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Keeping the Faith: The American and Canadian Legions Construct Memories of the First World War, 1919-1941

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Introduction

As he reflected on the first decade of the American Legion's existence, Legion historian Bernard A. Gimmestad noted that after the Minnesota state convention in 1925, delegates traveled to Winnipeg for an "international good-will visit." Delegates paraded down the city's main thoroughfare and enjoyed the Canadians' hospitality. Thus a trend began in which Minnesota Legionnaires returned to Winnipeg when their state conventions took place near the border. Likewise, the Department of Minnesota often welcomed Canadian veterans at their conventions.[1]

This example of transnational camaraderie belies assertions that veterans' associations, such as the American Legion, were merely jingoistic organizations that focused on national defense.[2] Although the American Legion considered national defense an important part of its agenda, it concentrated on constructing war memory through service during the 1920s and 1930s. Legionnaires gained popularity and exerted influence in the crafting of First World War narratives because they functioned as living memorials in both national and local settings. These veterans fashioned a memory of the First World War as a sacred experience in which they had a duty to preserve the ideals for which they fought and to remember their fallen comrades.

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[1]Bernard A Gimmestad, *Legion 50: The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary, and the 40 and 8 in Minnesota, 1919-1969* (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, Inc., 1970), 80.

[2] See William Gellermann, *The American Legion as Educator* (New York: Columbia University, 1938), 10, 240; Steven Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory: The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919-1941* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 44.

Furthermore, this narrative crossed national boundaries as members of the American Legion and the Canadian Legion fraternized with each other in towns and cities near the U.S.-Canadian border. Scholar Volker Depkat argues that although wars divide nations, they also connect them; and as a result, war memories are intertwined. Moreover, he postulates that "the United States' very multicultural plurality produced multiple transnational interconnections with the countries the U.S. was allied with."[3] Geographic borders presented opportunities for interaction rather than isolation, in other words. Both Legions participated in each other's activities, thus forging a kind of transnational brotherhood founded on shared sets of experiences and ideals.

This study will compare and contrast the two associations and examine how they constructed war memory among their members and within their local communities. In addition, this paper will explore how the respective organizations used memory to advocate for veterans and to advance their overall agendas. Since the American and Canadian Legions' organizational histories employ a top-down approach in their narratives, we do not have a clear idea of how ordinary veterans constructed memory; how they deviated from the national organizations' agendas; nor how they interacted with their allied counterparts. Uncovering the commemoration activities of average people can present challenges, but scholars in other fields have developed theories that can prove useful to historians of memory. In "Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History," Thomas C. Holt declares that race and racism are part of "the 'ordinary' events of everyday life and [are] perpetuated by 'ordinary' people."[4] Although Holt's assertion primarily deals with the construction of race, I argue that it can apply to memory as well. As

[3] Volker Depkat, "Remembering War the Transnational Way: The U.S.-American Memory of World War I," in *Transnational American Memories* ed. Urdo Hebel (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 186.
[4] Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (Feb., 1995): 1-20, 3.

Michel de Certeau suggested, everyday practices contain value beyond the "background of social activity."[5] Instead of focusing solely on the Legions' national administrations, scholars should turn to the posts and branches where Legionnaires engaged in a variety of everyday practices crucial to the formation of their war memories. Legion historians of local posts and branches often published narratives of their units' activities, and this paper analyzes publications from posts and branches in cities and small towns near the U.S.-Canadian border. Legion historians included information about weekly meetings, celebrations, and the organizations' work in their communities. By examining these post and branch histories, Legion periodicals, and oral histories, I will explore how American and Canadian Legionnaires fashioned a collective war memory as they participated in local community service projects and social gatherings that reinforced their organizations' common objectives.

Historiography

The literature on World War I memory spans nearly forty years and analyzes everything from monuments to pilgrimages. The proliferation of specialized studies in recent years and the focus on individual countries' war experiences tend to obscure the common themes in the scholarship. Despite these trends, most war memory studies highlight the soldier and his role in the construction of memory. The primacy of the soldier in memory formation may appear obvious, since without soldiers, there would be no wars and thus no war memory; however, the soldier performs functions beyond military service. In the construction of war memory, the soldier symbolizes the nation; he perpetuates the cult of the fallen warrior; and he advocates for his fellow comrades in peace time.

John Bodnar, one of the first American historians to explore war memory, described the political nature of public memory and presented a useful framework for analyzing it. In

[5] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xi.

Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century (1992), Bodnar argues that public memory "emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions."[6] In other words, the discourse between authority figures and specialized interest groups produces public memory. As most of Bodnar's case studies demonstrate, the official culture usually eclipses the vernacular culture; however, national narratives often incorporate multiple, conflicting perspectives couched in the language of patriotism.

This symbolic language of patriotism relies on such ideals as bravery and sacrifice as embodied by the soldier. Allied leaders labored to construct public memories of a just war in which their soldiers won the victory, saved civilization from the Central Powers, and preserved peace. Some nations, including the United States and Canada, believed that they had something to prove in the First World War. For example, Jonathan F. Vance states that the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) represented Canada overseas and came to personify the country.[7] Once dependent upon Great Britain, the soldiers in the CEF saw the war as an opportunity to assert their strength and capability and contributed to the myth of the Canadian as a rugged outdoorsman, even though most soldiers hailed from the cities.

Just as the Canadian government appropriated the soldier to construct and reinforce national identity, so did American governmental officials and middle-class representatives craft commemorations to unite a pluralistic society. Kurt Piehler's chapter "Remembering the War to End All Wars" examines how national leaders built monuments in hopes that these memorials

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[6] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13.
[7] Jonathan William Franklin Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC, 1997), 136.

would "camouflage the divisions caused by the war."[8] In spite of the government's lofty goals, Piehler illustrates how contestations over the ownership of war memory marked every commemoration, as various groups, such as the American Legion and other veterans' associations, insisted that they were the protectors of the war's heritage. The perceived need for a unifying narrative crossed geographic boundaries. As Mark David Sheftall explains, Canada also needed memorials that projected traditional ideals to counteract economic and political strife. Canada's war narrative, like most of the Dominions', celebrated the soldiers' performance on the battlefield and portrayed the war as a rite of passage for colonies to become nations.[9]

At the heart of national and local commemorations lay the remembrance of the fallen soldiers. As men and women gathered around their towns' memorials, many sought consolation and justification for their loss. Monuments reinforced what George L. Mosse has described as the "myth of the war experience" and the "cult of the fallen soldier."[10] The inscriptions upon the memorials glorified and validated the soldiers' sacrifice, and the commemorations held at the monuments recalled the war as a sacred experience. Although memorials can and do embody nationalism and project patriotism, Jay Winter argues that they also serve as spaces for people to mourn.[11] Winter introduces mourning as an aspect of memory that links individuals through similar expressions of loss, despair, and confusion. In grief, he argues, individuals form invisible communities as they pass through the processes of mourning, consolation, and commemoration. For solace, individuals relied on traditional artistic motifs displayed on memorials. Although Lisa M. Budreau acknowledges grief as a factor influencing the construction of memory, she

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[8]Kurt Piehler, *Remembering War the American Way* (Washington, D.C.: 2004), 94.
[9]Mark David Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War: Divergent Narratives of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 5.
[10]George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 7.
[11]Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 5.

notes that the rituals of remembrance reflected Americans' ambivalence about the purpose and meaning of the war.[12] Even the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where all could come to mourn, could not mask the tensions that developed over where the burial should take place and how many unidentified bodies should be returned. Budreau traces how the national identity of the American soldier gradually came to replace the identity of the individual anonymous soldier buried beneath the monument.

The soldiers who survived the war performed tangible roles in addition to building national identity and reinforcing ideals of sacrifice and valor. They testified to the war's brutality and advocated for their fellow comrades. In Paul Fussell's landmark study, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, soldier-poets Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, and others ushered in the modern age.[13] In order to cope with the death of their system of values, they turned to irony. Fussell's book sets up a dichotomy in which post-war life is marked by bitterness and relativism. Although Fussell primarily examines how the war is remembered through English literature, his analysis has come to represent the entire war experience and the attitudes of the war generation. His book has played a significant role in the public's association of the First World War with disillusionment and the origins of modernity. Likewise, Modris Eksteins suggests that the war created a discontinuity between nineteenth- and twentieth-century culture.[14] The war acted as a catalyst and affected soldiers' existing mental structures, a change which they and civilians expressed by emphasizing different values in art and literature. For example, Eksteins argues that soldiers believed a common feeling developed among their comrades, that their experience at the front had created an insurmountable barrier between them and civilians.

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[12]Lisa M. Budreau, *Bodies of War: World War I and the Politics of Commemoration in America, 1919-1933* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 3.
[13]Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).
[14]Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

The bond of their shared experience may partially explain why veterans formed their own organizations in which they could reminisce while securing benefits for those who served. Many civilians viewed the war memory produced by veterans' associations as legitimate because these men and women had directly participated in the war. Activities, including commemorations, hosted by veterans' associations helped to validate members' service in the war. Professor Steven Trout explores the American Legion's influence in the construction of national war memory and argues that theirs was one perspective in an ambivalent collective memory.[15] For instance, many had protested America's entry into the war and found little reason to celebrate the Allies' victory. Others, such as African-American soldiers, had viewed the war as an opportunity to advance social reforms but encountered apathy and resistance when they returned from the front. Trout's emphasis on fragmentation contrasts sharply with Fussell's and Ekstein's portrayal of a homogenous memory of the First World War.

Amidst the contestation of American remembrance some dominant narratives emerged. From its inception the American Legion emphasized its role as a keeper of war memory; moreover, the public viewed the organization itself as a kind of memorial. Few works place the American Legion in a historical context and discuss the organization's effect on society. Official histories written by Legionnaires typically glorify the Legion's accomplishments while First World War studies often devote only a chapter to veterans or mention the organization in passing.[16] During a time of uncertainty and instability in the US, the Legion's presence in communities reinforced ideals for which the veterans had fought.

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[15]Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory*, 2.

[16] See Marquis James, *A History of the American Legion* (New York: W. Green, 1923); Richard Seelye Jones, *A History of the American Legion* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1946); Raymond Moley, Jr., *The American Legion Story* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1966); William Pencak, *For God & Country: The American Legion, 1919-1941* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989); and Thomas Rumer, *The American Legion: An Official History, 1919-1989* (New York: M. Evans & Co., Inc., 1989).

Both pride and mourning colored collective remembrances of the Great War. Veterans especially found themselves torn between memories of the horrors they endured and of the excitement they experienced. As a result, they often constructed positive recollections of the war which displaced reality and justified nations' participation in the war. "The Myth of the War Experience" reflects upon the Great War as a meaningful and even sacred experience.[17] The first generation of Legionnaires generally ascribed to this myth, and volunteer soldiers, in particular, cultivated the myth because they alone chose to go to war. Draftees could shift blame onto their government, on the other hand. The Myth of the War Experience assuaged the trauma caused by the war's wholesale destruction.

Founding of the Legions

From its inception, the Legion invoked the concepts of camaraderie, glory, and patriotism. The American Legion, headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana, originated in Paris, France. Although the armistice signed on November 11, 1918, ended hostilities, soldiers could not return home immediately. The state of the American soldiers' morale concerned American Expeditionary Force (AEF) commander General John Pershing. On February 15 and 16, 1919, Pershing and twenty other officers met to discuss ways to boost morale.[18] Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., proposed a veterans' association to preserve the soldiers' unity of purpose, and in peace-time, to advance the ideals and objectives for which they had fought. The spread of socialist and communist propaganda amongst the troops abroad and in the United States greatly worried the officers. They agreed with Roosevelt's plan and decided to hold two organizational meetings, one in Paris and one in St. Louis. The Paris meeting (also known as a caucus) laid the foundations for the American Legion. At the St. Louis Caucus on May 7, 1919, delegations

[17]Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 7.
[18]Moley, Jr., *The American Legion Story*, 43.

appointed members to standing committees to further determine the Legion's framework and policies.[19]

The Legionnaires of 1919 did share a nationalistic idealism fueled in part by insecurity about the position of America's traditional elite in an era of immigration, large-scale capitalism, and political machines.[20] Nonetheless, the Legion embraced American men from different regions, political affiliations, religions, socio-economic classes, and ethnic groups, although most of the members hailed from the middle class. The nature of military service tended to give white Americans of different backgrounds a common, positive experience. As historian William Pencak explains, "[The Legion] was…representative of those groups that dominated the civic culture and identified themselves as 'the nation' and 'the community'."[21]

The Legion's organizational hierarchy reflected that balance between nation and community. The initial constitution decreed that the Legion would be a national organization with subsidiary branches in each state, territory, and foreign country where members resided. The state would function as the Legion's basic unit, retaining the right to handle its internal organization. All Americans, including women, who had served honorably in the Great War, were eligible for membership. The final preamble to the constitution embodied the Legion's brand of Americanism. The Legion dedicated itself to perform specific duties, such as "to safeguard and transmit to posterity" democratic principles and "to preserve the memories" of the war.[22]

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[19]Ibid., 57.
[20] Marcus Duffield, *King Legion* (New York: Jonathan Cape & Harrison Smith, Inc., 1931), 10.
[21] Pencak, *For God & Country*, 80-81, 105.
[22] Richard Seelye Jones, *A History of the American Legion* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1946), 40.

The Canadian Legion displays its commitment to memory in its motto: "memoriam, eorum, retinebimus" while concomitantly reintegrating soldiers into civilian life.[23] Since Canada entered the war before the United States, it confronted the challenge of re-assimilating its soldiers into society while the war raged on. Before the First World War, Canadian veterans could either turn to regimental associations or to one Dominion organization known as the Army and Navy Veterans in Canada; however, these associations limited membership and restricted their activity largely to urban centers.[24] The First World War magnified the problems facing veterans to a degree that Canada had never before witnessed. Six hundred thousand men and women had served in the war out of a total population of eight million. Of those who served, 60,000 died in action, and 140,000 sustained wounds and disabilities.[25] The government was not prepared to deal with such complicated matters as pension administration or the care of the disabled.[26] Numerous organizations, such as the Disabled Veterans Association and the War Amputations Association, sprang up to deal with veterans' infirmities, but the organizations lacked unity. Canadian Legionnaire and historian Clifford Bowering estimates that fourteen or fifteen national organizations in addition to scattered local groups were established between 1917 and 1925, yet many merely functioned as social clubs.[27] The associations' leaders gradually realized that they were laboring to achieve the same goals: medical care, pensions, and employment for veterans in difficult situations. In the early 1920s, inflation increased and jobs became scarce for returning soldiers. Canadian and American veterans encountered similar economic situations with little assistance initially available. Then, in 1925, a number of

[23]"We will remember them." Jack Jarvie and Diana Swift, *The Royal Canadian Legion, 1926-1986* (Toronto: Discovery Books, 1985), title page.
[24]Clifford H. Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Canadian Legion, 1925-1960* (Ottawa: Canadian Legion, 1960), 2.
[25]Jarvie and Swift, *The Royal Canadian Legion*, 20.
[26]Bowering, *Service*, 4.
[27]Ibid., 5.

servicemen's organizations led by the Great War Veterans Association met in Winnipeg to discuss merging all of the organizations to present a united voice for veterans.[28] Delegates agreed that the purpose of the new organization would be service to the nation through three channels: caring for the war-disabled, the dependent, and the needy; perpetuating the memory of the fallen in the cause of world peace; and developing a national consciousness.[29] The Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League emerged from this conference and received its official charter from the secretary of state in 1926.[30] Although the formation of the Canadian Legion represented a milestone for veterans, several internal issues continued to hamper the organization's work, including class divisions, regional hostility, and prejudice against officers.[31] These divisions, however, did not prevent the Legion from formulating clear objectives similar to the ones voiced at the unity conference. The Canadian Legion aimed to foster loyalty to Canada and the Empire, to secure the welfare of veteran comrades and their dependents, to inculcate appreciation for the sacrifices of the fallen and the survivors, and to work for the good of society as a whole.[32]

The "Imagined" National Community

Both the American and Canadian Legions' objectives reflected their dedication to developing nationalism in which war memory figured prominently. The associations strove to evoke in the public patriotism and other traditional values for which the veterans had fought. For example, the American Legion's brand of nationalism, Americanism, intertwined war memory with freedom, loyalty, and civic duty. The Legion had difficulty defining Americanism but had no trouble evoking it and America as subjects of historical and mythical grandeur. Russell Cook, the director of the Legion's National Americanism Commission, remarked that it was nearly

[28]Jarvie and Swift, *The Royal Canadian Legion*, 27.
[29]Bowering, *Service*, 15.
[30]Jarvie and Swift, *The Royal Canadian Legion*, 29.
[31]Ibid., 25-26.
[32]Ibid., 27.

impossible to define the phrase 100% Americanism. The concept varied from individual to individual. Nevertheless, every individual could be 100% loyal to America. Cook asserted, "It is that loyalty with which The American Legion is concerned today, in order that the aggregate Americanism of our people, as a whole, will be 100 per cent."[33] Nebraska Legion historian Robert Simmons presented Americanism as something akin to a Hegelian "spirit moving through the centuries to realize an idea of freedom where nation and citizen perfected each other."[34] Phrases such as "undivided allegiance, cooperation on a grand scale, and worthy of sacrifice" appear throughout Simmons' work and the Americanism Commission's minutes to describe the individual's proper relationship to society. The Americanism Commission defined the concept in this manner:

> Take the common denominator [of the various connotations of the word], take an appreciation of the principles on which our nation is founded: loyalty and devotion to its institutions, and unselfishness, service in the promotion of the welfare and happiness of its people and that would serve as a working definition for the purposes of the commission.[35]

Overall, it appeared that the definition of Americanism was connected to the promotion and protection of justice, freedom, and democracy, as well as loyalty to the US. Their devotion to Americanism sprang from the veterans' time in the military. The common experience that the soldiers shared contributed to their definition of Americanism; in fact, the Legion maintained that the ideal test of Americanism was a citizen's willingness to fight for his country in time of war, just as the Legionnaires had done in 1917-1918. In a sense, they believed that they were still

[33]Russell Cook, Address of the Director of the National Americanism Commission [ca. 1920s] (Indianapolis, IN: American Legion Library Microfilms, 1920s. Microfilm), 1.
[34]Pencak, *For God & Country*, 5.
[35]Rumer, *The American Legion*, 181-182.

fighting the war to protect America from dangerous ideologies.[36] Those groups which did not participate in the war, such as alien slackers, radicals, and profiteers, were branded as un-American. The Legion supported the traditional order of church and state, states' rights, limited government, free enterprise, and freedom of speech within limits. As most Legionnaires were middle-class businessmen or clerical, skilled, or professional workers, the Legion exercised its strongest influence in small town America and the Midwest where inhabitants were accustomed to homogeneity. However, posts in New York City, Detroit, Chicago, and San Francisco also played important roles in civic life and the spread of Americanism.[37]

The American Legion worked to instill nationalistic principles that had originated before the war while the Canadian Legion joined in an effort to develop a national consciousness. During the war, many argued that Canada needed to develop its own distinct culture, and historian Jonathan Vance has observed that the war initially had a negative effect on the arts. News from the front preoccupied or depressed writers and artists who consequently produced fewer works; furthermore, the government reallocated funding from the arts to the war effort.[38] Soon, however, artists and the literati channeled their talents into the propaganda machine and the other patriotic causes, such as fundraisers for Belgium and the Red Cross Society. Cultural works produced during the war boosted morale, offered an escape for war-weary citizens, and reminded the public of the reasons Canada had entered the war.[39] Traditional forms of poetry, novels, and painting that evoked feelings of stability and continuity dominated the cultural scene during the war years. At first, these works rallied society around the common theme of defending the motherland, but as the war dragged on, Canada needed other reasons to justify its

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[36]Pencak, *For God & Country*, 6, 14.
[37]Jones, *History of the American Legion*, 78.
[38]Jonathan Franklin William Vance, *A History of Canadian Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 218-219.
[39]Ibid., 219-220.

involvement in the war. Instead, propagandists emphasized preserving freedom and civilization. More significant, they stressed the opportunity Canada had to achieve respect on the world stage.[40] After the war, narratives that validated Canada's participation in the war continued to appear, even though British media typically reflected disillusionment and the high cost of the conflict. Historian Mark David Sheftall contends, however, that this collective memory represents only the English-Canadian perspective.[41] In fact, English journalist Richard Jebb argued that because of French Canada, Canadian nationalism was more mature than that of the other settler colonies. The French Canadians did not share the colonial loyalty of the Anglophones but instead articulated a non-racial nationalism based on shared territory.[42] Yet, even the French-Canadian *nationaliste* politician Henri Bourassa desired an independent but bi-cultural Canada.[43] The few Canadian books that presented alternative narratives were quickly marginalized.

The war memory articulated and transmitted in Canada celebrated the Canadian Expeditionary Force's battlefield performance and portrayed the war as a national rite of passage. In this collective memory, Canada demonstrated that it had achieved its independence from Great Britain. No longer a colony in need of guidance and protection from the mother country, Canada had proven its maturity as a nation on the battlefield.[44] The battle that resonated most strongly with Canadians was Vimy Ridge. In April 1917, the Canadian Expeditionary Force drove the Germans from the ridge, a feat that Allied forces had been trying to accomplish for two years. Most historians consider this battle the moment when Canada established its new

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[40]Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War*, 123.
[41]Ibid., 11.
[42]Jacques Monet, "Canadians, Canadiens, and Colonial Nationalism, 1896-1914: The Thorn in the Lion's Paw," in *The Rise of Colonial Nationalism: Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa First Assert Their Nationalities, 1880-1914*, John Eddy and Deryck Schreuder, eds., (1988), 162, 176-177.
[43]Ibid., 176-177.
[44]Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War*, 7.

national identity, a process it had begun fifty years earlier in 1867.[45] Besides the CEF's memorable performance at Vimy, it also had distinguished itself at the Second Battle of Ypres in 1915 when it held the front line while under a gas attack and later in the capture of Passchendaele in October 1917.[46]

The Legions transmitted their respective brands of nationalism by educating the public. During the 1920s and 1930s, the American Legion developed citizenship courses and activities geared toward school children to perpetuate "those fighting qualities…shown in the American participation in the World War."[47] The Legion devoted a great deal of its attention to public schools because it firmly believed that they were "the very foundation" of the nation.[48] Probably the best-known school program launched by the Legion is their National Essay Contest begun in 1922. The Legion asked participants to compose an essay describing how the association could best serve the nation. Dedication to service, a vital component of living memorials, manifested itself in the Legion's educational outreach because it believed that it needed to instill these virtues in the next generation. A reported fifty thousand children participated in the contest in 1922, and approximately thirty-three thousand students submitted essays the following year.[49] In addition to the theme of service, essay topics ranged from immigration restriction to the dangers of communism. Memory of the First World War also played a subtle but significant role in the topics. The original topic for 1925's contest inquired, "Why has the American Legion, an organization of veterans of the World War, dedicated itself, first of all, to uphold the Constitution

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[45]Jarvie and Swift, *The Royal Canadian Legion*, 22.
[46]Albert Charles Young, *24 Good Men and True: Members of Branch #142 of the Royal Canadian Legion* (New York: Vantage Press, 1992), 142.
[47] The American Legion, *Proceedings of the Fifteenth National Convention* (Indianapolis: The American Legion, 1934), 108.
[48] The American Legion, *Proceedings of the Twelfth National Convention*, H.D. 576, 71st Cong. 3d sess. (U.S. Govt. Pr. Office, Washington, D.C., 1931), 139-140.
[49] Gellermann, *The American Legion as Educator*, 209.

of the United States?"[50] Mentioning the war in conjunction with the Constitution and other national symbols reinforced the Legionnaires' war narrative that recounts how they had fought to preserve American ideals.

The Canadian Legion shared a similar commitment to transmitting certain national values, but its approach differed markedly from the American Legion's. Although the Canadian Legion encouraged the public to take pride in their country, they did not formulate a kind of nationalism comparable to the American Legion's Americanism. Historian Diana Swift indicates that the Canadian Legion formed an education committee in 1938, but most of the Legion's involvement with school and youth activities began after 1945.[51] In response to World War I, Canadian communities did participate in essay writing contests that promoted national unity and also "valorized the gendered place of teachers in the classroom who selected the project."[52] These women performed a vital duty by sharing with their students the importance of good citizenship and patriotism. Likewise, many Canadian authors imbued their works with a celebratory tone and an uncritical nationalism.[53] Since the Canadian Legion did not form until 1925, it invested most of its time and resources into assisting veterans during the inter-war years. Thus, it would take time for Canadian Legionnaires to develop their own education programs. Today, the Legion sponsors activities that seem to be specifically associated with Remembrance Day. The annual Literary and Poster Contest helps "foster the tradition of Remembrance

[50]The American Legion, *Proceedings of the Eighth National Convention* (Indianapolis: The American Legion, 1927), 76-77.
[51] Jarvie and Swift, *The Royal Canadian Legion*, 32.
[52] Robert Rutherdale, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada's Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 212.
[53] Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War*, 160.

amongst Canadians."[54] The guidelines for the contests are very broad, encouraging students to write an essay or poem on Remembrance.

In addition, the Legion designed its teaching guide for public schools to cultivate traditions of Remembrance. The guide addresses Canadian military history and the creation of the Legion as well as important national symbols, such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.[55] The guide emphasizes bravery and sacrifice yet describes war as something that simply occurred: "after four years of bloody conflict Canada emerged as a significant player on the world stage. The Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917 is enshrined in the Canadian conscience as a 'nation-building event.'"[56] This narrative makes no mention of enemies or victors and employs far less fervent language than the American Legion's educational materials from the 1920s and 1930s. The Canadian nationalism is present in the guide, but it is muted.

The "Experienced" Local Community

Through national directives in education, the Legions contrived imagined national communities based on their experiences in the First World War. They developed rhetoric to express their nationalisms, but it was at the local level that they performed this rhetoric and constructed memories of the First World War. The action that linked the nation and the local community was commemoration. Plans for national and local monuments abounded after the war, and these patriotic symbols helped to implant "a sense of national belonging…across a population experiencing life within the nation-state on different levels simultaneously."[57]

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[54] The Royal Canadian Legion, "Remembrance Contest," http://legion.ca/Poppy/contests_e.cfm (Accessed 29 March 2013).
[55] The Royal Canadian Legion, *Teaching Guide*, http://www.legion.ca/_PDF/Teachers/TeachingGuide2012_e.pdf, 27.
[56] Ibid., 6.
[57] Rutherdale, *Hometown Horizons*, xx-xxi.

Individuals gathered at the war monuments to mourn, to honor the dead, and to reflect on the war's meaning.

The Legions naturally supported erecting traditional monuments; however, they embodied the definition of a living memorial because of their commitment to service. Some argued that since the Great War differed from previous wars in terms of scope and scale, the memorials also needed to be different. Arches and the like could not satisfactorily commemorate a war. Memorials, critics argued, should express the spirit of the community and of those who fought, but others contended that "practical memorials" were too impersonal.[58] Living memorials, or practical memorials, honored the dead by commemorating the principles for which they sacrificed themselves and which the Legions had pledged to perpetuate. The National Committee on Memorial Buildings stated that these principles could exist only in the lives of men; therefore, living memorials best perpetuated these principles. Living memorials also acknowledged the service of veterans by serving others.[59] Though the description of a living memorial implies that the memorial be an edifice or piece of infrastructure, the concept could also incorporate veterans' organizations, such as the Legions.

Professor Steven Trout states that "between 1919 and 1941, no remembrance organization in the United States expended more energy, raised more money, or enjoyed more success when working to maintain the Great War (especially the memory of its fallen) as a living presence in American culture."[60] Trout's statement indicates that the public viewed the American Legion as a having an active role in shaping the memory of the First World in the public sphere. Not only did the posts advocate for veterans but they allowed Legionnaires to

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[58] Arnold W. Brunner, "The Permanent Memorial," *American Magazine of Art*, 1919, 249.
[59]National Committee on Memorial Buildings, *For Living Tributes to Those Who Served in the Great War for Liberty and Democracy* (New York: The Committee, 1919), preface.
[60]Trout, *On the Battlefield of Memory*, 48.

construct war memory through community service. The Legion's creed of Americanism stressed community service in order to "make a better America."[61] The Legions' areas of focus tended to overlap. For example, education and recreation could invoke patriotism and citizenship, and commemoration could honor the dead while calling attention to veterans' needs. By performing community service, Legionnaires emphasized the obligations citizens had to their countries and encouraged the patriotic spirit engendered during the war. Legionnaires believed that this spirit should be perpetuated in peace time, and they discovered the most effective place to inculcate these ideals was the in "the local community" in which they as individuals resided.[62] In fact, local American Legion posts had been striving to improve their communities for several years when the 1926 national convention recognized that the moment had arrived for the Legion as a whole to embrace community service. At the national convention, Dan Sowers, the National Director of the Community Service Division, stated that nearly two thousand posts had completed or were involved in some kind of community service project.[63]

In the posts and branches, located in towns and cities across the U.S. and Canada, Legionnaires embedded their war narrative in everyday practices.[64] They advocated for veterans, organized and sponsored educational activities, and participated in various forms of recreation. Although they often conformed to the national headquarters' objectives, they also occasionally deviated from them as well.[65] Indeed, regional and local levels of the associations sometimes felt disconnected from the national headquarters. Thousands of miles separated Canadian Legion

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[61] T.H. Hayden, Jr., ed., *The American Legion History Department of Kentucky* [Louisville, KY: George G. Fetter Co., 1927?], 81.
[62] Ibid., 81.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Thomas C. Holt argues that race and racism are part of the "ordinary events of everyday life" and are perpetuated "by ordinary people, but his assertion can apply to the construction of memory as well. Thomas C. Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (Feb., 1995): 1-20, 3.
[65] William Gellermann comments on the contrast between local Legionnaires' attitudes and actions and national headquarters' directives in *The American Legion as Educator*, v.

branches in Lumby, British Columbia, and Ryerly, Alberta, from their national headquarters in Ottawa, Ontario. Speaking of the American Legionnaire, National Commander Franklin D'Olier commented that the typical member felt "`the less we hear from Indianapolis the better.'"[66] Between ten and twelve thousand American Legion posts existed during the inter-war years, and they varied in size.[67] Because of their heterogeneity, posts adapted procedures to suit their specific needs. Some, for example, dispensed with initiations for new members and ceremonial rituals for meetings.[68] Other posts tried different approaches to fundraising or raising awareness about veterans' issues.

Advocacy

The primary reasons veterans formed associations were to intercede for each other during difficult times and to maintain friendships formed during the war. In 1919 and the early 1920s, the United States and Canada experienced recessions and unemployment rose. One of the posts' and branches' primary goals was to help veterans find jobs and to provide assistance to the disabled ex-servicemen. The Legionnaires of the Philips-Elliott-Hodges-Van Auken Post regularly collected donations for disabled veterans and their families and delivered charity baskets at Christmas. During the Great Depression, these Legionnaires convinced local businesses to offer discounts and assembled coupon-books for needy veterans.[69] In 1932, the Cadillac Post increased its efforts to help veterans find gainful employment. In fact, the Michigan Department formed a special committee on unemployment and named a Cadillac Post Legionnaire chairman.[70] This committee partnered with the Michigan Chamber of Commerce

[66]Pencak, *For God & Country*, 88.
[67]Ibid., 89.
[68]Ibid., 88-89.
[69] George E. McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943* (Saginaw, MI: [1943?]), 41, 57-58.
[70] Harold H. Emmons, *History of the Cadillac Post No. 333 American Legion* (Detroit, MI: American Legion, 1955), 31.

and other fraternal organizations to put one million men to work. The Legion committee also labored to ensure that the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enrolled veterans. By 1935, 17,000 veterans found jobs in the CCC.[71]

Advocacy, or welfare work, as many post histories described it, also encompassed caring for the disabled. The Joyce Kilmer Post in St. Paul, Minnesota, lent its support to a group requesting a pardon for an incarcerated disabled ex-serviceman named Clyde Hawkins so that he could receive treatment from a government hospital.[72] The Joyce Kilmer Post also made headlines when it treated sixty disabled veterans from the Fort Snelling Hospital to a seventy-mile automobile ride in June 1930. The newspaper editorial remarked, "They [Legionnaires] realize that each member who drove his own car was doing his personal bit to make the day enjoyable for them."[73] The phrase "doing his personal bit" evokes war-time memories in which citizens spoke of doing their duty to their country. By visiting their disabled comrades, the Legionnaires recognized that they still had a duty to perform. Indeed, the editorial observed that the post "had put into practice" the Legion's preamble to its constitution.[74]

Most Canadian Legion branches resolved to make assisting veterans their main priority. Providing aid for veterans took precedence over educational or recreational activities for many branches. Their emphasis on caring for veterans conformed to the 1925 National Unity Conference's agenda, the first point of which was "care of the war disabled, the dependent, and the needy."[75] Since Canada did not have a specific governmental department dedicated to veterans' social welfare and readjustment, local Legion branches shouldered the responsibility.

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[71] Ibid., 33.
[72] Atus P. Reuther, *Biography--History--Roster of the Joyce Kilmer Post No. 107 American Legion, Saint Paul, Minnesota* [Saint Paul, MN?] [1930?], 2.
[73] Ibid., 12.
[74] Ibid.
[75] William Simcock, *The First Sixty Years: The Royal Canadian Legion, Fredericton Branch No. 4* (Fredericton, N.B.: The Royal Canadian Legion, 1985), 20.

Civilian gratitude did not always translate into what veterans needed, nor did civilians always understand veterans' needs.[76] As a result, the branches' work engendered a special bond between the Legionnaires of World War I who relied on their friends and neighbors for assistance with pension and rehabilitation matters.[77] The Oshawa Branch in Ontario even set up an office in their clubroom where veterans could submit their pension paperwork. The Canadian Legion hailed the passage of the War Veterans' Act in 1930 as a victory for veterans and their families, as it restored pensions for those whose disabilities persisted and offered more generous pensions for widows.[78] Even with the improved government assistance, the branches still found ways to help comrades. During the Great Depression, the Oshawa Branch started a community garden for needy members and their families and assisted families with purchasing groceries and coal or wood for heating. Between November 9 and December 31, 1929, the Oshawa Branch helped over sixty families.[79]

Commemoration

Mutual helpfulness, a concept that both Legions shared, meant supporting veterans in tangible ways. Legionnaires believed they were obligated to help their fellow comrades in peace-time, just as they had cared for each other in war-time. To honor the sacrifice of those who were beyond physical aid, the Legionnaires turned to commemoration. For the Canadian Legion branches, commemoration practices usually involved presiding over Armistice Day (renamed Remembrance Day in 1931) ceremonies or overseeing the annual Poppy Day campaign, which coincides with Remembrance Day. As Legion historian Clifford Bowering observes, "Remembrance Day and all connected with it epitomizes their [the Canadian Legion's] avowed

[76] Rutherdale, *Hometown Horizons*, 226.
[77] Simcock, *Fredericton Branch No. 4*, 6.
[78] June Brown, *The First Fifty Years: Royal Canadian Legion Branch 43* [Oshawa, ON?] [1976?], 19-20.
[79] Brown, *First Fifty Years*, 18,24.

purpose—service to the veteran; honour the dead but remember the living."[80] A Remembrance Day service usually consisted of a two minutes' silence; a speech or some kind of acknowledgement by a government official; a parade of soldiers and veterans; and a presentation of poppy wreaths. Branches followed similar practices. The Fredericton Branch, for example, instituted annual Armistice Day banquets and supervised the town's arrangements for Armistice Day.[81] Local governments typically allowed Legionnaires to take charge of the ceremonies or to care for the town memorials since their status as veterans lent authenticity to the events. For example in 1929, the City Council in Oshawa relinquished the upkeep of its memorial garden to the Legionnaires.[82] Like the Fredericton Branch, the Vimy Branch in London, Ontario, held annual Armistice Day dinners but also coordinated their bi-annual meetings to coincide with the dinners and other significant dates. Their other meeting took place on the anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.[83]

In addition to performing the pageantry of memorial services and dinners, the Canadian Legionnaires engaged in aspects of living memorials. Most branches, including the Vimy Branch, organized and administered the Poppy Fund. In 1918, an American teacher named Moina Michael read the poem "In Flanders Fields" by slain Canadian officer John McCrae and was inspired to begin wearing a poppy to "keep the faith" with those who had died.[84] Many veterans' associations, including the American and Canadian Legions, adopted this practice; however, Americans typically wear poppies on Memorial Day instead of Armistice Day. Disabled veterans crafted artificial poppies that the Canadian Legion then purchased at a penny a

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[80] Bowering, *Service*, 196.
[81] Simcock, *Fredericton Branch No. 4*, 13, 19.
[82] Brown, *First Fifty Years*, 16.
[83] *Friends and Comrades: Vimy Branch #145 Royal Canadian Legion* (London, ON: History Committee of Vimy Branch, 1983), 13.
[84] The Royal Canadian Legion, "The Flower of Remembrance," http://legion.ca/Poppy/campaign_e.cfm (Accessed 23 April 2013).

flower. Legionnaires later sold the poppies on Poppy Day as a visual symbol of remembrance. Proceeds from Poppy Day went to disabled veterans. These poppies reminded the public of the tragedy of war on two levels: the lives lost and the lives altered. They also adhered to the Canadian Legion's commitment to support the war's survivors. The town of Blenheim took seriously the idea of a living memorial by transforming an old power plant into a memorial building. Part of the building functioned as the town library while other areas served as meeting rooms for various organizations, including the Legion branch until it acquired a separate building.[85]

The American Legion posts appeared to accentuate pageantry more than the Canadian Legion branches. The posts supervised ceremonies for Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, and Armistice Day; whereas the Canadian Legion involved itself only in Poppy Day and Remembrance Day. Many histories suggested that the pageantry was source of pride for Legionnaires who associated it with their old military drills. Legion historian George McMullen noted how, during the 1940 Armistice Day Parade, despite the wind and snow, the Legionnaires and Ladies' Auxiliary "carried on and marched like the soldiers of old."[86] Commemorations presented opportunities for all veterans to come together to reflect on the sacrifices made on their behalves and to recall the camaraderie and energetic spirit that characterized their military service. For instance, on Memorial Day 1929, in Barre, Vermont, the town held a joint program with the R.B. Crandall Post, the Barre Post, the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), and the Spanish War Veterans. As part of the Memorial Day observance, the veterans decorated all military graves in Barre, including those in the Catholic cemeteries. Although some posts did discriminate against Catholics and Jews, others demonstrated that military service, especially

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[85] *Corporal Harry Miner, V.C. (Ontario No. 185) Blenheim Branch Royal Canadian Legion* [Blenheim, ON ?] [1990?], 13-14.
[86] McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943*, 82.

dying for one's country, trumped religion and class.[87] Besides decorating graves, Legion posts often hosted or attended the funerals of fallen comrades. Bodies of soldiers killed in action were still being repatriated when many posts were forming. Legionnaires at the Phillips-Elliott-Hodges-Van Auken Post paid their final respects to their brothers-in-arms as late as 1921.[88] Even after the funerals had ceased, Legionnaires at Hawkes 32nd Division Post in Detroit, Michigan, held memorial nights when they remembered deceased members. By holding memorial services for the fallen, the Legion kept its pledge to preserve its memories of the Great War and to keep faith with those who had died. Occasionally, though, some communities protested the Legion's dominance over the memorial services. The post in Peshastin, Washington, had overseen the Memorial Day services in the Peshastin Community Church during the 1920s, but the post's involvement eventually ended because the pastors asserted that the services fell under their purview.[89] Since the practice of remembering entailed emotional experiences and the memories of loved ones, the public took these observances seriously and sometimes contested the manner in which their communities conducted them. Veterans' associations seldom had to acquiesce to others' objections because they possessed a unique authenticity and authority.

Education

Because of their military service, Legionnaires believed that they had a mission to impart the qualities of good citizenship. As previously discussed, the Canadian Legion did not begin establishing educational programs for youth until after World War II, although an education committee formed in 1938.[90] In addition, the Fredericton Branch granted financial assistance to

[87] *Programme, Memorial Day, Barre, Vermont* (Barre City, VT: Granite City Press, 1929), 1.
[88] McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943*, 25.
[89] Alfred W. Moltke, *"For God and Country": A Condensed 50-Year History, American Legion Peshastin Post No. 85* (College Place, WA: Color Press, 1978), 14.
[90] Jarvie and Swift, *Royal Canadian Legion*, 32.

students, and the Oshawa Branch chartered a junior branch for children in 1934.[91] Sometimes, branches held special camps for children of widows and veterans in special circumstances, as in the case of the Oshawa Branch.[92] The camps featured sports and all kinds of entertainment but also provided an opportunity for Legionnaires to mentor children who lacked role models. Legionnaires intended their citizenship programs and curricula to prevent radicalism from spreading to the next generation. Although Canadian Legionnaires concentrated primarily on veterans' affairs in the inter-war years, they did their part to combat communism. The history of the Oshawa Branch records that "there was much discontent and great fears of Communist disturbances in these days."[93] As a safety measure, the Oshawa police department appointed a group of Legionnaires special constables to assist in case of disturbances. One afternoon, the police department received word that a contingent of communists from Toronto intended to hold a meeting in Oshawa's memorial park. In response, the Legion gathered a group of one hundred, armed themselves with baseball bats and clubs, and assembled at the park. Some communists entered the park, but most stayed away.[94] In other instances, however, the Canadian Legion branches appeared less critical of unions and so-call "radical" activities than the American Legion. When the General Motors employees struck in 1937, the Oshawa Branch did its best to "segregate itself from any controversy which might arise in the community."[95]

The American Legionnaires' reputation for overzealous nationalism and vigilantism stems, in part, from a violent incident that occurred in Centralia, Washington, in 1919. Although

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[91] Simcock, *Fredericton Branch No. 4*, 21; Brown, *First Fifty Years*, 31.
[92] Brown, *First Fifty Years*, 25.
[93] Ibid.; For the history of the Communist Party in Canada during the 1920s and 1930s, see William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968); Irving M. Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour: The CIO, the Communist Party and the Canadian Congress of Labour, 1935-1956* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); and Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981).
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 31.

historians still dispute the sequence of events, the Legion maintains that on November 11, 1919, some IWW members ambushed a Legion parade, killing four Legionnaires. Another group of Legionnaires took cover in the IWW hall to escape the cross-fire and encountered the suspects. They then subdued the IWW members and took them to jail. That night, a lynch mob tortured and killed one of the IWW members, Hiram Wesley Evans. The Legion insisted that its members played no part in the crime, but the IWW countered that the attack was premeditated.[96] In response to the Centralia tragedy, the Grant Hodge Post of Centralia published a pamphlet about the incident and the subsequent trial. The pamphlet links the tragedy to the First World War and argues that an increasing number of people had forgotten the war and "all those valiant and high-hearted boys who crossed the submarine lanes to fight and suffer and die gloriously in France—that certain American ideals and institutions might remain intact for the salvation of the world."[97] Furthermore, the pamphlet contends, threats to those ideals and institutions still lurked at home and abroad, but the Legionnaires were striving to combat such dangers. The pamphlet admits that Everest's lynching was "an unlawful error," although the fact that it does not use the word "murder" is suggestive.[98] Perhaps, the post believed that, regardless of the consequences to the Legion, justice had been served. Although the national organization never condoned vigilantism, it did not censure posts or individual Legionnaires who committed such acts. If the national organization did issue a warning, it usually reminded members that any transgression resulted in more propaganda for the radicals and negative publicity for the Legion.

On the other hand, some posts demonstrated a degree of tolerance towards communism. For instance, the J.W. Person Post in Brooklyn, New York, participated in a debate with the

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[96] Pencak, *For God & Country*, 152.
[97] Ben Hur Lampman, *Centralia Tragedy and Trial* (Centralia, WA: Grant Hodge Post No. 17 and Edward B. Rhodes Post No. 2, 1920), 1.
[98] Lampman, *Centralia*, 15.

Communist Party of New York State on March 18, 1938. The chairman of the debate, Vice-Dean William V. Hagedorn of Brooklyn Law School, explained that the purpose of the debate was education. Both sides had to either prove or refute that the American democracy was superior to communism. The Legion representatives stated their case without resorting to patriotic rhetoric and challenged the generalization of Legionnaires as right-wing extremists. Legionnaire Richard Fuchs, in fact, declared that "we may disagree 100 per cent but we can never settle disagreements by taking the law into our own hands."[99] Edward and Richard Fuchs compared both forms of government and each country's economic situation. They also quoted from *The Communist Manifesto* and Max Eastman's *The End of Socialism*. The Communist Party's representatives countered that every American did not enjoy the benefits of democracy. Ultimately, the judges, of whom only one was a Legionnaire, ruled that the Legion post won the debate because the Communist Party representatives did not address the debate's question. They spoke in favor of socialism but not communism.[100]

The Legion posts' approach and tone toward school outreach sometimes differed from the national organization's recommendations. Scholar William Gellermann notes that posts often were reluctant to try to impose their curricula on the public schools. [101] Instead, posts opted to sponsor Boy Scout troops, erect flag poles on school grounds, or start Big Brothers clubs to mentor boys.[102] Believing public education to be vital to democracy, the Phillips-Elliott-Hodges-Van Auken Post adopted a resolution supporting funding public schools and teachers' salaries and joined other organizations in combating juvenile delinquency.[103] The Cadillac Post worked

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[99] "American Legion and the Communists Discuss Democracy: A Debate" (New York: Workers Library Publishers, 1938), 68.
[100] Ibid., 71.
[101] Gellermann, *American Legion as Educator*, v.
[102] Mills M. Van Valkenburgh, *The American Legion in Michigan* (Port Huron, MI: Riverside Printing Co., 1930) 162, 202.
[103] McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943*, 62, 79.

to secure legislation that permitted war orphans to attend any state educational or training institute for free, and in 1936, 229 orphans took advantage of this act.[104] Other posts did decide to participate in National Education Week and to sponsor the national organization's essay contest whose purpose was to instill the values of good citizenship in an effort to counter the "moral breakdown" and corruption some departments had observed in the cities.[105] The national organization designed this and other activities to perpetuate "those fighting qualities…shown in the American participation in the World War."[106]

The American Legion strove to impress upon the next generation the importance of good citizenship not only in educational programs but also in athletics. Legionnaire Mickey Cochrane stated, "A lot of the boys who weren't more than seventeen years old had what it took back in 1917-18, and reaching middle age, now, they are trying to pass on a heritage of a winning competitive habit to up and coming youngsters of this generation by giving them the opportunity to play this grand old game of baseball."[107] Nearly every post sponsored a junior baseball or basketball team at some point during its history. Although their involvement in baseball may appear frivolous, Legion posts had an ulterior motive in promoting the game. Baseball, as well as other sports, imparted lessons in good sportsmanship that transferred over into good citizenship. Legionnaire Mickey Cochrane explained, "Real citizenship and the right kind of teamwork which holds this nation together can be best taught on the diamonds of American sandlots."[108] In the 1935 Junior World Series, over 400,000 boys participated.[109] After World War II, the

[104] Emmons, *History of the Cadillac Post*, 63.
[105]Gimmestad, *Legion 50*, 74.
[106] The American Legion, *Proceedings of the Fifteenth National Convention*, 108.
[107] Mickey Cochrane, "Off on the Right Foot," *American Legion Monthly* (June 1936), 52.
[108] Ibid., 30.
[109] "Champion of Champions," *American Legion Monthly* (November 1935), 44.

Canadian Legion branches followed the American Legion's example by forming their own junior teams.

International

Even though the American Legion devoted a great deal of its energy and resources into transmitting its brand of nationalism, it did form international ties through its relief efforts and its fraternization with the Canadian Legion. At the national level, the Legion participated in an international veterans' association, the Inter-Allied Federation of Ex-Service Men (FIDAC), but posts also found ways to assist former allied and even enemy nations.[110] In the 1920s, the Phillips-Elliott-Hodges-Van Auken Post collected donations for a Red Cross fund for Japanese earthquake survivors. That same year in 1923, the post sponsored a relief fund for German children.[111] The Legion posts' efforts in these areas illustrates their avowal to "promote peace and goodwill on earth."[112] This tenet of their preamble meant maintaining ties with former war-time allies and challenging enemy propaganda by showing compassion to children of former enemy nations.

The American Legion posts' transnational friendship with the Canadian Legion branches also satisfied the goals of their preamble. Preserving the memories and incidents of their association in the Great War and sanctifying their comradeship implied national as well as international activity. Although some scholars dwell on the American Legion's preoccupation with Americanism, the posts' fraternization with Canadian Legion branches complicates the American Legion's portrayal as a jingoistic organization. The American Legion defined and committed itself to a set of ideals intertwined with members' war-time experiences; therefore,

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[110] The National Committee on World Peace and Foreign Relations, *A Handbook on Peace and Foreign Relations* (Indianapolis, IN: The American Legion, 1936), 14-15.
[111] McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943*, 36-37.
[112] The American Legion, "Preamble to the Constitution," http://legion.org/preamble (Accessed 5 April 2013).

another organization's adherence to similar ideals could transcend geographical boundaries. The U.S. and Canada shared several characteristics that increased the likelihood of the veteran interaction. Both shared a British heritage; both fought in the First World War as allies; and both used the war as an opportunity to strengthen their national identities. Posts and branches situated near the Canadian-U.S. border naturally fraternized with each other. In 1933, American Legion historian George McMullen reports that joint meetings took place between the Canadian Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), and the American Legion.[113] In recognition of their common war-time experiences, the Department of Maine invited the Fredericton Branch to its annual convention in 1939.[114] All seventy members of the branch attended and paraded with the American Legionnaires through the streets of Bangor. One member of the Fredericton Legion Pipe Band, Joe Lifford, "was singled out for an extra measure of hero worship" because he had sustained a serious leg wound during the war that caused him to walk with a pronounced limp.[115] Lifford's nationality mattered less to the American Legionnaires than his visible sacrifice for the Allied cause. Sometimes, this transnational bond translated into monetary assistance in the name of commemoration. A number of veterans' associations in Canada furnished stone plaques for the Michigan War Veterans Memorial Shaft. During the groundbreaking ceremony, members from the American Legion Cadillac Post and Commander Charles Jones of the Canadian Legion's Harmony Post attended.[116] Later in 1940, the Phillips-Elliott-Hodges-Van Auken Post and the Canadian Legion participated in a ceremony called "trooping the colors" during a benefit referred to as the "Bundles for Britain" ball.[117] American and Canadian Legionnaires still maintain their ties today. For example, every year Canadian Legionnaires from Lumby, British

[113] McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943*, 59.
[114] Simcock, *Fredericton Branch No. 4*, 24.
[115] Ibid., 25.
[116] Emmons, *History of the Cadillac Post*, 71-73.
[117] McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943*, 82.

Columbia, exchange a friendship gavel with American Legionnaires from Oroville, Washington.[118]

Community

These activities contributed to a transnational sense of community, even as many posts and branches functioned as community centers in small towns and in city neighborhoods. Legionnaires initiated or volunteered for community service projects, such as building hospitals, collecting donations for natural disaster relief, cleaning up cemeteries, and hosting parties for needy children and orphans. Legion historian Alfred Moltke once remarked that the reason he continued to pay dues to the Peshastin Post in Peshastin, Washington, even though he had lived in Oregon for twenty years, was the concern that the post demonstrated for the community. For example, the Peshastin Post helped move a widow's house, after her husband, John Herman, who was an apple-grower and Legionnaire died, forcing her to move off of the orchard land.[119] The service Legion posts provided to their communities again indicated their function as living memorials. As Legionnaire Walter J. Kohler asserted, "Veterans 'proved their patriotism' in the war and in peace time their devotion assumed practical forms."[120] The concept of service for both the American and Canadian Legions was paramount. Transmitting the memory of their fallen comrades by helping others seemed more meaningful and practical than building a traditional memorial. By volunteering in their communities, Legionnaires embodied service.

Another aspect of serving as living memorials in communities involved recreation. Whether Legionnaires reminisced during one of their weekly meetings or monthly socials or held a dance for the entire community, they performed these activities with the attitude that their fallen comrades would have wanted them to enjoy life and each other's company. Furthermore,

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[118] Jarvie and Swift, *Royal Canadian Legion*, 53.
[119] Moltke, *"For God and Country,"* 22.
[120] Walter J. Kohler, "I Believe Our Legion Post Is Typical," *American Legion Monthly* (December 1936), 5.

maintaining a presence in their communities reminded the public of what the Legion symbolized. Through common practices, such as parties, baseball games, and films, the Legionnaires communicated their ideals and the memory of their war-time service. The pageantry and rhetoric of commemorations often overlapped into recreational activities, as posts held "Experience Nights" during which Legionnaires told stories of their time in the military and wore their Legion uniforms to celebratory balls and dinners.[121] Maintaining war-time friendships that composed part of the veterans' very identities was crucial. As the Red Arrow 32nd Division Post reminded its members, "Time is short, and people forget that relationships are the most important thing."[122]

Conclusion

Maintaining camaraderie and fostering relationships with the public allowed the Legions to become vital presences in their communities. In their agendas, memory of the First World War imbricated nationalism, education, service, and recreation. The scholarship has affirmed that veterans' associations wielded considerable influence, especially at the national level; however, historians have not demonstrated how typical veterans constructed memory or explained what roles they performed in the organizations. The Legionnaires not only articulated their memories of the First World War, they performed them in obvious and subtle ways. As living memorials, the veterans embodied memory and devised practical ways to transmit it. The narratives in the post and branch histories contain "symbolic truths that stretch beyond the facticity of specific events."[123] In meeting halls all over the United States and Canada, veterans gathered to swap stories of their war experiences, to remember their fallen comrades, and celebrate the nation they

[121] McMullen, *Post History, 1919-1943*, 14; Red Arrow News, 1.
[122] Red Arrow 32nd Division Post No. 361, *Red Arrow News* (Wayne County, MI: American Legion, April 1, 1935), 1.
[123] Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 11.

had defended during the war. A set of ideals that elevated the nation, revered soldiers' sacrifices, and stressed the benefits of service linked both the American and Canadian Legions and shaped their narratives of the First World War. Through everyday practices, such as listening to speeches, speaking to students, and playing sports, they constructed and reinforced a collective memory of the war that characterized it as a pivotal moment in their lives as well as that of their respective countries'. The activities sponsored by the posts and branches offer a solution to what Holt calls the "problem of establishing continuity between the individual and societal levels of human experience."[124] The local posts' and branches' wide range of activities present a new paradigm in which to study the organizations' national commitment to perpetuate the memory of the First World War.

[124] Holt, "Marking Race," 7.

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