

## **Eminent Pearsonians: Britishness, Anti-Britishness, and Canadianism**

C. P. Champion

Volume 16, numéro 1, 2005

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/015736ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/015736ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

### Éditeur(s)

The Canadian Historical Association/La Société historique du Canada

### ISSN

0847-4478 (imprimé)

1712-6274 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

### Citer cet article

Champion, C. P. (2005). Eminent Pearsonians: Britishness, Anti-Britishness, and Canadianism. *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association / Revue de la Société historique du Canada*, 16(1), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.7202/015736ar>

### Résumé de l'article

On a habituellement interprété la « britannicité » du Canada au milieu du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle comme un lien outre-atlantique évanescant, un sentiment d'allégeance à un pays étranger, ou un signe de dépendance et d'immaturité coloniale. On a tendance à diviser de façon manichéenne les pro- et les antibritanniques – les uns favorables au lien britannique, les autres, à l'indépendance du Canada – et de distinguer sans nuance ce qui est « britannique » de ce qui est authentiquement « canadien ». Toutefois, une étude portant sur les célèbres Pearsoniens (trois générations de Canadiens qui ont assumé à la fois leur anglophilie et leur « canadienité ») suggère qu'ils n'étaient ni purement anglophiles ni tout à fait anglophobes, mais qu'ils se situaient entre les deux. La britannicité et la canadienité s'interpénétraient bien plus qu'on le pense généralement. Le nationalisme et l'internationalisme pratiqués par Pearson et ses contemporains étaient teintés de libéralisme anglais et d'impérialisme libéral britannique. En fait, la britannicité a coloré la canadienité de tous ceux et celles qui, de près ou de loin, et quelles qu'aient été leurs origines sociales et ethniques, ont participé à l'aventure historique canadienne. Dans le sens positif du terme, le canadianisme était une excroissance de la britannicité.

# Eminent Pearsonians: Britishness, Anti-Britishness, and Canadianism

C.P. CHAMPION

## Résumé

*On a habituellement interprété la « britannicité » du Canada au milieu du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle comme un lien outre-atlantique évanescent, un sentiment d'allégeance à un pays étranger, ou un signe de dépendance et d'immaturation coloniale. On a tendance à diviser de façon manichéenne les pro- et les antibritanniques – les uns favorables au lien britannique, les autres, à l'indépendance du Canada – et de distinguer sans nuance ce qui est « britannique » de ce qui est authentiquement « canadien ». Toutefois, une étude portant sur les célèbres Pearsoniens (trois générations de Canadiens qui ont assumé à la fois leur anglophilie et leur « canadienité ») suggère qu'ils n'étaient ni purement anglophiles ni tout à fait anglophobes, mais qu'ils se situaient entre les deux. La britannicité et la canadienité s'interpénétraient bien plus qu'on le pense généralement. Le nationalisme et l'internationalisme pratiqués par Pearson et ses contemporains étaient teintés de libéralisme anglais et d'impérialisme libéral britannique. En fait, la britannicité a coloré la canadienité de tous ceux et celles qui, de près ou de loin, et quelles qu'aient été leurs origines sociales et ethniques, ont participé à l'aventure historique canadienne. Dans le sens positif du terme, le canadianisme était une excroissance de la britannicité.*

## Abstract

*Britishness in mid-Twentieth century Canada is usually treated as a fading overseas tie, a foreign allegiance, or a mark of dependency and colonial immaturity. There is a tendency to assume a kind of Manichean division between pro-British and anti-British: either in favour of Canadian independence, or beholden to the British connection, and to draw too sharp a distinction between what was "British" and what was genuinely "Canadian." However, a study of the Eminent Pearsonians – three generations of Canadians whose anglophilia and Canadianness were intermingled – suggests that they were neither purely anglophile nor quite anglophobe but a tertium quid. Britishness and Canadianism were far more interpenetrated than is commonly thought. The nationalism and internationalism of Pearson and his contemporaries adum-*

*brated their adoptive English liberalism and British liberal imperialism. Indeed, Britishness was interwoven into the Canadianness of the actors, bit-players, and stage-hands of all classes, ethnicities and genders in the Canadian pageant. In the positive sense of the term, Canadianism was an excrescence of Britishness.*

**I**N 1964 VINCENT MASSEY, PC, CH, industrialist, philanthropist, retired governor general, diplomat, and at 77 the venerable manor lord of “Batterwood House, Nr. Port Hope,” made earnest arrangements to have a favourite bowler hat repaired. Some of the fur had been rubbed away, and Massey, fussy as he was about clothes, had been unable to find a Canadian hatter with the necessary skill. Resourcefully, Massey got his secretary to ship the hat by surface mail to Lock & Company of St. James Street, London. It was “very comfortable,” he explained. Several weeks later he learned that, alas, repair was not possible. The forlorn coke hat was put back in its box and made a stately return journey to Canada by sea.<sup>1</sup> Massey’s appeal to a London hatter typified his lifelong devotion to the English style, a sartorial intersection of one prominent Anglo-Canadian’s multiple identities, his affections and affectations, anglophilia, class consciousness, and (in a most literal way) continuing dependency on the mother country. Having been raised in the family seat on Jarvis Street in Toronto, attended St. Andrew’s School, made the pilgrimage to Oxford University, donned an officer’s uniform in service of King and Empire, and served as High Commissioner in London, Massey cherished his associations with members of the British aristocracy,<sup>2</sup> and emulated its noblesse oblige in the Canadian setting. Anglophiles of his type are easily dismissed as “old-fashioned, irrelevant, anachronistic, Tory elitists.”<sup>3</sup> George Ignatieff found Massey sycophantic and naively pro-British,<sup>4</sup> while Douglas LePan thought him a “mannikin,” an “actor,” and a “cipher,” with “presence” but not “substance.”<sup>5</sup> Massey was easily made a butt; for all his aspirations he may well embody, for some, Canon Lionel Groulx’s attribution to Anglo-Saxons of “médiocrité de goût et des oeuvres d’arts, inélégance atavique, hypocrisie, mesquinerie,

1 Vincent Massey Papers, University of Toronto Archives, Massey-Lock & Co. correspondence, 11 March to 1 June 1964, Box 357, File 14, “Clothes.”

2 Cf. Massey correspondence with Lord and Lady Clark (i.e., the former Sir Kenneth Clark, the art critic), and his visits to Saltwood Castle, Kent, among other examples in *ibid.*, Correspondence files.

3 David Cannadine, “Imperial Canada: Old history, new problems,” in *Imperial Canada 1867-1917*, ed. Colin M. Coates (Edinburgh: Centre of Canadian Studies, 1997), 13.

4 George Ignatieff, *The Making of a Peacemaker* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 63-4.

5 Douglas LePan, *Bright Glass of Memory* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979), 25, 51.

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

vanité, egoïsme, arrogance, pédanterie, vénalité.”<sup>6</sup> A too-British Anglo-Canadianism could be an intolerable eccentricity to both English and French observers dismissive of subservient “loyalism” or “colonialism.” As John Holmes perceived, “Anglophobia is an old phenomenon in Canada – along, of course, with an equally irrational Anglophilia.”<sup>7</sup>

Anglophobia and anglophilia seem to be polar opposites, and there is a tendency among historians to assume a kind of Manichean division between pro-British and anti-British: either in favour of Canadian independence, or beholden to the British connection; on the one hand, anglophile traditionalism represented by Massey, and on the other, anglophobe nationalism associated with O.D. Skelton. According to Massey, himself no unquestioning imperialist,<sup>8</sup> Skelton was “anti-British.”<sup>9</sup> Skelton, on the other hand, mistrusted Massey’s devotion to England. Donald Creighton condemned Skelton, Mackenzie King, and their East Block kindergarten<sup>10</sup> for having squandered the British counterweight to American influence,<sup>11</sup> while nationalist historians have lionized the same men as “true patriots” who constructed an autonomous nationalism that has proven more durable than the Empire they sensed Canada was outgrowing: men “with the vision and skills to make Canada the kind of country it could and should be,” J.L. Granatstein wrote.<sup>12</sup> To the extent that the significance of Britishness has been addressed in all of this, it tends to be treated as a form of colonialism, a quaint artefact, an immature “local variant of Britannic pan-nationalism,”<sup>13</sup> or a manifestation of anti-modernism.<sup>14</sup>

---

6 Gérard Bouchard, *Les Deux Chanoines: Contradiction et ambivalence dans la pensée de Lionel Groulx* (Québec: Boréal, 2003), 142-4.

7 John W. Holmes, *The Better Part of Valour: Essays on Canadian Diplomacy* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1970), 103.

8 C.f., Massey’s pre-war Liberal views on tariffs, Ireland, and dreadnoughts. Claude Bissell, *The Young Vincent Massey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 94.

9 Vincent Massey, *What’s Past is Prologue: The Memoirs of the Right Honourable Vincent Massey* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963), 135.

10 James G. Greenlee, “Canadian External Affairs 1867-1957,” *Historical Journal* 27, 2 (1984): 508.

11 Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada 1939-1957* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976).

12 J.L. Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins 1935-57* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982, 1998), 273. Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian intellectuals and the state, 1900-1945* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

13 Douglas L. Cole, “Canada’s ‘Nationalistic’ Imperialists,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 5, no. 3 (August 1970): 44-50.

14 Philip Massolin, *Canadian Intellectuals, the Tory Tradition, and the Challenge of Modernity, 1939-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 235; Ian Mackay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994), 67-8.

A related tendency has been to draw too sharp a distinction between what was “British” and what was genuinely “Canadian.” According to Blair Fraser, the flag debate of 1964 divided “those who wanted Canada’s symbols to be British [sic] and those who wanted them to be Canadian.”<sup>15</sup> The historiography has largely accepted this dichotomy, portraying a contest between truly Canadian symbols and the icons of an outmoded colonialism.<sup>16</sup> In French Canada, the prevalent view has been that Britishness was little more than a foreign allegiance. In 1964, much of the francophone press dismissed Canada’s British connection as merely a colonial tie.<sup>17</sup> Léon Balcer, the Conservative MP for Trois-Rivières who broke ranks with his caucus to vote for the Maple leaf, dismissed the traditional Canadian flag, the Red Ensign, as “ce vestige colonial.”<sup>18</sup> Supporters of Pearson’s flag initiative in English Canada, a substantial minority of the population, also adopted the view that the British connection was no more than a colonial vestige. Attitudes toward Britishness tend to be divided into two camps, pro- and anti-British, Masseyite vs. Skeltonian, anglophile or anglophobe, colonialist vs. nationalist, reactionary vs. progressive.

Britishness has been typecast, it might be said, as a foreign allegiance or a kind of retro-colonialism, akin to Massey’s resort to a London hatmaker. Britishness meant the “British connection” overseas, the “transatlantic link,” Commonwealth conferences, and commercial, family, sentimental ties to the United Kingdom, nostalgia for lost Empire and subservience to its outmoded ideals. Robert Bothwell reduces Britishness to an “imperial allegiance” or “imperial past,” a removable appendage with which it was simply a matter of “breaking the ties.”<sup>19</sup> As Doug Owrarn put it, “Canada’s sense of its own identity was closely connected to its British ties,” which were merely the country’s “main link to the wider world.”<sup>20</sup> According to David Mackenzie, “the British Empire in Canada meant one thing: relations with Britain.”<sup>21</sup> H.V. Nelles wrote of the post-1945 period: “There remained a good deal of sentimental attachment to things British – especially royalty – among recent British immigrants and older English-speaking Canadians.” But Canada “had clearly drifted away from British influence” and “the few remaining formal ties between Canada

15 Blair Fraser, *The Search for Identity: Canada 1945–1967* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1967), 235.

16 C.P. Champion, “A Very British Coup: Canadianism, Quebec, and Ethnicity in the Flag Debate,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2006), 68–99.

17 *Le Soleil*, 19 mai 1964.

18 Léon Balcer, *Léon Balcer Raconte* (Sillery: Septentrion, 1988), 132.

19 Robert Bothwell, “Breaking the Ties,” *Literary Review of Canada* (April 2005): 23–4.

20 D.R. Owrarn, “Canada and the Empire,” *Oxford History of the British Empire*, Vol. V, 146, 162.

21 David Mackenzie, “Canada, the North Atlantic Triangle, and the Empire,” in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis, eds., *The Oxford History of the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), IV: *The Twentieth Century*, 575.

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

and Great Britain ... dropped away at this time.”<sup>22</sup> Thus, a dwindling band of immigrants and elderly monarchists, “links to the old Empire,” were the last indicators of Britishness, a relic that lost its potency as worshippers drifted away. A critic of multiculturalism wrote, “In Canada, the old colonial mentality ... has been relegated kicking and blustering to the margins, but the attitude of dependence – the comforts of being a follower beholden to forces and traditions larger and older than our own – retains a certain appeal.”<sup>23</sup> Historians have been equally dismissive of English Canadians’ support for the Anglo-French expedition after Colonel Nasser’s illegal seizure of the Suez Canal in 1956. Such Canadians “waxed nostalgic for the receding imperial connection,”<sup>24</sup> Greg Donaghy says. The notion that this was a natural and legitimate expression of Anglo-Canadian identity is seldom considered.<sup>25</sup>

And yet, this reduction of Britishness into sycophancy or a fading overseas link is to gloss over the deeper and more complex meaning of Britishness in Canadian life. The essential Britishness of Canadians went beyond the sense of “being British,” belonging to a larger Empire, or retaining a strong external connection, things that have passed away.<sup>26</sup> Like the blood royal, Britishness flowed in Canadian veins. Sympathy for English liberalism, “the free action of several independent British communities,” influenced Henri Bourassa no less than his anglophone counterparts.<sup>27</sup> Whatever the interplay of Canadianness and Britishness, all Canadian nationalists of the 20th century were, in their ideas, origins, and formative experiences within the British parliamentarism of Dominion and provincial legislatures, both “British” and “Canadian.” If André Siegfried perceived “a truly Canadian attitude,” it nevertheless could be understood only against “a British background.”<sup>28</sup> This was the “Britishness at the heart of everything,” as the Nova Scotia-born journalist Robert MacNeil described it in 1991.<sup>29</sup> We are presented, then, not with two opposing camps, colonials and true Canadians – British and anti-British – but with a spectrum of Canadian Britishness. In short, Canadianism, a local variant of Britishness, is

---

22 H.V. Nelles, *A little history of Canada* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2004), 210-11.

23 Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism* (Toronto: Penguin, 1994), 200.

24 Greg Donaghy, *Tolerant Allies: Canada and the United States 1963-1968* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 6.

25 José E. Igartua, ““Ready, Aye, Ready” No More? Canada, Britain, and the Suez Crisis in the Canadian Press,” in *Canada and the End of Empire*, ed. Phillip Buckner, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 47-65.

26 Owram, loc. cit., 160.

27 Sylvie Lacombe, “Henri Bourassa: A Nationalist Leader Against British Imperialism,” *Journal of Indo-Canadian Studies* 2, no. 2 (July 2002): 86.

28 André Siegfried, *Canada* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 97.

29 Robert MacNeil, “Looking for My Country,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* XXI (1991): 410, quoted in Cannadine, loc. cit., 14.

inseparable and cannot be understood apart from the British context from which it emerged.

Canadianness and Britishness were always deeply interpenetrated. If Skelton felt “something like hate for the Empire,”<sup>30</sup> he also admired the “British genius for compromise.”<sup>31</sup> Like the young Canadians who made the pilgrimage to Oxford in the 1920s, Skelton had felt drawn to the metropole to be examined for the Indian Civil Service in 1901.<sup>32</sup> After lunching with Massey in 1926, he found “a good deal of sympathy and respect under the surface differences.”<sup>33</sup> As Anglo-Canadians and products of a British world, both men experienced to varying degrees the colonial tension between belonging and not belonging; of “cultural and psychological separation,” the “ambivalence...difference and otherness” that have been ascribed to Australian anglophiles.<sup>34</sup> As Lower wrote in 1946, “The effort has invariably been made in Canada to convict anyone stressing national sentiments of being ‘anti-British.’” In fact, such nationalists usually “found it possible to entertain respect and admiration for Great Britain while devoting their careers and their hearts to their own country.”<sup>35</sup> C.P. Stacey reached similar conclusions in revisiting King’s Anglo-Scots ambivalence about Empire.<sup>36</sup>

What was it to be “British” or “Canadian”? Sir John A. Macdonald died “a British subject,” but his successors did not doubt his “true and deep Canadianism.”<sup>37</sup> Murray Beck subtitled the second volume of his life of Joseph Howe, who died in 1873, “The Briton Becomes a Canadian.” A recent study has described John Diefenbaker as one of the most “British” prime ministers in the Commonwealth “at empire’s end.”<sup>38</sup> And yet the background and anglophilia of his arch-rival, Lester B. Pearson, were no less “British” than the Chief’s. Such individuals could be at the same time both Canadian and British – as well as an Ontarian or Westerner, Ulster Irish or Scots-German, male, middle class, Methodist or Presbyterian, and a freemason. Massey, the arch-anglophile, him-

30 Gerald Graham to Anthony Kirk-Greene, November 9, 1978, quoted in *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 15, no.1 (1981): 35, n. 9.

31 Terry Crowley, *Marriage of Minds: Isabel and Oscar Skelton Reinventing Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 183.

32 Norman Hillmer, “The Anglo-Canadian Neurosis: The Case of O.D. Skelton,” in *Britain and Canada*, ed. Peter Lyon (London: Frank Cass, 1976), 63.

33 Skelton Diary, January 4, 1926. Skelton Papers, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).

34 Kosmas Tsokhas, “Tradition, fantasy and Britishness: Four Australian prime ministers,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 31, no. 1 (2001): 3-30.

35 A.R.M. Lower, *Colony to Nation* (Toronto: Longmans, 1946), 473.

36 C.P. Stacey, *Mackenzie King and the Atlantic Triangle* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976).

37 Sir John Thompson, in *Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Sir John Alexander Macdonald, G.C.B.*, ed. Joseph Pope (London: Edward Arnold, 1894; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1971), Vol. 2, 344.

38 Stuart Ward, “Worlds Apart: Three ‘British’ prime ministers at Empire’s end,” in, *Rediscovering the British World*, eds. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: Calgary University Press, 2005), 399-419.

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

self accepted the leading role in the St. Laurent government's nationalist *coup de théâtre* – usually portrayed as a step into independence – in naming Rideau Hall's first "Canadian-born" occupant in 1951, an innovation whose anti-British overtones were disguised by Massey's studied Englishness.

One way to pigeon-hole Britishness has been to attribute it to earlier generations whose loyalty to Canada was stunted and incomplete. Nationalist accounts of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, for example, attribute early enthusiasm for enlistment to the birth of so many of the volunteers in the U.K., whether gentlemen emigrants and old Etonians, or clerks and shopworkers.<sup>39</sup> This is the Britishness of Canadians born in Britain or with recent British family ties, the "loyalism" of Verdun, Quebec.<sup>40</sup> Like them, the poet Earle Birney's father enlisted in Banff in 1915 to uphold "the old Traditions of True Britishness" and his father, in turn, had been born in England and fought in the Crimean War.<sup>41</sup> And if this foreign allegiance known as the "British connection" peaked in the early part of the Great War, enjoyed a brief revival after 1939, and declined after 1945, then by 1957, it was "already dying, a vestigial organ in an increasingly North Americanized body politic."<sup>42</sup> Canada came of age, and institutions that were genuinely Canadian superseded the outmoded British connection. Exasperated nationalists could quote Sir Charles G.D. Roberts' couplet, "How long the ignoble sloth, how long / The trust in greatness not thine own?" What Canada needed was to purge Britishness to cleanse its soul; during the flag debate, both John Matheson and Mitchell Sharp praised its "cleansing" and "purging" effects. As Hugh MacLennan wrote in 1965, after the advent of the new flag, "there is a great change among all English Canadians who are guided by their intelligence and not by conditioned reflex" – the former reflexive Britishness. The future was with "Canada," he said, for the youth of English Canada "have not been indoctrinated in the mystique of the old British Empire."<sup>43</sup> On this reading, one was either with Canada or against it, proud of Canadian independence or subservient to a "foreign" (i.e., British) power: the familiar Manichean divide in Canadian history.

The debates of the 1960s over the flag and over military symbols, though celebrated as watersheds of national achievement with a similar Manichean rift

---

39 Patrick A. Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public School to the Canadian Frontier* (Toronto: Douglas McIntyre, 1981), 222-3; Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997).

40 Serge Durlfänger, "Owing allegiance: the British community in Verdun, Quebec during the Second World War," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XXXVI, no. 1 (March 2004): 9.

41 Elspeth Cameron, *Earle Birney: A Life* (Toronto: Viking, 1994), 1, 12.

42 Andrew Potter, Introduction to the 40th Anniversary Edition, in George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), xviii.

43 "Hugh MacLennan: Sees Two Solitudes Ending," *McGill News* 46, No. 3 (June-July 1965): 9-10.



between Canadian and British, are in fact rich with examples of the interpenetration of Britishness and Canadianness. "One of the most interesting things in our country is the meeting of traditions," Massey wrote, those of the "old country" and those "springing out of our own North American soil."<sup>44</sup> Pearson and his contemporaries – men who had grown up in the atmosphere of Nova Britannia, nurtured their sense of Canadianism while playing hockey for Oxford University,<sup>45</sup> and risen to prominence through the expanding public service of the 1940s and 1950s – held key positions in public life and conducted an open confrontation with public symbols of Britishness, from Dominion nomenclature to the flag. But this did not mean that they were anti-British. Like Pearson and his contemporaries, many Canadians emerged from the First World War not only more Canadian but also more British, and the war's nationalizing effect did not necessarily diminish the sense of Britishness.<sup>46</sup> The effect of studying in England was not to destroy the sense of Britishness but to modify it. All their lives the Oxford Canadians bore the marks of anglophilia in their dress, affections, and manners. Spry's maxim at Oxford was "not to be a typical and good Oxonian, but a typical and better Canadian."<sup>47</sup> Yet the Canadian devotion to Oxford was "as deep, and probably deeper, than that of most British undergraduates," Pearson wrote.<sup>48</sup> Pickersgill described Oxford as the "greatest of all schools of English Canadian nationalism."<sup>49</sup> In fact, Pearson and his contemporaries were neither unquestioningly anglophile nor quite anglophobe but a *tertium quid* that may be called, for convenience, "anglosceptic anglophiles" or simply "anglosceptics."

Significantly, Pearson is the figure who links two, perhaps three, generations of academic, political, and literary Canadians of his time, in the vanguard of the debates of the 1960s, who may be grouped as "Eminent Pearsonians."<sup>50</sup> Pearson, the unlikely gladiator, is a cynosure not only of the class of diplomats and mandarins celebrated as the Ottawa Men – an older generation that included Pearson's mentors, Massey and Skelton, and contemporaries like Brooke Claxton, Norman Robertson, J.W. Pickersgill, Gordon Robertson, Escott Reid, and Hume Wrong – but also, in shared attitudes, ethnic and reli-

---

44 Massey, 25.

45 C.P. Champion, "Mike Pearson at Oxford: War, Varsity, and Canadianism," forthcoming.

46 Patrick H. Brennan, "The Other Battle: Imperialist versus nationalist sympathies within the Officer Corps of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919," in Buckner and Francis, 251-65.

47 Rose Potvin, ed., *Passion and Conviction: The Letters of Graham Spry* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1992), 37.

48 Pearson Diary, April 21, 1940. L.B. Pearson Papers, LAC.

49 Granatstein, *The Ottawa Men*, 193, 210, citing J.W. Pickersgill in *International Perspectives*, March-April 1973, 56.

50 Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1918); cf. Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994).

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

gious background, sense of nationalism, formative experiences, and a Canadian type of Britishness, of a cast that included Hugh MacLennan, the novelist and McGill professor; academics such as A.R.M. Lower and F.H. Underhill; Davidson Dunton of Carleton University and the B&B Commission; social thinkers such as F.R. Scott; broadcasting figures including Graham Spry and Alan Plaunt; and junior contemporaries in politics including Matheson, Pearson's parliamentary secretary, and Paul Hellyer, the minister of national defence who implemented the unification and Canadianization of the armed forces.

These Eminent Pearsonians, bearing the marks of interpenetrated Britishness and Canadianism, a range of Anglo-Celtic ethnicities, and anglosceptic anglophilia, deserve closer study. In Canada, "all of those who come to the top are sons of the Manse," Charles Ritchie told Sir John Colville at the Travellers Club in 1940, quintessentially English gossip about the class origins of others, in this case Mackenzie King and John Buchan, both minister's sons.<sup>51</sup> Hugh Keenleyside, Reid, Arnold Heeney, Pearson, and Matheson, all Methodist or Anglican, were sons of the manse. Hellyer was a United Church Sunday school teacher. Underhill, Lower and his junior colleague at Wesley College, Pickersgill, shared Pearson's small-town lower-middle-class Ontario Methodist origins. Claxton, an Anglican of Baptist lineage and an anglophile, died in 1960, but his nationalism and dislike of the Britishness of Canadian military culture anticipated the policies of the 1960s. Historians and biographers, with some justification, have portrayed them as uniquely gifted nationalists. But there has also been a tendency to distort the period into a struggle between "true" Canadians and retrograde colonialists such as the defenders of the Red Ensign, "anachronisms" like Diefenbaker, rather than as a debate between contemporaries with different visions of Canada each of which had some claim to legitimacy. The controversies of the 1960s were not a struggle between Britishness and Canadianism, Britishness vs. anti-Britishness. The reality is more subtle and more interesting.

Britishness in the post-1945 era is usually associated with defenders of "the British tradition" such as John Farthing, Donald Creighton, George Grant, Eugene Forsey, or Scott Symons, the novelist, and T.H.B. Symons, the founding president of Trent University. Traditionalists of the Tory stripe were more likely to be attached to overtly British symbols such as the Crown, the Red Ensign (or a new flag that would include British and French symbols), the royal anthem, and "Dominion" nomenclature. In contrast to most Eminent Pearsonians, who tended to have a Methodist or other dissenting background, most traditionalists were Anglicans or, like Creighton, converts to Anglicanism. But how

---

51 John Colville, *The Fringes of Power: 10 Downing Street Diaries 1939-1955* (London: W.W. Norton, 1985), 95.

different fundamentally was their Britishness? Their attachment to British-looking symbols was really a different expression of the underlying Canadian Britishness that was shared by their opponents. After all, the process of creating a “distinctively Canadian” flag in 1964 was a rather “British” exercise, and the Maple leaf, no less than its Red Ensign predecessor, was the product of a British milieu.<sup>52</sup> It was not a contest between the pro-British Diefenbaker and the truly Canadian Pearson, but between two competing brands of Canadianism both of which were tinged with Britishness.

The Eminent Pearsonians, in short, were not “anti-British.” To oppose overt symbols of Britishness did not make one any less “British” in spirit. If Anglo-Canadian anti-monarchists like Phillips Thompson, E.E. Sheppard, Goldwin Smith, and John S. Ewart embraced republicanism, they did so believing that a republic would strengthen the British connection by removing subordination from the relationship.<sup>53</sup> William Arthur Deacon wrote in 1933 that “the logical effect to expect from our retirement from the Empire, in name as well as in fact, is that the present friendship between Canadians and English will ripen into cordiality.”<sup>54</sup> To be anti-Tory or anti-imperialist, or even anti-monarchist, was no less “British,” or even anglophile, than to be a jingo. As a pilgrim in London in 1899, the 25-year-old Mackenzie King marvelled at the colonial contingents en route to South Africa, a gathering that he called a “great step towards Empire building...hard to restrain my feelings.” It was militarism, not his beloved liberal Empire, that King lamented as he strode past Horse Guards Parade on his way to bespeak his suits at a London tailor,<sup>55</sup> and he was not about to volunteer for the Canadian Mounted Rifles. In turn, Pearson and many of his contemporaries were nationalists and internationalists, but they inherited Mackenzie King’s Little England liberalism adapted to the Canadian setting – one of the multiple identities of mid-century nationalists who were British as well as Canadian.

It was Liberals like Pearson who tended to enjoy smoother relations with British officialdom than had the supposedly pro-British Tories: as Ritchie wrote in 1962, “Canadian Tories have, or used to have, a devotion to the ‘British connection.’ [But] when they went to London, as Diefenbaker did, they were more at odds with the British Establishment than Liberal politicians who have no devotion to ‘Crown and Altar.’”<sup>56</sup> Pearson did of course retain a measure of

52 C.P. Champion, “A Very British Coup,” loc. cit.

53 Wade A. Henry, “Severing the Imperial Tie? Republicanism and British Identity in English Canada, 1864-1917,” in Coates, ed., 177-86.

54 William Arthur Deacon, *My Vision of Canada* (Toronto: Ontario Publishing Company, 1933), 248.

55 King Diary, October 20, 26, 1899. Cf. the Pepsysian passage, “I went to the tailor’s & had my suits tried on, they look exceedingly well.” October 12, 1899.

56 Charles Ritchie, Diary, 22 February 1963, in *Storm Signals: More Undiplomatic Diaries, 1962-1971* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1983; Macmillan Paperback, 1987), 40.

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

respect for the monarchy. Perhaps Ritchie's distinction implies that Pearson was *more* British – in the sense that he “got on” more easily with certain British types with whom he had more in common than did Diefenbaker, the populist lawyer from Prince Albert with no Oxford education, who visited the U.K. with the attitude of a pilgrim at the age of 62 and idealized “England” much as Pearson had done at the age of 20. In 1956, Pearson, as external affairs minister, shared with his English contemporary, Gladwyn Jebb (of Eton and Oxford), the same anti-imperialist views about the Suez Crisis<sup>57</sup> – views that were no less part of his British-Canadianism because they adumbrated his internationalism. According to Lord Gladwyn, Pearson was “one of us.”<sup>58</sup> Diefenbaker, the self-appointed defender of British tradition, was not.

If Canadians had a distinctive sense of themselves – some more than others – they also shared the “universality” of culture, assumptions and traditions, Britishness “with a small ‘b,’” as Sir Fred Clarke’s summed up the “empire of ideas,” attitudes, spirit, and behaviour on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>59</sup> Clarke called this the *Res Britannica*, “the British entity” (on the analogy of *res publica*), not a political structure but a “whole philosophy of life and culture and social order which, with its roots and historical origins in these islands, has now re-rooted itself and grown to maturity in distant lands.” This did not detract from local and regional variations, the “marked difference in outlook as between the centre and points on the circumference.” The fact that colonial nationalists in South Africa and Canada opposed a centralized vision of Empire between the wars was, Clarke said, a logical outcome of British values. The “younger men” in the Dominions “who feel the differences more keenly,” Clarke said, were evidence that “the inner logic of the British spirit, a logic of influence more than of power, has been working itself out,” as Bourassa fully understood. British Liberal values, “sovereignty of the rule of law, the free action of groups and communities in the life of the whole, individual responsibility for the common good, responsible government, these and suchlike things are universal values” that comprised the emerging *Res Britannica*. Pearson and his contemporaries, too, were products of the *Res Britannica*, and the natural expression of their local patriotism was to build up the *Res Canadiana*, to coin the appropriate cognate.

If Pearson believed that Canada could not afford to “dwell upon its past,”<sup>60</sup> this was not an anti-British sentiment but, in a sense, a fulfilment of English liberalism and liberal imperialism. A separatist nationalist like F.H. Underhill

---

57 Miles Jebb, ed., *Diaries of Cynthia Gladwyn* (London: Constable, 1995), 190.

58 John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester Pearson, Vol. 2: 1949-1972* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) 174; cf. 361, n. 5.

59 F. Clarke, “British with a small ‘b,’” *Nineteenth Century* CXIX, no. 710 (April 1936): 428-39.

60 Robert Bothwell, Ian Drummond and John English, eds., *Canada Since 1945: Power, Politics, and Provincialism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 270.

thought that Canadians suffered from “belated colonialism” and “a literary theory of our constitution” in the mistaken belief that a North American state could be run on British lines; “and it is high time we shook ourselves free from it.”<sup>61</sup> Underhill’s yearning was to import from American history the revolutionary break with the mother country that Canadian history failed to provide. “The last political tie with Britain must be severed,” wrote W.A. Deacon in his call to jettison the monarchy. “Then she [Britain] will respect us as she respects the United States; the world will respect us and – most important of all – we shall respect ourselves.”<sup>62</sup> Underhill was a seminal Eminent Pearsonian, the “Lionel Groulx” of English Canada, Graham Spry suggested,<sup>63</sup> infusing in a generation of Anglo-Canadian nationalists something of the quest for a northern equivalent of 1776. (Historians of the colony to nation school could cite “Vimy” in 1917, the Byng-King affair of 1926, the Statute of Westminster of 1931, the abolition of appeals to the Privy Council in 1949, the Suez affair of 1956, the new flag of 1965, and even the Constitution Act of 1982 – none of them quite as convincing as the Declaration of Independence.) However, for Pearson, the need for Canada in the 1960s was not to destroy the British heritage but to adjust it to contemporary realities – as he said repeatedly during the flag debate. The backward-looking, triumphalist Britishness of the Red Ensign must be downgraded to preserve national unity and bring the symbols of Canada’s inheritance of liberty and fair play up to date. This was also Massey’s belief in accepting the appointment as Governor-General, to make the monarchy more significant to Canadians by giving its representative a recognizably Canadian face. Massey also seems to have endorsed Pearson’s three-maple-leaf flag motif, though he thought a crown should be included.<sup>64</sup>

The yearning to break with the past, or at least bring it up to date, was not merely an American import. Reform, of course, was also part of the British tradition. This was not a Britishness based on imperial pretensions as described by

61 Quoted in Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 63.

62 Deacon, 247.

63 Graham Spry, *On Canada* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941), 29-30.

64 The “Flag” file in the Massey Papers (Box 370, file 15) contains only two items, colour plates each with three conjoined red maple leaves flanked by red bars, one with a red crown over the leaves, the other with a gold crown superimposed in the canton. This is not conclusive evidence of his preference. Bissell’s biography omits the flag debate, though it is clear from Massey’s Diary that he was keenly interested: “In the morning had a meeting with Mike Pearson to discuss the vexed problem of a new Canadian flag” (23 April 1964). “Meeting [of the Association of Canadian Clubs] unanimously gave approval to a new Canadian flag.” (2 June 1964). On August 30, Massey discussed with Pearson and Sir Edward Boyle the “deplorable situation in our Parliament created by the irresponsible and obstructive tactics of the Opposition.” Massey’s correspondence suggests that most Englishmen who were interested in Canada supported Pearson rather than Diefenbaker: which, therefore, was more ‘British’?

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

Carl Berger, but on *liberal* pretensions as discerned by C.P. Stacey: the love of liberty and dislike of social inequality that characterized the the Scots-Englishness of Mackenzie King, inspired by the Midlothian Liberalism of W.E. Gladstone, one of King's many English heroes. It was related to another type of Britishness: class-consciousness. Underhill's vision, Spry believed, was to fight for "his people's enfranchisement," bringing to bear "Oxford's profound scepticism" on behalf of the "English-Canadian "nation." "One of Underhill's most telling statements was in connection with the new flag of 1965: "Our new Maple Leaf flag will, one hopes, be taken by future generations as the epoch-making symbol marking the end of the era of the Wasp domination of Canadian society."<sup>65</sup> If Underhill was disenchanted with the English upper class and the Canadian elite, this was a class-consciousness shared by the British and international left, and thus not *per se* anti-British.

Ethnicity was also a factor. Many Canadians of Scots, Irish, and regional English origins nurtured a particular loathing for "a certain type" of elite Englishness. Pearson was of Ulster-Irish descent mediated through the English Methodism of his father's itinerant Ontario parsonage. The Eminent Pearsonians illustrated the layers of ethnic Britishness that have influenced Canadian nationalism but have not received sufficient attention from historians. W.L. Morton wrote of his youth in Gladstone, Manitoba, "British we were, but English in the sense of southern English we never were ... Our Britishness ... was not Englishness, but a local brew which we called Canadian."<sup>66</sup> Less self-conscious was the Britishness (and *non-Englishness*) of Ritchie's Nova Scotia forebears: "They thought of themselves as belonging to the British Empire, than which they could imagine nothing more glorious. They did not think of themselves as English. Certainly everything British was Best, but they viewed the individual Englishman with a critical eye. ... The Colonial was an ambivalent creature, half in one element, half in another; British, but not English, cantankerously loyal."<sup>67</sup>

Senator Harold Connolly, who had been Angus L. Macdonald's executive assistant in wartime measures to Canadianize the Royal Canadian Navy, cited the experience as sound reason to abolish the RCN in 1967: "I had my stomach full of *certain types* of naval officer (emphasis added)," he wrote, encouraging Hellyer, the minister who was implementing armed forces unification, to elim-

---

65 Quoted in Eric Kaufmann, "The Decline of the WASP in the United States and Canada," in *Rethinking Ethnicity: Majority Groups and Dominant Minorities*, ed. Eric Kaufmann (London: Routledge, 2004), 61-83.

66 W.L. Morton, "An English Canadian Denounces Separatism," *The Globe Magazine*, 24 September 1964, p. 10.

67 Charles Ritchie, *My Grandfather's House: Scenes of Childhood and Youth* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1987), 11.

inate British vestiges from the military.<sup>68</sup> This is partly a matter of old ethnic enmities and resentments, but it may also be related to a kind of “reverse” class prejudice. Claxton, in his capacity as defence minister from 1948 to 1954, deplored ‘stuffy and pompous” pseudo-English accents and considered them “un-Canadian.”<sup>69</sup> Hostility toward Englishness has deep roots in Canada, going back to the gentlemen emigrants who, despite having died in Canadian ranks on the Western Front, have gone down in history as good-for-nothing remittance men.<sup>70</sup> Still, Canadian aversion to upper-class Englishness was not anti-British: it was shared by non-upper-class Englishman like Ernest Watkins, the biographer of R.B. Bennett. Writing in 1963, the year Pearson became prime minister, Watkins said his “compelling motive” for emigrating from the U.K. was his “distaste for what one was leaving behind,” an “abiding hostility towards those who make up what is now known as the Establishment in Britain,” and an “escape from their arrogance.”<sup>71</sup> There was nothing un-British about the antipathy toward the English ascendancy in the British Isles, analogies to which can be found among South Africans, New Zealanders, and Australians as well as Canadians.

Among Canadians of an older generation, the Anglo-Celtic intolerance for Englishness can be traced to Sir Sam Hughes, an Ulster-Ontarian whose Britishness was coloured by a sense not of colonial inferiority, but of superior *Canadian* acumen and skill.<sup>72</sup> What better representation of Hughes’ über-Canadianism, a kind of “Canadian ideology,” than his personal test-firing of the Ross rifle – notoriously ineffective in battle but certifiably *Made in Canada* – under the supervision of Major Vincent Massey, chief musketry officer of Militia District No. 2, in July 1916.<sup>73</sup> Like Lorne Murchison, Sara Jeanette Duncan’s fictional small-town *Imperialist*, some believed that the Dominion would be a sturdier barque for preserving the best British ideals than the effete English elites – a view shared by many Britishers including Rudyard Kipling, whose associates included Canadians Sir Max Aitken and Sir Andrew Bonar Law.<sup>74</sup> Hugh MacLennan, by origin a Nova Scotia Presbyterian-Scot, reflected this sense also: “Maybe when the wars and revolutions were ended, Canada would begin to live; maybe instead of being pulled eastward by Britain she

---

68 Connolly to Hellyer, 7 January 1967, Hellyer Papers, Vol. 81.

69 Milner, 184-5, 242.

70 Dunae, loc. cit.

71 Ernest Watkins, *R.B. Bennett: A Biography* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1963), 12, 140.

72 Cf. Ronald Haycock, *Sam Hughes: the public career of a controversial Canadian* (Waterloo and Ottawa: Wilfrid Laurier University Press and the Canadian War Museum, 1986), 322.

73 Massey Diary, UTA, 11 July 1916, newspaper clippings pasted into the diary space.

74 Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970); Sara Jeanette Duncan, *The Imperialist* (Westminster: A. Constable, 1904); Charles Carrington, *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work* (London: Penguin, 1986), 465, 476, 490, 517.

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

would herself pull Britain clear of decay and give her a new birth.”<sup>75</sup> This was not anti-British sentiment but a disenchantment with British decadence for which Canadian virtue might be the remedy.

Skelton, Irish in origin, and his East Block protégés adapted from their own experience the Hughesian sense of a Canadian vocation to safeguard British or English liberal institutions from the perceived *ennui* of the British elite. Massey, too, rejected the “too provincial Anglo-Saxonism in Canada and in England,”<sup>76</sup> advocating a broader British outlook that Canadians were well-placed to comprehend. Pearson took pride in his Irishness and disliked English ‘stuffed shirts.’<sup>77</sup> One of his letters of recommendation for a job with External Affairs came from a fellow Irish-Canadian, Professor W.P.M. Kennedy, who wrote with a Celtic flourish that “Professor Pearson had a distinguished war record, both in camp and on the field of battle.”<sup>78</sup> When Pearson exclaimed in a heated moment, in England, in 1940, “Never have I been as glad to be a Canadian as in these last days. ... I hope Canada will become a republic and that would be the end of this business of our duty to the Empire,”<sup>79</sup> he sounded almost more Irish than Canadian. In the flag debate, Irish-Canadian journalist Eugene Collins was scathing towards “Anglo-Saxon” supporters of the Red Ensign, whom he called “Britain-firsters” and chauvinists.<sup>80</sup> This suggests an important Celto-Hibernian strand in Eminent Pearsonians’ Canadianism, the inspiration that the Skeltons drew from the life of D’Arcy McGee.<sup>81</sup>

Ritchie described his own identity as that of a perpetual “outsider-insider – one immersed from boyhood in English life but not an Englishman,”<sup>82</sup> one who “slipped in and out of the interstices of English life. Recognized in no social category ... I was familiar without belonging.”<sup>83</sup> By contrast, Herbert Norman, of English descent and Methodist missionary provenance, and a Cambridge man, was noted for his “weak sense of identity,” the “ambiguity of

---

75 Hugh MacLennan, *Barometer Rising* (Toronto: Collins, 1941), 300-1; Cameron, 143.

76 Massey, 38.

77 Cf. Pearson to Grattan O’Leary: “in Winnipeg at the St. Andrew’s Society dinner, at which I spoke like a true Irishman,” 10 December 1959. Grattan O’Leary Papers, LAC, Vol. 2; *Globe and Mail*, 27 June 1942, an early example of journalists’ helpfulness in constructing the Pearson persona.

78 Civil Service Commission Papers, Pearson Personnel File, LAC.

79 Charles Ritchie Diary, 29 May and 17 June 1940, in *The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad, 1937-1945* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974; Macmillan Paperbacks, 1987), 54, 57.

80 Eugene L. Collins, *Canadian Commentator*, June 1958, 2. The editor of this paper was the Irish-born Marcus Long.

81 Crowley, 91.

82 Charles Ritchie, *The Siren Years: A Canadian Diplomat Abroad 1937-1945* (Toronto: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1987), 7.

83 Idem, “London 1967-1971,” *Storm Signals*, 87.



his Canadianness,”<sup>84</sup> and assessed by American officials as “an American – as opposed to a British – Canadian.”<sup>85</sup> Brooke Claxton was a second-generation Anglican whose Baptist father had entered the Church of England while studying in Lausanne (he had been sent to Geneva by Brooke’s grandfather, T.J. Claxton, to save him from the temptations of Paris).<sup>86</sup> Brooke was raised in the *haut-bourgeois* milieu of Westmount, Eton suits, Lower Canada College, McGill, the Canadian Officer Training Corps, and a circle of Oxford alumni, and later served as honorary solicitor for Montreal’s Elgar Choir.<sup>87</sup> But the young Claxton felt affronted when Sir John Simon arrived in Montreal to receive an honorary LL.D. from McGill without having prepared an acceptance speech. To Claxton’s horror, Simon relied on a quick briefing from Claxton in the taxi on the way to the Convocation.<sup>88</sup> Perhaps this was a case of an aspiring Canadian anglophile discomfited by his own imperfect grasp of the aristocratic informality affected by Simon. The “ambiguity” of Herbert Norman’s English-Canadianness, W.L. Morton’s isolation of the categories “southern English” and “Englishness” from other types of Britishness, and Claxton’s discomfort with what might be called an English lack of attention to Canadian detail, deserve further investigation. Englishness remains perhaps the least understood of the wide spectrum of Canadian multiple identities and ethnicities in the Anglo-Celtic diaspora – the once and future “invisible immigrants” and their assimilated Canadian descendants.

A case could be made that this Britishness should be classified as a Canadian *ethnicity*. If we take Wsevolod W. Isajiw’s definition of ethnicity as “an involuntary group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who identify themselves and/or are identified by others as belonging to the same involuntary group,”<sup>89</sup> then this could be applied to the Anglo-Canadians. Although they might not always see it themselves, it was possible for others – French Canadians and recent immigrants – to identify “les Brits” even if they had been in Canada for generations. It might be said that flying Hurricane fighter planes in the Battle of Britain (as did Hartland Molson, a fifth-generation Canadian, in 1940) was a “voluntary” and quite conscious identification with Britain by a Canadian of mostly British stock.<sup>90</sup> A glimpse of the “ethnicity” of such men can be seen in Charles Ritchie’s description of

---

84 James Barros, *No Sense of Evil: The Espionage Case of E. Herbert Norman* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 9.

85 According to a 1948 State Department profile, quoted in Roger W. Bowen, ed., *E.H. Norman: His Life and Scholarship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 197.

86 Brooke Claxton Memoirs (unpublished), Brooke Claxton Papers, LAC, typescript, 7-14.

87 *Ibid.*, 72, 82, 277.

88 *Ibid.*, 233-4.

89 Wsevolod W. Isajiw, “Definitions of Ethnicity,” *Ethnicity* 1 (1974): 111-24.

90 Karen Molson, *Man of Honour: The Life and Legacy of Hartland Molson* (forthcoming).

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

Dean Acheson, the half-Canadian U.S. Secretary of State, as being “in style, in appearance, even in his London-looking clothes, ... the nearest of all Americans to an upper-class Englishman or Anglo-Canadian.”<sup>91</sup>

Canadians did not have to develop their own squirearchy for class aspirations to be influential. Massey’s reception into the Church of England personally by the Archbishop of Canterbury, at the age of 39, rounded off his escape from middle-class rural Ontario Methodist origins by the well-travelled aspirant bourgeois route of High Church Anglicanism.<sup>92</sup> At Garnons in 1941, the country house in Herefordshire let by the Masseys as a hospital for Canadian officers, the masseur assured Charles Ritchie that, “What I foresee in Canada is an aristocracy beginning to grow up there. You will have aristocrats – the grandsons of the Eatons, Masseys, Flavelles and other millionaires.” But Ritchie knew better: “Of course he is dead wrong. There is no aristocratic principle alive in Canada and you will not make it by a few rich men imitating English lords.”<sup>93</sup> The lack of an established gentry, however, did not prevent its characteristics from being inherited, imitated, and experienced as a multiple identity by Anglo-Canadians who married or were appointed into the British aristocracy,<sup>94</sup> a neglected aspect of the Canadian mosaic.

And yet, British-Canadian characteristics and loyalties could be shared by ethnically half-British Canadians like soldiers Georges P. Vanier, Maurice Pope, and Bert Hoffmeister, or by non-British, Ukrainian or Icelandic Canadians such as senators John Hnatyshn, Paul Yuzyk, and Gunnar Thorvaldson. French-Canadians and non-British, non-French “New” Canadians shared elements of a common British-Canadian Anglo-Celtic identity. In the flag debate, the non-British ethnic loyalism of Canadians of Ukrainian and East-Central European background exemplified this.<sup>95</sup> Such an attachment to British-Canadian identity, in fact, subsumed a range of multiple identities and ethnicities, from anglophilia to anglophobia, in association with Scottishness, Irishness or Englishness, often laden with class implications, in Canadian life – a spectrum that continues to confront scholars with unanswered questions. “Canadians, like other peoples, hold multiple identities simultaneously ... people have the ability to maintain a considerable number of identities ... even ones which historians believe ought not to be compatible,” wrote Phillip Buckner.<sup>96</sup> This

91 Ritchie Diary, 22 February 1963, in *Storm Signals*, 40.

92 Bissell, 116.

93 Ritchie Diary, 18 March 1941, in *Diplomatic Passport*, 96.

94 Shirley E. Woods, *The Molson Saga 1763-1983* (Scarborough: Avon, 1983), 338; Hugh Molson, a minister in Harold Macmillan’s Tory cabinet, was created Lord Molson in 1961, cf. *Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 2002.

95 C.P. Champion, “Courting “our ethnic friends”: Canadianism, Britishness, and New Canadians,” *Canadian Ethnic Studies* XXXVIII, no. 2 (2006), 23-46.

96 P.A. Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History,” *Acadiensis*, XXX, 1 (Autumn 2000), 12.

suggests that while ethnicity is a contributing factor, Britishness is a matter of multiple identities rather than ethnicity alone.

Canadian-born Britishness was not limited by ethnic, gender, and class boundaries. Sir Percy Girouard, born in Montreal, a graduate of the Royal Military College at Kingston, served in the Royal Engineers, built the railway that made possible Kitchener's ascent of the Nile, and became governor of the British East Africa Protectorate in 1909-12. Sir Frederick Guggisberg, born in Galt, Ontario, a Royal Engineer, served in the Great War, and became governor of the Gold Coast (later Ghana) from 1919-27. Guggisberg's political officer, Beckles Willson, born in Colbourne, Ontario, recalled the impression made on him as a youth by locally retired Hudson's Bay Company factors and a certain Mrs. Grover's "huge beaver coat" (what could be more Canadian?); he made his first trip to the U.K. at the age of 22.<sup>97</sup> To be Canadian meant something different for these earlier generations of British Canadians at ease with worldwide Britishness.

To bring a new and compelling example to light, H.R. MacMillan's previously untapped diary from his 1916 survey of India's timber trade for the Dominion government reads like a classic, unapologetic account of life in the Raj. By the time of the Great War, the thoroughly North American, Ontario-born Yale alumnus had been chief forester of British Columbia for several years; yet he was so immersed in a British *mentalité* that we find him remarking without irony on the native-free enclave of the Royal Bombay Yacht Club; hiring a "Babu" to type his report on East Africa; expelling a "native" from a first-class train carriage; meeting an "educated native gentleman in English sporting clothes" at Jogighopa on the Brahmaputra; discussing Shakespeare with "all the babus in [Goal] village"; reading at leisure *England, The English* ("a mighty good book"); shooting partridge, lynx, Brahmini ducks, and jungle fowl; revelling in sightings of Indian "bison" and tiger tracks, and happening upon a group of "bushmen, wild Garos [who] threw down [their] packs and bolted into the woods – thinking we were spirits [riding] on elephant[s]."

For H.R. MacMillan, this unabashed Kiplingesque Britishness seems to have sat comfortably with his identity as a U.S.-educated Anglo-Canadian, and his tour of Africa, India, and Australia provided "great inspiration" for his dream of a forestry school for British Columbia comparable to India's.<sup>98</sup> This was MacMillan's Canadianism – at ease with membership in a larger whole, and hostile to petty Colonial arrogance, as he saw it. MacMillan disparaged the boastfulness of Australian nationalists, writing in 1916: "Interesting [to] see how Australian newspapers [are] full of [Australian prime minister] Hughes running [the] Empire and Anzacs cleaning up [the] war. It is nauseating, nar-

97 Beckles Willson, *From Quebec to Piccadilly and Other Places: Some Anglo-Canadian Memories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929).

98 *Diary*, January 3 to 29, 1916, H.R. MacMillan Papers, University of British Columbia Archives, Box 113, File 22.

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

row-minded and will lead to even more over-conceit.”<sup>99</sup> When an English officer expressed “contempt for Americans” and assumed that MacMillan “was one,” the young Canadian forester took it in stride and bore no grudge – a resilience toward English snobbery that not every Canadian would manifest.<sup>100</sup> His was an older-school Canadianism comfortable with the larger British identity of which he felt himself to be a part.

In later years MacMillan “regretted” and “viewed with sadness and perhaps with dismay the liquidation of the British Empire,” lamenting the replacement of British by American world influence.<sup>101</sup> In 1964, he advised Pearson against any move “to supersede the Canadian Ensign as the flag of Canada or to remove the Union Jack therefrom,”<sup>102</sup> and after Pearson ignored this advice, continued to fly the old flag from his yacht outside Canadian waters.<sup>103</sup> This did not make MacMillan less authentically Canadian, but rather represented another vision of Canada and its inherent Britishness.

The intertwining of gender and ethnicity, as multiple identities, can be seen in a public figure like Charlotte Whitton. As Mayor of Ottawa, she greeted with derision the proposed new flag in 1964 that did not include symbols of the founding races. Whitton dismissed Pearson’s initial three-leaf proposal as a “white badge of surrender, waving three dying maple leaves” which might as well be “three white feathers on a red background” – a symbol of cowardice. “It is a poor observance of our first century as a nation if we run up a flag of surrender with three dying maple leaves on it,” she said.<sup>104</sup> For Whitton, the Red Ensign, with its Union Jack and coat of arms containing symbols of England, Scotland, Ireland and France (or a similar flag with traditional symbols on it) would be a stronger embodiment of the Canadian achievement. The following year, when invited by Martin Symons, the president of the St. George’s Society of Ottawa, to reply to the traditional toast to ‘St. George and England’ at the Society’s annual dinner, Whitton eulogized the late Sir Winston Churchill. The wartime leader, Whitton said, provided ‘such an expression of the free parliament which Englishmen have given to the world and the seven hundredth anniversary of which we are observing in 1965.’<sup>105</sup> Neither the Red Ensign, flown in North America since 1670 in one form or another, nor the institutions of Parliamentary government that were a legacy of Canada’s 19th century, could be described as un-Canadian, as Canadians like Whitton defined the term.

99 Ibid., 26 June 1916.

100 Ibid., 17 February 1916.

101 Conversation with G.R. Stevens, 15 September 1966. Notes for G.R. Stevens’ draft biography (unpublished), MacMillan Papers, Box 112, File 3, typescript, 124-5, 192.

102 MacMillan to Pearson, 6 April 1964, loc. cit. Box 33, File 23.

103 Ken Drushka, *HR: A Biography of H.R. MacMillan* (Madeira Park, British Columbia: Harbour Publishing, 1995), 364.

104 *Ottawa Citizen*, 21 May 1964; *Globe and Mail*, 22 May 1964.

105 Whitton to Symons, 30 January 1965, Charlotte Whitton Papers, LAC, Vol. 7.

Vanier, seven generations a French Canadian (though his mother was born in Cork, Ireland), exemplified the multiple identities of a Canadian nationalist and a very Eminent Pearsonian. Vanier described at East Sandling camp in England in 1915 a “gathering of Canadian officers from every part of the Dominion and belonging to every walk of life, united in the mother country and proclaiming the solidarity of the English peoples.”<sup>106</sup> A Roman Catholic and a combination of the gentleman of the classical French school, the British army officer ideal, and “a splendid example of biculturalism,”<sup>107</sup> Vanier was at ease in the transatlantic British-Canadian milieu. He received the Military Cross at Windsor personally from the King in 1916, and played tennis at Wimbledon while on leave from France in 1917. (Tennis was out of the question the next time he was wounded; he lost most of his right leg in 1918.)<sup>108</sup> Vanier respected established Canadian symbols: as a diplomat in 1940, on more than one occasion during his escape across France from the advancing *Wehrmacht*, he expressed relief at the sight of the Canadian Red Ensign, recognizing it without hesitation or irony as “the Canadian flag.”<sup>109</sup> Similarly, Lt. Gen. Maurice Pope, the son of Sir John A. Macdonald’s private secretary Sir Joseph Pope, was a Roman Catholic with a French Canadian mother. He enjoyed a greater sense of ease than most Anglo-Canadians among French officers in France, and yet was also more than comfortable in his Canadian-British skin. He played cricket on the grounds of Rideau Hall, hunted on horseback with the East Kent Fox Hounds while stationed at Shorncliffe (a “living tradition”), and dined at the Carlton Club on Armistice Day in 1918.<sup>110</sup> Britishness did not undermine the Canadianness of these half-French Canadians, but coloured it with multiple identities that were no less Canadian for being British in character.

Britishness and Canadianism were more interpenetrated than is commonly thought. There is little in Canadian life and culture that does not reflect Canada’s emergence as an organically British society that has changed externally, adapting to time and circumstance, without losing its British essence. For example, the catalogue of British (Canadian) traditions associated with “colleges,” schools and universities, governments at various levels, clubs, the armed forces, police services, churches, newspapers, and other institutions, would fill an unwieldy volume. Many of these phenomena were animated by customs and habits of

106 Vanier to his mother, 5 August 1915, in Deborah Cowley, ed., *Georges Vanier—Soldier: The Wartime, Letters and Diaries 1915-1919* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2000), 48.

107 A.R.M. Lower, Review of Robert Speaight, Vanier: *Soldier, Diplomat & Governor General: A Biography* (Toronto: Collins, 1970), *Queen’s Quarterly* 77, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 637.

108 Deborah Cowley, *Georges Vanier, Soldier: The wartime letters and diaries 1915-1919* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2000), 200, 161.

109 Robert Speaight, *Vanier: Soldier, Diplomat & Governor General: A Biography* (Toronto: Collins, 1970), 196, 210.

110 Maurice Pope, *Soldiers and Politicians: Memoirs* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 8, 28, 43.

EMINENT PEARSONIANS:  
BRITISHNESS, ANTI-BRITISHNESS, AND CANADIANISM

thought that have evolved in Canada since the 18th century (in some cases earlier) that have become just as Canadian as they were ever British. This applied to the scarlet tunics and bearskin hats of the Royal 22<sup>e</sup> Regiment, adopted in 1914 at the end of the “long nineteenth century” and a uniform to which the regiment’s exclusively francophone members remain fiercely devoted. When the Pearson government and its successors set out to Canadianize the armed forces after 1966, it was found that there was little viable military tradition in Canada that did not have British origins.<sup>111</sup> Regimental badges, guidons, and colours such as the Princess Patricias’ *ric-a-dam-doo*, might be altered to incorporate a Canadian motif, but not the usage of such banners or the battle honours from “British” wars that gave the colours their haunting power over successive generations. Today, there are more Scottish regiments in the Canadian Army than in the British Army. Some customs have faded, such as the “vice-regal influences” that once gave a persuasive social example,<sup>112</sup> while others were absorbed and became Canadian. In either case, there was an evolutionary process that did not necessarily imply a sharp break with the past.

Skelton asked Massey, in 1938, if he thought Canada should adopt British diplomatic uniforms “with some distinctive Canadian feature,” or “seek some sartorial genius to devise a new one.” Massey replied that a “distinctively Canadian” uniform could be a Canadianized version of the British model; “but this distinction can be provided quite easily by the use of maple leaf embroidery on the collar and cuff and by the use of a special Canadian button.”<sup>113</sup> Most Canadian institutions represent adaptations of precedent rather than repudiations. H.V. Nelles wrote, “In the place of British honours, Canada established its own three-tiered Order of Canada.”<sup>114</sup> But in fact, the Victoria Cross remains the highest award in Canada’s honours system, followed by the Cross of Valour which replaced the George Cross, both taking precedence over the Order of Canada.<sup>115</sup> The Canadian honours system, established in 1967 and celebrated as a distinctly Canadian achievement, was really a simplified version of the British model, the most obvious omission being titles such as knight-hoods and peerages, despite many Canadians having held these honours. In their very nature such a system drew substantially on the British and French background.<sup>116</sup> Examples of such continuities are of course legion, such as the

---

111 C.P. Champion, “Confronting Britishness in the Canadian Armed Forces: 1964-68,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 19, no.1 (2006).

112 R.H. Hubbard, “Viceregal Influences on Canadian Society,” in *The Shield of Achilles: Aspects of Canada in the Victorian Age*, ed. W.L. Morton (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1968), 256-74

113 Massey to Skelton, August 15, 1938, quoted in *ibid.*, 139.

114 Nelles, 222-3.

115 Christopher McCreery, *The Canadian Honours System* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2005), 153, 361.

116 *Idem*, *The Order of Canada: Its Origins, History, and Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 6-12.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's debt to the British model of state-supported radio and television, or the Stratford Festival's recruitment of English theatrical talent to establish itself on Southern Ontario's Avon River, in the process of establishing "genuinely Canadian" cultural institutions.<sup>117</sup>

Revisiting Britishness confronts us with the reality that the cast and characters of *Deeds that Won the Empire* included, by extension, many of the *Makers of Canada* as well as most of the soldiers and subject peoples, comrades and labourers, men and women, masters, servants, orphans and housemaids. Britishness and Canadianness were not opposed to each other but intermingled, and the debates surrounding national symbols did not pit pro- and anti-British Canadians against each other. Blair Fraser was wrong: the flag debate was not about replacing an outmoded British symbol with a genuinely Canadian one; it was a contest between two different and legitimate visions of what it meant to be Canadian. Eminent Pearsonian nationalists were not entirely anglophile nor pure anglophobes, nor were they anti-British, but rather a *tertium quid*: anglo-septic anglophiles who retained a strong sense of the British connection that did not conflict with their Canadianism.

Britishness was interwoven into the Canadianness of the actors, bit-players, and stage-hands of all classes, ethnicities and genders in the Canadian pageant, participants in Sir Fred Clarke's "Britishness with a small 'b.'" The vision of independent and autonomous Canada, with its own "genuinely Canadian" customs and symbols, developed as something different from, but in many ways complementary to, the evolving *Res Britannica* from which it emerged. Pearson and his colleagues resembled the nation-building postcolonial elites of Asia and Africa, rebranding and bringing up to date the country's institutions and symbols while avoiding too sharp a repudiation of the past.<sup>118</sup> Canada remained an organically British society, adapting to the changing times but retaining its essential Britishness, a multicultural state that emerged from a multiracial Empire.<sup>119</sup> What was billed as "distinctively Canadian" was an excrescence of Britishness, in the positive sense of that term, and the developing *Res Canadiana* remained the product of a British world.

\* \* \*

**C.P. CHAMPION** is a Ph.D. candidate at McGill University, and lectures at McGill and Concordia Universities.

**C.P. CHAMPION** est un candidat doctoral à l'université de McGill, et il donne les conférences aux universités de McGill et de Concordia.

---

117 Pauline Greenhill, *Ethnicity in the Mainstream: Three Studies of English Canadian Culture in Ontario* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994) 128-9.

118 Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), 102.

119 J.M.S. Careless, "'Waspishness' and Multiculture," in *Careless At Work: Selected Canadian Historical Studies* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1990), 295-307.