

THE PARTICIPATION OF CANADIANS
IN THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR
AND ITS
IMPLICATION ON CANADA'S FUTURE

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Preface:

During my military career, I had the chance to travel throughout Canada and the opportunity to join the Brockville Infantry Company (1862) located in Brockville, Ontario Canada. It is with this group that my wife and I acquired our first period uniforms and that we discovered our interest for this kind of activity.

In 2007, we were invited to participate to our first American Civil War re-enactment in Zoar, Ohio. The hobby, soon after, turned into a passion.

As members of the 37th Alabama Infantry Co. " H " located in Florida, and honorary members of the 15th Alabama Co. "G" located in Maine, we participate in more than 10 events per year. To this day, (2013), we have been reenacting in 7 States, in events involving 100 to 10,000 participants.

The fact that we are Canadians always brings the same question; Why do you take part in this? The short answer is that we love the hobby, but then comes the historical aspect.....

It has already been more than 150 years since this cruel conflict raged in the United States of America. As you will see in the following pages, this historic event forever changed the destiny of our two countries.

Several books, commercial and academic, have been written on the subject, they address different aspects of the conflict and submit a variety of assumptions about the political, social and economic reasons that may or may not have been involved.

This document is based on true and documented historical facts highlighting the impact of the activities of the American Civil War on the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867, on its economic development as well as at its impact on emigration.

In addition, throughout the course of your reading you will discover little-known facts about the involvement of many of our ancestors who took part in the fight. From the composer of our National Anthem, to the sometimes-forced recruitment of our fellow citizens!

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CHAPTER I

Looking Back

The political reasons for the conflict between the northern and southern states really took a foothold in the mid 1800s. Several southern states saw political setup by Washington as interference with their rights. Following the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln, an anti-slavery activist, South Carolina was the first to leave the Union, soon followed by another 6 on December 20 1860, (Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas). In the spring 1861, following the President's call to take up arms against the Confederate States four other states left the Union (Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina). Two other states, Missouri and Kentucky were pro-secessionist but were still claimed by the Union.

At that time Canada, as a Nation, did not exist. Rather, It was composed of Upper and Lower Canada (Quebec and Ontario) and four separate colonies (Newfoundland, New Brunswick, PEI and Nova Scotia). There was also a territory administered by the Hudson Bay Company called "Rupert's Land". The social and economic conditions in the colonies were not looking good either. In 1861 due to the political tensions, Upper and Lower Canada were united to form the Province of Canada.

Britain was officially neutral, but in reality, it supported the southern states, its major cotton suppliers. Of course, if the south would have been victorious, the UK would have had a stronger alliance with them and by doing so, would have secured its position in North America. The tension between the UK and Washington was at its peak. From 1861-1862 discussions took place in London in order to formally recognize the Confederate States. Washington warned England that this would mean war between the two Nations. London was afraid of losing their "Canadian" territories and backed off. Several incidents took place at sea such as the **Trent Affair** where two Confederate diplomats were captured on a British ship on the high seas (postal steamer Trent departing from Havana en route to England).

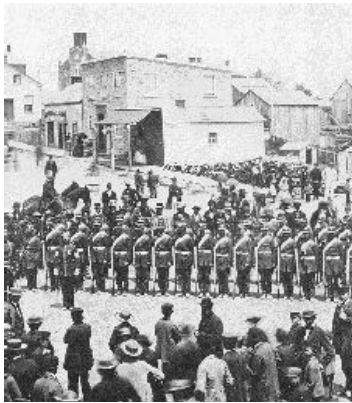
The case made a major stir in British North America. The Maritimes, Upper and Lower Canada realized that they could become a battlefield in the middle of a conflict between the British and Unionists and called in reinforcements. London announced it would defend its colonies with all its resources and sent reinforcements of 14,000 soldiers and recruited 40,000 Canadian militias. (Red Coats). On December 26th 1861, the prisoners were released and the "Trent tension" diminishes. In addition to the release, President Lincoln had to make a formal apology to defuse the crisis.

Most of the "Canadians" were opposed to slavery, which turned "Canada" into the ideal terminal for the underground train. Also, due to their proximity, the colonists and citizens of states located along the border (invisible in 1860) exchanged services and migrated freely resulting in important links (family, business and work related). Another incentive was that during the war, the colonies received major economic spin-offs, making them sympathetic to the Union. On the other hand, the French and English Press East (Quebec and Maritime) ridiculed "Yankees" and supported secession.

In his manuscript, Wink identifies 77 very important “Canadian” newspapers, 43 Pro south, 33 pro north and finally 1 with mixed opinions¹.



The Edgar Cecil loading guns in Halifax. During the Civil War, the city had more than 18,000 soldiers.



Volunteer regiment of Elora, Ontario, in May 1862. The active army on “Canadian” soil reached 30,000 men in 1870 to defend against a possible attack from the United States.

¹Winks, *The Civil War Years*, p. 222.

CHAPTER II

Confederate activities on Canadian soil

Due to the strategic location of Canada and the sympathy of the peoples of the east to the southern cause, the Confederates used secret bases in Canada and especially in the area where British loyalists had taken refuge after the revolutionary war (East coast). Here are some of these events:

- Benjamin Wier (1805-1868)

A wealthy Halifax merchant, he was acting as agent between the Confederates and the Canadian port authorities allowed Confederate vessels to use repair shops. In return, he received cotton that he was exporting to Britain.

- Chesapeake

In December 1863, 17 Confederates took possession of the ship "Chesapeake" by force and went in the direction of Sambro, Nova Scotia. Two Union vessels were able to rejoin and were planning to bring it to Boston, but disregarding diplomatic protocol the British authorities decided to escort them to Halifax in order for the Navy court to rule on the matter. Even though the ship was returned to the Union, the British interference and the fact that no Canadian sympathizers were punished, tension between the U.S. and the UK increased.

- Tallahassee

On 18 August 1864, the Tallahassee under the command of John Taylor Wood sailed to Halifax to repair its main mast, replenish its coal and get provisions. Two ships of the Union, the Nansemont and the Huron were closing in. Afraid to be caught in port, the commander of the Tallahassee hired a local captain, Jack Flemming, to sail his ship under the cover of night through a narrow fjord in order to return to the open sea. Without any light they sailed through a rarely used crossing between McNad Island and Dartmouth shore.

- St. Albans Raid

The most controversial event involving Canadian citizens was undoubtedly the St. Albans Raid. Indeed, in October 1864, members of a Confederate secret cell based in Montreal, who frequently went back into the US in order to gather intelligence and to perform sabotage operations, decided to rob banks. They went to St Albans, stole \$ 170 000.00 from three banks killing a civilian in the process. The Union forces chased them well beyond the Canadian border, creating a diplomatic incident. The thieves were finally arrested by Canadian authorities. At their trial it was ruled that since it was an action authorized by the Confederate government, their action could not be considered a crime and they were extradited under the 1842 Webster-Ashburton treaty.

CHAPTER III

The Canadians that went on to join the fight

Why did they take part in the fighting? Looking for adventure, to join the fight against slavery, for monetary gain or in search of a better life abroad..... These are just a few reasons that may have led Canadians to join the conflict.

How many Canadians were in the battle? This is a much more difficult question to answer. Indeed, numbers from 40,000 to 60,000 (20,000 were French-Canadians) have been claimed, but the reality is that no official registries were maintained.

What we do know is that the majority of those who participated did so under the flag of the Union. It is also known that approximately 37,000 Canadians were already working in New England before the outbreak of hostilities, which give them an incentive to join. In addition, during the war, recruiters travelled through Canada, offering monetary bounties to those who signed a contract².

In some cases, recruiters used excessive tactics. The newspapers of the time displayed articles regarding the disappearance of young men who, under the influence of drugs or alcohol, did sign a recruitment contract. It is also reported that men were attacked and transported to the US unconscious to be conscripted into the army of the Union³. Some parish's registers mention names of parishioners who left to join the American war. The priests of the time addressed this problem "Settlers leaving the colony" during their sermons.

It should also be noted, that official records indicate that, three Canadians reached the rank of General and that 29 received the Medal of Honor, the highest American honor.

² \$402.00 in case of the 2nd Michigan.

³ *La Minerve*, 6 décembre 1863 ; *Le Canadien*, 15 mars 1865:

CHAPTER IV

Canadian-born men and women who have left their mark

During my research, I discovered that many of our ancestors left their mark in history, here are a few;

- Sarah Emma Edmonds

During the conflict many women took up arms by disguising themselves as a man. They took part in the fighting and if they were discovered, had to leave their unit. Sarah was one of them. Born in New Brunswick, she fled her home in 1850 to avoid a forced marriage. To survive she disguised herself as a man, and used the pseudonym of Frank Thompson and sold Bibles.

When war broke out she was living in Flint, Michigan. "Frank" joined the 2nd Michigan Infantry Co. as a soldier.

She took part in the "Battle of First Bull Run" and the campaign of the Peninsula. At the Battle of Fredericksburg, she was an aide to Colonel Orlando M. Poe and at least on two occasions had to cross enemy lines, once disguised as a woman "and what is even more surprising" as a Negro.

In 1863, her unit the 2nd Michigan was serving Kentucky. Edmonds contracted malaria and fearing that her true gender would be discovered by the medical staff, she deserted. Later she worked as a nurse for the United States Christian Commission and published a popular series of her experience as a nurse and spy.

After the war, she married L H Sleeve, a Canadian, and raised three children while residing in Michigan, Illinois, Ohio, Louisiana and Kansas. After several years of effort, she finally received a military pension. Just before her death in 1898, she became the only woman to be received into the Grand Army of the Republic.

- John A. Huff

Born in Holland Landing, Upper Canada in 1819 he moved to Michigan. As a sniper with the 5th Cavalry Regiment of Michigan, he took part in the battle of "Yellow Tavern". During this battle the famous Confederate cavalry General JEB, Stuart was killed. Huff was recognized for eliminating the General. He died in 1864 following an injury received in battle.

- George Fairweather

Born in Canada in 1838, he participated in several major battles and joined hundreds of veterans who immigrated to Australia where he died in 1908.

- William Winer Cooke

Born in "Mount Pleasant", Upper Canada, he joined the 24th Cavalry Regiment of New York at the age of 17. Making the military is his career; he rose to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel by the end of the war in 1865. In 1866 he re-enlisted and joined the 7th Reg. Cavalry. He died during the "Battle of Little Big Horn". His body rests in Hamilton, Ontario.

- Dr. Solomon Secord

Solomon was the great-nephew of Laura Secord. Well-known Canadian, Laura Secord lived from 1775 to 1868. During the war of 1812 she walked for miles in order to warn the British Army about an impending ambush by the American soldiers.

Born in Kincardine, Dr. Solomon went to Georgia several years before the start of the Civil War. Openly opposed to slavery, his opinions almost got him killed. He was not the most likely person to serve in the Confederate Army, yet this was the case. He joined the 20th Georgia regiment as a doctor.

He was captured at the Battle of Gettysburg and found himself imprisoned in Maryland. He escaped in 1864 and returned to serve with his regiment. Around 1867 he returned to Kincardine, Ontario, where he practiced medicine for over 50 years.

In 1910, a statue was erected in his honor in his native town. This statue is the only one in Canada dedicated to a Confederate officer.

- Lester E. Alexander

Born in St. John, NB, he served with the 2nd Regiment of Maine and was part of the 300 men who were accused of desertion when the majority of the units' members recruiting contracts expired. He was transferred to the 20th Maine just before the Battle of Gettysburg. Lester was killed there 2 July 1863 during the attack of "Little Round Top".

- Calixa Lavallée.

Born in Vercheres, Quebec in 1842, he left for Rhode Island at the age of 15 years. At the outbreak of hostilities, he was recruited by the 4th Rhode Island and served as a musician. By early fall 1862 he was their main cornet. After being wounded in the leg in the Battle of Antietam he was discharged in the fall of 1862.

Calixa did not make his mark in history as a result of these actions during the Civil War but as a composer (1880) of "O Canada", the eventual Canadian national anthem.

He died in Boston in 1891 and in 1933 his remains were brought back to Montreal.

- John Lang Bray

A native of Kingston, Ontario, he graduated in medicine at Queen's University in 1863. He joined the "Confederate Army Surgeon Corp", Richmond, Virginia. There he served until the end of the war. Back home, he continued to practise medicine and became President of the Canadian Medical Association. At his death in 1915 he was buried in Maple Leaf Cemetery in Chatham, Ontario.

- Joseph Vallor

A farmer in the Toronto area, he became a member (1 August 1861) of the "42nd Illinois Infantry Regiment" in Chicago at the age of 25. Two months after being recruited he was promoted to Corporal. In April 1862 he was promoted to Sergeant Major. In 1863 he was nominated for the "Army of the Cumberland's Roll of Honor", probably due to his action at the "Battle of Stone River" (Murfreesboro, Tennessee).

- Jerry Cronan

Born in Canada in 1833, Crocan was a member of the 10th Louisiana Infantry. He fell in 1864 at the "Battle of Spotsylvania". He was buried at Arlington Cemetery before it became a cemetery dedicated to the Union. Thereby Jerry Cronan has the double distinction of being Canadian and Confederate soldier to be buried at Arlington National Cemetery near Washington DC.

- Edward P. Doherty

Canadian-born Edward was an officer in the army of the Union. He was placed at the head of the detachment that captured and killed John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Lincoln. Indeed, 12 days after the assassination of Lincoln, Booth received a fatal shot on April 26th, 1865, in a barn in Virginia.

- Newton Wolverton

When Newton Wolverton, born at Wolverton, Ontario, was 15 years old and working as a teamster in Washington, he presented a petition for peace to President Lincoln from a committee of Canadians at the time of the *Trent* affair. President Lincoln said to him:

"Mr. Wolverton, I want you to go back to your boys and tell them that...as long as Abraham Lincoln is President, the United States of America will not declare war on Great Britain."

On July 20, 1861 Wolverton enlisted in the Northern army. He returned to join the Canadian militia to protect the border after the St Albans Raid and during the Fenian War.

Battle of Gettysburg

During this famous battle of July 1863, records show that at least 24 "Canadians" died during the three days of fighting. Of them, 3 were members of the 20th Maine, all from New Brunswick and they died on 2 July at the "Battle of Little Round Top". They were 18 year-old Alexander Lester, Aaron Adams, 27 years and George Leach 25 years.

Obviously, this document only relates the actions of a few Canadian-born who took part in the activities of the Civil War. Unfortunately, the vast majority of those who took part will remain anonymous.....

CHAPTER V

Impacts on Canada's immigration and economy

There is no doubt that the coming of the Civil War forced the northern states to dramatically increase their importations from the British colonies. The purchase of manufactured and agricultural products by the US resulted in an economic boom for the colonies.

Regarding immigration, in addition to the thousands of settlers who regularly worked in the US at the time, military and industry recruiters were sent to the colonies in order to fill vacant jobs (mining, wool etc.). Due to the British law prohibiting its citizens from taking part in another country's conflict, many of them had no other choice than to stay in the US.

Due to the fact that many of them couldn't read or write, their family names were often modified to sound English. Sometime names were altered voluntarily in order to fit in. Here are a few examples; Boisvert became Greenwood, Boismenu - Smallwood, Grandpré - Widepark and Oligny – Olena.

This was the case for the Smallwood family living in New York; their son's Raphaël Boismenu regularly sent them his monthly wage of \$17.00⁴

⁴ Le Canadien, 25 septembre 1861. (Lamarre, RMC)

ADDENDUM 1

Chronology of events marking the establishment of Canada

12000 BC. JC = Migration of people from Asia to America by the Bering Strait

1000 = Visits from the Vikings

1492 = Discovery of the New World"" The Americas by Christopher Columbus (for Spain)

**From 1492 to 1608, several European countries financed expeditions to the New World

1608 = Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec City

1607-1732 = Foundation of the first 13 colonies Columbia (USA)

1759 = Battle of the Plains of Abraham, a decisive battle during the conquest of New France from the British (Seven Years' War)

1775 = The American's colonies unified, and in 1776 they revolted against Great Britain (Revolutionary War 1776-1783). The United States of America was born.

1812-1815 = Anglo-American War between the U.S. The British Empire [War of 1812]

1861 = Establishment of the Province of Canada in response to the outbreak of hostilities in the American Civil War 1861-1865

1864 = Quebec Conference, the groundwork for the creation of the Dominion of Canada was established there

1864 = On Oct 18 John Wilkes Booth was in Montreal. He stayed at the prestigious St-Lawrence Hall, an old Montreal Hotel widely known as the Confederacy's Canadian Headquarters. 6 months later, he shot and killed President Lincoln.

1866-1870 = Fenian attacks

In 1865, after the conclusion of the American Civil War, Brockville Ontario and many other cities in western Canada became aware of possible attacks by a group of Fenians (U.S. citizens of Irish origin called the Irish Republican Brotherhood). There were a total of five confrontations:

1. Attack on the island of Campobello in 1866 (New Brunswick)
2. Battles of Ridgeway and Fort Erie in 1866 (Niagara Ontario)
3. Attack on Pigeon Hill in 1866 (the St-Laurent, Quebec)
4. Attack on County Mississquoi in 1870 (Ontario)
5. Attack on Pemina in 1871 (Manitoba)

1867 = Creation of the Dominion of Canada

Following the proclamation of the 1867, British North America Act, the Canadian Confederation was created. This resulted in the establishment of a political system based on the British Westminster model and on the division of provincial sovereignty (federalism). This model was established in order to avoid known US political issues.

1869 = The **Alabama Claims** were a series of demands for damages sought by the government of the United States from the United Kingdom in 1869, for the attacks upon Union merchant ships by Confederate Navy commerce raiders built in British shipyards during the American Civil War. The claims focused chiefly on the most famous of these raiders, the CSS *Alabama*, which took more than sixty prizes before she was sunk off the French coast in 1864. After international arbitration endorsed the American position in 1872, Britain settled the matter by paying the United States \$15.5 million, ending the dispute and leading to a treaty that restored friendly relations between Britain and the United States.

1880 = Composition of "O Canada" by Calixa Lavallée (Union veteran)

1965 = Birth of the Canadian flag, created by The Honourable John Matheson from Quebec and now (2013) resident of Kingston, Ontario. His flag replaced the Red Ensign, a red flag with the Canadian armories in the upper left corner.

1980 = "O Canada" became our National Anthem

1982 = Constitutional Act of 1982 (Repatriation of the Constitution)

Signed by all provinces except Quebec, this paper gives complete political freedom from Britain. By this law, Britain cedes power to make laws affecting Canada, including the Constitution.

At the same time, the British parliament proclaimed the 1982 Canada Act. This document has the distinction of being the only document written in French to be ratified by the British parliament since the French Normand ceased to be the language used by the British government.

ADDENDUM 2

Addendum 2: Alexandre Bélanger enlisting contract in the army of the Union

\$3.00 fee
by Thomas Barton

(No. 39.)
Substitute
VOLUNTEER ENLISTMENT.

STATE OF Maine TOWN OF Augusta

I, Alexandre Bélanger born in the State of Quebec
of Quebec, aged Forty years, and by occupation a Carpenter Do HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE to have agreed with John Mitchell Esq., of Bangor
Penobscot County State of Maine to become his **SUBSTITUTE** in the Military Service, for a sufficient consideration paid and delivered to me, on the Tenth day of March, 1865; and having thus agreed with said John Mitchell, I DO HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGE to have enlisted this Tenth day of March, 1865, to serve as a **Soldier** in the **Army of the United States of America**, for the period of **THREE YEARS**, unless sooner discharged by proper authority: I do also agree to accept such bounty, pay, rations, and clothing, as are, or may be, established by law for soldiers. And I do solemnly swear that I will bear true and faithful allegiance to the **United States of America**; that I will serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whomsoever; and that I will observe and obey the orders of the President of the United States, and the orders of the Officers appointed over me, according to the Rules and Articles of War.

SWORN and subscribed to, at Augusta, Me.
this Tenth day of March, 1865. Alexandre Bélanger
BEFORE John Mitchell
Justice of Peace

This man is a non-resident and is married

We certify, on honor, That we have carefully examined the above-named Volunteer Substitute agreeably to the Regulations, and that, in our opinion, he is free from all bodily defects and mental infirmity which would in any way disqualify him from performing the duties of a soldier; that he was entirely sober when enlisted; that he is of lawful age, (not under 18 years;) and that, in accepting him, as duly qualified to perform the duties of an able-bodied soldier, and as a Substitute in lieu of John Mitchell
Bangor Maine married man drafted in _____, 1865 we have strictly observed the Regulations which govern in such cases. This soldier has light eyes, Dark hair, Dark complexion; is five feet Six inches high.

John Mitchell
Captain and Provost Marshal
Jos. T. Woodward
Commissioner of Board.
C. A. Wilbur
Surgeon of Board.

Board of Enrollment of 3^d Dist. of Maine