

INTRODUCTION

This study of Manitoba's war memorials focuses on the artistic legacy of an important collection of heritage sites. It was developed with an eye mainly on aesthetic issues: form, style, materials, designers, and craftsmanship.

But as we studied our collection of monuments, the subject of numbers kept arising.

A number like 201. The total number of community war memorials in Manitoba, this is one for nearly every municipality in the province. In addition to these—the focus of our study—there are hundreds or thousands more, most of them in the form of plaques or rolls of honour, in churches, schools, businesses, clubs and other institutions province-wide, each honouring the memory of members of its own community who fought in the war, and perhaps did not come home.

Or occasional references to the costs of a monument: \$5,500 for example in 1924 for the beautiful memorial, "Miss Canada," in Dauphin; \$1,700 in 1927 for the fine sculptural monument in Roblin; \$1,100 for the handsome Melita cenotaph.

References to fund-raising efforts: at Roblin for example, the donations in the late 1920s (amongst many others) from Mr Kapey for \$25, from the Perriots for \$106.35, the local Football Club for \$50, the Jewish Ladies Aid for \$50, the Cromarty Soft Ball Club for \$10, and the Union Ladies Aid for \$25 – keeping in mind that \$50 from 1927 is worth about \$700 in 2014.

And then, gradually, we come to the most significant number—not immediately apparent when focusing on individual memorials: 5,279 names are carved in the stone or cast in the bronze of Manitoba's community memorials. These are the names of many of the province's men and women lost in World War I—buried in foreign military cemeteries or even lying unmarked in battlefield sites from which their bodies were never recovered.

Even this large number does not tell the whole story. For while that is the number of names engraved for posterity, quite a number of memorials (about 30) do not feature individual names—perhaps the community could not afford to have it done, or chose to memorialize the names on a roll of honour in the town

hall instead. And so we come to an even larger number. According to historians at the Canadian War Museum, 7,760 Manitobans died in the service of the war effort. 61, 543 men and women left their Manitoba homes to fight, or to serve as doctors or nurses or other military supports, and almost 8,000 lost their lives, often in terrible conditions. We must remember their courage and sacrifice.

It is essential that these people be kept in mind as readers explore this study. While our primary purpose is the analysis of memorials as works of art, these thousands of individuals, and those names, can never be far from our thoughts.

The study has been organized according to five main subjects:

- A Brief History of War Memorial Design
- The Making of a Memorial
- Guide to Manitoba Memorial Types
- Local World War I Stories
- Learning Materials

The information in “A Brief History of War Memorial Design” establishes the basic historic and artistic precedents that inform Manitoba’s collection of war memorials. “The Making of a Memorial” provides information on how the grandest of our memorials—those featuring sculptural figures—were created. The “Guide to Manitoba Memorial Types” uses selected examples to help readers and visitors appreciate the artistic qualities of any Manitoba memorial. “Local World War I Stories” features vignettes from some of Manitoba’s local histories that put these memorials into a larger social and cultural context. Finally, the entry “Learning Materials” includes suggestions and resources that school teachers can use to help students appreciate how the local war memorial can be used as a resource for a deeper understanding of their history.

Patrick Morican’s 1996 inventory, the genesis for this present project, is also included, in an updated format and with a few new entries.

Most of Manitoba’s war memorials went up shortly after the end of the First World War – often in the early 1920s. Because their genesis is intimately linked to that war, and because the centennial of its beginning is being commemorated in 2014, this study focuses on Manitoba’s experience with the First World War.

The First World War, World War I, or the Great War as it was widely known until the onset of the Second World War, was a profound period in world history, in Canadian history, and in the history of Manitoba communities. It is impossible, in a study focused on war memorial design, to provide the kind of detail necessary for a thorough understanding of this war, but some background is useful. There are hundreds of excellent sources available in libraries and online for anyone wanting to learn more.

The First World War began in Europe on 28 July 1914, and for Canada it began on 4 August, when Britain declared war on Germany. It lasted until 11 November 1918. Over the course of more than four years (in fact almost 52 months), the war proved to be one of the deadliest conflicts in history. It paved the way for major political changes, including revolutions and the redrawing of international boundaries. In addition to millions of civilians, more than 9 million combatants were killed, a casualty rate exacerbated by the belligerents' technological and industrial sophistication, and by a lengthy tactical stalemate manifesting itself in a long war of attrition.

The war drew in all of the world's great economic powers, which were assembled in two opposing alliances: the Allies (based on the Triple Entente of the United Kingdom and its dominions, France and the Russian Empire) and the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Italy had also been a member of the Triple Alliance alongside Germany and Austria-Hungary, but it did not join the Central Powers because Austria-Hungary, against the terms of the alliance, had taken the offensive. These alliances were reorganized and expanded as more nations entered the war: Italy, Japan and, eventually, the United States joined the Allies, while the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria fought with the Central Powers. Ultimately, more than 70 million military personnel were mobilized in one of the largest wars in history.

There were many theatres of war, but the trench warfare and aerial dogfights of the Western Front—in Northern France and Belgium—have become synonymous with this conflict for many in the Western World, and certainly for most Canadians. Almost every memorial in Manitoba is inscribed with battle names from the Western Front.



A squadron of Sopwith Camels, the type flown by many Canadian fighter pilots

Warfare proved to be very different in this than in previous wars, but it took everyone some time to figure that out. Technological advances, such as newly-lethal artillery, together with extensive defenses built in the years leading up to the war, meant that 19th-century military tactics were no longer effective. Horses were nearly useless, and nests of barbed wire combined with machine-gun fire to make it almost impossible for infantry to advance over open ground. Casualties were heavy as commanders on both sides attempted to take entrenched positions using outdated methods. A bloody and demoralizing war of attrition resulted, though new offensive weapons, such as poison gas and the tank (first used at the Somme in September 1916, and especially effective against barbed wire), disrupted the stalemate. A couple of years into the war, field telephones, wireless communications and offensive aircraft had also come into use and begun to change the rules of warfare.

Aircraft were initially used for reconnaissance and close air support of ground troops. As their utility became evident, anti-aircraft guns and fighter aircraft were developed to shoot them down. Strategic bombers were developed, and towards the end of the war, Sopwith Camels were used for the first time with aircraft carriers. Ace fighter pilots, including several Canadians, were portrayed as modern knights, and many became popular heroes.



Dauphin-born Ace Billy Barker with his Sopwith Camel (Library and Archives Canada)

On the ground, neither side proved able to deliver a decisive blow for the first two years of the war; battles were fought and many died as a few metres of muddy territory changed hands. Despite this general stalemate, these years were marked by bloody battles whose names many Canadians will recognize.

In 1916, the Germans attacked French positions at Verdun, and after ten months of struggle, December of that year saw anywhere from 700,000 to 975,000 casualties and little change in the relative positions of the armies.

During that time, the Battle of the Somme (River) began as an Anglo-French offensive on 1 July 1916—the bloodiest day in the history of the British army, with 19,240 killed and almost 40,000 other casualties. In half an hour on that day, the Newfoundland Regiment was almost obliterated. By the end of the Somme offensive in mid-November of that year, well over a million casualties had been sustained by the two sides.

For many Canadians, Vimy Ridge is the most recognizable battle site associated with the war. Part of the Battle of Arras, in 1917, the capture of Vimy Ridge by the Canadian divisions—fighting together for the first time as a Canadian Corps—has come to be seen as the birthplace of Canada's national identity. Many war memorials include Vimy amongst the battles they list, sometimes, a bit confusingly, along with “Arras,” of which Vimy Ridge was just one part.



Canadian soldiers moving out of a trench onto a battlefield, c. 1916.

The last large-scale offensive of this period was at Passchendaele (the Third Battle of Ypres), lasting from July to November 1917. Some 200,000 to 400,000 casualties were suffered on each side, with men and horses drowning in the deep October mud churned up by weeks of relentless shelling. The name of this Belgian village, forever synonymous with mud, blood and horror, is among the most common battle names that appear on our memorials.

In early 1918, German General Erich Ludendorff planned a major Spring Offensive on the Western Front, beginning in late March with an attack on British forces near Amiens. The hope was to strike a decisive blow before significant American forces could arrive to support the Allies, but after some initial gains, the assault proved futile. It was followed by another major German operation, also unsuccessful, and by 20 July 1918, the Germans were back across the Marne River at their starting lines, having achieved little, with heavy casualties on both sides.



Canadian soldiers carrying a casualty through a bomb-cratered battlefield.

In early August, at the Battle of Amiens, the Allies began a counteroffensive known as the Hundred Days Offensive. Immediate and decisive Allied gains caused the German high command to realize that they could not now win the war. By late September, the first capitulation came when Bulgaria signed an armistice. Further Allied victories culminated at last in the German surrender in November 1918.

On 11 November, at 5:00 a.m., the armistice with Germany was signed in a railroad carriage at Compiègne, France. During the six hours between the signing of the armistice and its taking effect at the symbolic moment of the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, opposing armies on the Western Front began to withdraw from their positions, but fighting continued in many areas. Canadian Private George Lawrence Price was shot by a German sniper at 10:57 and died at 10:58; he is considered the last casualty of the war.

No other war has altered the map so dramatically. Four empires disappeared: the German, Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian. Numerous nations regained their former independence, and new ones were created; the redrawing of international borders had consequences stretching into the current century. Four dynasties, together with their associated aristocracies, fell after the war: the Hohenzollerns, the Habsburgs, the Romanovs, and the Ottomans. Many countries were badly damaged, with millions of soldiers and civilians dead or injured, and the social fabric badly frayed.

The effects on Canada, and Manitoba, were tremendous, as suggested in this extract from the Canadian War Museum website (“The War’s Impact on Canada”):

Canada emerged from the First World War a proud, victorious nation with newfound standing in the world. It also emerged grieving and divided, forever changed by the war's unprecedented exertions and horrific costs.

The war united most Canadians in a common cause even as the extremity of national effort nearly tore the country apart. Few had expected such a long struggle or heavy death toll. A war fought supposedly for liberal freedoms against Prussian militarism had exposed uneasy contradictions, including compulsory military service, broken promises to farmers and organized labour, high inflation, deep social and linguistic divisions, and the suspension of many civil liberties. Some women had received the right to vote, but other Canadians—recent immigrants associated with enemy countries—had seen this right rescinded.

Government had intervened in the lives of Canadians to an unprecedented degree, introducing policies that would eventually mature into a fully fledged system of social welfare. But it had not prevented wartime profiteering, strikes, or economic disasters, leading many to question the extent to which rich Canadians had sacrificed at all. A massive and unprecedented voluntary effort had supported the troops overseas and loaned Ottawa the money it needed to fight the war. The resulting post-war debt of some \$2 billion was owed mostly to other Canadians, a fact which fundamentally altered the nature of the post-war economy.

Politically, the war was also a watershed. Prime Minister Borden's efforts to win the 1917 election and carry the nation to victory succeeded in the short term, but fractured the country along regional, cultural, linguistic, and class lines. English and French relations were never poorer, and accusations of French traitors and English militarists were not soon forgotten. Quebec would be a wasteland for federal Conservative politicians for most of the next 40 years. Wilfred Laurier's forlorn stand against conscription lost him the election and

divided his party, but helped ensure the Liberals' national credibility, with a firm basis in French Canada, for decades to come.

Labour, newly empowered by its important role in supporting the war effort, pushed for more rights, first through negotiations, and then through strikes. Farmers seethed over agricultural policies and Ottawa's broken promise on conscription. In the post-war period, both groups would form powerful new political and regional parties.

The war accelerated the transformation of the British Empire into the British Commonwealth and demonstrated Great Britain's military and economic reliance on the self-governing dominions. Most of the principal Commonwealth heads of government recognized this, and saw clearly in their wartime contributions the route to greater independence and standing within imperial counsels.

Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden orchestrated a massive national effort in support of the mother country, but also demanded that Great Britain recognize Canada's wartime sacrifices with greater post-war autonomy. Canada signed independently the Treaty of Versailles (1919) that formally ended the war, and assumed a cautious, non-committal role in the newly established League of Nations. London's wartime agreement to re-evaluate the constitutional arrangements between Great Britain and its dominions culminated in the Statute of Westminster (1931), which formalized the dominions' full control over their own foreign policy. Canada's determination to do so regardless had already been made evident during the 1922 Chanak Crisis, when Ottawa insisted on a Parliamentary debate before considering possible support to Great Britain in a military confrontation with Turkey.

Despite the social and political challenges of the post-war period, most Canadians also emerged from the struggle believing they had done important and difficult things together. Their primary fighting force at the front, the Canadian Corps, had achieved a first-class reputation as one of the most effective formations on the Western Front. Their generals and politicians had played an obvious role in victory, and the country itself enjoyed an international standing that few observers in 1914 could have predicted.

These undeniable achievements and challenges do not overshadow the great costs of the war itself, which are also noted on the Canadian War Museum website: Some 619,636 Canadians enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) during the war, and approximately 424,000 served overseas. Of these men and women, 59,544 members of the CEF died during the war, 51,748 of them as a result of enemy action. The small Royal Canadian Navy reported 150 deaths from all causes. No accurate tabulation exists for Canadians who served as volunteers in the Royal Navy or British army, or with the French army. An additional 1,388 Canadians died while serving with the British Flying Services.

Of the more than 172,000 Canadians who reported wounds during the war, medical authorities classified approximately 138,000 as battle casualties. The rest were injuries suffered away from the war zone. Of the wounded who survived, 3,461 men and one woman had a limb amputated. One soldier, Curly Christian, survived the loss of all four limbs. No reliable method existed for tracking or treating psychological casualties, but authorities identified over 9,000 Canadians as suffering from "shell shock," which we now know as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

It is within this context—the real cost of lives—that this study has been developed. The conflict that we now commonly call the First World War, and which many at the time called the Great War, is the primary focus for the information developed here. But it is important to note that the lost of World War II (1939-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), and more recent conflicts like the Afghanistan War, as well as casualties in peacekeeping missions, are also featured on many war memorials.

Manitoba memorials, mostly created shortly after the end of the First World War, are thus looked to again and again to commemorate lives sacrificed. And we are asked, again, to honour, to remember, and even to question.

These beautiful and poignant memorials stand as appropriate places to remember the dead we never knew, and, in contemplating the nature of their sacrifice, to—as the memorial at Virden exhorts us (borrowing from Lincoln's Gettysburg address) "Highly Resolve that the Dead Shall not have Died in Vain."