

University of Guelph, Department of History

Elaine Young

PhD Final Oral Examination

Placing Battlefields: Ontario's War of 1812 Niagara Frontier, 1885-1930

A B S T R A C T

**Wednesday
July 8/15**

Time: 2:00 pm

Location: MCKN 132

**Advisor:
Alan Gordon**

**Examining Committee
Members:
Geoff Hayes
Susan Nance**

**External Examiner:
Dr. Cecilia Morgan (U of T)**

**Chair:
Linda Mahood**



This dissertation investigates former War of 1812 battlefields on the Canadian Niagara Frontier as places, or spaces invested with meaning, focusing on 1885 - 1930. These former battlefields include Fort George, Queenston Heights, Beaverdams, Lundy's Lane, and Fort Erie. In the mid-1880s Niagara saw the creation of several local historical societies composed of amateur historians and the Niagara Parks Commission (NPC), which was created to protect Niagara Falls and which eventually acquired most of the Frontier's former battlefields. As places the former battlefields had complex, layered meanings that shifted over time. They were both places with close connections to the War of 1812 and places of nature and recreation. After the War of 1812 political oratory and early written accounts of the conflict helped establish the war's public memory, and early monuments and tourism helped to enforce the places' organic connections to that memory. The local historical societies later reinforced these links by erecting monuments on the former battlefields and holding commemorative ceremonies there. The places were important in reflecting and shaping the war's public memory, as the monuments were erected on the their highest points and speakers at the ceremonies drew on the places to add weight to a public memory stressing sacrifice, loyalty, Britishness, manliness, and peace.

As places, the former battlefields also gave underprivileged groups opportunities to present alternative public memories of the war. Although they met with relatively little success, women and the Grand River Six Nations both supplemented and contested the places' public memories through monuments and oratory. While local historical societies were reinforcing the places' connections to the War of 1812, the NPC was shaping the former battlefields to reflect an idealized nature where visitors could engage in various recreational activities not necessarily related to the places' public memory. Beginning in the 1910s and accelerating after the Great War, the former battlefields were perceived and used more for recreation than commemoration. The former battlefields' meanings as battlefields and parks coexisted, but over time the places became less significant as battlefields, and more significant as parks.