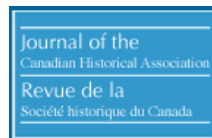


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The Masculine Mountie: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police as a Male Institution, 1914-1939

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Article abstract

1914 to 1939 was a very important period in the history of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). The Force found its very existence threatened. It also was transformed as it lost and then regained a role at the provincial level of policing, found itself amalgamated with the Dominion Police in 1920, and experienced widely fluctuating personnel levels throughout the period. Finally, it took on a security/intelligence role that would last until 1984. "The Masculine Mountie" looks at the Mounted Police in this era. Specifically the paper uses gender and ethnic analysis to explore the values and characteristics of the RCMP and how they affected the work it performed. Who Mounties were leads directly into what they did. These two aspects are very related, a reality that is too often ignored in much of the writing about Canada's national police force. Finally, the paper connects these various threads in an effort to deal with the important question of why the RCMP survived and prospered in its era of great uncertainty.

The Masculine Mountie: The Royal Canadian Mounted Police as a Male Institution, 1914-1939

STEVE HEWITT

BRAVE YOUNG MEN, INVARIABLY ON HORSEBACK AND FAR FROM HOME, who battled smugglers and thieves with only the broad prairie horizon as a constant companion – that is the Mountie mystique, celebrated in book after book written about the Force. But who really were the members of the Mounted Police between 1914 and 1939? When 15-year-old Vernon Kemp joined the Mounted Police in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, in 1910, a barracks mate asked him where he came from. When Kemp replied that he and his family had emigrated from England just two years earlier, the response was immediate: “‘Ye gods,’” he cried to the others. “‘Did you hear that? Another bloody Englishman. How many does that make now in the post? Apart from the OC, who’s a French Canadian, I’m the only native-born, true-blue Canadian in the place. The Force is getting lousy with these blokes from England.’”¹ What was an Englishman doing in the Mounted Police? And what were so many Britons doing in a Canadian police force? The truth of the matter is that men like Vernon Kemp were far from being unrepresentative. He – and they – exemplified all of the dominant characteristics of the Force in this era: he was an English-born male.²

Special thanks to Professor W.A. Waiser, Pasi Ahonen, Christa Scowby, Bryan Scowby, Moira Harris and the anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*.

1 V.A.M. Kemp, *Scarlet and Stetson: The Royal North-West Mounted Police on the Prairies* (Toronto, 1964), 79.

2 English, British, Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Canadian are used interchangeably in this paper. These terms represent, in the words of historian Catherine Hall, “a cultural identity, with its own ethnocentric roots and perspectives.” She argues that “Englishness is defined through the creation of an imagined community For the imagined community is built on a series of assumptions about ‘others’ which define the nature of Englishness itself.” Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (New York, 1992), 25. Hall notes that there is a clear linkage between these two concepts: “That national identity [English] was powerfully articulated by middle-class men in [the nineteenth century]: men who claimed to speak for the nation and on behalf of others The search for masculine independence, for a secure identity, was built on their assertion of their superiority over the decadent aristocracy, over dependent females, over children, servants and employers, over the peoples of the Empire, over all *others* who were not English, male and middle class.” *Ibid.*, 207.

Analysing the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in terms of the Force's gender and ethnic characteristics fills a void in the existing historiography.³ Historian R.C. Macleod's important study of the Force in the nineteenth century, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement*, dealt with the issue of social class and the North-West Mounted Police, while historian Keith Walden explored the Mounted Policeman as a cultural symbol in *Visions of Order*.⁴ Examining the RCMP's gender and ethnic characteristics between 1914 and 1939 contributes to the historiography because it allows for a more nuanced and detailed portrait of the government agency, especially the values it espoused. Such an approach also sheds some light on the way the Mounted Police viewed the world and, ultimately, the path it would choose to conduct its policing activities.

Gender analysis in terms of men is a recent trend in the historical profession. In *The Gender of Breadwinners* (1990), historian Joy Parr dismissed the usual dichotomy which views women as the product of gender and men of class. "Men, like women," she argued, "were gendered subjects."⁵ Parr also demonstrated that people are composed of many variables, including class, ethnicity and gender, none of which are mutually exclusive. Nor are concepts of manliness and masculinity rigid. They are complex, sometimes contradictory, and ever evolving.⁶ For example, historian Gail Bederman makes a distinction between the concepts of manliness and masculinity. Manliness, more of a nineteenth-century concept, emphasised honour, self-control and order. On the other hand, masculinity, which was displacing manliness as a primary middle-class definition of maleness in the early twentieth century, stressed physicality, size and violence.⁷ Both manliness and physical masculinity were masculinities.

3 Ethnicity and race are also used interchangeably in this paper. Hall notes that "[i]n the nineteenth century the word 'race' covered the terrain now also referred to by the term 'ethnicity' and was increasingly seen as a crucial dividing line between peoples." Ibid., 25.

4 R.C. Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1906* (Toronto, 1976), 73-88; Keith Walden, *Visions of Order: The Canadian Mounties in Symbol and Myth* (Toronto, 1982). For a recent work along similar lines as Walden, see Michael Dawson, "'That Nice Red Coat Goes to My Head Like Champagne': Popular Images of the Mountie, 1880-1960," unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, 1 June 1996. The concept of class and its impact on the Mounted Police is an important one. My research has yet to turn up any systematic information on the economic and social background of large numbers of Mounties serving in the early twentieth century. It is safe to suggest, however, that even if an individual Mounted Policeman was not from a middle- or upper-class background the values of the Force were certainly middle and upper class ones.

5 Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto, 1990), 245.

6 Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the U.S., 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1995), 11.

7 Ibid., 19.

Often they ran parallel to each other. Just as frequently they overlapped or combined in policing, a male-constructed occupation that often required several forms of masculinity. The early-twentieth-century Mounted Police was no exception to this rule.

The male nature of the Mounties was important to the Canadian state between 1914 and 1939; it increasingly had to rely on the police during this era of great change and turmoil in Canada. The old rural and agricultural nation was giving way to an industrial and urban one. Immigration was part of this change. The arrival of Eastern and Central European immigrants prior to the First World War triggered a nativist response from the entrenched Anglo-Canadian population.⁸ In the minds of those in power, these new Canadians were intimately linked to the burst of labour discontent and the growth of radicalism at the end of the First World War. For many citizens, an event such as the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia or the Winnipeg General Strike only confirmed the equation that "foreigners" equalled "radicals."⁹ In the 1920s the challenges to the status quo continued. The Communist Party of Canada, with a majority of members from ethnic minorities, was formed. By the end of the decade, the party had become active in organising radical labour unions under the banner of the Workers' Union League.

The 1930s was the ultimate decade of social discontent in Canada. Tens of thousands of Canadians were unemployed; many went without regular meals. On the prairies, thousands of Canadians abandoned their farms and moved to urban centres. Hunger marches, sit-ins and violent strikes, mostly organised by Communists, became frequent events. Section 98 of the *Criminal Code*, passed as a tool for dealing with strikers in Winnipeg in 1919, was dusted off and put to use against the radical left by the Conservative government of Prime Minister R.B. Bennett. The solution to the problem of single unemployed men, perceived as having nothing to lose and therefore a social menace, was to send them off to military-run relief camps in remote areas, where they laboured for \$0.20 a day. Discontent quickly became widespread in the camps. The unhappiness culminated in a 1935 province-wide relief camp strike in British Columbia and an ill-fated trip to Ottawa by the strikers in the form of the On to Ottawa Trek.¹⁰ The nation-wide dissatisfaction did not end with the departure of the hated R.B. Bennett and the return of William Lyon Mackenzie King. In 1937,

8 Historian Howard Palmer defines nativism as "opposition to an internal minority on the grounds that it posed a threat to Canadian national life." He identifies three strains of nativism as being relevant to western Canada: Anglo-Saxon, anti-Catholic and anti-radical. Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto, 1982), 7, 9.

9 Donald Avery, *"Dangerous Foreigners": European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto, 1979), 85.

10 Lorne A. Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State* (Montreal, 1987), 47-200.

278 strikes involving 71,905 workers, the highest levels for both since 1920, occurred.¹¹

To deal with class, ethnic and political discontent in post-war Canada, the state needed a body to perform its bidding. The RCMP seemed the obvious choice. During the First World War, one of its main functions in western Canada was to monitor enemy aliens in an effort to prevent espionage. To accomplish this task the Royal North-West Mounted Police (RNWMP), as it was then called, took on a security/intelligence role for the first time. Secret agents were hired and regular detectives found themselves mixing regular policing with activities more consistent with those of a security agency.¹² After the war, the RCMP had experience, tradition and, more than any other police force in Canada, a national presence, a crucial factor when the state required coordinated efforts against criminals, radicals, foreigners or working-class unrest. Finally, the officer corps of the Mounted Police shared the values, world outlook, and ethnic and gender background of those who designed public policy in Canada.¹³

The Force emerged triumphant in the immediate postwar period. In 1920, the RNWMP amalgamated with the Dominion Police to form the RCMP. With the victory of the Liberals under Mackenzie King in 1921, questions again arose over the RCMP's future. Although the Liberals found the national police force useful, it was also viewed as an intrusion on provincial responsibilities. Again, however, the RCMP survived; it was simply too useful to kill. The RCMP was still in the process of developing its security role throughout this period, and a blurring of the distinction between regular policing duties and security intelligence activities was a regular occurrence.¹⁴ The work of the Force in the latter area should not be underestimated, although this role has sparked a heated debate. Some historians have argued that the importance of security work in the overall history of the RCMP has been exaggerated. "A

11 John Herd Thompson, with Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto, 1985), 349.

12 Carl Betke and S.W. Horrall, *Canada's Security Service: An Historical Outline, 1864-1966*, Vol. 1 (Ottawa, 1978), 210-77.

13 Jack Fossum, who served between 1932 and 1953, described the commissioned officers of his era as "an elite, above the nitty-gritty of day-to-day law enforcement . . . [with] concerns . . . more in the areas of policy making, personnel work and interior economy." Letter to the author from Fossum, 9 March 1996.

14 For studies on the beginning of the RCMP's security role, see Gregory S. Kealey, "The Surveillance State: The Origins of Domestic Intelligence and Counter-Subversion in Canada, 1914-21," *Intelligence and National Security* 7 (1992): 179-210, and "The Early Years of State Surveillance of Labour and the Left in Canada: The Institutional Framework of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Security and Intelligence Apparatus, 1918-26," *Intelligence and National Security* 8 (1993): 129-48. For a description of the variety of policing duties in the 1920s, see C.W. Harvison, *The Horsemen* (Toronto, 1967), 34-57.

number of academics and journalists," writes historian Greg Marquis, "fascinated with security and intelligence, duties exclusive to the RCMP as of 1919, have helped perpetuate this distortion, ignoring the more important operational history of the force."¹⁵ R.C. Macleod agrees with this assessment, arguing that security work in the 1920s accounted for "less than 1% of the total work of the RCMP for that decade."¹⁶ Both scholars fail to realise, however, *that not all police work is created equal*. Catching a murderer is more celebrated by any society than the arrest of a burglar, even though theft is far more rampant than murder. Similarly, in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s the work of the RCMP against Chinese drug dealers and Ukrainian Communists carried more importance to both the state and Canadian society than did enforcing the Migratory Birds or Noxious Weeds Acts. Those in power were aware of the work and its importance to maintaining order.¹⁷ Soon after the return of the RCMP to Saskatchewan, the provincial government of Alberta contemplated a similar move. J.E. Brownlee, the province's Premier, wrote to the attorney-general of his eastern neighbour to collect information on the experience. The Mounted Police's effectiveness at catching shoplifters in small-town Saskatchewan did not interest him; he wanted to know about the willingness of the Force to deal with challenges to order, specifically from labour and the unemployed. His Saskatchewan correspondent assured him that the "Police have co-operated in every way with us and . . . I am satisfied will do everything they can to help us."¹⁸

What were the wider values that members of the political and economic elite and the RCMP shared? Examining Canada's English roots provides some answers to this question. Although the Great War had damaged in some quarters the imperialist form of Canadian nationalism identified by historian Carl Berger, large parts of Canadian society still embraced the values of English society.¹⁹ Ethnocentrism was a prominent part of English identity in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the next. Genera-

15 Greg Marquis, *Policing Canada's Century: A History of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police* (Toronto, 1993), 5.

16 R.C. Macleod, "How They 'Got Their Man,'" *Literary Review of Canada* 5 (September 1996): 21. For a spirited response to Macleod's argument, see Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, "The RCMP and the Enemy Within," *Literary Review of Canada* 5 (November 1996): 22.

17 Even the federal government of William Lyon Mackenzie King which was not overly concerned about radicals in the 1920s, found the RCMP useful because of its work in enforcing federal statutes on behalf of government departments. R.C. Macleod, "The RCMP and the Evolution of Provincial Policing," in *Police Powers in Canada: The Evolution and Practice of Authority*. R.C. Macleod and David Schneiderman, eds. (Toronto, 1994), 48-50.

18 Alberta. Public Archives of Alberta (PAA), Premier Papers, Access No. 69.289, File 77A, Brownlee to MacPherson, 5 November 1930; *ibid.*, File 108, Brownlee to MacPherson, 12 November 1930; *ibid.*, File 108, MacPherson to Brownlee, 8 November 1930.

19 Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto, 1970).

tions of English children had been raised to say as part of their prayers:

How happy is our lot
 Who live on Britain's isle
 Which is of heaven the favour'd spot,
 Where countless blessings smile.
 And,
 I was not born as thousands are,
 Where God was never known;
 And taught to pray a useless pray'r
 To blocks of wood and stone.²⁰

Anglo-Canada demonstrated its English roots in every way, including bigoted attitudes towards non-Anglo-Saxon groups. The Canadian educational system, heavily influenced by Britain, cultivated and reinforced racial and ethnic perspectives. Textbooks such as *History of England for Public Schools* (1923) inculcated in Canadian school children a sense of English nationalism and a pride in and recognition of the fact that the English made up only a seventh of its Empire's population:

Unless this fact is grasped clearly, it is impossible to appreciate the wonderful work being done in controlling and civilizing the millions of subject peoples, comprising hundreds of races, each with its own language, customs, and religion. Rarely, if ever, does Britain find it necessary to resort to force in governing her subject peoples. Even their prejudices are respected, their religion, their social customs, and local laws are seldom interfered with, unless for the purpose of preventing crime or abolishing brutal customs²¹

Even reformers sympathetic to the plight of immigrants and ethnic minorities reflected the prevailing prejudices of Anglo-Canadian society.²²

Whether from Britain or Canada, the vast majority of Mounted Policemen were products of English-dominated societies. Often the influence was obvious: in 1914 Prime Minister Robert Borden proudly confirmed in the House of Commons, under questioning from the opposition, that the United Kingdom had

20 T. Bilby, *A Course of Lessons* (London, 1823), 94, 85, as cited in James Walvin, "Symbols of Moral Superiority: Slavery, Sport and the Changing World Order, 1800-1950," in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*. J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, eds. (New York, 1987), 246-47.

21 *History of England for Public Schools* (Toronto, 1923), 297, as quoted in Timothy J. Stanley, "White Supremacy and the Rhetoric of Educational Indoctrination: A Canadian Case Study," in *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialization and British Imperialism*. J.A. Mangan, ed. (New York, 1990), 150.

22 See J.S. Woodsworth, *Strangers Within Our Gates* (Toronto, 1972 [1909]), 46-160.

supplied 79 per cent of the members of the Mounted Police.²³ The opposition wanted to know why Canadians were not joining their own police force. Some of the reasons included poor wages and even worse working conditions which discouraged Canadian men from joining, and forced the government to actively recruit in Britain. Vernon Kemp's initial wage upon joining was \$0.60 a day. That wage later rose to \$0.75 in 1912 and \$1.25 in 1935.²⁴ For a considerable period of time, this wage was below what an unskilled labourer could hope to attain; unskilled labourers, moreover, did not have jobs that followed them home. Mounties, especially those in small towns and rural areas, were literally on duty around the clock. The police dealt with aspects of life – especially homicides and accidents, but even undercover work – that repelled society.²⁵ On the other hand, despite occasional bursts of excitement, many of the duties of an ordinary Mountie were incredibly banal, as an examination of the records of some of the detachments in Alberta and Saskatchewan reveals. The day-to-day life of most Mounties consisted of uneventful patrols. During the month of November 1919 Constable Carlson of the Short Creek detachment in Saskatchewan travelled 375 miles or an average of 21 miles for each day he ventured out on his horse. In only one case was he investigating a theft, a task that in fact was the duty of the Saskatchewan Provincial Police. Most of his excursions involved “registering aliens,” “general patrol” and another exciting activity listed as “Re: Mail.”²⁶

Then there were the actual working conditions in which many bored policemen laboured for their low wage. As late as October 1915, the six members of the Mounted Police detachment at Yorkton slept in a 15 x 20 room, situated directly above the guardroom which had no sanitary facilities for the prisoners. Prisoners and police had to share one bath-tub and four wash-basins. Finally, after typhoid fever struck one Mountie, six constables petitioned Commissioner Perry for better facilities.²⁷ Such conditions led to a large annual

23 House of Commons Debates, 12 February 1914: 710.

24 S.W. Horrall, *The Pictorial History of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (Toronto, 1973), 34.

25 In the aftermath of the 1933 Saskatoon Relief Camp Riot when it was revealed that a Mounted Policeman, Constable H.M. Wilson, had infiltrated the Saskatoon unemployed, the *Regina Leader-Post* ran an editorial critical of the police methods: “. . . it should be recognized that Canadian public opinion is strongly against what might be referred to as secret police. The tradition of the country is against it, as also is the British tradition.” Canada, National Archives (NA), RG 146, RCMP Security Service Records, Vol. 27, File 92-A-00123, Pt. 3. For a discussion of British attitudes towards undercover surveillance, see Bernard Porter, *The Origins of the Vigilant State: The London Metropolitan Police Special Branch Before the First World War* (London, 1987), 4-16.

26 NA, RG 18, Records of the RCMP, Vol. 1933, File 3, Pt. 8, “Patrols made at the Short Creek Detachment from Oct. 23, 1919 to Nov. 25, 1919.”

27 Kemp, *Scarlet and Stetson*, 41.

turnover in personnel. Many deserted or purchased their freedom. Those who left may have viewed that as their only option. Working for change from within was risky because of the harsh discipline of the Force, a reflection of the militaristic nature of the RCMP. Under Section 30 of the RCMP's 1928 governing code, rank-and-file Mounties could face arrest for "(m) making any anonymous complaint to the government or the Commissioner; (n) communicating, without the Commissioner's authority, either directly or indirectly, to the public press any matter or thing touching the Force."²⁸

Despite the hardships and the emphasis on discipline and hierarchy, some found the life of a Mountie appealing. For former British military men, this was a world they knew.²⁹ These same Mounties, however, would be the first to enlist to fight for King and Empire once the First World War began.³⁰ Many would never return from the killing fields of France; they were replaced by Canadians, although the values of the RCMP remained the same.

The Canadian contingent in the RCMP increased throughout the 1920s, and especially in the 1930s when other work could not be found. A retired Mounted Policeman who joined in 1934, however, could still recall over 60 years later a strong English influence during his training:

the four Commissioned Officers in "Depot" were Englishmen. The chief Riding Sergeant-Major was born in England. The Corporal who was the riding instructor for my squad was an English man, former member of the famous British Cavalry regiment Our P.T. instructor was an Englishman Another drill instructor formerly of Gordon Highlanders stationed on N.W. Frontier in India – and on and on.³¹

Partial statistics culled from obituaries in the *R.C.M.P. Quarterly* suggest that approximately 25 per cent of the Mounties who served at least part of their career in Alberta and Saskatchewan between 1914 and 1939 were English.³² One would also suspect that the majority of those categorised as "Canadian"

28 *Rules and Regulations for the Government and Guidance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1928* (Ottawa, 1928), 243.

29 Interview with Supt. (rtd.) Stirling McNeil, 24 January 1996.

30 By the end of 1915, 60 per cent of volunteers from Canada were British born. Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto, 1991 [1974]), 262.

31 Letter to the author from an anonymous source, 30 January 1996. Another former Mountie who joined in 1934 stated bluntly that there "were too damn many of them [British officers in the Mounted Police]." Interview with Staff-Sergeant (rtd.) Stan Wight, 29 March 1996.

32 Because of inconsistent reporting on the part of the *R.C.M.P. Quarterly* and the advent of the *Access to Information Act*, which allows records deemed not of historical value to be destroyed, these numbers are by no means definitive. This particularly large sample (several hundred deceased Mounties) does, however, confirm the trend suggested by the 1914 numbers.

were probably of British background. Former Commissioner C.W. Harvison was Canadian, born in Ontario. His father, however, left England at the age of four and, although his "memories of the Old Country were vague . . . he retained a deep-rooted loyalty to England, the Crown, and the Flag."³³

For the Mounted Police, gender and ethnicity were intertwined. Their maleness and the dominant English ethnicity meant that they had been inculcated with certain masculine values. Patriotism was one, although it was part of a larger group of values that made up the Victorian ideal of manliness: "physical courage, chivalric ideals, virtuous fortitude, with additional connotations of military and patriotic virtues."³⁴ In the later Victorian period, spartan stoicism was increasingly encouraged in the young. The belief, according to Gail Bederman, was that, "[b]y gaining the manly strength to control himself, a man gained the strength, as well as the duty, to protect and direct those weaker than himself."³⁵ Organisations, such as the Boy Scouts and the Boys' Brigade, sprang up in an effort to indoctrinate working-class boys with the values of their supposed superiors. The Boys' Brigade promoted "the advancement of Christ's Kingdom among Boys and the promotion of habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-Respect and all that tends towards a true Christian Manliness."³⁶

The even more popular and famous Boy Scouts (10,000 adherents in 1910 in English Canada³⁷) promoted similar values, albeit with the emphasis on Christianity replaced by the promotion of patriotism and militarism. As Lord Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* noted in 1908: "Every boy ought to learn how to shoot and to obey orders, else he is no more good when war breaks out than an old woman." Baden-Powell was also famous for the phrase "BE A BRICK," which encouraged Scouts to accept the status quo and their lot within it: "Some bricks may be high up and others low down in the wall; but all must make the best of it and play in their place for the good of the whole. So it is among people; each of us has his place in the world, it is no use being discontented, it is no use hating our neighbours because they are higher up or lower down than themselves."³⁸

The masculine Mountie exhibited the values of the society that produced an organisation like the Boy Scouts. The Force, however, also reflected the

33 Harvison, *The Horsemen*, 4.

34 J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, "Introduction," in Mangan and Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality*, 1.

35 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 12.

36 John Springhall, "Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-Class Adolescents, 1880-1914," in Mangan and Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality*, 52-3.

37 Berger, *The Sense of Power*, 255.

38 Michael Rosenthal, *The Character Factory: Baden-Powell and the Origins of the Boy Scout Movement* (New York, 1986), 9.

transformation in white, male middle-class identity that was taking place in the early decades of the twentieth century.³⁹ Victorian values and the emphasis on being “manly” were being replaced by an increasing emphasis on aggression and physical strength.⁴⁰ Along the way, the ideal body shape of men changed. During the 1850s, a lean and wiry body was the middle-class ideal. By the turn of the century, however, there was an increasing emphasis on large, muscular bodies. It is no coincidence that this was an age when heavyweight boxing became both the most popular form of pugilism and an increasingly popular outside the working classes.⁴¹ The RCMP also celebrated the new ideal male body type. A 35 inch chest, the minimum requirement for a new recruit, was more highly valued in the Mounted Police of the early twentieth century than a high-school education.⁴² Having a “good physique” was the first attribute that came to the mind of a former Mountie upon being asked the characteristics of a competent police officer.⁴³ This attitude was reflected in the Force’s report for 1919. “One thousand two hundred and seventy-five men were engaged,” wrote Commissioner Perry, “but a percentage turned out unsuitable, chiefly for physical unfitness. Examining surgeons do not recognize that the force has no place for weaklings and that only men of sound health and robust physique can carry on.”⁴⁴ This observation by the most important policeman in Canada at the time is significant, for it indirectly reflects turn-of-the-century fears among many in North America and Britain that the white race was in decline. Two events both confirmed and fuelled the apprehension. A large number of British Army volunteers had been found physically unfit, prompting many to talk of the deterioration of the “manly British character.”⁴⁵ In the United States in 1910, meanwhile, the

39 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 15-17.

40 The same was true of the Boy Scouts, where physical ability was stressed over intellectual capacity. Allen Warren, “Popular Manliness: Baden-Powell, Scouting and the Development of Manly Character,” in Mangan and Walvin, eds., *Manliness and Morality*, 194.

41 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 15-17.

42 Prior to 1974 (when it was raised to Grade 12), the minimum educational requirement for a Mountie was Grade 11. Edward Mann and John Alan Lee, *The RCMP vs the People: Inside Canada’s Security Service* (Don Mills, 1979), 123.

43 Letter to the author from an anonymous source, 30 January 1996.

44 Canada. Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers 16:8, “Report of the Royal North-West Mounted Police for the Year Ended September 30, 1919,” 17. Some have suggested that a good physique was necessary in this era because of the rough conditions. While there may be some truth in this, an RCMP recruiting officer in the 1960s still found it necessary to write “[t]his applicant is small [5’9,” 150 pounds], somewhat soft-looking with short neck, round, broad face, clear complexion, and a full head of dark brown hair combed to the right side” on the application form of Patrick Kelly (later to become famous for killing his wife). His RCMP trainers described him as “[a] square-jawed member of small build and little over minimum height, who presents a good appearance in uniform.” Michael Harris, *The Judas Kiss: The Undercover Life of Patrick Kelly* (Toronto, 1995), 39.

45 Rosenthal, *The Character Factory*, 3.

battering of that generation's "Great White Hope" by Jack Johnson, a black boxer, ignited race riots and killings across the country. Many white men viewed the fight as a blow to their male identity. The concern about racial decline sparked efforts and schemes to improve all aspects of white males.⁴⁶

Perry's comment is important also because it demonstrates the masculine construction of policing, specifically the emphasis on physical masculinity. Policing had long been a profession that had had to rely on both physical masculine values and the Victorian emphasis on the manliness of restraint. In his study of the early-twentieth-century Toronto police, Greg Marquis explored the masculine nature of that force: "[T]he atmosphere of the police station was akin to that of the military barracks where job socialization and the camaraderie of the all-male group interacted with working-class culture to produce an exaggerated masculinity." That "police culture," continued Marquis, was

manifested in the maintenance of a bold front with the public, feats of physical courage, support of fellow workers, direct action and the use of colourful language The military background of many Toronto recruits no doubt enhanced this rough culture The image of the patrolmen as exercising restraint yet able to take care of themselves in the rough and tumble of the beat, an image in keeping with the working-class concept of 'masculiness,' did much to maintain popular admiration for the department.⁴⁷

These male characteristics and values were not simply applicable to the Toronto Police or the working classes; they were even more true of Mounted Policemen, many of whom actually lived in barracks in remote places and in an all-male atmospheres.⁴⁸

Ambition, another construct related to men and one little discussed as such, was rampant in the Mounted Police of this era. Many members, perhaps believing achievement to be an integral part of their male identity and also recognising that higher positions in the Force allowed them more control over their own lives, shamelessly campaigned for promotions. Robert Mercer, who would

46 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 41-2, 3-7.

47 Greg Marquis, "Working Men in Uniform: The Early Twentieth-Century Toronto Police," *Social History* 20 (1987), 270.

48 Evidence of an "exaggerated masculinity" can still be seen in the Mounted Police. A 1994 semi-autobiographical work by Mounted Policeman Robert Gordon Teather contains a rather revealing section on gender and the Mounted Police: "Female police officers were not well liked. Most supervisors openly admitted their disgust at having to work with a cripp – short for cripple." According to Teather, one female officer who gained his respect did so after she bit the ear off a thug and then kept it on display in a jar. Robert Gordon Teather, *Scarlet Tunic: Inside our Cars – Inside our Hearts: On Patrol with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police* (Surrey, BC, 1994), 55-56. Female officers have had, and continue to have, a difficult time fitting into not only a nearly all-male world of policing, but also a world constructed by and for men. A recent study found that female police officers in Quebec have a much higher suicide rate

eventually attain the position of superintendent before his retirement, led the way. Beginning in 1909, letters written on his behalf poured in from Cabinet ministers, Members of Parliament, the Premier of Saskatchewan, a mayor, the Indian Commissioner, concerned citizens, and even his wife. Mercer was not unique in his efforts. Superintendent A.B. Allard, in charge of the Southern Saskatchewan detachment in the early 1920s, wrote to his archbishop asking him to try to convince Ernest Lapointe, the federal Minister of Justice, to promote Allard.⁴⁹ J.W. Spalding took the direct route: "I have the honour to submit the following as an application of promotion for myself."⁵⁰ Finally, Christen Junget tried the sycophantic approach in an effort to become a superintendent: "I ask you if you will kindly recommend me for next appointment to Superintendent. I make this rather blunt request to you as I consider I am altogether of 'your own make' and have you only to thank for every promotion I have received in the Force. It would therefore be nothing but natural for me to wish my next promotion also to come direct from you."⁵¹ Such appeals often had mixed results but that did not stop Mounties from participating in the game.

Mounted Policemen willingly embraced the male identity that had been constructed for them: these were the very values that were used to judge their capability as a Mountie. The criteria used to evaluate non-commissioned and commissioned officers, for example, reflected both the older Victorian manly characteristics and the newer emphasis on physical power. The evaluation form contained a section entitled "Physical and Athletic Qualifications" and assessed Mounties according to the following categories: "Appearance," "Physique," "Strength," "Energy," "Endurance," "Horsemanship" and "Keeness on games."⁵² The reference to games reflected a Victorian English notion that athletics, especially team play, built character and promoted discipline.⁵³

than their male counterparts or the general populace: *Globe and Mail*, 25 May 1995: A4. In addition, a study of the Pittsburgh Police, which has one of the highest rates of female officers in the world, found women police officers admitting to having behaved in uncharacteristic ways in order to fit in. Bonnie McElhinny, "An Economy of Affect: Objectivity, Masculinity and the Gendering of Police Work," in *Dislocating Masculinity: Comparative Ethnographies*. Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne, eds. (London, 1994), 159-72. For a discussion of the negative treatment of contemporary British policewomen by their male colleagues, see Malcolm Young, *An Inside Job: Policing and Police Culture in Britain* (Oxford, 1991), 191-252.

49 NA, RG 18, Vol. 3446, File 0-142, Pt. 1, Starnes to Archbishop O.E. Mathieu, 24 April 1924.

50 RCMP, Personnel Records of J.W. Spalding, Spalding to Perry, 18 October 1915.

51 Ibid., Personnel Records of Christen Junget, Junget to Perry, 21 April 1920.

52 Ibid., Personnel Records of Supt. Walter Mortimer, "Royal Canadian Mounted Police Annual Confidential Report – Non-Commissioned Officers."

53 An English football commentator noted in 1888 the value of games in building the character of men. Walvin, "Symbols of Moral Superiority," 242. Historian Peter Bailey notes that in the Victorian era games were intended for the upper classes, while drill was designed for the working classes in order to encourage discipline and make them better workers. Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England* (Toronto, 1978), 130.

When asked why he thought he would have made a good Mounted Policeman, retired RCMP member Stirling McNeil replied: "I was athletic. I played football for Calgary and Winnipeg as a junior." McNeil also expressed admiration for a particular officer because the individual was an excellent athlete who frequently played rugby with the rank and file.

McNeil's emphasis on athletics, however, also demonstrates the increasingly popular physical masculinity of the age. He first came to the attention of Mounted Police recruiters when he played as a civilian on the RCMP softball team in Calgary. His physical size (6'4" and 200 pounds) and strength led an officer to ask him to enlist.⁵⁴ A fellow Mountie from this era, I.C. Shank, also exemplified the physical characteristics of the era; in fact, a friend encouraged him to enlist after remarking that "physically, [he] was ideally suited to be a Mounted Policeman."⁵⁵

The mixture of manly and masculine values, such as order, patriotism, militarism and physicality, went hand-in-hand with being a Mounted Policeman and help explain why seemingly endless numbers of Britons enlisted. This was an era when the "soldier-hero" was in vogue in British society,⁵⁶ and the RCMP was after all a police force that had "tact, and courage, and an endless patience and persistence."⁵⁷ Even the Mountie uniform, historian Douglas Owram has argued, carried with it a great deal of patriotic symbolism: "The scarlet coat of the North West Mounted Police had been deliberately chosen in order to evoke the British tradition. Thus the myth of the police became in reality a part of the tradition of law in British society The man and the abstract concept merged into a symbol that few dared to challenge."⁵⁸

New recruits would need such confidence and dedication if they were to last as members of the Mounted Police; theirs was a quasi-religious commitment to a militaristic organisation that would rule almost every aspect of their life and demand a monastic-like commitment in return, including, apparently, celibacy. Until the 1970s, except under special circumstances, the RCMP accepted only single men who were not allowed to marry until they had served several years in the Force.⁵⁹ This rule forced many Mounties either to marry in secret or to leave the Force to wed.⁶⁰ The prohibition on marriage, coupled with the encouragement of members to spend their free time in the barracks,

54 Interview with Supt. (ret.) Stirling McNeil, 24 January 1996.

55 Letter to the author from I.C. Shank, 15 December 1995. He played football for the Saskatchewan Roughriders and was a Canadian heavyweight champion.

56 Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (New York, 1994), 233.

57 L.V. Kelly, "Canada's Famous Mounted Police," *Scarlet and Gold* (1920), 38, as quoted in Walden, *Visions of Order*, 36.

58 Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto, 1992), 140.

59 Mann and Lee, *The RCMP vs the People*, 123.

60 Harvison, *The Horsemen*, 60-64.

probably led to some homosexual activity on the part of Mounties.⁶¹ Certainly, any such activity, combined with the stereotype of the effeminate homosexual,⁶² would have challenged the masculine image of the Mounted Policeman. Here is what Jack Fossum, a 21 year veteran of the Force, had to say about a fellow barracks member:

Next to [Jeff was] Earl – a Cockney, an Imperial Army type whose every sentence was spiced with four letter words. He was in his mid-thirties, a powerful man with the build and walk of a gorilla. We suspected him of being a fag. He had a crush on Jeff for whom he'd buy sweets and little presents. Jeff, a lusty hetero, would often as not toss the presents back to him with a curt "stick it!"⁶³

Fossum also noted that, in the Force's Lethbridge barracks, all of the wash-room's cubicle doors had been removed specifically to inhibit acts of "sexual perversion."⁶⁴

Undoubtedly Mounties also frequented houses of ill fame. R.C. Macleod devotes a chapter in *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement* to the subject of prostitution, arguing that the Mounties tolerated it because they were attuned to attitudes in the communities they policed.⁶⁵ There is a more likely reason for Mountie tolerance: prostitution was a service regularly used by policemen.⁶⁶

The militaristic nature of the Force stretched far beyond the creation of an all-male environment and its emphasis on discipline and self-control. It was

61 Similar activities occurred in other all-masculine environments. See Steven Maynard, "Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-Class History," *Labour/Le Travail* 23 (Spring 1989): 159-69. Maynard specifically cites the military as being "an important institution in fostering same-gender sexual networks" (p. 168).

The Mounted Police did not have an official policy against homosexual members, but the unofficial policy until recently was to dismiss them. In the Cold War era, the Mounties led the witch-hunt against homosexuals in the civil service. See Daniel Robinson and David Kimmel, "The Queer Career of Homosexual Security Vetting in Cold War Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 75 (September 1994): 334. (The *Rules and Regulations* did allow for the arrest of rank-and-file members who engaged in "grossly immoral conduct.")

62 Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies* (New York, 1995 [1981]), 4-5.

63 Jack Fossum, *Mancatcher: An Immigrant's Story of Logging, Policing and Pioneering in the Canadian West* (Comox, 1990), 59-60.

64 *Ibid.*, 98.

65 Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement*, 127-28.

66 One Mountie addressed the subject of sex or lack thereof this way: "[S]ome people that felt a need to see the bright lights they would get permission to take a truck going into Prince Albert and have a little time off and then come back with the truck." Interview with Supt. (rtd.) Stirling McNeil, 24 January 1996.

no coincidence that three of the four commissioners who served between 1914 and 1939 were graduates of the Royal Military College (RMC) – the lone exception between 1914 and 1939 being Cortlandt Starnes who had served in the military before enlisting with the RNWMP. In fact, the education ranking on evaluation forms would offer two choices: university or the RMC.⁶⁷ Personnel could be directly appointed to the officer corps of the Mounted Police simply by graduating from the RMC, as future commissioner Stuart Taylor Wood would do, or by being an officer in the Canadian militia. There was no requirement for an officer to have risen through the non-commissioned ranks of the Mounted Police.⁶⁸

The connections between the militia and the Mounted Police went even further. The Governor General had the “power to prescribe the rank and seniority in the militia which Officers of the Force shall hold, for the purpose of seniority and command, when they are serving with the Militia.”⁶⁹ The *Rules and Regulations for the Government and Guidance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1928* even listed the honorary ranks in the militia held by officers of the Force.⁷⁰

Being a military man was seen as conducive to working as a Mounted Policeman. In the aftermath of the Great War, the RNWMP was desperate for recruits, and a memo to the federal government from the Force’s comptroller, A.A. McLean, made it clear how closely the career of soldiering coincided with work as a Mounted Policeman. To reach a goal of 2,000 members, McLean advocated the re-enlistment of former Mounties returning from Europe and the signing up of any members of the Canadian Cavalry in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) “who might be desirous of joining.”⁷¹

Then there was the symbolic connection between the RCMP and the military. Historian Graham Dawson has noted that

military virtues such as aggression, strength, courage and endurance have repeatedly been defined as the natural and inherent qualities of manhood, whose apogee is attainable only in battle. Celebrated as a hero in adventure stories telling of the dangerous and daring exploits, the soldier has become a quintessential figure of masculinity.⁷²

67 RCMP, Personnel Records of Walter Mortimer, “Royal Canadian Mounted Police Annual Confidential Report – Non-Commissioned Officers,” 1931.

68 *Rules and Regulations for the Government and Guidance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1928*, 14.

69 *Ibid.*, 14, 19.

70 *Ibid.*, 119.

71 NA, RG 18, Vol. 1003, File “Personnel,” Memo from A.A. McLean, 10 December 1918.

72 Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 1.

The recruitment campaign conducted in Ontario during the First World War directly equated being a real man with serving in the military. Conversely, posters depicted those who avoided service as emasculated men.⁷³

The linkage between maleness and the military led the Mounted Police to indoctrinate its recruits with militaristic values. Former Commissioner William Kelly described the goal of recruit training, or "boot camp," as an opportunity to instil discipline in young Mounties.⁷⁴ The first weeks of a Mounted Policeman's career involved physical exercise, marching, riding, and rifle and revolver practice. (Scientific criminal investigation and the practices associated with it arrived only in a meaningful way during Commissioner J.H. MacBrien's tenure in the 1930s.⁷⁵) The *Rules and Regulations* described training as a "process which will place the recruit in a good position to become familiar with all the duties of a member of the Force, give him the broad outlines of the knowledge required to carry out such duties, and to instill discipline."⁷⁶

Ultimately the masculine and manly values promoted in the RCMP would be reflected in its work. Physical size and strength came into play in policing strikes and riots between 1914 and 1939. Not surprisingly, the cultivation of masculine values, such as physicality, often led to the use of force – sometimes violence – in policing situations. In 1919 in Winnipeg, the Mounted Police rode over and shot protesters who had become disorderly. Twelve years later in Estevan, Saskatchewan, the RCMP, in part because of an abundance of inexperienced members, lost control of a volatile situation and turned to violence; three miners died as a result.⁷⁷ Finally, the Regina Riot is perhaps the best example of Mounted Police decisions leading to violence. Choosing to arrest the leaders of the On to Ottawa Trek in a crowded square provoked a violent response. In turn, members of the Mounted Police shot and beat trekkers and citizens of Regina. Several ordinary citizens testified at the Regina Riot Inquiry Commission to having witnessed outbreaks of police brutality. The Commission disregarded such testimony. Although

73 Paul Maroney, "'The Great Adventure': The Context and Ideology of Recruiting in Ontario, 1914-17," *Canadian Historical Review* 77 (March 1996): 92-93.

74 Frank W. Anderson, *Sergeant Harry Morren: Royal North West Mounted Police* (Calgary, 1969), 9.

75 Larry Hannant, *The Infernal Machine: Investigating the Loyalty of Canada's Citizens* (Toronto, 1995), 41.

76 *Rules and Regulations for the Government and Guidance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, 1928, 105.

77 David J. Bercuson, "The Winnipeg General Strike," in *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1919-1949*. Irving Abella, ed. (Toronto, 1974), 26-27. S.D. Hanson, "Estevan 1931," in Abella, ed., *On Strike*, 54; Steve Hewitt, "September 1931: A Re-Interpretation of the RCMP's Handling of the Estevan Strike and Riot," *Labour/Le Travail* 38 (Spring 1997).



THE MASCULINE MOUNTIE

(photo courtesy of Saskatchewan Archives Board)

*Senior members of the Mounted Police greet the Prince of Wales (front row, centre)
on the steps of their brick-walled barracks, Regina, 1919.*

forced to admit that a clergyman had been beaten by the RCMP, it dismissed this incident as an "accident."⁷⁸ Similar violence had only narrowly been averted the day before in Winnipeg through the intervention of civic leaders. A group of Winnipeg-based trekkers had occupied a dining hall, and the local RCMP commander had made no secret of his desire to "send down my men and clean the hall out." The deputy mayor, however, blocked his plans.⁷⁹

Often, the implied threat of violence, represented by physical size, was enough to ensure social conformity.⁸⁰ In the 1930s the town of Melfort, Saskatchewan, acquired the reputation of being rough and lawless. The Mounted Police responded by sending into the town four of its largest constables from Regina, including I.C. Shank.⁸¹ Sometimes, individual Mounties took matters into their own hands. In 1936, Stirling McNeil handled a spousal abuser by challenging him to a boxing match, that most masculine of games, and then pummelling him.⁸²

The ultimate symbolism of the RCMP as a male institution, however, was an even more significant deterrent to attacks on the status quo. Such assaults meant being at odds with an institution whose male members symbolised the best of Anglo-Canadian society and, because of the power of this ethnic group, the best of Canada. Thus, a Mounted Policeman and everything he represented became synonymous with law and authority. In a hierarchical and patriarchal Canada, the white, male Mountie was king.

Not surprisingly, then, many Mounted Policemen exhibited the nativist sentiments held by much of Anglo-Canadian society. Commissioner Perry set the tone in 1919, when he supported the vigilante actions of returning soldiers while offering advice on how to handle non-Anglo-Saxon Canadians:

During the war . . . all foreigners received the most considerate treatment as long as they obeyed the laws of the country and pursued their ordinary avocations. The returned soldiers found them filling their jobs and enjoying prosperity. In Winnipeg, Calgary, Medicine Hat and other points, the resentment of the soldiers found expression in small disturbances provoked by the indiscreet acts and words of these people, who, as a body, have shown little appreciation of the just and fair treatment meted out to them by the people of this country. They have shown themselves ready to follow and support the extremists who play upon their ignorance and appeal to their national prejudices and sympathy for the central powers. Bolshevism finds a fertile field among them and is assiduously cultivated by the ardent agitator.

78 Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost*, 194-95.

79 Supt. T. Dann, as quoted in S.R. Hewitt, "'We are sitting at the edge of a volcano': Winnipeg During the On to Ottawa Trek," *Prairie Forum* 19 (Spring 1994): 58-59.

80 Bederman argues that at the "turn-of-the-century manhood constructed bodily strength and social authority as identical." Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 8.

81 Interview with Staff-Sergeant (rtd.) Stan Wight, 29 March 1996.

82 *The Way It Was: Fifty Years of RCMP Memories* (Victoria, 1990), 158.

The assimilation of our large alien population is of the greatest importance and it demands wise and sympathetic action and constant attention.⁸³

Similar and cruder attitudes can easily be found throughout the Mounted Police in this era. A scarlet uniform was not a magic shield against the prevailing prejudices of the time. During the Great War, Inspector T.S. Belcher, in charge of the Yorkton area, noted that "aliens," especially Austrians, in his area had "behaved themselves very well during the past year." "The Germans," he added, "are different and very bitter, but, knowing that their country is beaten, with the usual German cunning, they are changing around and are quite willing to fawn on us now."⁸⁴ In describing a rural Saskatchewan rally for Tim Buck, the leader of the Communist Party of Canada, Const. H.A. Buntine, offered a comment on the ethnic make-up of the audience, as was common practice for most Mounties reporting on such events in the interwar period. Another Mountie reported that the "foreigners" in attendance at the Communist Party rally in rural Saskatchewan "were all farmers . . . of a particularly ignorant type . . ."⁸⁵ In 1919, Sgt.-Major William George Edgenton reported on allegations concerning the poor behaviour of some of his colleagues. He noted that there had been complaints of Mounties in Regina "associating with undesirable characters such as coons, etc."⁸⁶ Detective Cecil Hildyard, a native of Yorkshire, England and a graduate of Eton and Oxford, noted in 1922 that a meeting in Saskatoon "was attended by approximately fifty people, mostly of a decent British type, only about ten foreigners."⁸⁷ And, reflecting the anti-Semitism of the interwar period, a Mountie secret agent, himself of Eastern European background, noted during the Estevan miners' strike of September 1931 that "all Jews in Estevan and Bienfait are 100% behind the Communist movement."⁸⁸

Mounted Policemen or potential members of the Force had no protection from the ethnic prejudice present in the RCMP. In 1919, Assistant Commissioner W.H. Routledge underlined the words "Russian Jew" and wrote "*NO*" in the margin of a letter that offered the services of an individual of that ethnic background.⁸⁹ In another case, Assistant Commissioner J.W. Spalding advised Regina, headquarters of "F" Division, on its choice to replace Special

83 Canada. Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers 16:8, "Report of the Royal North-West Mounted Police for the Year Ended September 30, 1919," 14.

84 Canada. Parliament, House of Commons, Sessional Papers 28:8, "Report of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 1916," 49.

85 NA, RG 146, Vol. 21, File 92-A-00099, Pt. 2, Report of Const. Buntine, 18 July 1936.

86 NA, RG 18, Vol. 1950, File 13/9, Report of Sgt. Major Edgenton, 6 June 1919.

87 NA, RG 146, Vol. 27, File 92-A-00123, Pt. 4, Report of Det. C. Hildyard, 21 December 1922.

88 Ibid., Vol. 6, File 1025-9-91093, Pt. 3, Secret Report, 4 October 1931. The author of the report was almost certainly J.L. Eberhardt.

89 NA, RG 18, Vol. 2169, File 16/18, Letter to Assistant Commissioner W. Routledge, 3 April 1919.

Constable J.L. Eberhardt, a Mountie of Czech background: "Mr. M. Black appears to have qualifications by way of education and experience much superior to those of Eberhardt – further, as he is of Anglo-Saxon origin – his value as an interpreter would far exceed that of Eberhardt."⁹⁰

Mounties of non-Anglo-Saxon background were almost exclusively secret agents or special constables; they experienced even less job security and fewer employment rights than regular Mounties. That non-Anglo-Saxon members of the RCMP were almost exclusively in special constable or secret agent positions demonstrates a certain practicality in that they were being asked to spy on those similar to themselves.

Jacob M. Tatko, who spoke nine languages, "mostly of the slavic countries," had his career affected by his ethnic background.⁹¹ In 1916, he joined the Mounted Police in Alberta as an interpreter and Secret Agent 125. He served in Alberta until 1928, when the Force discharged him, and later rejoined as a special constable. He lasted until 1937, when the Commissioner dismissed him for incompetence. Because of the nature of his service, specifically his secret agent work, Tatko did not qualify for a pension. (He went as far as to hire a lawyer to try to obtain a pension but to no avail.)⁹²

Occasionally, the exploits of some non-Anglo-Saxon Mounties received popular praise. Bohemian-born John (Johann) Leopold became the most famous Mountie of the interwar period thanks to his activities as an undercover Mountie active in the Regina branch of the Communist Party of Canada. He was not even a Canadian citizen when he joined the Mounted Police in 1918, something prohibited under its regulations.⁹³ His non-English language skills, however, were badly needed at the time, so the Mounted Police ignored Leopold's national status. Even with his celebrated exploits, Leopold found himself regularly challenged by the guards at RCMP headquarters in Ottawa because of being, in the words of the official historians of the RCMP Security Service, "foreign looking."⁹⁴

Even a regular member of the force could find himself under surveillance because of his ethnicity. Corporal Franz Droeske, a German-Canadian Mountie who served from 1920 to 1946, found himself under suspicion by the

90 RCMP, Personnel Records of Special Constable J.L. Eberhardt, Assistant Commissioner J.W. Spalding to Officer Commanding "F" Division, 28 December 1932. Eberhardt was released from service two months later.

91 Ibid., Personnel Records of Jacob M. Tatko, Obituary, 1942.

92 Ibid. Tatko had earlier allowed a prisoner to escape, and had apparently begun to make a habit of entering Vegreville-area bars and openly discussing his police work, including his previous activities as a secret agent.

93 *Rules and Regulations for the Government and Guidance of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police*, 1928, 14.

94 Betke and Horrall, *Canada's Security*, Vol. 1, 449.

RCMP two weeks after the beginning of the Second World War because of his ethnicity. At first, the RCMP sought to station him in less sensitive positions to avoid public criticism. (He was assigned to traffic duty.) Even that, however, was not enough to allay suspicions among his colleagues, and his commander had Droeske and another Mountie of German background put under surveillance.⁹⁵

Many of Droeske's fellow citizens in the 1920s and 1930s would have understood what it meant to be spied on because of their ethnic background. The RCMP focused its police resources on ethnic and racial communities, reflecting the nativist view that equated radicalism with ethnicity.⁹⁶ Accordingly, the RCMP accumulated tens of thousands of pages of security records on the activities of individuals and groups from particular ethnic communities. In the 1930s Mounties would be involved in deporting many of the same people.⁹⁷ As well, members of the Chinese community in Canada would find themselves the target of an anti-narcotics campaign, a crackdown largely fuelled by white racism.⁹⁸ In a deeper sense, the various non-Anglo-Saxon groups under police scrutiny, with their different languages, customs, and appearance, not only represented radicalism to the Mounted Police, but also symbolized a challenge to the sort of male identity the Force held. Those of similar Anglo-Saxon backgrounds who chose to involve themselves in radical activity were, according to at least one Mountie, racial traitors. P.W. Pennefather described such individuals as "renegade whites," "white agitators" and "certain white men, or so-called white men [who] have the upper hand over foreign elements."⁹⁹

Like Pennefather's, the RCMP's values influenced what it defined as the norm in Canadian society. The Mounted Police as an institution believed in order, discipline and hierarchy, and strove for a world that reflected these values. Different ethnic groups, Communists, socialists, students, university faculty, labour activists, union leaders, and anyone else not content with their place

95 RCMP, Personnel Records of Franz Droeske, F.A. Blake, Supt. Adjutant, to O.C. "A" Div., 15 September 1939; *ibid.*, T.B. Caulkin, O.C. "A" Div., to Commissioner S.T. Wood, 4 June 1940.

96 RCMP Commissioner James MacBrien made an explicit link between radicalism, ethnicity and disorder in a 1932 speech in Toronto: "It is notable that 99% of these fellows [Communists] are foreigners and many of them have not been here long. The best thing to do would be to send them back where they came from in every way possible. If we were rid of them there would be no unemployment or unrest in Canada." As quoted in Lorne Brown and Caroline Brown, *An Unauthorized History of the RCMP* (Toronto, 1978), 63.

97 For more information on deportation as a means of control, see Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900-1935* (Ottawa, 1988).

98 For a depiction of the mind-set of this era of "reform," see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto, 1991).

99 NA, RG 18, Vol. 1933, File G-57-9-1, Confidential Monthly Report for April 1919, "K" Division, Lethbridge, 8 May 1919; *ibid.*, Confidential Monthly Report for August 1919; *ibid.*, Confidential Monthly Report for March 1919.

in the brick wall of society found themselves under suspicion either directly from uniformed Mounties or more subtly through hordes of RCMP informants, secret agents and undercover Mounties.¹⁰⁰ Be a brick or beware!

So who were the Mounted Police between 1914 and 1939? They were very much a British institution, reflecting all the popular middle-class, Anglo-Saxon male definitions of manliness and masculinity, including a belief in racial superiority. Gail Bederman describes the goal of male construction during this era as an effort to demonstrate that "civilized white men were the most manly ever evolved – firm of character; self-controlled; protectors of women and children."¹⁰¹ This notion of manliness, combined with the emphasis on physicality, made up the image the Mounted Police cultivated in its members: it was not simply that they were white and male; rather, it was that they represented the ultimate in what it meant to be white and male in the Anglo-Saxon-dominated Canada of this period.

100 For detailed information on the targets of RCMP operations in this period, see Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Early Years, 1919-1929* (St. John's, 1994); *ibid.*, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part I, 1933-1934* (St. John's, 1993); *ibid.*, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935* (St. John's, 1995); *ibid.*, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part III, 1936* (St. John's, 1996); *ibid.*, *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The War Series, 1939-1941* (St. John's, 1989).

101 Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 25. RCMP intelligence reports in the 1920s and 1930s frequently mentioned the number of women and children in attendance at meetings and rallies.