

Building National Monuments in Canada

One of the instances of a great nation is impressive and tasteful monuments. They may be understated, as in London, where they are rarely larger than a nine-feet tall statue of a statesman or monarch, and include foreigners and former enemies (Washington, South African leader Jan Smuts, de Gaulle, and four other U.S. presidents). They may be either very large, quite large, or comparatively small, as in Paris (respectively, the Arc de Triomphe, Napoleon's column, and statues of domestic and foreign statesmen: de Gaulle, Clemenceau, Washington, Churchill). And they may mix the ancient and modern, the classical and baroque, as in Rome (the Coliseum and the Victor Emmanuel).

The finest monuments of any city in the world are in Washington. They include four mighty and world-renowned presidential memorials (Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt), plus countless imaginatively cast and located statues of statesmen and military commanders. What does not work so well are over-sized monuments to officials insufficiently distinguished to deserve them, as in Barcelona, or exaggeratedly heroic and bellicose monuments erected by and to rather peaceable people, as in the hypertrophic and rampant equestrian effigies of soldiers and monarchs of the Holy Roman Empire in Vienna, of whom only Prince Eugene and the Archduke Charles are entitled to any such lionization.

Canada is, naturally, a late-comer to this sort of thing, and, just as naturally, tends to be rather under-stated. There are some good and unpretentious statues of the founders of French Canada in Quebec City and in Montreal, and the statues of the leading parliamentarians of French and English Canada around Parliament Hill, Queen's Park, and the National Assembly (including that of Maurice Duplessis, which languished for 17

years in the basement of the provincial police building in Montreal before René Lévesque finally unveiled it), are solid and appropriate, if a little unexciting.

Where Canada did outdo itself was in the magnificent memorial to the Canadian Corp's successful efforts at Vimy, France, in 1917. That was the first time the Canadian army had fought as a unit, rather than being dispersed as needed among British units in the South African or First World wars, and it succeeded splendidly with innovative tactics and conspicuous bravery, where allies had not. As the centennial of that action and the sesquicentennial of Canada approach in 2017, there is a great and commendable effort to focus on the importance of Vimy, and it was a seminal victory on the Western Front and a milestone in the advance of Canada toward full recognition as an autonomous power.

We must maintain perspective: Canada had four divisions out of an ultimate Allied total of 300 in France and Belgium in 1918, but they were such daring troops and the contest was so desperately close, they made a difference, and were suitably honoured at the scene of their greatest contribution. There is also a fine and subtle memorial to Canada's contribution to both world wars in Green Park, near Buckingham Palace, where water flows over bronze maple leaves, which it was my privilege, with my friend Galen Weston, to help to create. (We were vitally and graciously assisted by the Queen and Queen Mother, Margaret Thatcher, John Major, and others.)<

The contributions of the late Harry Jackman – to moving the formidable equestrian statue of King Edward VII from India to Queen's Park, to the memorials to Canada's original Flying Corps on University Avenue in Toronto, and to the statue of Winston Churchill in front of the Toronto city hall – have been under-recognized. There are now signs that Canada is moving beyond the discreet recognition phase in monuments

within the country, and although current instances of this are fiercely contested in some circles, I believe they should be encouraged. The current projects that are controversial are the proposed statue to "Mother Canada" on Cape Breton's Cabot Trail, and the planned memorial to the victims of communism between the National Library and the Supreme Court of Canada in Ottawa. As always happens when artistic projects are in dispute, a tremendous volume of fatuous argument magnifies legitimate concerns.

I understand the concerns of Cape Bretoners regarding Mother Canada, 100 feet high and directly facing the Vimy Memorial, whose "Canada Bereft" it to some extent replicates. Some local residents fear it will be a spoliation of a national park that preserves the magnificently rugged Atlantic coastline of the cape. With the utmost respect, I believe it will highlight that park and detract nothing from it. Canada has spent 400 years in often rather forced recognition of its status as the offspring of other nationalities and this fine project confers the well-earned distinction of maternity on this country, in respect of its glorious veterans of foreign wars that threatened civilization but not directly our country, and to which huge numbers of Canadians volunteered their service, and tens of thousands gave their lives

The proposed surrounding attractions, the "We See Thee Rise Observation Deck," the "Commemorative Ring of True Patriot Love," and "With Glowing Hearts National Sanctuary," are so formulaic they raise questions of taste, but the idea and the main statue are splendid, and if the statue is built, it will eventually inspire the whole country with the notion of a mighty and graceful welcoming maternal effigy, to some extent comparable to the Statue of Liberty, one of the world's most successful monuments. Completely absurd arguments, as well as legitimate concerns about changing the character of the immediate area, have been trotted out, such as that the landward view will be of Mother's behind. All statues,

including those of people on horseback, offer a hind-perspective, and if this statue is sculpted properly, as published designs assure it will be, that will not be an unpleasing prospect.

In the other raging controversy, the monument to the victims of communism has been attacked for ideological, design, and location reasons. Canada could claim to be the starting place of the Cold War, only a few blocks from the proposed site of this monument, with the defection of Soviet embassy intelligence clerk Igor Gouzenko, handing over voluminous documents to prove the extent of Soviet espionage in the West. Prime Minister Mackenzie King was so startled by these revelations, he took them personally to show to U.S. president Harry Truman and British prime minister Clement Attlee in 1945. Canada was a co-founder of the Western Alliance and played an important role in the Open Skies Conference in Ottawa in 1990 that was transformed into the forum of agreement on the reunification of Germany, the conclusive end to the Cold War, bloodlessly and satisfactorily. Again there have been spurious complaints about the brutalistic design, as if a memorial to the massacres of millions of innocents by Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Ho Chi Minh, Kim Il-sung, and others should be festooned with angels, cherubs and sylphs.

In a particularly inane outburst, a columnist in *The Globe and Mail* called the monument a "looming disaster" and added that the millions of victims of communism comprise a number that "pales, surely, in comparison with the victims of capitalism." The occasions when capitalists systematically murdered the hundred million or so victims the communist leaders managed in the action-packed 20th century are not specified. Newspaper accounts of the value of the parcel of land range from \$1 million to \$30 million, and the theme is criticized as being external to Canada (so were the world wars), and inappropriate to the vicinity of the Supreme Court, toiling nobly in pursuit

of condign justice (a flattering caricature of its current vocation). There could not be a better location, and the prime minister, together with Jason Kenney, John Baird, and in the Cape Breton project, Peter MacKay, have persevered commendably

Almost all monuments are opposed before they are unveiled. Let's build them.

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