THE LOYAL AND PATRIOTIC SOCIETY OF UPPER CANADA AND ITS FAMOUS MEDAL

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At Fort York, a historic site operated by the City of Toronto Museums and Heritage Services, there is a handsome silver artefact associated with the War of 1812: the Upper Canada Preserved medal. One face has a laurel wreath and the words, 'FOR MERIT. PRESENTED BY A GRATEFUL COUNTRY.' The other presents a stylized map of the Niagara River: on the right, or US, side of the waterway, a flustered American eagle flaps its wings, while across the border, on the left, an industrious Canadian beaver works away peacefully, protected by a British lion who sits ready to pounce should the eagle try to enter Canada. Around this image are the words, 'UPPER CANADA PRESERVED.' Like so many objects in Fort York's collection, it not only is an aesthetically-pleasing artefact, but evokes a larger and interesting story. Unfortunately, it is only a re-strike from the 1910s. Yet, it is in good company: probably every one of the medals of this particular design in existence today is either a re-strike or reproduction because the Loyal and Patriotic Society, which ordered the medals during the War of 1812, destroyed all but three of them in 1840, and those three were of a different pattern. I recently had the privilege of examining one of those three original artefacts (in 2006); thus it seems appropriate to review the history of the society and the story of its famous medals.

The famous Upper Canada Preserved medal, as illustrated in Benson J. Lossing's *Pictorial field-book of the War of 1812* (New York: Harper, 1868): the society received 50 of these medals from England in 1813, but destroyed all of its stock of them in 1840. They were 2.5 inches (64 mm) in diameter. One of these – a numbered re-strike from the 1910s – forms part of the collection at Historic Fort York. (City of Toronto Museums and Heritage Services.)

The Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada had its origins in the provincial capital of York (now Toronto, Ontario). According to an 1814 letter by the rector of the town's Anglican parish, the Revd John Strachan, the idea for the society came from Elizabeth Selby, the daughter of the colony's receiver-general, Prideaux Selby. Early in the war, she thought that a charity should be created to relieve suffering among the loyal population and to recognize meritorious service in defending the province against the Americans. Strachan liked the idea, and in December 1812 founded the society (although the presidency went to Thomas Scott, the province's chief justice, while Strachan served as treasurer). That Strachan took the initiative rather than Selby, of course, speaks to the gendered nature of charitable work at the time because women rarely could lead philanthropic efforts that fell outside of clearly recognized female spheres. The Loyal and Patriotic Society, as a male-centred enterprise in terms of its objectives, could not be dominated by women, although they could contribute money and play secondary roles in the organization. (An example of a fitting distaff charity was the Female Society for the Relief of Poor Women in Childbirth, founded in York by several prominent ladies in 1820.)

People who donated £1/annum to the Loyal and Patriotic Society became voting members, while the British army's general and field officers in Upper Canada were made honorary members. The society's directors comprised people who gave at least

£10/annum, along with the speaker of the colony's legislative assembly, members of the legislative and executive councils, judges, and Anglican clergymen. In 1813, clerics from the other officially-recognized churches of Rome and Scotland also became directors. However, ministers from denominations such as the Methodists and Baptists were not included (unless they made the requisite financial donation) because they belonged to faiths that existed in a state of 'dissent' from the 'established' church. In part, this reflected John Strachan's desire to utilize the Loyal and Patriotic Society in support the Church of England's attempt to assert its status as the colony's official church. That status was in doubt because the British parliament's Canada Act of 1791 that created the province only implied that Anglicanism would become the established faith, and thus Strachan and his supporters felt much had to be done to secure such a designation. It also represented his wish to affirm that church's role – along with that of the state – as one of the twin pillars upon which an orderly and Christian society could be built and sustained on the Upper Canadian frontier. The problem with Strachan's perspective was that many people opposed church establishment, and the concept would be abandoned in the decades following the war because the province was too diverse religiously and the times were too liberal attitudinally to support privileging one denomination over the others. In giving the Loyal and Patriotic Society's character something of an Anglican gloss, Strachan may have weakened its ability to appeal more broadly than it did, and consequently may have restricted its capacity to raise as much money to relieve distress as otherwise might have been possible.

Despite the problematic vision associated with Anglican dominance, the York Committee of the society – the most active of several – collected what then was the huge sum of £21,500 by 1817 when it more or less wrapped up its operations. The London and Montreal committees generated an additional £4,000 by 1819 (which included contributions from the Duke of Kent and other notables). Branches elsewhere, such as one in Kingston, also raised money, while impressive support came from different parts of the British Empire. For instance, the Nova Scotia legislature donated £2,500, while people in the West Indies sent £1,400 in cash, rum, and tobacco. Major-General Sir Roger Sheaffe and Lieutenant-General Sir Gordon Drummond gave £200 and £500 respectively, militiamen in the York garrison donated a day's pay, Strachan offered 10 per cent of his income during the war, and the Anglican bishop of Quebec, the Right Revd Jacob Mountain (whose diocese included Upper Canada), contributed £75/annum throughout the conflict.

The first effort of the Loyal and Patriotic Society focused on providing warm clothing to militiamen serving along the Niagara River over the winter of 1812-13. A few months later, after the American victory in the battle of York in April 1813, the society contributed £253 to provide medical care to the British and Canadian wounded at a time when there were no British army medical personnel available in the capital. In the winter of 1814-15 the society tried to subsidize the price of bread in York to help the poor face the ravages of wartime inflation. However, most of the money the society raised during the conflict went into direct aid to individuals rather than collective efforts. For example, a militiaman at Fort York, who could not support his family on his pay, received a weekly allowance to help meet his needs. Two women whose husbands had died in action got travel money to return to their homes from the front lines. (Some families marched with their soldier husbands and fathers in those days.) If a militiaman passed away on service, his widow or parents typically received a grant to help meet immediate needs for support. As well as responding to formal applications for help, the society distributed money to Anglican clergymen and a handful of other prominent people to give to the needy on an *ad hoc* basis as they travelled through the war-torn province. After hostilities ended, the society provided some compensation to people in the Niagara area whose homes had been burnt by American forces in 1813. Support, of course, was not given to anyone suspected of disloyalty. Charitable assistance also was not granted to people who were not Upper Canadians, despite fundraising outside the province. For instance, the commanding officer of the 104th Regiment was turned down when he requested help in sending 20 widows with the regiment in Upper Canada back to their homes in New Brunswick.

The society faced the usual limitations inherent in charitable enterprises in that its financial resources did not allow it to help more than a portion of its potential clients, and even then it only could offer assistance at modest levels. The £25 payment typically given when a militiaman died on service, for example, was a not a lot of money for the loss of a family's principal breadwinner, even by the standards of the time. The way people received support fitted the way John Strachan, his fellow clergymen, and their supporters saw the marriage of Anglican Christianity to its allegiance to King George III. These people attempted to integrate all levels of society across the empire in an effort to unify disparate individuals in support of a worthy charitable enterprise as defined by the 'state' church. They tried to include donors of many denominations, and appointed clergy to the board of directors from the two other churches in Upper Canada that Anglicans considered legitimate. However, even that ecumenical gesture asserted the primacy of the Church of England and downgraded the status of Anglicanism's main competitors among the Methodists and other dissenting Protestants. The approach the society's directors took also represented the way elites throughout the Atlantic world (as well as on both sides of the British-American divide) thought the established social order

should work: through collecting money broadly (with leading citizens being particularly generous) but by channelling aid from the top downwards. Recipients of the society's help were expected to be grateful for the recognition they received for their fidelity, and in return, to serve as models of loyalty for others to emulate. Despite the limitations of its financial resources and the hierarchical agenda it embraced, the Loyal and Patriotic Society nevertheless made significant and measurable contributions to ameliorating the war's sad impact for a great many people in Upper Canada.

After the return of peace, the society used its surplus to support other worthy causes. In York, for example, it gave money to start a charity for the 'relief of strangers in distress.' In 1819, the society used the £4,000 it received from London and Montreal to found an institution that became Toronto General Hospital. The society also spent £220 to publish 750 copies of a detailed report on its work in 1817, but it gave nothing to its directors and volunteers to reimburse them for their personal expenses in carrying out their duties.

As well as charitable relief, of course, the society wanted to honour those whose meritorious service had helped to defend Upper Canada, and its directors saw its ill-fated medal as the primary means for achieving that goal. First struck after the British victories at Mackinac, Detroit, and Queenston, its 'Upper Canada Preserved' motto declared a kind of sigh of relief that the colony had not been overrun by the Americans. At the outbreak of hostilities, most people had expected the United States to conquer the province because the British were so badly outnumbered and because there was little hope of Britain sending significant numbers of reinforcements since most of her military resources were tied down in Europe fighting Napoleon Bonaparte's France. We might speculate that the motto 'Upper Canada Preserved' affirmed a sense of divine intervention in Canada's survival, especially as variations of the verb 'preserve' appear in petitions to the divine in the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* and in other similar texts. We even might speculate that the words on the other side of the medal heralded an early form of the self-effacing nationalism of Canadians: they spoke of *merit* and *gratefulness* rather than *glory* and *victory*, even though the people of Upper Canada had good reason to be proud. The iconography of the beaver and the lion attested to the British North American identity, which not only embraced a local patriotism but looked across the Atlantic to the imperial centre for leadership, inspiration, and comfort.

Originally, the society ordered medals from England, which were designed by the young Thomas Wyon, Jr, chief engraver at the Royal Mint. Although they were particularly handsome examples of the engraver's art, the society did not like Wyon's creation, thinking the American and Canadian sides of the border on the medal should have been reversed (and thus, oddly, that 'south' should be at the top of the map rather than 'north'). Therefore, it ordered a second version from someone else (possibly another member of the Wyon family of engravers). The next design was less-pleasing because it was comparatively less elegant. In terms of its appearance, the main differences between it and the original – aside from changing the positions of Upper Canada and New York – was that the new version included names of the Niagara region forts and water features on the map, as well as the year '1815' on the other side of the medal.

One of only three original Upper Canada Preserved medals that were not destroyed in 1840, of the second but less familiar pattern: the society ordered 500 silver examples in this design from England along with 62 gold medals (of which 12 were larger and 50 were smaller examples, for, respectively, field and company grade officers). The medal illustrated here is the second pattern approved by the society with various Niagara River place names added to the map: Lake Erie, B[uff]alo C[ree]k, Blackrock, R[ive]r Tonewonta, Falls, Ft Niagara, Lake Ontario, Ft George, Ft Drummond, Chippewa C[ree]k, and Ft Erie. This silver medal is smaller than the first design, at 2.0 inches (51 mm) in diameter. (Private collection.)

The Loyal and Patriotic Society acquired 62 gold and 550 silver medals in 1814 and 1817 (of which the first 50, in silver, were of Wyon's famous but rejected design). The society's directors intended to give the gold medals to officers, the Wyon-designed silver examples to non-commissioned officers, and the second pattern silver medals to privates. Despite the society's plans, it never issued the medals – a decision that generated some scandal in post-war Upper Canada. The main problem was that there were more people recommended for the honour than the society's supply could meet, and its directors felt unable to distinguish between the merits of the various potential recipients. In 1820, therefore, the directors decided to convert the medals into bullion to support other charitable efforts, but did nothing at the time. Resentment towards the society grew as the years passed. Meanwhile, the medals of the second design sat untouched in the vault of the Bank of Upper Canada in York while those of the first remained in the hands of Thomas Scott (and later in the possession of his executor). Many people wanted the medals issued and became impatient when the society failed to act on their demands. By the 1830s, the controversy grew as the province's political environment became polarized, especially because the Loyal and Patriotic Society's leading figures were seen as belonging to the 'Family Compact,' an elite group vilified by the colony's reform politicians. In 1840, once the larger political tensions of the period exploded in the Rebellion of 1837 (in which most Upper Canadians, however, remained loyal to the Crown) the province's legislative assembly launched an investigation. It recommended that the society distribute the medals to deserving militiamen who still were alive or to their children if they had passed away 'as a distinguished memorial of the gallantry and loyalty of the brave and patriotic men for whom they were designed.' (When the society first considered issuing the honour, it meant to give them to both militiamen and regulars, but the inclusion of regular soldiers seems to have been abandoned or forgotten early in the society's history.)

A group of surviving directors of the Loyal and Patriotic Society rejected the province's demand, arguing that the society was a private endeavour that fell outside the government's purview (although the society had been aligned closely to Upper Canadian officialdom because provincial judges and parliamentarians had been included among its directors by virtue of their offices). In response to this political pressure, the directors hired a blacksmith, Paul Bishop, and his two assistants in the summer of 1840 to deface the medals in preparation to sell them for their bullion. They destroyed 61 gold and 548 silver medals in sight of witnesses so that none in good condition would fall into 'unworthy hands' (to cite the society's 1841 justification for its actions). Thus only one gold and two silver examples, unaccounted for at the time, were not defaced. That autumn, the directors sold the defaced objects to two Toronto watchmakers, William Stennett and Charles Sewell. The proceeds, £394 in the Halifax Currency used in Upper Canada at the time, went to support Toronto General Hospital. That amount was less than the £850 Sterling (£944 Halifax) purchase price, but the original costs included design, die-cutting, manufacturing, packaging, transportation, and other expenses beyond the value of the gold and silver needed for the medals.

So, how is it that examples of the rejected and destroyed design appear frequently on the antique market? The answer is that medals have been reproduced at various times for collectors, either as re-strikes from Thomas Wyon's original 1813 dies or in some other reproduction form. Earlier Wyon re-strikes exist in both silver and bronze (the latter metal had not been used by the society). While no medals in the original Wyon design in existence were produced for the Loyal and Patriotic Society, some of the re-strikes are quite old. For instance, examples of the first design appeared in print in the 1860s in Benson J. Lossing's *Pictorial Field-Book of the War of 1812* at the beginning of the period when collectors seem to have become aware of the story of the medals; and silver and bronze examples were mentioned in numismatic literature as of the 1870s. (The Wyon firm made the bronze examples decades after the War of 1812, for Toronto General Hospital, in the post-Confederation period.) There also seems to have been a bit of a flurry in the sale of re-strikes by the coin and medal dealer Spink and Sons of London in the 1920s (at a guinea each). Sometimes re-strikes in the original design have edge numbers and sometimes they do not, the former being part of a run created around the time of the centennial of the War of 1812 (as indicated in a note from 1916 in the Wyon firms' manuscript register of dies in the collection of the British Museum). Almost none of the re-strikes have the suspension ring on them that the originals had, but at least one of the numbered re-strikes from the 1910s has appeared on eBay with such an addition (although the ring on the eBay item was quite different from the one on the original medal that I examined). Even today, the Toronto General and Western Hospital Foundation presents reproductions (not re-strikes) of the Upper Canada Preserved medal in copper, pewter, bronze, silver, and gold to honour donors for varying levels of support above $25,000. Unfortunately, the production and marketing history of the re-strikes and reproductions still needs to be unearthed fully. As of 1916 the original Thomas Wyon dies were catalogued as being numbers 1336 and 1337 by the Wyon firm. In 1933, all of the firm's dies went to another English medal company, John Pinches, and more recently were acquired by the Franklin Mint in the United States. One authority, Robert Wallace McLachlan, declared in an 1894 edition of the *American Journal of Numismatics* that 'all of the known Wyon medals are re-strikes' but his assessment, confirmed by subsequent scholarship, seems to have been lost in the collecting world over time. Thus these copies often are marketed as being original to both the War of 1812 and to the Loyal and Patriotic

Society. One story in circulation goes so far as to claim that people in the Niagara Peninsula possess examples that venerable ancestors won in the War of 1812, but of course that is not possible.

The second design of the medal, in silver, with the place names on its map and the date '1815,' began to be noted in the numismatic literature in the 1890s in Joseph LeRoux's *Le Medaillier du Canada*. This suggests that one of the three surviving examples may have entered the numismatic market at the time (and since has disappeared) or at least was documented by someone. Beyond the three medals the society did not deface in 1840, it is possible that the Wyon firm made one or two extras for itself of one or both of the designs that it never sent to Canada. However, if they ever existed, such examples probably would be impossible to differentiate from the later re-strikes unless they came with an impeccable provenance (and I am unaware of the existence of such objects). In any case, they would not be authentic to the Loyal and Patriotic Society.

As noted above, the authentic medals produced for the society that were not defaced in 1840 consisted of one gold and two silver medals in the second pattern with the place names on the map. However, the records of the Loyal and Patriotic Society from the time the rest were destroyed might be read to suggest that the two surviving silver medals had gone missing from the estate of the Chief Justice Thomas Scott, which would imply they were of the first design, without the place names. (Scott had died in 1824.) Yet that would seem to be impossible, given the original that I saw recently and the one that came into public awareness in the late 1800s. I suspect that the society directors may have 'fudged' the record slightly so that they could keep one gold and two silver examples of the pattern they liked as souvenirs, which seems like a perfectly reasonable and human desire on their part. The owners of the medal that I saw in 2006 belong to a family linked to the Loyal and Patriotic Society, and their medal possesses additional 19th-century documentation that helps to affirm its authenticity. Recognizing that medals have less diagnostic elements than many other artefacts, that particular medal does match the written descriptions from the period of what it should look like (complete with suspension ring), and is manufactured correctly, at an appropriate level of skill, and in the right material. It also does not show signs of having been a re-strike (such as the spotting common on such pieces), and the characteristics of the wear on it are consistent with what one would expect for such an artefact of that age (as opposed to faked wear). It also does not show any signs of having been altered over time.

Although the City of Toronto's medal mentioned at the head of this article – in the first pattern – is only a re-strike, in contrast to the privately-owned one that I examined recently in the second design, it nevertheless keeps alive the image of Thomas Wyon's outstanding design. It further serves as an evocative link to the charitable work, self-consciousness, and public-spirited endeavours of the Loyal and Patriotic Society (and to the controversies associated with it). One irony, of course, is that this icon of Upper Canadian patriotism in today's imagination almost certainly does not exist in any real examples that were commissioned by the society. It also is a design that very few people during the war and its immediate aftermath ever saw, yet in modern times it is one of the more common 'period' images that we think of when imagining the visual culture of the war. A second irony is that the design favoured by the Loyal and Patriotic Society – the second one – almost has been forgotten completely. Yet its design also would have been virtually unknown to most people in Upper Canada, even though many individuals felt strongly that the Loyal and Patriotic Society made an error in not issuing the medals as it had intended to do. A third irony that becomes apparent to anyone reading the society's 1817 report is that the vast bulk of the Loyal and Patriotic Society's efforts went into relieving suffering, while the medals consumed very little of the society's energies during the war, even though the medals are the primary way we remember the society today. Recognizing the charitable priorities of the society, it is easier for us in the 21st century to understand the decision in 1840 to convert the never-issued medals into cash for ongoing good works.

FURTHER READING

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Upper Canada House of Assembly, *Journals 1840-41*, parts 1 and 11, and appendix, parts 1 and 11. (Includes assembly investigation into the society and various society documents; available from CIHM in microfiche, as well as electronically from Early Canadiana Online.)

I would like to thank the anonymous family that owns an original Upper Canada Preserved Medal for its generosity in allowing the artefact to be studied and illustrated for the public benefit. Thanks also go to Philip Attwood of the British Museum for his insights in helping to prepare this online article in terms of the history of the dies and the Wyon firm's register of its dies. Thanks also go to Kristi Spencer of the Toronto General and Western Hospital Foundation.