

The Acadia Athenæum

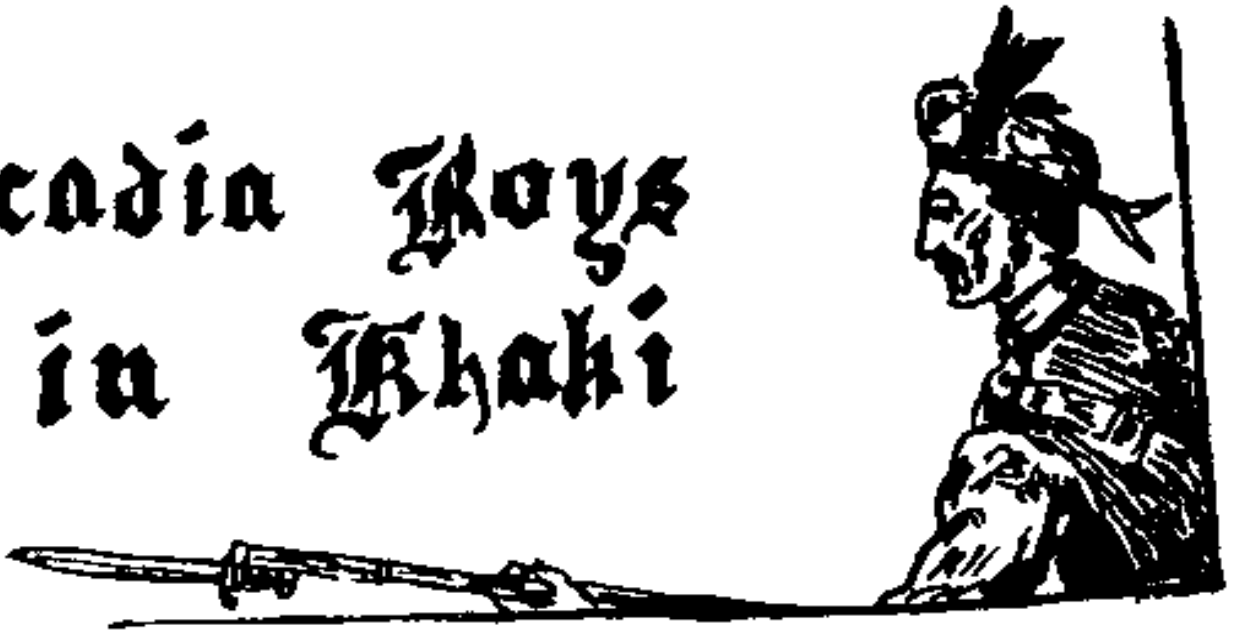
Fostering a Wartime Campus Discourse:



In commemoration of the one hundred year anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, our public history class presented the “1914: War Comes to Acadia” exhibition. My project focused on the role played by Acadia University’s student newspaper in fostering a wartime campus discourse. My own position as News Editor for *The Athenæum* in 2014-2015 inspired me to take this route with my research. Several questions guided my inquiry: How did students like myself react to the war? How did they express these feelings in print? What kind of discourse did the Athenæum cultivate over the course of the war? Please enjoy the virtual component of my exhibit. I hope it helps convey the central arguments of my project: that *The Athenæum* provided students with a useful medium for discussion about the war, and that it reflected some of the changes happening in Canadian society from 1914-1918.

ACADIA ATHENÆUM

Acadia Boys in Khaki



Research:

The majority of my primary source research for this project consisted of scouring through back issues of *The Athenaeum* from 1914 to 1918, which are all available in the Esther Clark Wright Archives. I also examined the constitutions of *The Athenaeum* from 1911 and 1920 in hopes of finding any profound changes in how the institution operated. I was unsuccessful in finding any instances of war-related reform or reorganization, and so almost all of the content in this exhibition is taken from *The Athenaeum*.

As for my secondary sources, I consulted Barry Moody's article "Acadia and the Great War" and Stephen P.T. Jensen's undergrad thesis "A Student is a Student, a Type, Seldom More." Moreover, I employed the advice of John A. Veverka on how to create and convey interpretive themes for public consumption. There are more detailed commentaries on these sources in the Annotated Bibliography section at the end of this document.

Presentation:

I chose a PowerPoint presentation as the means of displaying my research for several reasons. For example, I faced the dilemma of portraying text to the public. Since an audience can easily get bored of reading text at an exhibit, I had to be conscious with how I presented my findings. The PowerPoint presentation allowed me to present snippets from the student newspaper in succession, thus allowing me to an overview of *The Athenaeum* during the First World War. There are approximately twenty slides in total and they include news articles and photographs that were featured in *The Athenaeum* from 1914 to 1918.

Exhibit Commentary:

The exhibit begins with a poem excerpt that displays the common imperialist sentiment throughout the British Empire at the outset of war. The anti-German attitudes of the author are rather clear in this text. As this passionate piece suggests, nationalistic fervour was rife amongst the Acadia student populace in the early months of the Great War. Walt Mason's poem, published a few months later, draws on the same sense of British nationalism. Mason expresses the way the Allies demonized their German enemy during the war. In one of his more poignant lines, Mason writes: "The day' has been the German toast, for that day she's been praying, when she might tread the British coast, destroying, burning, slaying." The perception of the Germans as ruthless savages is evident here.

As a November 1914 article demonstrates, the First World War was known as "The European War" in its early stages. Until word of the true extent of violence and destruction began to travel back to Canada, students and citizens in general just figured the conflict was another European skirmish. By early 1915, however, stories in *The Athenaeum* began to refer to the conflict as "The Great War." This name would stick, at least, until the Second World War.



J. G. McKay's Christmas poem from December 1914 paints a bleak picture of life on the Western Front. The author writes of a "wint'ry chill in the frozen trench," with his "fingers numb on the rifle stock." He laments about how "war is hell." Evidently, the festive spirit was lost in the trenches. That same month, an article describes the proceedings of a "Patriotic Concert" organized for the war effort on November 27, 1914. The programme listing includes imperial standards such as "It's a long, long way to Tipperary" and "God Save the King." It is interesting that the performance included both the Russian and French National Anthems. These two nations, of course, were British allies in the First World War. Thus, these tributes to their foreign collaborators are understandable if not expected.

One article explains how students agree to "forego all banquets" and other festivities. Instead of spending money for entertainment purposes, students seek to "devote the money to patriotic services." This is a characteristic of the concept of "total war," in which virtually all aspects of society are mobilized to support the war effort. Another article reports on a Farewell Reception held for students who had volunteered to fight overseas. Though saddened by "the loss of these boys," *The Athenaeum* staff concludes that it is for a just cause. In times of war, academics become secondary to serving the Empire. The newspaper staff could not be more proud of its peers: "We know that they will show the same noble spirit upon the battle field, that they have manifested among us."



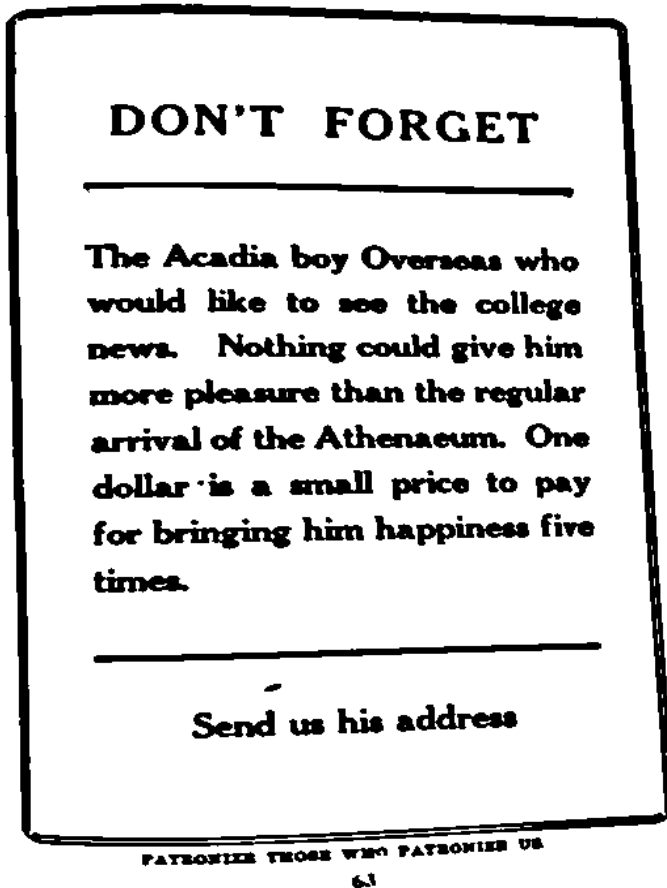
"FIGHTING GEORGE CUTTEN."

The Athenaeum also demonstrates that Acadia students had a profound sense of respect for President George Barton Cutten. Students used the newspaper to discuss Cutten's initiatives to garner support for the war. In a June 1916 issue of *The Athenaeum*, the president is dubbed "Fighting George Cutten" in homage to his recruitment efforts. A picture of him in his military uniform is included. Furthermore a November 1917 issue reproduces the lyrics to "Cutten's Song," known formally as "The Son of God Goes Forth to War." Cutten's collection of war posters still exists today in the Esther Clark Wright Archives. Moreover, many of the back issues of *The Athenaeum* from the war years were Cutten's personal copies.

The May 1915 issue of *The Athenaeum* features names and photographs of those who had recently enlisted to fight overseas. The jovial tone of this article is a far cry from the somber stories that would appear as the war progressed. By 1917 some of the same faces would turn up in the obituary section of *The Athenaeum*. It is a dismal commentary on the loss of life that was so common throughout the First World War.

My research also found that *The Athenaeum* reflected the changing gender roles during the First World War. The proportion of the women on the staff of *The Athenaeum* in 1914 was a meager 1 out of 10. By 1918, however, it had increased to 4 out of 10. Evelyn Enid Smallman's article titled "Women's Part in the War" is a reproduced version of her speech given at commencement in 1915. She explains how "this is the first great war in

which the voice of woman has had power to make itself heard, universally.” Women began to work in industry jobs while men fought overseas. It would not be long before women would obtain suffrage. Perhaps the most impressive accomplishment for Acadia women during WWI was the first female editor of *The Athenaeum* in 1917. The female population of the university played a more active role in the war effort as years went on. This is evident from the “Patriotic Concert” of 1914, through to Helen Starr’s appointment as Editor-in-Chief of *The Athenaeum* in 1917.



Towards the end of the war, *The Athenaeum* initiated this thoughtful campaign. It allowed for readers to send issues of the paper to fellow Acadia students fighting in Europe. If one’s relative or friend was stationed overseas, they had the opportunity to pay for copies of the student newspaper to be shipped to their loved one stationed on the Western Front.

Conclusion:

The majority of this presentation features content from 1914 to 1916. The However this was a conscious decision, as content from the later years of the war became more gloomy and depressing. As the war carried on, the patriotism and nationalistic fervour mostly faded from newspaper. The evolving role of women within the newspaper and society in general represents most significant development of *The Athenaeum* during the war.

Annotated Bibliography:

Primary Sources:

Acadia Athenaeum (September 1914-May 1915). Kirkconnell Room, Archives and Special Collections, Acadia University.

Acadia Athenaeum (September 1915-May 1916). Kirkconnell Room, Archives and Special Collections, Acadia University.

Acadia Athenaeum (September 1916-May 1917). Kirkconnell Room, Archives and Special Collections, Acadia University.

Acadia Athenaeum (September 1917-May 1918). Kirkconnell Room, Archives and Special Collections, Acadia University.

Athenaeum Society. "Constitution and by-laws of the Acadia Athenaeum Society, with, Regulations of the Maritime Inter-Collegiate Debating League." Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Acadia University, 1911.

Athenaeum Society. "The Constitution, by-laws and rules of order, with, Regulations of the Paper of the Acadia Athenaeum." Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Acadia University, 1920.

Secondary Sources:

Jensen, Stephan P. T. "A Student is a Student, a Type, Seldom More": The Acadia (University) Athenaeum and the Definition of the Christian Gentleman, 1885-1920." B.A. Hon. Thesis, Acadia University, 1998.

This thesis contains valuable insights regarding the role of Christianity in compelling young men to join the military and serve on the Western Front. The Baptist impulse was still prominent amongst Acadia students in the 1910s. Young men attending Acadia University when the Great War began often felt it was their Christian duty to defend the Empire. Jensen cites many valuable Athenaeum articles to enhance his argument.

Moody, Barry. "Acadia and the Great War." In *Youth University and Canadian Society: Essays in the Social History of Higher Education*, edited by Paul Axelrod and John G. Reid, 143-160. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press.

Barry Moody's investigative study of the relationship between Acadia University and the Great War is my central secondary source for this project. His primary source research for this article is extensive and it features many citations from *The Athenaeum* that have proven advantageous for my research. Moreover, Moody has accumulated a breadth of statistical data on the Great War that has aided my own inquiry on the subject.

Moody, Barry. *Give Us an A: An Acadia Album*. Wolfville, Nova Scotia: Acadia University, 1988.

This scrapbook-themed book on the history of Acadia contains many valuable illustrations. Several news-clippings from *The Athenaeum* are featured in the book. Moreover, it includes some pictures of *The Athenaeum* editorial staff from the era of the Great War that might look nice on my power point presentation. Pictures of *The Athenaeum* staff may also help personalize my overwhelmingly text-based presentation for the audience.

Veverka, John A. "Creating Interpretive Themes for Heritage Tourism Sites and Attractions." *John Veverka & Associates*. Accessed October 18, 2014. <http://www.heritageinterp.com/creating.htm>.