, now lie at the bottom of Lake Nasser, given that the terrain of Egypt and the Sudan has been dramatically altered by hydro projects in Aswan and Meroe (near Kirbekan). Kennedy's body was requested to be transported back to Canada by his family but due to smallpox, his corpse could not be transported. He is buried in Highgate cemetery.

Denison wrote in his diary that he was sorry that some of the men who went home in the first wave, at the end of the contract, would be judged poorly by Canadians, compared to those who re-engaged. But if the welcome for the first and largest group was somewhat ambivalent and uneven, the return of the remaining men took no form whatsoever. There were no sports events at Wady Halfa, there was no reception in Cairo, no curious throngs at the Halifax pier, no snowshoe clubs, bands, parades, speeches or banquets for any of them. There was not even a sufficiently critical mass to justify newspaper coverage as the men came home in dribs and drabs from April to June. Some were held over in hospitals in Africa or London. Some toured in England or Europe before returning.

Conclusions

The returning voyageurs seemed overshadowed by the question of Canadian troops for the Sudan. It seemed to prove a second time that the British did not consider Canadian soldiers to be capable of standing shoulder to shoulder with imperial troops, worthy only of inferior roles, such as garrison duty or "voyageur." As the voyageur contingent returned home amidst widespread public disappointments over London's refusal of the Canadian offers of active service, outbreak of war in the west pushed away from the public attention all matters

¹⁴⁶ Letter from Thomas Pierce (9 December 1884), *Winnipeg Daily Times*, 12 January 1885

concerning the Sudan, whether it was the voyageurs or those wishing to fight the Mahdi. When they returned to Canada, public discussions over soldiers for the east and then soldiers for the west dealt the voyageurs a double dislocation from the public consciousness at the end of their journey. Beyond this general dislocation, there were also mixed messages at the end of the campaign concerning whether or not the voyageurs had really been valuable, whether they were "really voyagaeurs" and whether they were even "really Canadians." The men in the first wave, split off into their community groups and each received the men home in a different manner. Only in Caughnawaga did it seem that there was a clear and obvious way for the event to be honoured, whereas the observers words seemed out of sync with the experiences of the voyageurs in Trois-Rivières and Ottawa, which at least had ceremonies of welcoming, however ambivalent, which is more than can be said for Peterborough or Winnipeg. Before the men left, speeches and newspaper editorials seemed sure they would win credit for themselves and honour for their country, but upon their return, there seemed to be few willing to "puff them" up as Canadian representatives, or tell stories about how they were all proud of them. As far as the voyageurs were concerned, a great number of them were very eager to express their happiness just to be home again and have the experience over. In several of the towns, the men were so eager to get home, that they skipped out on the public ceremonies that were planned for them, more eager to see their loved ones than to listen to speeches about winning credit for Canada and proving loyalty to empire.

From the perspective of the men, they most commonly told reporters that on the whole they had a good experience. The ongoing confusion of language usage to describe incidents like those at Queenstown illustrated the gap in understanding that existed in the public at large as to how the men saw their situation. On a variety of levels, the conflict grammars of a range of recognition struggles were evident. The middle-class tropes of describing good working class men as plants or children that has been noted at several points in the study were frequently deployed in a harsher manner by the men themselves to explain their outrage at being treated with disrespect, like dogs, sheep, or river hogs. But the working class men of the expedition were not, as Hobsbawm has stated, generally interested in nationalism that

much. They didn't, couldn't and may not have wanted to "puff themselves" to win recognition as Canadian representatives. They got to travel, they made some good money, they have some very interesting stories to tell and some of them might be better positioned to gain social prestige of some sort from their adventure, whether its getting married or being able to craft stories for *Toronto Saturday Night* magazine. Many of the men were famous in their localities as a "voyageur" for rest of their lives. They each had the resources to maintain a localized memory of their experiences, but some creative effort would likely have been necessary to weave their story into some national or at least regional identity because the Nile Voyageur story was too unusual to cohere with anyone's pre-existent national narrative to be worthy of commemoration and remembrance.

In the months after their return, the voyageurs were publicly thanked for their services by General Wolseley, the Queen, and the British Parliament. Medals were eventually delivered to the men by the agents who enlisted them, and in some cases they were simply sent out in the mail. None were distributed ceremonially. In public memory, the expedition seemed to have left little lasting impression, winning no commemoration in statues, works of memorable Canadian fiction, history texts, or school books. There were a variety of private motivations for those men who participated in the expedition. There were also no doubt, a variety of meanings each associated with it. But private meanings and motivations did not lend an event to public commemorations. There were repeated, almost reflexive, attempts to try and frame this episode in some larger purpose, some higher ideal, some grander narrative – usually empire, nation and "our people" – beyond just a well-paid job in an interesting locale. That all sounded very interesting, but none of the voyageurs once actually believed such a thing or thought it might be worth dying for. They were just glad to be home again.

CONCLUSION

At different points in this study, binary oppositions have been highlighted to explore different manifestations of mutual recognition and/or group identities, such as settler-Aboriginal, Canadian-Indian, anglophone-francophone, imperialism-independence, Canada-Britain, West-East, Catholic-Protestant, Christian-Muslim, worker-soldier, voyageur-officer or any combination of these. Looking over the evidence and findings, however, the true polarity that emerges, with all the dangerous generalization such a statement contains, is the difference in understanding between those who were Nile Voyageurs and those who were not. This is the first study to explore a wide body of texts created by the voyageurs and to explore how they understood their participation in the Khartoum Relief Expedition. Very few Canadian historians have made any reference to Canada's involvement in the imperial war in the Sudan in 1884-1885, and of the handful that do, there are some, such as Berger and Morton, who manage to do so without explicitly mentioning the phrase "Nile Voyageur" let alone considering the significance of their participation. With the exception of few minor works of intentionally limited scope, no one has attempted a full study of the Nile Voyageurs, including Stacey, who admits that he passed over most of the actual texts created by the participants because they were only concerned with "local colour" and not matters of "historical importance." Stacey's collection of texts shows us what Lord Melgund and the Denison clan thought of the Nile Voyageurs, but it is not a publication that lets us read the words of the Nile Voyageurs themselves. A major outcome of this study has been the recovery and organization of these voyageur texts, together with a large body of associated texts from newspapers and other sources that help us understand what observers in Canada said about the voyageurs. In this concluding chapter, I will review the different stories revealed in these texts from the perspectives of the participants and those observing them.

The second goal of this study was to test the viability and utility of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition as a basis for discourse analysis and demonstrate the way in which public memory can be understood to be a form of recognition. Given that the voyageur texts I have

discovered are quite numerous, I have had to be selective and the recognition dynamics have served as a guide in data selection and analysis. It has been fruitful to selectively explore incidents which reveal respect/disrespect because they have inevitably exposed the assumed cultural norms underpinning the criteria subjects use to demand recognition of respect. Associated with such demands for recognition are clusters of semantic elements (tropes, narrative fragments) that the speakers use, and these elements allow for a mapping of cultural norms and group identities sustained by narratives of meaning. This final chapter will review some key examples that demonstrate the operation of the method and identify some general observations regarding its usage.

Finally, taken as a whole, there are a few broader observations that can be made, especially in light of a renewed and ongoing interest in studies of Canada's imperial history. According to the findings of this study Canada was neither aloof from empire nor was it recognized by Britain as an equal member in a partnership of "white dominions." Through the participation of the Nile Voyageurs, whose movements were followed by a frequently enthusiastic and engaged domestic public, Canadians were actively engaged in this high profile imperial military campaign and many demanded a more active role. If Canada did not send soldiers to fight the Mahdi and help "pacify" the Sudan, it is only because Britain would not allow it. Identifying the Nile Expedition as a key point in the evolution of popular imperialism in Canada challenges historians to reassess our understanding of this period, not only concerning external affairs, but the ways in which Canada's domestic affairs were imperial as well. The final third of this chapter will outline several implications for the study of Canadian history as an imperial history.

"Trip of a Lifetime"

Wolseley planned the Nile Expedition based on lessons he had first learned in Canada and his mental image of the "voyageur" was a skilled Indian boatman who would require a Catholic priest and who might require three Canadian militia officers. Political and business leaders incorrectly advised the Lansdowne and Melgund that aboriginal boatmen, who as

"Indians" were categorically different in speech than "Canadians," were either non-existent or inferior to the "white man" of the lumber industry of Ontario and Quebec. This is how many of the men who became Nile voyageurs first heard of the opportunity through recruiters or advertisements in the Ottawa newspapers. When Wolseley insisted that Ottawa's recruiters give priority to Indians and voyageurs from the Northwest, organizers scrambled to make up for lost time and urged a rapid recruitment out of Winnipeg. Some tentative efforts at aboriginal recruitment were made in Thunder Bay and possibly the Gaspé, but due to time delays caused by an initial reluctance to follow Wolseley's instructions, these men did not join the expedition. In Winnipeg, Peterborough, Ottawa, Caughnawga and Trois-Rivières, the men signed contracts that were a curious blend between a work contract and a military engagement form. On advice from Lambert and Rice, Meglund was glad to remove any reference to the men being under military discipline and the control of the Canadian officers. He didn't want to scare them away and at the same time, he held the Canadian militia in very low esteem, doubting he would be able to find three good officers in Canada and doubting that the ones he did find would be able to have any influence at all over the men. Both of these concerns were well-founded, as many of the men made it very clear that they did not want to fight, they did not want to be bound by military discipline and they did not expect to be subject to military punishments. To secure their participation, the engagement form placed joint control in the hands of the officers, whose authority the men never truly recognized, and the foremen, whom they knew and trusted. To these men, the Empire was a surrogate lumber firm and the Queen was the "biggest boss" they ever worked for.

As the men were signing up, the press had a wide-ranging set of reactions, first to the idea of a contingent, and then, as the men began to enroll, to the actual boatmen who would be joining the expedition. Amongst those papers, mostly but not exclusively Conservative, that advocated for a bigger role for Canada in the affairs of the British Empire, the call from Wolseley was greeted with great enthusiasm, and it was described as a "great compliment" to Canada. Gratitude was expressed that Wolseley had "remembered Canada." Many of the papers were fairly neutral in their assessment, reporting the expected wages and contract

terms. There were some papers that began with open hostility to the idea, first saying that few would sign up and later saying that Britain was asking for workers, "hewers of wood and drawers of water", who would not be able to demonstrate true Canadian qualities, like a soldier. They resented the fact that the representatives from Canada would apparently fill a subordinate and inferior role on the expedition. Such critical and negative commentary was countered by claims in newspapers that the departure of these men would demonstrate Canada's devotion to empire and would also help these men develop an appreciation and understanding for the greatness of the British empire. There were hopeful expressions that the Nile Voyageurs would win credit for themselves and bring honour to Canada in the eyes of Britain, paving the way for increasing Canadian involvement in imperial affairs.

The men who signed up, coming from a range of regional, class, linguistic and cultural backgrounds did not speak of such things. They were toasted and gave speeches at parties and banquets when they left, and they were regularly interviewed at engagement centres, in farewell parades and at the train station and in all cases, crossing all lines of group identity, the men expressed a genuine sense of excitement about going to Egypt, they expressed opinions about some of the logistical questions (seeming satisfied with the pay) and they participated in many "affecting scenes" bidding farewell to wives, sweethearts, friends and families. According to reporters, the crowds that came to see them off were unprecedented in their size, numbering in the thousands in Winnipeg and Ottawa, and diverse in their social make-up, containing people from all classes and walks of life. In the parties, banquets, parades and train-station cheers, there was no meaningful allusions to Queen, Gordon and Empire, despite the thick emphasis on these three topics in many of the pro-imperial newspaper editorials that tried to "make sense" of the departing voyageurs.

Even though Wolseley was clear that he only wanted civilian boatmen, hundreds of men spontaneously wrote seeking "active service" in the Sudan. In their letters to the Governor General or the Canadian government, these men made it clear that they did not wish to be boatmen, but rather, they wanted to fight with the British forces. Curiously, in their

expressions of military enthusiasm, they made no appeals to imperial duty or the rescue of Gordon, when one would have perhaps expected at least lip service in many or most of the letters. They continued to apply, despite repeated reminders from the government and newspapers that soldiers were not wanted. In a similar fashion, the anglophone press frequently seemed to forget that it was a civilian group that would not be expected to follow the rules and cultural norms of the British army.

This was very clear to a majority of the voyageurs, but their officers regularly expected more "discipline" amidst the group even though they were incapable of eliciting such behaviour amongst the men. While they were in transit on the *Ocean King*, several conflicts arose over the divergent expectations of the workers on one hand and the officers and military authorities on the other hand. Strong resentment was expressed regarding the poor condition and insufficient quantity of food, but the officers dismissed such complaints as grumbling. At every occasion when the men could physically go ashore they did, despite strict orders from the officers, which the voyageurs dismissed as unreasonable. When in transit, the men considered it their right to go ashore and when they were working, they considered it their right to take the control of the boats in the rapids. In the former case they were considered to be out of control, and in the latter case, once officers learned that it was best to let them command the boats, the voyageurs were praised for their skill, courage, control and cool-headedness. The boatmen expressed great frustration that the British officers "interfered" with their work, and eventually boasted of their eventual position of authority over all soldiers and officers while in the rapids. It was not easy for the younger British officers to temporarily suspend their command to these working-class men from the colonies, who were, according to their internalized criteria of esteem, inferior to themselves on several counts, but a direct command to that effect from Wolseley helped persuade those who did not understand.

It took several weeks for the men to win this authority in their specialized sphere of expertise, and once they did, the number of drownings and broken boats decreased and the

progress of the expedition picked up. Working within their own gangs, frequently the same ones they had worked in for many years, the men competed with one another for status based on bragging rights won through the recognition and praise accorded them by the senior British officers. British war correspondents were also lavish with their praise for "the Canadians." Whether they profiling exotic creatures that they called "Americo-Britons", English, Scottish and Irish Canadians with North American accents - as though this might be a surprise to their readers - or whether they were profiling French-Canadians or Aboriginal boatmen, they were all "Canadians" and they generally were praised, although early press reports from Britain focussed on their supposed "insubordination." The contingents that received the highest praise from the Army and the British press were the groups from Caughnawaga and St. Peter's. One correspondent wrote that the sight of "North American Indians navigating British troops up the cataracts of the Nile is one of the most singular ever witnessed in a campaign." The groups from Trois-Rivières, Ottawa and Peterborough were also praised, and the only group critiqued for having poor boatmen was the Winnipeg contingent.

Amongst the men, reputation and ranking were important. They were described as bragging about "who made the best run and each boasting to have the best boat", engaged in "pitiless rivalry" and competition. Their intense desire to win the highest level of esteem was evident in a mild form with shanty games and Tug-of-War on the trip to Egypt, and at a sports day at Wady Halfa as the majority of men were leaving. Both Jackson and Deer were proud to announce each Caughnawaga victory at sports, which seemed more frequent than for any other gang. On the eastward trip, the men showed what most of them noted in their own letters to be a surprising degree of harmony and peacefulness towards one another. But on the homeward voyage, perhaps after the stress of the trip and the fresh memories of who won the greatest praise for their work, physical violence broke out first between the French-Canadian and Irish-Canadian gangs from Ottawa on the Cairo train, leaving two dead, and then there was sustained fighting between the "Ottawa French" and the Caughnawaga on the *Hanoverian* and the Montreal train. Deer was convinced, on the word of "the English", that

it was "jealousy," because everyone knew that the Caughnawaga had done a better job.

When the men landed in Halifa, they were profiled in the press as larger-than life adventurers from the east, with tall tales of what they had seen in Cairo. They spoke with frankness about their disdain for the "arrogant" British officers, they shared their deep resentment at the foul treatment they'd received on the Pooneh, they downplayed rumours of a mutiny but told the thrilling story of helping two English prisoners escape and recounted the shooting of an Egyptian farmer which made the unfortunate victim look like a thief when in fact the Canadians had been stealing from him when they shot him. The return of these "tanned and unshaven" wild men in Halifax prompted a stern letter of rebuke from one correspondent (likely George Denison) and a whisper campaign in Ottawa to "throw cold water on the movement for giving the voyageurs a cordial reception." Receptions were given in all the communities except Peterborough and Winnipeg. In all locales, however, there were interviews with the press and universally, the men expressed their relief to be home again with their friends and family and although they had a good trip, they were quite happy to be back again. In contrast to this rather straight forward sentiment shared by almost every interviewed voyageur, the speeches from Melgund and others in Ottawa, at which the voyageurs were not invited to talk, went on for several hours, praising the men for representing Canada so well and for showing that "the sentiment for the empire was so strong in Canada."

There was an air of ambivalence about the receptions in Trois-Rivières and Ottawa, if not in Caughnawgaa, that reflected an uncertainty amongst many observers as to what to really make of these men. Observers said they were like the Zouaves or imperialists but these were not things the men actually articulated themselves. The banquets occurred in the wake of a deep public shock over the death of Gordon and another wave of offers from Canadians to avenge his death, or to fight in "Egypt or anywhere." With such drama occupying the international and national news, the Nile Voyageurs quietly returned to their communities. It was in these locales, with family and friends that smaller, more limited memories of the

Nile expedition lingered during the period those men were alive to tell stories about their experiences. For the wider public, who did not know the individuals involved, especially amongst the "leading citizens" of colonial Canada, there was little to celebrate in these men, who were neither capable of winning recognition as class equals, true "Britons" or to achieve military honours for Canada. The episode seemed to say that Britons didn't need Canadians as Britishers, they needed them as voyageurs, and that meant something that was of a lower status. Lord Lorne had even used the phrase "voyageur," in discussing a possible role for Canadian militiamen on a second Nile campaign. He couldn't have been using the word in its older senses or in its most recent meaning, to refer to a skilled boatman of the Nile expedition, because the militiamen who wanted to fight in the Sudan had the skills for none of those things. He must have been imagining some type of second-class non-combatant role that would suit a Canadian. Within a few months, the word had taken on this unfortunate connotation to be used in this way by Lorne. Thus, despite the polite speeches, there were really few people who could believe that the men had both won "credit for themselves and honour for Canada." The *Montreal Star* expressed its disappointment by saying, "No matter what is said about the Canadian contingent as a whole," at least the Indians "acquitted themselves in a matter highly creditable to themselves." Did no one else? And could they not win honour for anyone else besides themselves? For Canada? In fact, the entire episode began with Wolseley's explicit request for Aboriginal boatmen, only to find that, according to advice from "the most competent authorities," "white men" were "preferable" to Aboriginals. But on the Nile, the British preferred the type of "Canadians" that were not considered Canadian in Canada.

Recognition - Winning Dignity and Esteem

Without making a full concordance of the clusters of tropes and narrative fragments that have emerged, it is important to pause and evaluate the merits of using Honneth as my guide in discourse analysis for this cultural history. Having no exemplars to follow or react to, I have tried to innovate by being the first historian, as far as I am aware, to take Honneth's social philosophy, and especially his theory of recognition as the basis for a grammar of social

conflict, and adapt it to a method that will give the historian an alternative set of data selection criteria and some tools for semantic analysis based on a structure that is both universal in form, and culturally relative in normative content.

To review, I have taken the two aspects of public recognition, or "respect", that Honneth outlines and called them Respect 1 and Respect 2, where the former is primarily the human need for dignity, fair due, and rights as these are culturally understood according to the norms of a given group. Respect 2 concerns the human need for esteem, credit, honour and other ways to win recognition and praise for distinctive qualities and accomplishments, as opposed to the baseline Respect 1. Here too, there are cultural norms determining how such respect is won and as Honneth has pointed out, there is a perpetual cultural struggle, involving the ongoing deployment of different semantic resources, to define the criteria for dignity and esteem.

To look at how this operates on the level of Respect 1, when there is no agreement on the dignity criteria, humans are treated in ways that some people consider acceptable and others consider outrageous and intolerable. The voyageurs felt their human dignity was offended with the way they were treated on the *Pooneh* and they said they were treated "like dogs" and herded "like sheep." Their resistance, refusal to comply and their behaviour at Queenstown must all be understood as a moral struggle about dignity and what they considered to be basic rights which had not been recognized. At the level of discussions about Canada and Empire, the fact that Canadian militiamen were not permitted to join the expedition was taken as an insult, since it implied that Canada was not capable of the same responsibilities as Britain. There is a familiar terrain of parent-child metaphors used to describe this inequality of national personhood, but in this case, the Winnipeg *Sun* considered a civilian boat brigade to be "army mules" and was insulted that this was the only role for Canada. Speaking more generally about its disdain for British paternalism, the Manitoba *Free Press* used an extended metaphor of Canada as a dog waiting for scraps at the imperial table. In these very different situations, the same feelings of being disrespected, are angrily articulated through the use of

animal metaphors to express the lack of dignity the recipient feels. In each case, probing such situations helps us uncover the otherwise unarticulated dignity criteria which have been violated and reveals the tropes and narratives that articulate cultural values and social expectations. As a side benefit, the unexpected frequency of this "animal" trope can be added to our toolkit as an indicator that someone might be feeling outraged and insulted about something if they start talking about dogs.

The second level, Respect 2, was one that was of great concern to a variety of subjects. From the perspective of the voyageurs, this was most clearly manifested in the competitive nature of their work, each gang "boasting" to have done the best work, engaged in recreational rivalry as sports and rivalry on the river to claim bragging rights of having done the best job, made the fastest run, had the fewest accidents, covered the greatest distance etc. The criteria of esteem was the skill of work done well and all of the shantymen and river pilots understood this and took it very seriously. The opinions of the British were only important to the extent that they were the employer. There are other examples, where the men deeply valued the respect they won from the soldiers, like Sherlock, who seemed to be adored by both the Royal Irish and the Black Watch, who called him "the Duke" and amongst whom he moved freely between the officers and the soldiers. Commonly, each gang articulated a source of pride that they could "teach something" to the British sailors ("à Jack") or the Egyptian natives or some other way of articulating their special skills and superior talents, especially to the extent that these could be connect to their particular way of life. To give a simple example from the non-Voyageurs, the most prevalent was the variations on the formula that expressed hope the men would win credit for themselves and honour for their country, which was gradually downgraded as expectations were managed. The cultural trend of this period, which Poulter has so effectively demonstrated as the attempt by Canadian middle-class anglophones to forge a distinctive Cancuck identity that was a sort of British+indigenous, seemed to have been placed under considerable strain when it turned out that while Canadians were taking pictures of themselves in snowshoes and fur for their English friends, this indigenized-Briton of the new world image was misrecognized and

reflected back as a reaffirmation of the Great Lone Land image of Canada as a wilderness. Similarly, the idea that Canada produced "hardy men" was a distinctive trait that the "leading families" were proud of, until it became clear that a hardy man was frequently a "hard case." In both situations, with settler-Canadians playing Indian and middle-class Canadians glorifying their strong workers, the desires for special credit as distinctive and unique and maybe even better than Britons, only led to disappointment when Britain interpreted voyageur and toiler as low-status colonial "types."

The use of Honneth's theory of recognition helps us understand the complete vulnerability of many colonial Canadians, especially anglophone Canadians, who depended on recognition from the British. For those who promoted the idea of a greater role for Canada in the empire, the death of their dream was not due to any material circumstances. It was because they were unable to achieve it on their own, and the more that they articulated their desire for a sense of the power that empire brought, the more they revealed their complete colonial dependence on the British for recognition of that role. In this light, Canadian imperialists are perhaps best characterized as profoundly dependent on British recognition. As colonists, Canadian imperialists placed themselves in a state of vulnerability and wounded pride at the slightest insult, misrepresentation or the worst type of misrecognition of all - being forgotten. Seeking both equality and distinction, they set themselves up for regular disappointments, of which this experience provided many examples.

In terms of lessons learned from using the method, I have found that generally speaking, that disrespect, which is misrecognition, either withheld or denied or as the product of any form of misrepresentation, is easier to identify than the successful winning of respect. Disrespect 1 draws forth more potent indicators: indignation, disgust, outrage, anger, grumbling, insubordination, etc. Disrespect 2 tends to lead to disappointment, when the hopes for glory and special recognition due to distinctive qualities are misrepresented or overlooked.

Future uses of a method such as the one deployed in this study would benefit from more

background work refining the mechanics of the recognition grammar. One does not simply say that "Fred Denison wanted recognition," one says that "FD wanted the esteem of other Canadian officers and the voyageurs as the commanding officer of the contingent" (Tactic - stop Kennedy from coming, demand promotion to Colonel) or "FD wanted to be respected by British officers on the Nile as an equal." (Tactic - dine frequently with the other officers, express outrage upon learning that on the Nile, a British Lieutenant outranks a newly-promoted Canadian colonel) The importance of prepositions and operators helps to identify the underlying cultural assumptions, the operational narratives and the scope of possible outcomes that recognition needs may face. My application of the "grammar" of recognition has been exploratory and perhaps might be more effective after systematically outlining its operational dynamics using historical data in a way than Honneth does not attempt to do in his philosophy.

A final recommendation on the further development of the theory and method is an attempt to include Honneth's more recent thinking on "reification" which he returns to its roots as the "thingification" of people and nature, or rather, the forgetfulness of the need to recognize them. This might augment our understanding of situations of violence and disrespect like those seen between many Canadian voyageurs and the Egyptians, or in the racism that exists between settlers and Aborigines.

Canada's Role in the Nile Expedition and in the Empire

Stacey has a simpler less accurate story than the one above because he does not consider it necessary to listen to the voyageurs. Stacey tried to downplay the event as Canadian and said that it was "strictly imperial" proving his point by correctly noting that "not a penny was spent" by the Canadian government. But Canadians thought it was a Canadian affair and so did the British. Clearly, Canadians went, Canadians were enthusiastic supporters, Canadians followed the news and Canadians died there, and the men were both critiqued and praised as Canadians. It was frequently claimed that Canadians *led* the expedition. The Nile Voyageur participation in the Sudan War of 1884-1885 should be recognized as a Canadian

affair and an imperial affair. Canada was "entangled" in the war and Canada did "waste men" in this "wretched business" to use Macdonald's language. There are four implications that flow from a fuller appreciation of Canada's role in the campaign.

First of all, the Nile expedition itself was inspired by Wolseley's campaign in 1870 on the Red River expedition. Canada was one of many imperial territories in which men like Gordon and Wolseley learned how to be imperial commanders. In Canada, Wolseley not only developed his close knit group of officers known as the Garnet Ring, men who would help him run the Nile expedition, but he developed what he called "the river strategy" in Canada and later used this approach in West Africa, during the Ashanti campaign and then again in the Nile expedition. In British eyes, the Red River expedition was an imperial campaign, and crossing northern Ontario was like opening up any other jungle or desert territory for British civilization. Canada was Wolseley's template for the rescue of Gordon. Canada is not so special in the mind of an imperial General, and this points to the need to avoid false distinctions between the empire of conquest and the empire of settler dominions.

Secondly, the Sudan war was an example of Canada's participation in the hard empire, the empire of wars, invasions and military campaigns. For many Canadians at the time, a connection to the empire was not just a world of letters, of trade fairs and exhibitions, of tariffs, of missionary work, of learned societies and political associations to bring about a federation of the "white dominions." It was also about active service, which meant "getting shot at" and suppressing insurrections. Many of the initial responses to the call for voyageurs expressed excitement that Canada would somehow get to help "smash up the Mahdi" which turned to disappointment that they could not be more actively involved. Militiamen across Canada fervently wanted to be shooting the Sudanese, not necessarily as an expression of their strong imperial sentiments, but seizing the opportunity that empire afforded them to participate in a war. Canada's role was not to supply armed forces, but that was not for lack of willing soldiers. Nor was it due to the wise statesmanship of a Prime Minister. It was because the British War Office, and Lansdowne and Melgund, did not have faith in the

capacity of the Canadian militia, whose use would have constituted an unnecessary "experiment." Even if Canadian battalions were not at the front, however, Canadians were deeply implicated in the war. Without the boatmen, the British army would not have made it to the front. Canadians carried them there and in this part of their work, they were universally praised by observers in Canada. That said, it is important to note that because of Canada's implication in the war, many of the boatmen felt the need to state the limits of what they were prepared to do and not do. For the most part, they did not want to go "under fire". When some of the Canadians watched the battle of Kirbekan from the sidelines, it left them shaken up. Instead of glory, they saw the British troops "killing them in all directions" and it was "an awful sight to us Canadians who had never seen a battle." Later Shaw would write an anti-war interpretation of that scene, doubting the justice of what he saw, having his "typical voyageur" character say "Gordon be damned!" and looking at the dead Sudanese who had died "fighting for what any man would fight for, their religion and their home." The Canadian boatmen helped the British get to the front, sixteen of them died in the process and many were ambivalent about the point of the whole thing. One cannot say that Canada was not involved in the war.

Third, the nature of Canada's role in the campaign was a subordinate one and this was the cause of much dissatisfaction and disappointment for many observers in Canada. Canada was clearly not seen by Britain as an equal partner in the empire, and in this high profile military campaign, Canada's utility was not the provision of "brother officers" but civilian workers, ideally "Indians." For those who valued the empire and thought that Canada was part of a Greater Britain, or rather for those who longed for Britain to recognize Canada as such, the perception of Canadians as a "race of toilers" and "coadjuncts" was not "encouraging." For imperialists, there was nothing memorable about such a representation of Canada's role in the Empire. For those who imagined Canada to eventually be independent, this was a typically insulting example of British ignorance and arrogance. To borrow a phrase from the *Manitoba Free Press*, Canadians were, "in the eyes of the British people" seen to be "a poor, mean spirited herd of backwoods boors." While everyone realized that the voyageurs did a

commendable job in the rapids, the type of role that they occupied had by definition limited the scope of "honour" and "credit" they could win for the country. In the end, workers could bring credit to themselves, satisfy their employer (the Queen), and maybe bring honour to their people (Caughnawagas), but they could not bring glory to Canada, no matter how well they did their job, because of who they were and the low-status role they were given. The population was polite upon their return but there remained an ambivalence based on the idea that somehow Canada was misrecognized by Britain, and many Canadians were "pas très enthousiasmé, ni très fier" of these men who "qui allaient représenter le pays en Egypte."

Finally, understanding the Nile Voyageur participation in this imperial campaign, and a closer examination of the discourse around empire and the military may bring fresh perspectives to other events of the 1880s in Canadian history, most notably the "Northwest rebellion." Riel hovers in the background of this study, bookending the Nile Expedition as the source of Wolseley's first river campaign and perhaps he should be seen as the final target of a frustrated Canadian militia, eager to prove its capacity against their very own domestic "half-breed Mahdi." The possibilities to examine the Northwest rebellion looking for links in discourse, overlapping membership of voyageurs and refused militiamen could be a fertile area of study for historians of this conflict which can only be properly understood in the context of other imperial wars at the time, especially the Sudan war, in which Canada had a particular role.

This study has repeatedly pointed out that the Nile voyageurs have been forgotten, both in public commemoration and, perhaps more importantly for our purposes here, in the historiography. By forgotten, what is meant is misrecognized and misrepresented. Historians are subject to the nationalisms of their time and other preoccupations of recognition. Some were blinded to the role of the Nile Voyageurs due to the same martial biases that said that workers could not represent a country and thus were not historically significant. Thus we have seen the unusual case of historians emphasizing Canada not sending soldiers to a war and almost entirely forgetting that we did send an indispensable crew of boatmen to that war

and that the population vacillated between enthusiasm and ambivalence over this representations. In public memory and in the historiography, the Nile Voyageurs were forgettable because they were not the right type of imperialism for anyone's taste. They did not cohere to any of the scenarios about Canada's relation to empire that were in play in 1885 nor did they complement anyone's national identity narratives in the years to follow. This study has not attempted to try to rehabilitate the Nile Voyageurs as heroes. Neilson was correct, posing falsely as a boatman: "none of us are angels." Yet it is finally time, after leaving this topic in a state of marginal obscurity, to put on differently tinted spectacles, and undertake, as "a student of human behaviour," the "abundant field of labour" required to study these men who, no matter what they or others may have felt about them, ended up representing the country on the Nile. Such a study is long over-due and yet there is happily a receptivity to re-examining Canada's imperial past and a spirit of innovation in methods of analysis that have made it timely to re-examine these men for what they reveal about the complex intersubjective relations that must be examined if we are to understand Canada's role in the British empire and the empire's role in Canada.

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