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Article abstract

Fought during the War of 1812, the Shannon-Chesapeake naval battle was one of the most important cultural events in Halifax's history. The Shannon's victory celebrations in 1813 sparked an unprecedented display of colonial patriotism and literature in the British North American context. This event remained at the forefront of public memory, history, art, and music throughout the 19th century. As personal connections to the battle faded at the turn of the 20th century, local authors such as Archibald MacMechan combined with historic sites organizations and the newly established Canadian Navy to keep its memory alive through commemorations and anniversaries

Colonial Patriotism to “Mystical Chords of Memory”: The Halifax Celebrations and Commemorations of the *Shannon-Chesapeake* Battle

KEITH MERCER

La bataille navale entre le Shannon et le Chesapeake, livrée au cours de la guerre de 1812, fut l'un des plus importants événements culturels dans l'histoire d'Halifax. Les célébrations saluant la victoire du Shannon en 1813 suscitérent un élan sans précédent de patriotisme colonial et de création littéraire dans le contexte de l'Amérique du Nord britannique. Cet événement demeura au premier plan dans la mémoire publique, l'histoire, les arts et la musique tout au long du 19^e siècle. À mesure que les acteurs et les témoins de la bataille disparurent au tournant du 20^e siècle, des auteurs de la région, tel Archibald MacMehan, joignirent leurs efforts à ceux de la Marine canadienne et d'organismes responsables de lieux historiques pour en perpétuer le souvenir par des commémorations et des anniversaries.

Fought during the War of 1812, the Shannon-Chesapeake naval battle was one of the most important cultural events in Halifax's history. The Shannon's victory celebrations in 1813 sparked an unprecedented display of colonial patriotism and literature in the British North American context. This event remained at the forefront of public memory, history, art, and music throughout the 19th century. As personal connections to the battle faded at the turn of the 20th century, local authors such as Archibald MacMechan combined with historic sites organizations and the newly established Canadian Navy to keep its memory alive through commemorations and anniversaries

THE WAR OF 1812 BEGAN DISASTROUSLY for the Royal Navy. During the first year it suffered a series of humiliating defeats to the United States; this included several single-ship engagements on roughly equal terms, which was almost unheard of in British history. Britain had been humbled by an upstart nation that barely had a navy. One man who wanted desperately to bring glory back to the service was Philip Broke, captain of HMS *Shannon* at Halifax. Writing to his wife in England, he passionately expressed his desire for a battle that would remind Americans of who really “commands the ocean.”¹ For about a year, Broke cruised off New England

1 Broke to Louisa Broke, 20 March 1813, in J.G. Brighton, *Admiral Sir P.B.V. Broke: A Memoir* (London: Sampson, 1866), 368-70. I thank Jerry Bannister, Julian Gwyn, Phillip Buckner, Andrew Lambert, Tom Malcomson, Dan Conlin, the journal's assessors, and staff at the various archives and libraries I visited.

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hoping to engage one of the big American frigates. Then, seeing that USS *Chesapeake* was getting ready for sea on 1 June 1813, he lingered off Boston in plain sight, daring Captain James Lawrence of the *Chesapeake* to fight. In one of the most famous battles of the Age of Sail, the *Shannon* battered the *Chesapeake* with broadsides and boarded in the smoke. The action was over in less than 15 minutes. Broke had a serious head wound; although he recovered, his career in the navy was over. Lawrence died from his injuries but not before uttering the phrase “Don’t give up the ship,” which soon entered American folklore. Command fell to Provo Wallis, the *Shannon*’s second lieutenant and native of Halifax, who took charge of the two ships and began the slow journey back to his home port. When HM Brig *Nova Scotia* arrived at Plymouth with news of another “Glorious First of June” – the first having been a major British-French naval action in 1794 – patriotic Britons celebrated and breathed a collective sigh of relief. This victory restored confidence in the navy and symbolized a turning of the tide in the War of 1812. Broke was showered with honours and his surviving officers were all promoted, including Wallis. Celebratory songs and plays soon followed.²

The celebrations were most intense in Halifax, where the *Shannon* was based. The ships’ arrival sparked naval euphoria in the town and popular rejoicing in the streets. Throngs of residents lined the waterfront to cheer the *Shannon* and its prize. Lawrence’s funeral in Halifax, the day after the arrival of the ships, was a formal display of British militarism and pageantry. Halifax’s newspapers competed for the most comprehensive coverage, but editorials soon gave way to patriotic literature and songs that kept appearing for months, particularly by local authors and the growing arts community. Halifax was well acquainted with wartime celebrations, such as those for the conquest of Louisbourg in 1758 and Lord Nelson’s victories, but the *Shannon-Chesapeake* festivities were unprecedented in both scale and spontaneity.³ For a generation of Nova Scotians, many of whom were there that day or made the pilgrimage to Halifax to see the ships, this moment was long remembered. Thomas Chandler Haliburton, who visited the ships in Halifax harbour, never forgot the powerful and bloody scene. During the 19th century the battle remained at the forefront of public memory, generating scores of publications, folklore, physical symbols at St. Paul’s Church and the naval cemetery, and art and music. By the early 20th century, privateering increasingly overshadowed the *Shannon* in historical writing and memory of the War of 1812, but heritage groups such as the Nova Scotia Historical Society (NSHS) and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) combined with the Canadian Navy to keep the *Shannon-Chesapeake* encounter alive in anniversary celebrations and memorials. Celebrated and commemorated for 200 years, it was one of the most important cultural events in Halifax’s history.

2 Brighton, *Broke*, 292-7; Andrew Lambert, *The Challenge: America, Britain and the War of 1812* (London: Faber & Faber, 2012), 187-90. On Broke, also see J.K. Laughton, “Broke, Sir Philip Bowes Vere (1776-1841),” rev. Andrew Lambert, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (ODNB), www.oxforddnb.com, and H.F. Pullen, “Sir Philip Bowes Vere Broke,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (DCB), www.biographi.ca.

3 Julian Gwyn, *Frigates and Foremasts: The North American Squadron in Nova Scotia Waters, 1745-1815* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), 35; Keith Mercer, “Lord Nelson on the Mind: Naval Victories and Cultural Memory in Nova Scotia,” *Trafalgar Chronicle* XXII (2012): 171-91.

This article moves beyond the traditional parameters of naval history to explore the *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle through the lenses of social history, colonial studies, and historical memory. Led by Julian Gwyn, the historiography of the Royal Navy in Nova Scotia has focused on maritime defence, the Halifax naval yard, and civil-military tensions sparked by press gangs, desertion, and mutiny.⁴ The navy, however, was also a cultural institution in Halifax with deep roots in the social and economic life of the community, particularly through naval families and imperial sentiment. During the Napoleonic era the armed forces were interwoven into the cultural fabric of colonial life, with many residents using the navy to identify themselves as Britons and to connect with the larger empire. Historians such as Linda Colley, Timothy Jenks, and Isaac Land have been studying the links between military iconography, nationalism, and identity for years. But until now these themes have been largely ignored with regard to British North America, despite Canadian scholars' contributions to Atlantic world historiography.⁵ Yet in both the celebrations and the literature, this event blurred boundaries between polite and popular society and stirred emotions far beyond the naval base in Halifax. It generated a level of patriotism that has never been associated with the Canadian colonies. The second half of this article examines the popular and historical memory of the battle. Beginning in the 1990s, scholarly interest in memory burgeoned in Canada. This stemmed from trends in other countries, especially influential works on invented traditions, imagined communities, and the heritage industry.⁶ The rise of public history and interdisciplinary studies, postmodernism and historical fiction, and First Nations politics all played a role, as did social historians' abandonment of labour history in favour of cultural studies and broader analyses of the state. In Atlantic Canada, this has produced stimulating work on the Loyalist tradition in New Brunswick, the Acadians, Newfoundland nationalism, and the cult of the Scots. Much of this literature criticizes how governments and heritage organizations have

4 Julian Gwyn, "Poseidon's Sphere: Early Naval History in Atlantic Canada," *Acadiensis* XXXI, no. 2 (Autumn 2001): 152-63; Keith Mercer, "Northern Exposure: Resistance to Naval Impressment in British North America, 1775-1815," *Canadian Historical Review* XCI, no. 2 (June 2010): 199-232; Martin Hubley and Thomas Malcomson, "'The people, from being tyrannically treated, would rejoice in being captured by the Americans': Mutiny and the Royal Navy during the War of 1812," in *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience, 1812 to 1919*, ed. Charles Leslie Mantle (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007): 31-83.

5 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992); Timothy Jenks, *Naval Engagements: Patriotism, Cultural Politics, and the Royal Navy, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Isaac Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). See also Nicholas Rogers, *The Press Gang: Impressment and its Opponents in Georgian Britain* (London: Continuum, 2007), and Margarette Lincoln, *Representing the Royal Navy: British Sea Power, 1750-1815* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002). On Canada and the Atlantic world, see Jerry Bannister, "Atlantic Canada in an Atlantic World? Northeastern North America in the Long 18th Century," *Acadiensis* XLIII, no. 2 (Summer-Autumn 2014): 3-30.

6 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Several of these works have been released in revised editions.

used selective versions of the past for their own political and commercial purposes.⁷ Yves Pelletier, for example, has shown that the early HSMBC operated like a “Victorian gentlemen’s club,” imposing on Canadians its shared interest in the British imperial tradition with little debate or consultation.⁸ For Nova Scotia, Ian McKay and Robin Bates argue that cultural producers and the provincial government took advantage of an economic crisis in the mid-20th century to create an antimodern, racialized, and edited version of history that was mobilized in the service of the tourist economy.⁹ Although less attention has been paid to military history, Jonathan Vance has demonstrated that war is a potent force in collective memory and imagination.¹⁰ The *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle, and many other long-term commemorative efforts focusing on war and society, fit uneasily into this new tourism/heritage paradigm. Many of McKay’s and Bates’s criticisms are aimed at the Historic Sites and Advisory Council, a short-lived provincial body that was meant to complement the NSHS and HSMBC. The council did not commemorate the *Shannon’s* victory because its counterparts had already done so multiple times. Beginning with the popular celebrations in 1813, it had long been a hallmark of Halifax’s public memory and history.¹¹

The *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle has interested many historians over the years. In the United States, giants of naval history such as Alfred T. Mahan and Theodore Roosevelt examined it while numerous books on the naval War of 1812 appeared for the bicentenary commemorations. British historian William James nearly had a front row seat for the engagement, while C.S. Forester and Peter Padfield covered the conflict in the 20th century. For readers of historical fiction, Broke and the *Shannon* come alive in the best-selling work of Patrick O’Brian. Chris Dickon wrote a cultural biography of the *Chesapeake*, and in 1958 the National Film Board of

7 Greg Marquis, “Commemorating the Loyalists in the Loyalist City: Saint John, New Brunswick, 1883-1934,” *Urban History Review* XXX, no. 1 (Fall 2004): 24-33; Ronald Rudin, *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie: A Historian’s Journey through Public Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Jerry Bannister, “Making History: Cultural Memory in Twentieth-Century Newfoundland,” *Newfoundland Studies* 18, no. 2 (October 2002): 175-94; Ian McKay, “Tartanism Triumphant: The Construction of Scottishness in Nova Scotia, 1933-1954,” *Acadiensis* XXI, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 5-47.

8 Yves Yvon J. Pelletier, “The Politics of Selection: The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada and the Imperial Commemoration of Canadian History, 1919-1950,” *Journal of Canadian Historical Association* XVII (2006): 125-50.

9 Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010); McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1994); McKay, “Imagining a Liberal Enlightenment: D.C. Harvey and a ‘Laboratory for History’ for Nova Scotia,” *Journal of Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* XVI (2013): 154-80. For a different perspective, see Jerry Bannister and Roger Marsters, “The Presence of the Past: Memory and Politics in Atlantic Canada since 2000,” in *Shaping an Agenda for Atlantic Canada*, ed. John G. Reid and Donald J. Savoie (Halifax: Fernwood, 2011), 111-31.

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

11 For one commemoration that did touch upon the battle, see Advisory Council Report 1959, in *Journal and Proceedings of House of Assembly of Nova Scotia, 1960* (Halifax: Queen’s Printer, 1960), I:Appendix, 10-13.

Canada produced a short animated film on the battle. Despite being a “sideshow” to Britain’s titanic clash with Napoleonic France, Andrew Lambert argues that Britain decisively won the maritime war against the United States, with Broke and his victory the focal point of his Atlantic narrative.¹² Yet examination of the War of 1812 in Canada continues to be dominated by the frontier clashes in the Canadas, the naval war on the Great Lakes, and myths surrounding Isaac Brock, Laura Secord, and Tecumseh. In many surveys, the Atlantic theatre is omitted altogether. Alan Taylor’s provocative argument for a “civil war” along the northern borderlands, however, together with important new studies on historical memory and usable pasts by Cecilia Morgan, Phillip Buckner, and Michael Eamon, have finally dragged the War of 1812 out from under Pierre Berton’s long shadow.¹³ Halifax received surprisingly little attention in a recent collection of conference papers on Broke and the *Shannon*, but it is actually Halifax, where the fighting ended and the celebrations began, that is most in need of scholarly attention. Although local writers such as Archibald MacMechan and Hugh Pullen kept the *Shannon*’s memory alive, this article breaks new ground in passing over the battle to study its emotional impact and cultural significance in Halifax society.¹⁴

Popular celebrations in 1813

It took five long days for the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake* to reach Halifax. As the ships entered the Halifax approaches on Sunday, 6 June, the signal station atop Citadel Hill correctly identified them as the *Shannon* with an American prize. The *Chesapeake* arrived first but hove to for about an hour between McNabs Island and Georges Island to let the victorious *Shannon* lead it up the harbour. By this time the ships were clearly visible from shore and news of them spread rapidly through town. It was Whitsunday and the holiday service in St. Paul’s Church was already underway. At least one excited resident raced into the church, not caring about interrupting the midday sermon. Whispers passed from pew to pew, and soon the congregation joined the rest of the population in running down the hill and crowding

12 Alfred T. Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812*, 2 vols. (London: Sampson, 1905); Theodore Roosevelt, *The Naval War of 1812* (New York: Putnam, 1882); William James, *A Full and Correct Account of the Chief Naval Occurrences of the late War between Great Britain and the United States of America* (London: T. Egerton, 1817); C.S. Forester, *The Age of Fighting Sail* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956); Kenneth Poolman, *Guns off Cape Ann: The Story of the Shannon and the Chesapeake* (London: Evans, 1961); Peter Padfield, *Broke and the Shannon* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1968); Patrick O’Brian, *The Fortune of War* (London: Collins, 1979); Chris Dickon, *The Enduring Journey of the USS Chesapeake: Navigating the Common History of Three Nations* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2008); *The Story of H.M.S. Shannon* (National Film Board, 1958); Lambert, *Challenge*.

13 Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British Subjects, Irish Rebels, and Indian Allies* (New York: Knopf, 2010); Cecilia Morgan, “‘Of Slender Frame and Delicate Appearance’: The Placing of Laura Secord in the Narratives of Canadian Loyalist History,” *Journal of Canadian Historical Association* V (1994): 195-212; Phillip Buckner, “Refighting the War of 1812: Canadian Historical Memory and the Politics of Commemoration,” unpublished paper to “The War of 1812 in Atlantic Canada” conference, Halifax, August 2014; Michael Eamon, “The War against Public Forgetfulness: Commemorating 1812 in Canada,” *London Journal of Canadian Studies* 29 (2013-14): 134-85.

14 Tim Voelcker, ed., *Broke of the Shannon and the War of 1812* (Barnsley, UK: Seaforth, 2013).

the waterfront to welcome the *Shannon* home. Roof tops and windows were packed with people cheering and waving, sailors manned the rigging of warships and merchantmen in the harbour, a military band played nationalistic songs such as “Britons Strike Home,” and the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake* were met with roars of jubilation as they moved past the town. British seamen in the *Chesapeake* returned the cheers, but those onboard the *Shannon* were told to keep quiet, as Broke was recovering in his cabin. Iconic paintings of this scene, although produced 20 years later, show Halifax in a state of naval euphoria.¹⁵

Symbolizing their cultural significance, several eyewitness accounts of these patriotic celebrations have survived. That morning, when Lieutenant-Governor John and Lady Sherbrooke arrived at Government House, they found some of Halifax’s leading political and military figures already in the drawing room, “anxiously waiting for intelligence respecting the *Shannon*.” Within hours Lady Sherbrooke had learned enough to write a detailed summary of the battle. The Sherbrookes worried about Broke, receiving regular updates from military officers and servants who stopped by their Bedford residence.¹⁶ Lady Sherbrooke did not join the festivities on the waterfront, but many other women did. One witness, an unidentified Halifax woman whose letter describing the celebrations was printed in London with a woodcut carving, wrote that the town had never experienced such excitement and that “men, women, and children were so delighted.” The woodcut had an early image of the battle, perhaps the first one.¹⁷ A young Thomas Haliburton, later well known as a judge and writer, described the atmosphere as “electrical” and the residents as “elated.” Looking at the commotion in the streets, with people rushing to the harbour, his first impression was that there must have been a fire near St. Paul’s, where he was attending church. When he reached the waterfront, the ships were in plain view passing Georges Island. Reflecting on the scene many years later, he still remembered the jubilation: “Every housetop and every wharf was crowded with groups of excited people, and, as the ships successively passed, they were greeted with vociferous cheers.” The town had celebrated military victories before, “but nothing had ever excited the Haligonians like the arrival of these frigates.” The fact that Wallis commanded the ships “added to the enthusiasm of the citizens, for they felt that through him they had some share in the honour of the achievement.” Haliburton described how Halifax had been shocked by the US naval victories in the first year of the war, with a discernable “gloom” hanging over the town. Residents,

15 Thomas Chandler Haliburton to George Broke-Middleton, 1 June 1864, in *The Letters of Thomas Chandler Haliburton*, ed. Richard A. Davies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 249-54; Brighton, *Broke*, chap. 2; Captain’s Log of HMS *Shannon*, ADM 51/2861, National Archives of United Kingdom (NAUK), London; H.F. Pullen, *The Shannon and the Chesapeake* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), chap. 7.

16 G. Brenton Haliburton, ed., *A Colonial Portrait: The Halifax Diaries of Lady Sherbrooke, 1811-1816* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2011), 99-101, 109; Broke to Louisa, 30 August 1813, in Brighton, *Broke*, 278-80. Broke “was not fond of large parties” but moved in the same social circles as the Sherbrookes.

17 *Capture of the Chesapeake* (London: J. Pitts, 1813), including an “Extract of a Private Letter from a Lady,” 10 June 1813, John Clarence Webster Canadiana Collection, W1593, New Brunswick Museum (NBM), Saint John.

“old and young,” women and men, were tense and saddened by the state of the war. The *Shannon*’s triumph allowed them to release that tension in a popular, patriotic, and unprecedented way.¹⁸

Haliburton was among many locals who visited the ships that day in pleasure boats. He and a friend were denied access to the *Shannon*, where Broke lay injured, but they did get aboard the *Chesapeake*. It looked normal from the outside, as if it had just returned from a cruise, but onboard they saw carnage that remained with them for the rest of their lives. “Altogether,” Haliburton recalled, “it was a scene of devastation as difficult to forget as to describe. It is one of the most painful reminiscences of my youth, for I was but seventeen years of age, and it made upon me a mournful impression that, even now, after a lapse of half a century, remains as vivid as ever.” He described the human wreckage: “The deck had not been cleaned . . . coils and folds of ropes were steeped in gore as if in a slaughter-house. . . . Pieces of skin, with pendant hair, were adhering to the sides of the ship; and in one place I noticed portions of fingers protruding, as if thrust through the outer wall of the frigate; while several of the sailors, to whom liquor had evidently been handed through the portholes by visitors in boats, were lying asleep on the bloody floor as if they had fallen in action and had expired where they lay.”¹⁹ Nathaniel White was also onboard the *Chesapeake*. Describing the scene for his brother Gideon, a prominent merchant at Shelburne, he wrote: “I was on board of the *Chesapeake* coming up the harbour, and such a horrid sight I never witnessed. Nothing but dead and dying strewn in every part of the ship. Among the wounded was a poor fellow that was in the class with me in College. He had just entered on board [the *Chesapeake*], and has come off with [only] one arm. He knew me instantly and appeared very much affected, he is in the hospital, but I am afraid he will not recover, as he has a very bad wound in the head.”²⁰ White was shocked by the damage. “That such dreadful havoc should have been made in so short a time as 11 minutes,” he stated, “is almost incredible.” He described the *Shannon*’s triumph as “the greatest victory ever gained by a single ship” and felt that it was long overdue for the obnoxious Americans. Because the ships were anchored at the naval yard, Nova Scotians pursued this kind of naval tourism throughout the summer, but festivities quickly spilled over into the streets and taverns of the downtown core. That night the town was illuminated with fireworks and celebrations.

For several weeks after the battle, Halifax experienced the full display of British militarism and pageantry. For the unidentified Halifax woman, Lawrence’s funeral was the most “impressive scene” she had ever witnessed in the town.²¹ On Monday, a day after the ships arrived, crowds descended on the naval yard to catch a glimpse of his body, which was laid out in public view, dressed by his comrades and wrapped in the *Chesapeake*’s ensign. The captured flag, torn and bloodstained, illustrated the brutal reality of war on the high seas. The following day Lawrence was buried in St. Paul’s Cemetery (now known as the Old Burying Ground) with full military

18 Haliburton to Broke-Middleton, 1 June 1864, in Davies, *Haliburton Letters*, 249-54.

19 Haliburton to Broke-Middleton, 1 June 1864, in Davies, *Haliburton Letters*, 249-54.

20 Nathaniel White to Gideon White, 12 June 1813, White Papers, MG 1/955/983, Nova Scotia Archives (NSA), Halifax.

21 *Capture of Chesapeake*, Webster Collection, W1593, NBM.

honours. His remains were rowed to the King's Wharf, with no fewer than 24 boats from the British squadron as an escort, and carried through the streets in a long procession that included the crews of the *Chesapeake* and *Shannon*, senior officials of the navy and army, privateer captains, leading citizens, and 300 soldiers from the 64th Regiment. Six British naval captains served as Lawrence's pallbearers. Some of the wounded Americans were reportedly in tears, as was the Halifax woman who described the scene. At St. Paul's, a military band played music while the 64th Regiment fired salutes over the grave. The coffin was covered with one of the *Chesapeake's* flags, and on top of it rested Lawrence's sword. Two months later an American vessel arrived in Halifax under a flag of truce to exhume his remains and take them back to Salem, and eventually to their final resting place in New York City. Lawrence's funeral, and the other military events surrounding this victory, served as a symbolic reminder of the battle and further embedded the *Shannon* and the War of 1812 in Halifax's psyche. These celebrations, more generally, added a popular and perhaps even plebeian dynamic to the wartime capital, which throughout the Napoleonic period saw polite society and the armed forces engage in an endless series of balls, levees, royal holidays, and other social and imperial functions including many civil-military weddings.²²

Predictably, the naval hierarchy was thrilled with the news. Thomas Capel, the senior officer at Halifax, called the victory a "gallant affair" and "most brilliant achievement." He rejoiced with Britons everywhere.²³ Receiving the news several weeks later, Admiral John Borlase Warren, the commander-in-chief of the navy in North America and the West Indies, praised the heroism, zeal, and loyalty of Broke and the *Shannon's* crew.²⁴ Nova Scotia's authorities joined in the acclaim. Sherbrooke, reporting the triumph to the British government, called it a "brilliant affair," crediting Broke's skill and "conspicuous gallantry" as the main reason that the enemy had been "vanquished in so rapid a manner."²⁵ The Society of Merchants gave a public address to Broke, thanking him for his service in Nova Scotia, congratulating him on his victory, and presenting him with a piece of plate worth 100 guineas. Regarding the "late brilliant event," the society wrote simply: "We will only point in silent admiration, well knowing that our feelings are in perfect unison with those of the nation at large."²⁶ The merchants also honoured the *Shannon* with a copper coin in 1814. On one side is Broke's portrait, with his name written above, and on the other is the warlike figure of "Britannia," trident in hand and watching over a single-ship action between two warships – likely the *Shannon* defeating the *Chesapeake*. Several related tokens or half pennies, featuring ships believed to be the *Shannon*, were produced in Halifax over the following two years. At a time when specie was rare in the colonies, especially metal coins, this token was used by local

22 Brighton, *Broke*, 209-13, 222-4; *Royal Gazette* (Halifax), 9-16 June, 11 August 1813; *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), 21 August 1813; Pullen, *Shannon and Chesapeake*, 67-73; Haliburton, *Colonial Portrait*.

23 Capel to John Wilson Croker, 11 June 1813, ADM 1/503, 322-5, NAUK; Capel to John Borlase Warren, 11 June 1813, ADM 1/503, 321, NAUK.

24 Warren to Croker, 6 July 1813, ADM 1/504, 3, NAUK.

25 Sherbrooke to Earl Bathurst, 11 June 1813, CO 217/91, 116, NAUK.

26 *Royal Gazette*, 8 September 1813.

retailers and shopkeepers. Produced in Halifax, it is one of the earliest forms of domestic currency in British North America.²⁷ The battle was also celebrated in other ways. Within months two privateers, named *Broke* and *Shannon*, were launched respectively in Annapolis Royal and Liverpool. Ship names were symbolic. Over the next few years, British and colonial merchantmen were also registered with those names.²⁸

The battle also soon found artistic representation on both sides of the Atlantic. Late in 1813, a local theatre company advertised a new song, performed first at Covent Garden in London, entitled “Shannon and Chesapeake, Or the Rival Frigates!” It began with the line “The Trumpet Sounds a Victory,” accompanied by real trumpets, and was performed by a “gentleman” from the navy. The much-anticipated show took place at Mason’s Hall but nearly ended in disaster, with female audience members whisked away to safety. According to one witness, it began with a fine display of culture and music until descending into violence caused by naval personnel. Several British officers were in disguise for the “express purpose of kicking up a Row,” but worse was the conduct of American prisoners on parole from Melville Island or Dartmouth, “who are suffered to enjoy the same advantages of this town as a British subject.” This likely included officers from the *Chesapeake*. The show featured a “beautiful transparency” of the British capture of Martinique in 1809, in which then-lieutenant governor George Prevost was second in command. When the crowd began singing the “patriotic song of the Shannon” with the opening salvo – “Three cheers my brave fellows the proud *Chesapeake* has lowered her flag to the *Shannon*” – the prisoners retaliated by destroying the picture and interrupting the show. In addition, there were allegations that the Americans tried to sabotage the building’s foundation. If these reports are accurate, the Americans’ behaviour may have been caused by frustration at the delay and public war of words between the two countries regarding the treatment and exchange of prisoners of war in addition to the boastful celebrations in the theatre hall. Either way, it did not dampen local enthusiasm for the *Shannon* in 1813.²⁹

Not much is known about the “Shannons” and how they responded to the victory. The mood for many was likely sombre, with crewmates dead and dying; but others took part in the festivities, some of them a little too much. Captain John Talbot of HMS *Victorious* complained to Wallis, the *Shannon*’s commanding officer, about their escapades on shore. He handed over two Shannons who had been detained (perhaps even jailed) for “very disrespectful and improper conduct.” Talbot warned that this behaviour threatened to subvert the good press that the navy had gained in Halifax recently from the “gallant action” against the *Chesapeake*. Favourable attention was highly coveted by the naval administration because of deteriorating civil-naval relations during the War of 1812, caused by impressment and naval

27 Robert Wallace McLachlan, *Canadian Numismatics* (Montreal: private, 1886), 76-8; “Britannia,” *OED*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/23451?redirectedFrom=Britannia#eid>.

28 Manuscript on Nova Scotia Privateers, W.R. Copp Papers, MG 1/233, NSA.

29 *Acadian Recorder*, 27 November, 11 December 1813; Richard Wilson, “Ballads and Broad-sides: The Poetic and Musical Legacy of the *Shannon* and the *Chesapeake*,” in Voelcker, *Broke of the Shannon*, 205-7; Brian Cuthbertson, *Melville Prison and Deadman’s Island: American and French Prisoners of War in Halifax, 1794-1816* (Halifax: Formac, 2009), 68.

violence and crime on shore.³⁰ The *Shannon*'s books also reveal that more than a dozen men deserted in Halifax after the battle. Running away, despite prize money and shore leave, suggests that patriotism and money was not enough to change some negative opinions of the navy.³¹ When Broke's condition improved, the *Shannon* finally set sail for England on 4 October, and the navy tried to ensure that it was a happy ship. Its purchase of the *Chesapeake* was finalized, giving officers and crew their first installment of prize money. In addition to the many honours awaiting captain and crew back home, Warren wanted Broke to maximize his impression on the government and wider British public. To that end, Broke carried home five enemy flags that had been recently captured by warships or raiding parties along the American seaboard.³²

Newspapers and patriotic literature

Halifax's newspapers relentlessly covered the story of the *Shannon*'s victory for months, while readers serenaded Broke and the *Shannon* in the press with poems and ballads. Patriotic literature was not uncommon in Nova Scotia during the Napoleonic era, but Halifax's close connection to the battle elevated it to an unprecedented level. All four papers featured lengthy editorials soon after the ships' arrival, with detailed narratives of the battle and the casualties on both sides. Editors competed to interview *Shannon* veterans. The *Halifax Journal*, under the editorship of John Howe Jr., was the first off the press. "Ours is the pleasing task," it declared, "the heart-enrapturing, animating task,"

to publish to our Countrymen and to the World, a Noble Deed of Heroism – which, when recorded in Britain's history, will form one of its brightest pages – the Capture of the *Chesapeake* Frigate by His Majesty's Ship *Shannon*, in Eleven Minutes!!! Yes! Thanks to the God of Battles, in eleven minutes, has an American frigate, mounting forty-nine guns, fitted in the best order, and manned with a full, prime, healthy crew, fresh from port, been conquered by the *Shannon* – thus proving to mankind, that British Seamen still possess that daring mind, strength and soul, for which they have so long been characterized.

Suggesting that the United States' earlier naval victories had just been lucky, the paper reported that on Sunday afternoon Halifax was treated to the "gratifying sight" of the ships' arrival in the harbour, when nearly the entire town came out to cheer "the gallant Heroes of the *Shannon*, with all the warmth of honest enthusiasm." And Provo Wallis, "son of Mr. Wallis of the Navy Yard," had conducted himself in a "very brave manner."³³

30 Talbot to *Shannon*'s Commanding Officer, 27 July 1813, John Talbot Order Books, A-1632, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Ottawa; Mercer, "Northern Exposure," 224-32.

31 Muster of HMS *Shannon*, ADM 37/4402, NAUK.

32 *Weekly Chronicle* (Halifax), 24 September 1813; Warren to Croker, 23 September 1813, ADM 1/504, 164, NAUK.

33 *Halifax Journal*, 7 June 1813.

Many Nova Scotians were knowledgeable about British claims that US victories had been the result of unequal contests between so-called “super frigates” and more conventional British warships. They were also aware of American boasting that these were fair fights, which undermined Britain’s historic claim of ruling the waves. In less than 15 minutes, the editor of the *Royal Gazette* chided, Broke “decided the question of superiority, and put an end to all the vapouring, with which the American papers have of late been filled.”³⁴ Similarly, the *Weekly Chronicle* focused on the “gallant” Broke and “terror-struck” Americans. The result of this engagement was anticipated by many in Halifax, it remarked, and yet the “lightning-like rapidity of the action (not exceeding 10 or 11 minutes) seems almost unparalleled, even in the annals of the British Navy.”³⁵ And the newly established *Acadian Recorder* ran successive laudatory editorials on the *Shannon*’s triumph, concluding that there was “not on record any naval achievement in which the artillery has been directed with such effect” and so quickly.³⁶ These editorials, in the spirit of the day, went beyond journalism to celebrate the victory and encourage expressions of British pride and patriotism, despite the fact that Nova Scotia’s population had deep American roots through earlier migrations of New England planters, Loyalists, and other settlers (including most of Halifax’s newspaper editors). American and foreign news percolated in the many taverns, inns, and coffee houses that flourished in wartime Halifax. These establishments functioned as hubs of sociability and gossip, where newspapers and periodicals from around the Atlantic world were readily available and widely circulated.³⁷

The *Weekly Chronicle* got the *Shannon-Chesapeake* literature moving in Nova Scotia with “a whimsical little ditty,” which had first appeared in the British *Naval Chronicle* the previous year. Written under the pen name “Nauticus,” it actually predicted the famous battle off Boston Bay:

And as the war they did provoke,
We’ll pay them with our cannon;
The first to do it shall be Broke,
In th’ gallant ship, the *Shannon*!³⁸

34 *Royal Gazette*, 9 June 1813. Joseph Howe was eight years old in 1813, and already working in his father’s shop. Although he later remembered the War of 1812, and probably witnessed some of the *Shannon-Chesapeake* festivities, there is no evidence that he was on the docks to see the ships arrive, as claimed in Kay Hill, *Joe Howe: The Man Who Was Nova Scotia* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980), 16. On the Howe family and the Halifax press, see J. Murray Beck, *Joseph Howe, Volume I: Conservative Reformer, 1804-1848* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1982); George L. Parker, “William Minns,” *DCB*; and Gertrude Tratt, “Anthony Henry Holland,” *DCB*.

35 *Weekly Chronicle*, 11 June 1813.

36 *Acadian Recorder*, 12, 19 June 1813.

37 On sociability, see Bonnie Huskins, “‘Remarks and Rough Memorandums’: Social Sets, Sociability, and Community in the Journal of William Booth, Shelburne, 1787 and 1789,” *Journal of Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* XIII (2010): 103-32.

38 *Weekly Chronicle*, 25 June 1813; Broke to Louisa, in Brighton, *Broke*, 273-4. Broke felt the poet “will be very vain of his prediction coming true.” On the British literary response, see Brighton, *Broke*, 318-35, as well as Wilson, “Ballads and Broad-sides,” 188-208.

Nova Scotia-based writers then got into the act with triumphant poems such as “A Naval Tribute,” published in the *Acadian Recorder*:

Illustrious Broke! – be thine the meed,
The civic wreath – the rostral crown!
Thine is the proud immortal deed,
That stamps thy glory and renown!³⁹

A long poem, printed only days after the ships’ arrival and reportedly composed by Crofton Uniacke, a son of Nova Scotia’s attorney general, declared:

Now off the shore the ship appears,
And towards the *Shannon* proudly steers;
Now all is still, – ‘tis death’s repose,
The gallant ships soon boldly close,
And while *Old England’s* thund’ring roar –
Re-echo’d from the neighb’ring shore,
Beneath the tow’ring sails dark shade,
The Battle raged with blade to blade.
‘Twas there the brave soon slept in death,
And nobly sigh’d their latest breath:
‘Twas there the manly heart was tried,
And *Britons* felt their *Naval* pride,
“No *chance* shall now decide the day
For *Broke himself* now leads the way.”⁴⁰

Literary tributes kept appearing in the press for more than a year, especially in the *Acadian Recorder*. From Cape Breton, “Anonymous” wrote a song, sung to the tune of “Rule Britannia,” that was dedicated to Broke, the “Gallant Defender of his Country.”⁴¹ In early 1814, a lengthy song by a “Nova-Scotia Farmer” compared Broke to other military heroes such as James Wolfe, Robert Barclay, Isaac Brock, and even Lord Nelson:

The *Chesapeake* assails,
Nelsonic BROKE prevails;
The *Shannon’s* Crew
Make British thunders roar,
Affright Columbia’s shore,
And soon to British power,
The Foe subdue.⁴²

Inspired by this, “Acadian Cobbler” wrote a song to commemorate the British war effort generally in 1813, which once again singled out Broke:

39 *Acadian Recorder*, 15 September 1813.

40 *Halifax Journal*, 14 June 1813; *Liverpool Transcript* (Liverpool, NS), 22 June 1865.

41 *Acadian Recorder*, 25 September 1813.

42 *Acadian Recorder*, 22 January 1814.

Three frigates (to our cost)
 'Tis certain we have lost;
 That's past a joke.
 When Yankees put to sea,
 And meet us ci-vi-ly,
 (If near in force we be)
 They'll find a BROKE.⁴³

This literature reveals an intense level of patriotism in Nova Scotia, which combined pride in Britishness with local concerns over the American maritime threat. It reached beyond the navy's headquarters in Halifax to stir emotions across the colony. Overlooked by many literary scholars, war inspired some of the earliest original poetry and ballads in the Canadian colonies.⁴⁴

The press was also an arena for verbal forays against the US. Reports from American papers, with accusations about British tactics and treatment of prisoners, received passionate and nationalistic responses in Nova Scotia. In the same issue that announced the *Shannon's* victory, the *Weekly Chronicle* printed President James Madison's speech to Congress on the "brilliant achievements of our infant navy." The irony was not lost on local readers.⁴⁵ When US writers sought to explain away the *Chesapeake's* defeat, "Tom Shannon" used patriotic language to celebrate the victory and mock Yankee sour grapes.⁴⁶ Another reader published a full broadside attack. He chastised the US for its newfound sense of superiority, as if British heroes such as Nelson had suddenly "dwindled into Pygmies before them." Enumerating seven American "Lies" about the battle, he quipped that the only thing the British had not been accused of was witchcraft.⁴⁷ Even Broke, while convalescing in the home of Philip Wodehouse, his friend and commissioner of the naval yard, could not believe the lies these "foolish *Americans* have been publishing."⁴⁸ Among the public critics of the US in Halifax was William James, a young lawyer who went on to become a famous historian of the Royal Navy. James arrived in late 1813, after escaping captivity in the United States. He remained in Halifax for three years. Writing under pseudonyms in the *Acadian Recorder* and *Naval Chronicle*, James attacked the United States with a vengeance. In 1816, he published his first small book at the *Acadian Recorder's* office, entitled *An Inquiry into the Merits of the Principal Naval Actions between Great Britain and the United States*. In a highly partisan analysis, James contended that American victories had little to do with seamanship or gunnery, but rather that the enemy frigates were significantly larger

43 *Acadian Recorder*, 12 February 1814.

44 See Gwendolyn Davies, *Studies in Maritime Literary History, 1760-1930* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1991) and Patricia Lockhart Fleming, Gilles Gallichan, and Yvan Lamonde, eds., *History of the Book in Canada: Volume 1, Beginnings to 1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

45 *Weekly Chronicle*, 11 June 1813.

46 *Halifax Journal*, 2 August 1813.

47 *Acadian Recorder*, 3 July 1813.

48 Broke to Louisa, 19 June 1813, in Brighton, *Broke*, 263-5.

and more powerful than their British counterparts. Dedicated to the “Loyal Inhabitants of His Majesty’s North-American Provinces,” he used this volume to launch a successful writing career in Britain. James published a second edition in 1817, and then spent years producing his multi-volume histories of the War of 1812 and the Napoleonic Wars. He corresponded extensively with Broke, who had retired to his English country estate at Broke Hall, to ensure that he got the *Shannon-Chesapeake* story right.⁴⁹

Popular memory and history

During the 19th century recollections of the battle persisted in popular memory and folklore, including visual culture. Soon after the event Wallis’s portrait was painted by Robert Field, who usually worked only on Halifax’s elite. Dressed in his blue lieutenant’s uniform, Wallis looks like a confident officer on the rise.⁵⁰ The battle also generated about 25 contemporary or near-contemporary paintings. At least two were available by August, just two months after the battle. In “The Brilliant Achievement of the *Shannon*,” William Elmes depicts the ships in close combat off Boston, with the *Shannon*’s boarding party raising the British flag atop the *Chesapeake*. Also in 1813, George Cruikshank released his cartoon “British Valour and Yankee Boasting, or *Shannon* versus *Chesapeake*.” In keeping with his body of work, this was a humorous and exaggerated caricature of the *Shannon*’s boarding party, complete with British tars storming the decks and cowardly Americans running away.⁵¹ These triumphant images sold well in both war and peacetime, culminating in 1830 with a four-painting collaboration between John Schetky and R.H. King, one of Broke’s lieutenants. Broke presented copies of these paintings to the Duke of Wellington, then Britain’s prime minister, who replied that there is “no event of the late war to which I have looked with more interest than that which these prints represent.”⁵² Even a century later, at the opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax in 1930, eight panels were hung in the balcony to mark the most significant events in the province’s history. One of them was Schetky’s painting of the *Shannon* leading its prize into the harbour.⁵³

Beyond imagery, veterans and the dead from the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake* provided a human connection to this event. Although only two local sailors are known to have fought onboard the *Shannon*, other veterans settled in the colony after

49 William James, *An Inquiry into the Merits of the Principal Naval Actions between Great Britain and the United States* (Halifax: Holland, 1816); J.K. Laughton, “James, William (d. 1827),” rev. Andrew Lambert, *ODNB*; Correspondence between James and Broke, 1816-26, Broke Papers, HA 93/9/275-99, Suffolk Record Office (SRO), Ipswich, UK. I thank Andrew Lambert for sharing his research on James.

50 Barry Lord, “Portraits of a Young Hero: Two Versions of Robert Field’s ‘Portrait of Lieutenant Provo William Parry Wallis’,” *National Gallery of Canada Bulletin* XX (1972): 13-21; Sandra Paikowsky, “Robert Field,” *DCB*.

51 James Davey, “Representing Nations: Caricature and the Naval War of 1812,” in Voelcker, *Broke of the Shannon*, 157-69.

52 Quoted in Lambert, *Challenge*, 454-5.

53 *Chronicle-Herald* (Halifax), 29 September 1956; Barbara DeLory, *Three Centuries of Public Art: Historic Halifax Regional Municipality* (Halifax: New World, 2011), 14-15. These panels are now at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia.

the war, including Thomas Ormiston – a rope maker who married a local woman later that summer. Broke helped several Shannons land jobs with the naval yard and provincial government.⁵⁴ On its way to Boston in 1813 the *Shannon* recaptured the *Duck*, which had been en route to Newfoundland with Irish fishing servants. Broke pressed 20 landsmen, who then fought against the *Chesapeake*. While some stayed in Halifax after the battle, others went to Newfoundland, including Darby Murphy, who was fond of telling friends “how he captured the Yankee frigate.”⁵⁵ More than 30 of the *Shannon*’s crew had died in the action. John Samwell and William Stevens were buried together in St. Paul’s Cemetery; the original headstone, damaged over time, now rests inside the church.⁵⁶ A stone monument for five Shannons was erected in the naval cemetery, which reads “Sacred to the memory of the brave seamen who died at this hospital of the wounds they received on board H.M.S. *Shannon* in the glorious action in which she captured the United States Frigate *Chesapeake*, on 1st June, 1813.” Having fallen into disrepair, it was restored in 1868 by Vice-Admiral Rodney Mundy.⁵⁷ Twelve “Chesapeakes” who died in the naval hospital are also believed to have been buried in this cemetery. The remaining American prisoners were transferred to Melville Island military prison, where they stayed for more than a year waiting to be exchanged; a number died and were buried on nearby Deadman’s Island. The *Chesapeake*’s officers were exchanged that summer, or allowed to live on parole. All of these sites continue to be of historical interest in the early 21st century. A major ceremony took place on Memorial Day in 2005 on Deadman’s Island to honour the prisoners buried there during the War of 1812, which was broadcast live on both American and Canadian television. A smaller ceremony now takes place on the island every Memorial Day. In 2011, the Canadian Navy announced plans to hire archaeologists to research the naval cemetery.⁵⁸

In living memory, the battle lingered for much of the 19th century. During the 1820s or 1830s, Colonel Charles Broke, the captain’s brother, hosted a dinner for ten or more Shannons still living in Halifax.⁵⁹ In an open letter to the British colonial secretary in 1839, Joseph Howe highlighted his colony’s contribution to the British Empire: “The proudest naval trophy of the last American war was brought by a Nova Scotian into the harbour of his native town.”⁶⁰ And sitting beside the Thames on 1 June 1864, the anniversary, Thomas Haliburton wrote to Broke’s son describing the

54 Broke to Capel, 6 June 1813, ADM 1/504, 4, NAUK; Edward Griffith to Croker, 17 August 1813, ADM 1/504, 50, NAUK; Marriage Bond of Ormiston and Susan Poor, 25 August 1813, RG 32/142, NSA. Broke signed the marriage certificate. On the crew, see Pullen, *Shannon and Chesapeake*, 120-32, 136-42.

55 D.W. Prowse, *A History of Newfoundland: From the English, Colonial and Foreign Records* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 390.

56 Reginald V. Harris, *The Church of Saint Paul in Halifax, Nova Scotia: 1749-1949* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949), 227-8.

57 Charles H. Stubbing, “Dockyard Memoranda,” *Collections of Nova Scotia Historical Society (CNSHS)* 13 (Halifax, 1908): 103-9; Brighton, *Broke*, 224-5.

58 *Daily News* (Halifax), 31 May 2005; Dickon, *Enduring Journey*, chaps. 6, 7; Cuthbertson, *Melville Prison*, 87-8; *Sunday Herald* (Halifax), 24 July 2011.

59 Charles Roche, “Dockyard Reminiscences,” *CNSHS* 18 (1914): 59-67.

60 Howe to Lord John Russell, 10 October 1829, in *Joseph Howe: Voice of Nova Scotia*, ed. J. Murray Beck (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964), 74-7.

scene in Halifax in 1813 as recalled from his “youthful imagination.”⁶¹ Two months later, he accompanied J.B. Brighton, Broke’s biographer, on a tour of Broke Hall. Brighton recorded the teary-eyed emotions of this “patriotic Briton” as he examined the *Shannon*’s figurehead, which he had first seen in a boat under the *Shannon*’s bow after the battle.⁶² Meanwhile, countless local articles were written about Broke and Wallis, “Nova Scotians and the British Navy,” the Broke token, the *Shannon* being broken up, and the subsequent deaths of *Shannon* veterans.⁶³ When the Halifax *Evening Express* learned of the death of William Smith in 1862, a Haligonian and master’s mate who led a boarding party onto the *Chesapeake*, it published a lengthy tribute entitled “Death of a Naval Hero.”⁶⁴ In 1883 the Halifax *Morning Herald* interviewed Phillip Brown, whose vivid memory included the arrival of the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake*.⁶⁵ As late as in 1895, an article in *Nova Scotia Illustrated* magazine noted “Old men still creep among us who saw that day, though the actors have all gone.”⁶⁶ Provo Wallis provided a personal connection to the *Shannon*. He commanded HMS *Niemen* at Halifax after the Napoleonic Wars, was praised for diplomacy in the Mediterranean, became an aide-de-camp to a young Queen Victoria, combated the slave trade off South America, and was promoted to the rank of admiral of the fleet in 1877.⁶⁷ On at least two occasions, Wallis visited Boston and was surprisingly warmly received.⁶⁸ In Halifax, even though he spent little time there, the press followed his career closely, marked his birthdays, and wrote about him regularly. On his 100th birthday in 1891 he received congratulations from Queen Victoria, the crew of the current *Shannon*, and Halifax’s mayor, and his death in the following year was marked prominently in Nova Scotia.⁶⁹

In historical treatments, the *Shannon*’s victory likewise attained lasting recognition. In his histories during the 1820s, Haliburton noted the battle only in passing but did describe the “patriotic spirit” and carnival-like atmosphere that the War of 1812 brought to Halifax.⁷⁰ Later historians told the story in greater detail,

61 Haliburton to Broke-Middleton, 1 June 1864, in Davies, *Haliburton Letters*, 249-54.

62 Brighton, *Broke*, 438-9.

63 *Acadian Recorder*: 10 December 1842, 13 March 1857, 8 October 1859; *Halifax Morning Post*, 21 September 1843; *Provincial*, I (Halifax, 1852), 25-6; *Philatelic Courier* 3 (Halifax, 1884), 67; *Novascotian* (Halifax), 8 May 1886; *Morning Herald* (Halifax), 27 August, 5 October 1887; *Critic* (Halifax), 16 August 1889, 10 April 1891; *Halifax Herald*, 3 December 1898.

64 *Evening Express* (Halifax), 14 November 1862.

65 *Morning Herald*, 4 September 1883.

66 George Perry, “Seen with An Author’s Eye,” *Nova Scotia Illustrated* 1, no. 1 (April 1895): 13-14.

67 J.K. Laughton, “Wallis, Sir Provo William Parry (1791-1892),” rev. Andrew Lambert, *ODNB*; Carl Christie, “Sir Provo William Parry Wallis,” *DCB*; J.B. Brighton, *Admiral of the Fleet Sir Provo W.P. Wallis: A Memoir* (London: Hutchinson, 1892).

68 Brighton, *Broke*, 385-7. In describing his reception in 1826, Broke responded: “It is pleasing to find our cousin Jonathan has so much hearty, English good humour in him, thus to shake hands and be friendly when the battle is over. I dare say they looked at little *Niemen* with much interest, as a representative of their old *playfellow*, the *Shannon*” [emphasis in original].

69 *Acadian Recorder*, 16 February 1892; *Morning Herald*, 17, 24 February 1892; Brighton, Wallis, 239-51.

70 [Thomas Chandler Haliburton], *A General Description of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Royal Acadian School, 1823), 170-1; Haliburton, *An Historical and Statistical Account of Nova Scotia*, 2 vols. (Halifax: Howe, 1829), I: 292-3.

including Beamish Murdoch in 1867.⁷¹ A decade later, Duncan Campbell noted “Citizens are now living who well remember the occasion.”⁷² Peter Lynch glorified the battle in a lecture to the NSHS in 1890: “At once the whole community, old and young, rich and poor, were on the *qui vive*, the men to the wharves and the women and children to the citadel. Every face beamed with pleasure. Men who had been estranged for years, in hurrying past each other with faces radiant with delight and involuntary fits of laughter, shook hands with each other, and all were jubilant with joy.”⁷³ In his *History of Halifax City* (1895), T.B. Akins, the first commissioner of public records in Nova Scotia, reflected on the life of A.H. Huxford, who suffered a serious head wound while piloting the *Shannon* in 1813, “from which he never fully recovered.” Afterwards “Crazy Huxford” became a pilot for the naval yard, but “when under the influence of liquor he became frantic and was continually shouting through the streets of the town without hat or coat.”⁷⁴ These 19th-century histories combined naval analysis by James and others with popular memory, folklore, and myth. Narratives published in Great Britain and elsewhere in Canada were also available in Halifax, including Brighton’s biographies of Broke and Wallis. C.F. Fraser, editor of *The Critic*, praised the biography of that “centurion hero” and suggested that Halifax should honour “her distinguished son by securing a fair number of copies of his life.” The *Acadian Recorder* agreed, keeping one in its office for public viewing.⁷⁵

In 1913 Archibald MacMechan, literary scholar and avocational historian at Dalhousie University, marked the centenary with “The Glory of the Shannon” in the *Canadian Magazine*.⁷⁶ For him there was a direct link between this event and the Anglo-German naval race of his own day. “For those faint hearts,” he wrote, “who fear that Britain is doomed to speedy decline, no better tonic could be prescribed than reading the naval history” of the Napoleonic clashes against France and the United States. Combining primary research with an engaging narrative, MacMechan added several layers to the story. Twenty years earlier he had interviewed Susan Etter, a witness to the naval euphoria in 1813. Only 13 at the time, she recalled the first vessel to arrive was a “little dirty black ship,” the *Shannon* after cruising duty, followed by a “big fine ship,” the *Chesapeake*. Etter saw Broke on Halifax’s streets, distinguishable by the “white handkerchief he wore about his head.”⁷⁷ MacMechan also recorded the banter that reportedly took place between Broke and William

71 Beamish Murdoch, *A History of Nova-Scotia or Acadie*, 3 vols. (Halifax: Barnes, 1865-7), III:341-4, 352-5.

72 Duncan Campbell, *Nova Scotia in its Historical, Mercantile and Industrial Relations* (Montreal: Lovell, 1873), 211-18.

73 NSHS Minutes, 18 November 1890, MG 20/642, NSA; *Daily Echo* (Halifax), 22 November 1890.

74 T.B. Akins, *History of Halifax City* (Halifax: CNSHS, 1895), 126-7, 155-6.

75 *Critic*, 11 March 1892; *Acadian Recorder*, 27 June 1892. On Nova Scotia’s 19th-century historiography, see M. Brook Taylor, *Promoters, Patriots and Partisans: Historiography in Nineteenth-Century English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

76 Archibald MacMechan, “The Glory of the ‘Shannon,’” *Canadian Magazine* XLII, no. 1 (November 1913): 3-13.

77 MacMechan Journal, 14 October 1893, MacMechan Papers, MS-2-82, box 1.2, Dalhousie University Archives (DAL Archives), Halifax; Broke to Louisa, 29-30 June 1813, in Brighton, *Broke*, 267-9. Broke described the “bonnet” that a local woman made for him.

Minns, editor of the *Weekly Chronicle*, before the *Shannon* left for Boston. This “local tradition,” according to MacMechan, survived in the memory of an “old Haligonian,” who claimed to have witnessed the conversation. Broke walked into Minns’s bookshop and stated “Well, Minns, I am going to Boston” to challenge an American frigate. Minns thought the US ships were too powerful for the *Shannon*, but Broke insisted that he was going to close the distance quickly, board the enemy, and fight “yardarm to yardarm.” His 300 tars would “follow me to the death, and stand by me to the last.” In recounting popular traditions from the 19th century, MacMechan contributed significantly to the way in which this event was remembered, and his essay became the leading account of the battle for the subsequent 50 years. It was republished in his book *Old Province Tales* (1924), and remains available in local bookstores to this day. In 1927, he also published a booklet on the battle in his series of Nova Scotia chap-books.⁷⁸

George Mullane, writing in his popular Saturday history column in the *Acadian Recorder*, told the *Shannon-Chesapeake* story many times over the years, notably in 1913.⁷⁹ Effie May Ross, a prolific writer from Truro, wrote an informative essay for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1913 that was later reprinted several times. “There are more famous names than Philip Broke in the annals of British naval history,” she concluded, “but few are connected with more courageous deeds than the hero of the *Shannon* in the capture of the *Chesapeake*.”⁸⁰ In 1914, the NSHS published an even more detailed account in its *Collections* by Halifax resident Charles Roche, which mixed eyewitness accounts with local tradition and folklore.⁸¹ At a meeting in 1918, its president read a letter from the captain of another HMS *Shannon*, a First World War cruiser, thanking the society for sending him its *Collections* with an account of the *Shannon*’s famous victory from the War of 1812.⁸² Not all of this attention stemmed from anniversaries. David Allison, a retired president of Mount Allison University, covered the story in his two-volume *History of Nova Scotia* (1916). Although he claimed to have personally “conversed with ladies and gentlemen who vividly remembered” the celebrations in 1813, Allison merely reprinted Murdoch’s take from 50 years earlier.⁸³ C.H.J. Snider provided the most thorough narrative in *The Glorious ‘Shannon’s’ Old Blue Duster and other Faded Flags of Fadeless Fame* (1923), which made great use of anecdote and folklore including the Etter and Minns legends.⁸⁴

In the first decades of the 20th century, privateering gradually replaced the *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle as the dominant theme in Nova Scotia’s historical memory and writing on the War of 1812. MacMechan, Mullane, and Snider, as well as Frederick William Wallace and Thomas H. Raddall, formed a prominent group of

78 Archibald MacMechan, *Old Province Tales* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1924); MacMechan, *In the Great Days of Sail: 14 Sea Stories* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2011); MacMechan, *Shannon and Chesapeake* (Halifax: Royal Printing, Chap-Book No. 9, 1927).

79 For instances, see *Acadian Recorder*: 9 August 1913, 3 June 1922, 27 December 1927.

80 *Morning Chronicle* (Halifax), 31 May 1913.

81 Roche, “Dockyard Reminiscences,” 59-67.

82 NSHS Minutes, 28 November 1918, NSA.

83 David Allison, *History of Nova Scotia*, 2 vols. (Halifax: Bowen, 1916), I:614-15, 927-9.

84 C.H.J. Snider, *The Glorious ‘Shannon’s’ Old Blue Duster and other Faded Flags of Fadeless Fame* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1923), chap. 1.

popular historians who focused on maritime themes such as “Wooden Ships and Iron Men” and the “Golden Age of Sail.” Their interest in sailing vessels reflected nostalgia for a way of life that had declined in eastern Canada, eclipsed by steamships and industrialization, but this does not fully explain the new emphasis on privateering. It would have been natural for the *Shannon* to fade in memory. By this time no citizens or veterans were left with personal connections to the battle and the British Navy had been replaced by a Canadian fleet that saw its first active service during the First World War. As the narratives of Canadian and British history diverged, these writers may have combined nostalgia for the Age of Sail with an interest in highlighting “Canadian” military exploits such as the community-based privateers of Nova Scotia – with their local ships and crews – not unlike the Loyalist and militia myths in Upper Canada in this same period.⁸⁵ This shift was also evident in Nova Scotia’s school system. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries the *Shannon* was prominent in history textbooks; but by the 1950s it had completely disappeared. References to the War of 1812 now focused on the *Liverpool Packet* and other privateering stories, with the navy relegated to the Great Lakes. This reflected a move from early readers produced in Halifax to Canadian texts published in Toronto, and has held true ever since. Today, tavern music, historical tourism, and tall ships festivals all claim that privateering was the most important activity in Nova Scotia during the War of 1812.⁸⁶

Although the *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle faded in memory by the mid-20th century, some writers kept it alive. Their interest stemmed partly from war in their own day, as in the case of Raddall’s history of *Halifax, Warden of the North* (1948). Raddall only expended a couple of pages on the battle, but he viewed the city’s history through the prism of military conflict and thought it a seminal event. C.E. Thomas of the Nova Scotia Archives wrote an engaging article for the *Mail-Star* in 1962, while Dorothy Evans published an article in 1963 that focused on Wallis and his long career in the Royal Navy. Evans’s essay was well researched, with new insights on Wallis’s connection to Halifax and his family’s property at Hammonds Plains, including the establishment of the Provo Wallis chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) there in the 20th century.⁸⁷ However, it was Rear-Admiral Hugh Pullen who brought the battle fully back to public attention. Pullen had been interested in this topic for years, but with his retirement from the Canadian Navy he researched it tirelessly during the 1960s. He was often discouraged, once describing his book project as “nothing but a series of frustrations.”⁸⁸ *The Shannon and the Chesapeake* was finally published in 1969, with a high-profile launch at

85 Dan Conlin, “A Historiography of Private Sea War in Nova Scotia,” *Journal of Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* I (1998): 79-92.

86 For example, see John B. Calkin, *History of British America: For the Use of Schools*, Nova Scotia School Series (Halifax: A & W Mackinlay, 1890), 280; Calkin, *A History and Geography of Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Mackinlay, 1911), 57; Emily P. Weaver, *A Canadian History for Boys and Girls*, authorized by Council of Public Instruction for Nova Scotia (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1919), 178-80.

87 Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax, Warden of the North*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), 147-9, 157. C.E. Thomas, “Recall Historic Sea Battle,” *Mail-Star* (Halifax), 3 October 1962; Dorothy Evans, “Ninety-Seven Years in the Navy,” *Atlantic Advocate* LIII, no. 5 (January 1963): 21-32.

88 Pullen to Ernest M. Eller, 20 January 1966, Pullen Papers, MG 1/2536/2, NSA.

Government House. J.L. Bennett, writing in the *Dalhousie Review*, noted that it compared favourably with previous treatments, especially in its rigorous analysis and surprising lack of British bias. Pullen's book remains the standard reference, in part because it is beautifully illustrated but also because of its coverage of the victory celebrations as well as the battle.⁸⁹

In 19th-century Nova Scotia, the battle also thrived in literature. It is referenced briefly in the Sam Slick novels published by Haliburton during the 1830s and 1840s. Slick, a brash Yankee clock trader, rationalized that he had not been overly depressed when the *Shannon* "whipped" the *Chesapeake* because the United States could "spare" to lose one ship to the British, and it knocked his countrymen's egos back down to size.⁹⁰ Although it is surprising that Haliburton did not write more about the battle in his novels and histories, especially because he took part in the celebrations in 1813, the carnage he witnessed may have hit too close to home. As he explained to Broke's son in 1864, the scene onboard the *Chesapeake* stayed with him for decades. In 1849, John S. Cummins published *Altham: A Tale of the Sea*. Born in Ireland, Cummins moved to the Canadas in the 1830s; but his novel is based on the Napoleonic Wars, with young James Annesley ("Jemmy") as the main character. With the outbreak of the War of 1812, Jemmy becomes a midshipman on the *Shannon*, just in time for its famous clash with the *Chesapeake*. A significant portion of the novel takes place aboard the *Shannon* or at Halifax after the battle, where Jemmy and the rest of the Shannons are welcomed as conquering heroes. "Halifax is proverbially gay and hospitable at all times," Cummins wrote, "but never was it more remarkably so than on the *Shannon's* arrival." These "ever loyal Novascotians" reveled in the celebrations and in "feting Captain Brooke and his officers." Although published in London, *Altham* received positive reviews and was available in Halifax.⁹¹

The *Shannon* continued to be remembered vividly in poetry, music, and Nova Scotia's folk culture. After Confederation, the War of 1812 became a popular subject for a new generation of Canadian writers such as the New Brunswick poet Charles G.D. Roberts. Much of this group's writing on the war focused on the Great Lakes region, but Roberts's poem, entitled "The Shannon and the Chesapeake," begins with the opening stanza:

Oh, shout for the good ship Shannon,
And cheer for the gallant Broke,
For hot was the fight she fought,
And staunch the ship she took.⁹²

89 Pullen Papers, MG 1/2536/5-7, NSA; NSHS Minutes, 25 November 1966, 2 November 1973, NSA; *Trident* (Halifax), 31 December 1969; J.L. Bennett [book review], *Dalhousie Review* XLIX (Winter 1969-70): 595-6.

90 Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Clockmaker: Sayings and Doings of Sam Slick of Slickville* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1871), 169-72; Haliburton, *The Attaché: or, Sam Slick in England* (London: Routledge, 1858), 59.

91 John S. Cummins, *Altham: A Tale of the Sea*, 2 vols. (London: Saunders and Otley, 1849); Mary Lu MacDonald, "The *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon* Approach the Cannon," *Canadian Poetry* 30 (Spring-Summer 1992): 30-40.

92 Charles G.D. Roberts, *Orion, and other Poems* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1880), 99-102.

It is probable that far more sea shanties and ballads on this theme circulated orally in the 19th-century Atlantic world than were ever written down. Thanks to early folklorists such as W. Roy Mackenzie and Helen Creighton, some of those that were still current at the turn of the 20th century were recorded. One such song, “The *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon*,” concluded:

Here’s to Broke and all his crew, who with courage stout and true
Fought against the Yankee frigate neat and handy O.
O may they ever prove both in fighting and in love
That the British tars will always be the dandy O!⁹³

Creighton noted that by the 1940s Mrs. Catherine Gallagher of Chebucto Head, near Halifax, was the only person who still remembered another version of “The *Chesapeake* and the *Shannon*.” Creighton wrote down the lyrics as Gallagher sang them aloud to her. Beginning with the phrase, “‘Twas on the glorious fourth of June,” it declares:

But ten minutes work we had to do
While Yankee bullets around us flew,
We boarded her down, her colours drew,
We boarded her down, her colours drew,
And struck her to the Shannon.⁹⁴

Although the day of the battle is confused, this song, set to a traditional tune, was typical of its genre in glorifying British bravery. Ironically, the lyrics and music from some of these ballads were based on Yankee songs from the War of 1812 that celebrated American victories over the British. Writing in the mid-20th century, Creighton noted how even then the battle lived on in regional memory – particularly the death and destruction that so many Nova Scotians had witnessed on the ships in 1813: “People living along the coast tell me that their fathers seldom sang or talked of this engagement because of the sights they had witnessed.”⁹⁵

Historic sites and commemorations

The battle’s 50th anniversary in 1863 passed with relatively little attention, despite the presence of Rear-Admiral Alexander Milne and the North American squadron. There were no public commemorations. Milne was sensitive to diplomatic tensions between Britain and the United States caused by the American Civil War, and he may have discouraged a patriotic ceremony that would insult US officials. Most of

93 W. Roy Mackenzie, *Ballads and Sea-Songs from Nova Scotia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928), 208-10, 399; Edith Fowke, Alan Mills, and Helmut Blume, *Canada’s Story in Song* (Toronto: Gage, 1965), 68-70. There are several variations of this song. I used the latter, which includes the music. Mackenzie recorded two songs with the same name, which were still known on Nova Scotia’s northeast coast in the early 20th century.

94 Helen Creighton and Doreen H. Senior, *Traditional Songs from Nova Scotia* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1950), 266-7.

95 In a ceremonial issue the *Mail-Star* (20 June 1949) published an essay on the *Shannon*, including one of the most “popular and spirited songs at Harrow and other British schools for boys.” It begins with “The ‘Chesapeake’ bold out of Boston I am told.”

Halifax's newspapers let the milestone pass with little remark. The *Acadian Recorder* stated simply that 1 June was the anniversary of the "memorable battle," and that on 6 June the "*Shannon*, with her prize, came up Halifax harbor half a century ago to-day, and the excitement created among the peaceful inhabitants of our city may be better imagined than described."⁹⁶ The *Morning Chronicle* offered the only editorial. It summarized the battle and noted "there are yet among us several venerable old gentlemen who distinctly remember seeing these two engines of war steering up the harbor on a Sunday, half a century ago."⁹⁷ For the 75th anniversary of the battle in 1888, *The Critic* noted that Halifax had seen its share of excitement over the years, including royal visits, "but it may be safely assumed that no subsequent excitement can ever have equaled that which she experienced when the *Shannon* glided up her noble harbor in company with her prize the *Chesapeake*."⁹⁸

The centenary in 1913 received significantly more attention. The NSHS had been planning to celebrate it for over a year and, as part of its historic sites program, it unveiled two tablets in 1913. The first, honouring Wallis, was revealed on 29 May in a public ceremony at the dockyard, where Wallis had been born and raised. This "Father of the British Fleet," the tablet reads, spent almost 90 years in the navy but "first won fame on board the *Shannon* in her famous action with the *Chesapeake*." A sizeable gathering assembled for the occasion. They included not only the president of the NSHS, but also a young Prince Albert of Britain – the future George VI but at the time a naval cadet – along with the captains and crews of British and Canadian warships and local heritage representatives. Captain Edward Martin, head of the dockyard, related how, as a midshipman in a later and steam-powered version of HMS *Shannon*, Wallis had presented its gun room with a snuff box as a memento from the ill-fated American frigate of the War of 1812. Wallis stated that gunnery was the key to victory: "If you have the guns use them, and use them properly." Seamen and soldiers of 1913 formed a square around the tablet, while bands from HMS *Cumberland* and the Royal Canadian Regiment played "Rule Britannia" and "O Canada."⁹⁹

This ceremony was covered widely in the press. The *Evening Mail* ran the headline, "Naval Hero Whom Halifax Well Delights to Honor."¹⁰⁰ Rain fell in "torrents" but apparently did not dampen the festivities. The *Acadian Recorder* prophesied that the *Shannon*'s triumph "will adorn the annals of the naval history of the empire as one of the finest single ship actions ever fought and is the last link which connects us with the glorious days of Nelson and Collingwood."¹⁰¹ Later in the year, the NSHS unveiled the second tablet at Province House in Halifax to honour a cannon outside of that building which, according to tradition, had been used on the *Shannon* in its "historic" fight against the *Chesapeake*. The tablet's

96 *Acadian Recorder*, 6 June 1863.

97 *Morning Chronicle*, 6 June 1863.

98 *Critic*, 1 June 1888.

99 *CNSHS* 18 (1914): preface; *Acadian Recorder*, 20 December 1856; NSHS Minutes, 22 May 1912, NSA; Harry Piers Journal, 29 May 1913, Piers Papers, MG 1/1049, NSA.

100 *Evening Mail* (Halifax), 30 May 1913.

101 *Acadian Recorder*, 29 May 1913. See also *Halifax Herald*, 27-30 May 1913, and *Morning Chronicle*, 31 May 1913.

inscription stated that it then had been used as the day and evening gun at Halifax Citadel between 1882 and 1905.¹⁰² At the turn of the 21st century, a second cannon, reported to be from the *Chesapeake*, was retrieved from storage, refurbished, and placed on the opposite side of Province House, where both remain on public display and serve as symbolic reminders of the War of 1812.¹⁰³

In 1919 the Canadian government created the HSMBC to designate sites of national historic significance. During its first generation, the board operated in a closed setting with minimal academic debate or public consultation. Although many sites were of historical significance, those chosen were often selected because of the personal research and community interests of local board members who included amateur historians such as Brigadier-General George Cruikshank on the War of 1812 in Upper Canada.¹⁰⁴ Nominated in 1924, the *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle was championed by three board members: Cruikshank, the HSMBC chair; John Clarence Webster of New Brunswick; and Judge Walter Crowe from Sydney. Admiralty House was chosen as the site, but initially the board had misgivings, preferring Point Pleasant Park or St. Paul's churchyard because they offered greater public exposure. The board worked closely with the NSHS, whose point man, Major J. Plimsoll Edwards, favoured the naval dockyard, fearing that in a public park the monument could be "smashed some night by a Yankee vandal." It was a team effort from the board in creating a patriotic message for what it considered one of the Royal Navy's only bright spots during the War of 1812.¹⁰⁵ Unveiled on 15 October 1927, the memorial consisted of a stone monument with the standard bronze HSMBC plaque: "*Shannon and Chesapeake. In Honour of Captain Philip V. Broke, officers and crew of H.M.S. Shannon, who gained a glorious victory over the United States frigate Chesapeake off Boston Harbour, 1st June 1813. The Shannon brought her prize into Halifax Harbour on 6th June.*" Webster took charge of the proceedings with assistance from the NSHS and Harry Piers, curator of the Nova Scotia Museum. Webster even arranged for Broke's great-grandson, Captain James St. Vincent Broke Saumarez, to come over from England.¹⁰⁶

On the day of the ceremony, Webster presided over a lunch at the genteel Halifax Club in Saumarez's honour, at which MacMechan distributed copies of his

102 *CNSHS* 18 (1914): preface; NSHS Minutes, 22 May 1912, NSA.

103 *Halifax Mail*, 25 November 1948; *Sunday Herald*, 30 September 2001.

104 Pelletier, "Politics of Selection," 126-42; C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), chaps. 2, 3; D.C. Harvey, "National Historic Sites in Nova Scotia," *Dalhousie Review* 18 (1939): 435-47; D.C. Harvey Papers, MG 1/441/95, NSA.

105 Edwards to Crowe, 30 November 1926, HSMBC file on *Shannon-Chesapeake* Memorial, RG 84, HS6-37, LAC; J.B. Harkin to Crowe, 10 January 1927, HSMBC file on *Shannon-Chesapeake*, LAC. Webster nominated the battle in 1924, when he was temporarily in charge of sites in Nova Scotia. Edwards, who served as president of the NSHS, was Nova Scotia's representative on the HSMBC before he resigned in 1925 and was replaced by Crowe. See Taylor, *Negotiating the Past*, chap. 3.

106 HSMBC file on *Shannon-Chesapeake* Memorial, RG 84, HS6-37, LAC; Papers on Unveiling of *Shannon-Chesapeake* Plaque, Webster Collection, S194/F217, NBM; NSHS Minutes, 20 April, 21 September, 4 November 1927, NSA; *CNSHS* 21 (1927): preface; MacMechan Journal, 15 October 1927, MS-2-82, box 1.2, DAL Archives.

chapbook *Shannon and Chesapeake*. At Admiralty House Saumarez unveiled the plaque, and wreaths were laid on behalf of the British and Canadian fleets, the recently established HMS *Shannon* chapter of the IODE in Dartmouth, and the absent Agnes Mary Oliphant (Broke's step-granddaughter). Commander V.G. Brodeur accepted custody of the memorial on behalf of the Canadian Navy and the Department of National Defence.¹⁰⁷ Lieutenant-Governor J.C. Tory came armed with a notebook on the War of 1812, gleaned mostly from MacMechan's and Snider's writings. He hoped that the "spirit of the ceremony was not one of glorification of War, but rather one of respect for the noble traditions of the Anglo-Saxon race that we share with the Americans."¹⁰⁸ Saumarez related how touched Broke had been in 1813 when every British seaman in Halifax donated two days' pay for the widows and orphans of men killed in the battle.¹⁰⁹ The *Evening Mail* noted how shades of the *Shannon* and *Chesapeake* now once again "rose and sailed the Harbour," while the *Halifax Chronicle* argued that even though "every schoolboy knows the story of the *Shannon* and the *Chesapeake*" it was always worth telling.¹¹⁰ Piers explained how the NSHS's heritage efforts added "distinctly to the interest of the place to tourists" and reminded "our own citizens of the prominent events and persons connected with the growth of Halifax."¹¹¹ Webster had anticipated that this would be the largest and most important HSMBC event in the Maritimes to date, and afterwards confirmed that it was a "great success" in a "picturesque setting."¹¹² Even so, the HSMBC was not yet finished with the *Shannon*. At the behest of D.C. Harvey, provincial archivist and Nova Scotia's representative on the board, it designated Wallis a nationally historic person in 1945. This stemmed from Harvey's own research, particularly his 1942 article "Nova Scotia and the Canadian Naval Tradition," in the *Canadian Historical Review*. At a small ceremony in 1949, with naval and civil representatives on hand, plaques honouring Wallis and four other Haligonians who became admirals in the Royal Navy were unveiled at the maritime museum in the dockyard, the predecessor of the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic.¹¹³

During the 1950s and 1960s, Admiral Pullen was the driving force behind most events devoted to the *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle. These usually took the form of anniversary services on 1 June at the *Shannon* monument in the naval cemetery or at St. Paul's, and often coincided with "Navy Week" celebrations. As public memory of the battle had faded over time, such activities were organized increasingly by

107 HSMBC File on *Shannon-Chesapeake* Memorial, RG 84, HS6-37, LAC; Papers on *Shannon-Chesapeake* Plaque, Webster Collection, S194/F204-17, NBM; Piers Journal, 13-15 October 1927, MG 1/1049, NSA; NSHS Minutes, 20 April, 21 September, 4 November 1927, NSA; *Acadian Recorder*, 17 October 1927.

108 J.C. Tory Papers, MG 2/717/3, NSA; *Evening Mail*, 17 October 1927.

109 Draft of Saumarez's Speech, Webster Collection, S194/F204-17, NBM.

110 *Evening Mail*, 17 October 1927; *Halifax Chronicle*, 17 October 1927.

111 Piers's Draft Memorandum on Historic Sites, 11 October 1927, Tory Papers, MG 2/717/3, NSA.

112 Webster to Harkin, 22 January, 18 October 1927, HSMBC file on *Shannon-Chesapeake* Memorial, RG 84, HS6-37, LAC.

113 Harvey, "Nova Scotia and the Canadian Naval Tradition," *Canadian Historical Review* XXIII, no. 3 (September 1942): 247-59; HSMBC file on Provo Wallis Memorial, RG 84, HS6-143, LAC; Harvey Papers, MG 1/441-6, NSA; *Crowsnest*, September 1949; *Mail-Star*, 8-14 August 1949.

heritage professionals in Halifax and connected directly to the promotion of the Canadian Navy. In addition, whereas early commemorations originated as a celebration of the British Empire with an anti-American undertone (particularly before the Second World War), they changed into a statement about Canadian-American friendship and joint participation in Navy Week from which the Royal Navy was gradually excluded. In 1952, for the 139th anniversary, Pullen laid a wreath in the naval cemetery, and for the 150th anniversary in 1963 Halifax welcomed ten American warships led by aircraft carrier USS *Essex* and the British Sixth Submarine Division.¹¹⁴ At St. Paul's in 1963, the senior chaplain in the US fleet assisted in conducting the service while Captain J.M. West of the *Essex* read the first scriptural lesson, followed by British Commander Kenneth Vause. These biblical messages struck a peaceful chord. With "The Mountain of the Lord," the Americans proclaimed that "Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore," while the British verse, entitled "Submission to Governing Authorities," preached peace and respect and concluded with "Love your neighbor as yourself." As the *Crowsnest*, the Canadian Navy's magazine, stated: "Commemoration of this particular engagement was considered appropriate since it has a prominent place in the history of Halifax and of St. Paul's."¹¹⁵

On 1 October 1966, the Canadian Navy and NSHS unveiled the "Chesapeake Memorial" in the naval cemetery. Placed near the *Shannon* monument, the memorial, consisting of a granite boulder and plaque, was a tombstone for 12 of the *Chesapeake*'s men who were believed to be buried there in unmarked graves. The aircraft carrier USS *Wasp* and other warships were on hand, as were the Canadian Forces band in Halifax, a United States marine guard, the American and Canadian admirals, and Premier Robert Stanfield. US Consul General Robert Black gave a prayer and address while C. Bruce Fergusson, provincial archivist and HSMBC representative, spoke about the "mystical chords of memory" that old sea fights stirred up, with none "more epic than the engagement of the *Shannon* and the *Chesapeake* in 1813."¹¹⁶ However, like the speakers at St. Paul's three years earlier, Fergusson focused on friendship: "We are met here today to pay a tribute to the heroism of men in days of yore. We boast about thousands of miles of undefended border between Canada and the United States and about more than a century and a half of peace. May the people of the United States and Canada, together with the people of Great Britain, continue forever in perfect amity in the cause of justice."¹¹⁷ Once again, Pullen was active behind the scenes – he had, in fact, been researching the *Chesapeake* graves since the early 1960s, after his retirement from the navy. In correspondence with Earnest M. Eller, a retired captain and director of naval history in Washington, Pullen stated how he hoped this "modest effort will complete the story at Halifax" of the *Shannon-Chesapeake* encounter. Eller regretted that he could

114 *Crowsnest*, August 1952; Pullen to Eller, 17 May 1963, Pullen Papers, MG 1/2536/2, NSA.

115 *Crowsnest*, June-July 1963.

116 *CNSHS*, 35 (1966): preface; NSHS Minutes, 25 November 1966, NSA; brochure for unveiling of *Chesapeake* Memorial, 1 October 1966, VF 514/4, NSA; *Chronicle-Herald*, 1, 3 October 1966; Pullen, *Shannon and Chesapeake*, 68-9.

117 Fergusson's Speech, "The *Shannon* and the *Chesapeake*," 1 October 1966, Fergusson Papers, MG 1/1883/12, NSA.

not attend, but noted that the “families of those of the *Chesapeake* who died of their wounds at Halifax and all other Americans will be grateful to you for the Memorial Bronz[e] Plaque which [has] resulted from your efforts.”¹¹⁸

For greater public exposure, in 1969 the HSMBC moved the *Shannon-Chesapeake* memorial from the dockyard to Point Pleasant Park. That August, the *Mail-Star* explained that more tourists and citizens would now be able to view the plaque. While phrases such as “glorious victory” were “rather blunt” by modern standards, it was confident that “our friends” from the United States would not be offended as there were “many memorials in the U.S.A. to local victories over the British in the War of 1812.” If so, an exception was Rudolph Kales, an American tourist who wrote to the editor that he could not understand why Canada would wish to celebrate a victory by the tyrannical British Navy against a young country fighting for its freedom. What was glorious about illegally pressing American sailors and sending captives to Dartmoor Prison? “My suggestion for your plaque,” Kales wrote, “would be to send it plunging into the deepest part of Halifax Harbor or, as you spell it, Harbour.”¹¹⁹ But this kind of criticism made little impression. Earlier that summer the *Mail-Star* had commented on Lunenburg’s construction of replicas of historic British warships such as HMS *Bounty*. “Why Not One for Halifax?” it asked, pointing to the *Shannon*. Like replicas in Britain and the United States, it could generate interest in Halifax and “stimulate its tourist trade while also serving as a restaurant, youth hostel or in some other capacity.”¹²⁰ No such replica was ever built, and many years later, in 1998, the HSMBC turned around the *Shannon-Chesapeake* plaque to the weather side of its cairn to make room for a memorial on Atlantic defences during the Second World War. While the *Shannon’s* plaque now faces the harbour, beside the same stretch of water the ships sailed past in 1813, most visitors, ironically, have no idea that it is even there.¹²¹

In 2011, Prime Minister Stephen Harper announced an allocation of \$11.5 million to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. That amount subsequently grew to nearly \$30 million. According to the government, the war was a “seminal event in the making of our great country.”¹²² In this narrative, by repelling an

118 Pullen to Eller, 28 June 1966, Pullen Papers, MG 1/2536/2, NSA; Eller to Pullen, 19 September 1966, Pullen Papers, MG 1/2536/2, NSA.

119 *Mail-Star*, 14, 19 August 1969.

120 *Mail-Star*, 30 June 1969; H.L. Pickrem to L.H. Robinson, 30 November 1970, Parks Canada file on *Shannon-Chesapeake* Memorial, HS6-37, Halifax Citadel Library; “Special Committee on the Revision of Unilingual Plaques, 1973-7,” files provided to author by HSMBC. During the 1970s, the HSMBC made its plaques bilingual and re-wrote most of their messages. The *Shannon-Chesapeake’s* wording was changed but its message remains the same: “Confidence in the British navy faltered early in the War of 1812 when American vessels won several single-ship engagements. This pattern was broken on June 1, 1813 when HMS *Shannon*, commanded by Philip Broke, closed with USS *Chesapeake* under Captain James Lawrence off Boston harbour. The latter was taken in a short and bloody fight and brought into Halifax by her captor on June 6. This engagement was long considered a naval classic. It marked a change in British fortunes in the war at sea and vindicated Broke’s insistence on gunnery training, neglected by the navy since Trafalgar.”

121 *Daily News*, 4 May 1998.

122 Prime Minister’s Official Message, “The War of 1812 – The Fight for Canada,” *Government of Canada Website*, <http://1812.gc.ca/eng/1305743548294/1305743621243>.

American invasion, the volunteer militias, Aboriginal warriors, and British regiments paved the way to Confederation in 1867 and ensured that Canada remained an independent country, even if Canada did not exist at that time. To mark the occasion, projects were funded across the country, especially museum exhibits, battle re-enactments, and community festivals. The critics were vocal. Journalists not only questioned the importance of the war, which was not a formative part of Canadian public memory, but also the government's sudden infatuation with the military as an icon of Canadianness. At a time of economic uncertainty – which included deep cuts to federal programs – they wondered if this money was being well spent.¹²³ Academics and heritage professionals pointed to the contradiction of the government celebrating the War of 1812 while at the same time implementing drastic cuts to Parks Canada and Library and Archives Canada – basically, undermining the people, resources, and institutions that preserved Canadian history in the first place.¹²⁴ Historians on the left have made their own call to arms, warning that part of the government's hidden agenda in reshaping the country is rewriting the past.¹²⁵ While most of the federal money went to southern Ontario, two events highlighted the *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle as a major event in the Atlantic region. Defence Minister Peter MacKay announced the bicentennial plans in front of the Point Pleasant memorial. After confidence in the navy had been shaken, he stated, the *Shannon*'s "classic" victory turned the War of 1812 around. During the summer of 2013, the 200th anniversary of the "Battle of Boston Harbor" was commemorated by Parks Canada at the boardwalk, the Old Burying Ground, and St. Paul's as well as by the Royal Nova Scotia International Tattoo and other heritage organizations. Meanwhile the Royal Canadian Mint unveiled a set of five coins on the War of 1812, with the HMS *Shannon* "Toonie" the only one featuring an Atlantic Canadian theme. This coin hearkens back to the token that Halifax merchants minted in 1814 to honour Broke's emotional victory.¹²⁶

Conclusion

When budding naval historian William James arrived in Halifax in 1813, he claimed to have been insulted by local newspaper editors. When they apparently refused to publish his anti-American diatribes, he called them "notorious" Bostonians and "rank republicans at heart." He claimed that the "greater proportion of the

123 Jane Taber and Gloria Galloway, "War of 1812 Fund Adds to Harper's Patriotic Initiatives," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 28 September 2011.

124 Eric Sager, "Harperizing Canada's History and Heritage," *Times Colonist* (Victoria, BC), 11 May 2012; J.L. Granatstein, "Who Will Preserve the Past for Future Generations?" *Globe and Mail*, 12 June 2012.

125 Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012); "Forum: History under Harper," *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (Spring 2014): 195-237; Yves Frenette, "Conscripting Canada's Past: The Harper Government and the Politics of Memory," *Canadian Journal of History* 49, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2014): 49-65; "Interchange: The War of 1812," *Journal of American History* 99, no. 2 (September 2012): 520-55. For a different perspective, see C.P. Champion, "The War that Created Canada," *National Post* (Toronto), 23 January 2014.

126 Peter MacKay's Speech: "Launching the Commemoration of the 200th Anniversary of the War of 1812," 12 October 2011, MacKay website, <http://petermackay.ca/news/5872/>.

community was under the political thralldom of this American junto.”¹²⁷ However, James was badly mistaken. These editors, respected residents such as John Howe and William Minns, were loyalists who rejected the republic during the American Revolution and chose the British Empire. Their response to the *Shannon*’s victory in 1813 was celebratory and nationalistic, as in Halifax generally. As Thomas Haliburton explained years later, on the battle’s anniversary, the *Shannon*’s triumph released tension caused by the shock of American naval victories that had been building up for over a year. When the men-of-war arrived in Halifax, residents expressed their relief in a popular, patriotic, and spontaneous way. Unprecedented in the British North American context, this outpouring of Britishness made the *Shannon-Chesapeake* battle one of the most important cultural events in the city’s history. For a generation of Nova Scotians, who were there that day or experienced the celebrations in some other way, the battle was much more than just a military event from the War of 1812. It lived on in public memory, history, and literature throughout the 19th century. Memory of the battle remained strong because it was a local event, with strong local connections to the city and in the collective imagination. People remembered it decades later, more so than almost any other public event. On 6 August 1914, only two days after Britain declared war on Germany, the luxury liner *Mauretania* was chased into Halifax harbour by German cruisers. The *Morning Chronicle* declared that “not since HMS *Shannon* towed the American frigate *Chesapeake* in here one hundred and one years before has there been such excitement.”¹²⁸ By the early 20th century, however, personal memories of the *Shannon* were gone, the British Navy had withdrawn from Halifax in 1905, and privateering eclipsed the battle as Nova Scotia’s dominant theme from the War of 1812. To keep the legacy alive for future generations, local writers such Archibald MacMechan, D.C. Harvey, and Hugh Pullen, with important ties to historic sites programs at the NSHS and HSMBC, combined with the Canadian Navy to organize anniversary celebrations and commemorations. These symbols remain a fixture of the city’s public art and historical consciousness. Although this famous frigate action from the Age of Sail had little to do with the politics of selection or the state’s commodification of history and tourism, it continues to be recognized as a defining feature of Halifax’s cultural and military heritage.

127 James to First Lord of Admiralty, 4 January 1819, in Holden Furber, “How William James Came to be a Naval Historian,” *American Historical Review* 38, no. 1 (October 1932): 74-85; James to Broke, September 1816, Broke Papers, HA 93/9/275-99, SRO.

128 Quoted in Peter McGuigan, “Flight to Safety,” *Sunday Herald*, 26 August 2001.