

# **Engaging the Line**

**How the Great War Shaped the Canada–US Border**

*Brandon R. Dimmel*



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## Introduction

THE CANADA–US BORDER changed dramatically during the First World War. Prior to August 1914, the international boundary had been – for the most part – porous, a fluid zone of friendly economic and social interchange. After the outbreak of war, however, the border steadily transformed into a high-security surveillance area where citizens of Canada and the United States encountered the state like never before. For some Canadians, this change was necessary; after all, Canada was at war, and citizens needed to be protected against potential threats, such as the substantial German American population.

But for many residents of Canadian borderland communities – such as Windsor, Ontario, which shares the international boundary with Detroit, Michigan – these changes to the border during wartime were highly controversial. For generations prior to 1914, Windsorites had visited, on a daily basis, the ballparks, stores, and factories of Detroit. Now federal customs officers tasked with protecting the revenue of the dominion and Windsor’s retailers discouraged locals from shopping in Detroit, where items such as clothing and jewellery were usually much cheaper. When boarding and leaving the ferries – which took locals across the Detroit River in an age before the Ambassador Bridge and Detroit–Windsor Tunnel (completed in 1929 and 1930, respectively) – Windsor residents could also expect to answer an escalating number of questions about their ethnicity, employment, and income posed by Canadian and American immigration officials. As for Windsor residents who joined the Canadian army, they were barred from crossing the border. Together these changes at the border served to strain long-running transnational social and economic relationships. It was a situation that concerned many residents of Windsor, who saw their region’s vibrant border-crossing culture suffocated by the distant and previously unseen federal governments of the United States and Canada. By late 1916, many Windsorites took to writing letters to the local newspaper, the *Evening Record*, to express their mounting frustration: “Established residents of Windsor and Detroit understand each other thoroughly and mingle together in harmony,” one Windsorite noted in a letter published December 5, 1916. “Respect is mutual. Friendship is self-evident. Hundreds of persons on this side cross to Detroit daily and find employment in the great city across the river.” But that friendly

interchange was now threatened, the writer thought. “It is only when outside influences are exerted that friction arises.”<sup>1</sup>

These “outside influences” were not always so visible at the Windsor–Detroit section of the border or at other parts of the long Canada–US international boundary. In fact, at the turn of the twentieth century, few travellers faced any challenges as they attempted to cross from one country to the other. There were several reasons for this ease of crossing. First, Canada and the United States welcomed most travellers, especially white Protestant Anglo-Saxons born on the other side of the boundary. Industrialization of the North American economy was also a factor: in the Detroit River region specifically, growth of the area’s automotive industry depended on access to a large pool of cheap labour, which an extranational neighbour could help to provide. Second, the state remained small at a time when the overwhelming attitude of North Americans was that the government that governed the least governed the best. Keeping that government small and taxes low meant limiting the number of customs and immigration officers on the government payroll. Meanwhile, most of those customs and immigration agents who did patrol the Canada–US border were hired to work in the communities in which they lived, and most tailored their inspections to the demands of the surrounding communities. In many border towns, the thinking was that having an open border helped rather than hindered the local culture and economy.

In 1914, this thinking was prominent in Windsor. Unlike many other communities in Canada (e.g., Ontario capital Toronto, where about one in every three city residents had been born in Britain), Windsor was home to as many Americans as Britons.<sup>2</sup> For years American investors had been establishing branch plants within Windsor city limits, thereby circumventing the Canadian government’s high tariffs and gaining entry into the lucrative British market.<sup>3</sup> Windsor residents crossed each day to Detroit to work, shop, and take in baseball games or plays. Windsor schools were built using Detroit institutions as models – no surprise given that many of Windsor’s young people flocked to Detroit high schools, colleges, and universities.<sup>4</sup> And this transnational movement was hardly one way, for thousands of Detroiters regularly visited Windsor’s baseball parks, bars, restaurants, and horse-racing tracks. Facilitating such cross-border travel – and the evolution of a very visible border-crossing culture – were dozens of ferries capable of transporting thousands of passengers from one side of the Detroit River to the other in just a few minutes.<sup>5</sup> Waiting for these passengers were small teams of locally raised customs and immigration agents who, at least prior to the war, only weeded out travellers of an “undesirable” race (typically Asians and African Americans) or appeared to



FIGURE 1 Windsor's factory district in 1911. With American branch plants – such as Frederick Stearns and Company, a prominent pharmaceuticals firm – relocating to Windsor throughout the period, the population and economy of the border cities region boomed. *Source:* Southwestern Ontario Digital Archive.

be a danger to themselves or others. Most white Anglo-Saxon Canadians and Americans easily passed through inspection.<sup>6</sup>

The first threat to this border-crossing culture between Windsor and Detroit was the First World War. It also threatened similar relationships in other towns lining the nearly 9,000-kilometre-long Canada–US boundary. This book explores the impact of the First World War on border-crossing culture in three transnational communities, including Windsor and Detroit; St. Stephen, New Brunswick, and Calais, Maine; and White Rock, British Columbia, and Blaine, Washington. These communities all have one common characteristic: proximity to the border and an extranational neighbour. In addition, each case study represents a unique region along Canada's southern border, including the northeast (St. Stephen and Calais), central Canada (Windsor and Detroit), and the Pacific coast (White Rock and Blaine).

I first approached this project while studying for my PhD. I wanted to know how the intense nationalism aroused by the war affected “border-crossing culture,” a term first used by historian Thomas Klug in a 2010 article titled “The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the Making of a Border-Crossing Culture on the US–Canada Border, 1891–1941.”<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, Klug

– whose study focuses on changing interpretations of the border-crossing experience along the American shore of the Detroit River – does not provide us with a clear definition of the term. Such a term is founded upon our definition of *culture*, an incredibly difficult word to define. One of the most accessible definitions comes from American-born intellectual Walter Lippman, who suggested that culture is “what people are interested in, their thoughts, their models, the books they read and the speeches they hear, their table talk, gossip, controversies, historical sense and scientific training.” In other words, culture is “the climate of ... civilization.”<sup>8</sup> Historian Jonathan Vance, author of *A History of Canadian Culture*, acknowledges that culture “is a tricky concept” that “can encompass almost everything that characterizes a society – the customs, modes of behaviour, beliefs, values, and social practices and structures.”<sup>9</sup> Border-crossing culture, therefore, can be defined as the thoughts, customs, events, policies, speeches, gossip, controversies, and history surrounding the international boundary. As this book shows, for many residents of Canadian and American border communities, the international boundary was an omnipresent actor in the formation of local culture.

Few historians have examined how people living along the border reacted to the American and Canadian federal governments’ attempts to better secure the boundary during the First World War. In the introduction to their collection of essays *Bridging National Borders in North America*, Andrew Graybill and Benjamin Johnson identify this gap in the scholarship and ask “did borders mean the same things to local residents of border areas as they did to national policymakers?”<sup>10</sup> A similar query was posed twenty-five years ago by geographers Victor Konrad and Lauren McKinsey, who asked “are there areas of public policy where Canadians and Americans sharing a particular border region actually have closer opinions than either group has with respective nationals?”<sup>11</sup>

This book attempts to answer these questions. It finds that Canadian residents of border communities who prided themselves on living within a peaceful, permeable border region before the First World War were most likely to resist attempts by the government (federal or provincial) to change how the border was administered during the war. In some cases, this meant protesting measures that prevented the easy movement of goods and people, and in other cases it meant objecting to the introduction of policies that indirectly affected border-crossing culture (e.g., the implementation of daylight saving time in 1918). The longer the social, cultural, and economic ties to an American border town, the more evident the opposition to “outside influences” or government efforts to enforce border controls in one form or another.

The history of borders, and especially the Canada–US border, represents a relatively new academic field. But the remarkable growth of transnational

trade and transportation networks is drawing attention to these highly contradictory spaces. According to Melissa Gauthier and Fayuca Hormiga, whose work focuses on the movement of illegal goods across the US–Mexico boundary, borders “represent lucrative zones of exchange and trade, often illicit and clandestine.”<sup>12</sup> This is precisely why borders fascinate us today. To put it succinctly, they are high-stakes zones – to challenge the border is to challenge the nation-state.<sup>13</sup>

Yet globalization is doing just that. Arguably, it is now more difficult (and certainly more expensive) than ever before for national governments to effectively monitor and patrol international boundaries. Authors such as David Kaplan, Emmanuel Brunet-Jailly, and Bruno Dupeyron have explored how Europeans struggle with the challenges posed by sharing a political and economic union while attempting to limit the transnational movement of violent radicals. “As national border-security policies attempt to enable security personnel to recognize dangerous individuals and substances, they must compete not only with the increasingly large market-driven flows of goods and people crossing borders and borderlands but also with the local culture and political clout of borderlands,” Brunet-Jailly and Dupeyron write.<sup>14</sup> The United States faces a similar quandary when it comes to its southern border – although some of the nation’s most influential corporations depend on the cheap labour provided by illegal immigrants, particularly those moving north across the Mexican border, many US citizens regularly express concern that these newcomers are threatening the economic and social stability of American neighbourhoods.<sup>15</sup>

These problems are not new. Europe has been struggling with the issues presented by permeable borders for centuries (and especially since the establishment of the European Union roughly two decades ago), while Americans and Mexicans have debated the border separating their countries since the nineteenth century. A fascination with these unique threats has translated into a growing historiography focused on European national boundaries and the US–Mexico border.

Interest in the Canada–US border, meanwhile, has been comparatively limited – particularly among American scholars. But in the period since completion of the Canada–US Free Trade Agreement in 1988 and the shocking events of 9–11, issues relating to the permeability of that border have become the focus of unprecedented discussion.<sup>16</sup> After American journalists and US officials erroneously pointed to the Canadian border as the entry point for the 9–11 hijackers, it became the subject of much debate. The idea that the Canadian border acts as a convenient crossing point for terrorists en route to the United States ironically turns the long-undefended border, once the pride of upper North Americans, into something distinctly *negative*.<sup>17</sup>

Although examining the Canada–US border is relatively new to many American historians, Canadian scholars have long debated its role in shaping the Great White North’s economy and culture. One of the first studies of economic and social relations across the border was Goldwin Smith’s *Canada and the Canadian Question*. Published in 1891, it discussed the extensive cross-border social and economic ties linking Canadians and Americans as well as the deep regional and cultural divisions within Canada.<sup>18</sup> Smith noted the role played by American capital in expanding Canada’s nascent manufacturing sector as well as the widespread out-migration of Canadians to the growing United States.<sup>19</sup> Given the fluidity of the Canada–US border and growing tensions north of the border (particularly after the execution of Métis leader Louis Riel in 1885), Smith suggested that Canada could succeed only if it moved toward commercial or even political union with the more powerful United States.<sup>20</sup>

Smith wrote his book at a time when hundreds of thousands of Canadians were leaving Canada to live permanently in the United States. Historian Marcus Lee Hansen examined this movement in *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples*, published in 1940. Hansen, who followed the southward migration of Canadians between the Revolutionary War and the 1920s, argued that in both the United States and Canada political affiliations were less important to a family than economic opportunities.<sup>21</sup> In other words, if a better-paying, more stable job was available south of the border, then few Canadians gave any thought to leaving their homeland for the United States. It was an attitude that encouraged migration and established a culture of permeability at the border and beyond.

Hansen’s central message – that, for the average family, the decision to migrate across the border was personal and transcended national affiliation – is a prominent theme in several more recent texts on the migration of Canadians to the United States. Arguably, the two most comprehensive studies are Bruno Ramirez’s *Crossing the 49th Parallel* (2001) and Randy Widdis’s *With Scarcely a Ripple* (1999).<sup>22</sup> Ramirez studies the cross-border movements of French and English Canadians from 1900 to 1930 and finds that, in the Maritimes, people’s permanent and seasonal movements were the results of an economy integrated with New England and based on lumbering, shipbuilding, and farming. In Ontario, conditions for migration (a cross-border regional economy) were similar but the destinations different: New York, Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, in Quebec, land shortages forced many residents to seek permanent and seasonal employment in the rapidly expanding New England textile industry.<sup>24</sup> Ramirez shows that, at least until the early twentieth century, the natural barriers in northern North America ran north-south rather than east-west. Migrants gave little thought to national affiliation when they made

these transitions; instead, they moved to whatever community offered them the most stable social and economic environments for their families.

In his analysis of Canadian migration to the United States between 1880 and 1920, Widdis takes the story a step further by examining the lives of migrants once they arrived in their new homes. He finds that several factors – including common language, religion, education, and economic outlook – led to the integration of Anglo-Canadians into American society “with scarcely a ripple.”<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the integration of Anglo-Canadians was facilitated by their own lack of a cohesive identity; specifically, ethnic barriers separated English speakers who traced their lineages to Scotland, Ireland, Wales, England, or other parts of the British Empire.<sup>26</sup> This weakening of the Anglo-Canadian identity, Widdis suggests, contributed to their rapid integration into American society.

In response to this rapid out-migration – in addition to concerns about “manifest destiny” in the United States – in the 1890s Ottawa relaxed Canada’s immigration standards (the idea being to replace outgoing Canadians with incoming Europeans).<sup>27</sup> In judging which men and women were best suited for life on the harsh Canadian prairies, the Liberal Party’s minister of the interior, Clifford Sifton, abandoned traditional preferences for Britons and favoured any “stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat with a stout wife.” The new policy worked. The population of the Canadian west exploded over the next two decades, from 300,000 in 1896 to 1.5 million in 1914.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of these “lowered” immigration standards, Canada was much slower to implement immigration law at the international boundary than the United States. South of the border, anxiety over the growing immigrant population continued to rise. In the cities, rivalries among ethnic groups were more readily apparent as Slavs, Swedes, Poles, and native-born white Americans competed for the same jobs. There was no easy solution: while labour groups identified the influx as a source of competition that would drive wages and working conditions down while prolonging the average workday, employers sought out immigrants for the same reasons.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, most Americans, employers and employees alike, fretted about the arrival from Europe of paupers, criminals, prostitutes, the physically disabled, and the mentally unfit.<sup>30</sup> These people, they worried, would restrict America’s economic growth by becoming expensive burdens on the state.

As Marian Smith shows in her article “The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) at the US-Canadian Border, 1893–1993,” one of the first attempts of the United States to monitor immigrant traffic was the 1893 “Canadian Agreement” signed by the American government and Canadian transportation companies. The agreement, which received only tacit approval from Ottawa, allowed for American immigration officials to inspect US-bound Europeans

leaving Canadian ports.<sup>31</sup> At the time, Ottawa made no effort to introduce a similar scheme to protect its own land and sea borders, meaning that immigrants arriving at Canadian ports of entry were not examined for medical or physical deficiencies.<sup>32</sup> Thus, as the American government moved quickly toward adopting a centralized border inspection apparatus in the late nineteenth century, Canada lagged behind.

But Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, in their book *The Making of the Mosaic*, find that that changed shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. Through the Immigration Acts of 1906 and 1910, the Canadian government clearly laid out which groups were considered desirable and undesirable while formalizing admission and deportation procedures.<sup>33</sup> The change of heart was a result of Canadians growing steadily more concerned that immigration from southern and eastern Europe was causing a spike in criminal activity.<sup>34</sup> In reality, the rise in crime was merely a side effect of Canada's rapidly growing population, but it was seen by many Canadians as a sign that immigration law was in desperate need of reform.<sup>35</sup> The result was that by 1910 both Canada and the United States had established federal immigration departments and placed immigration inspectors at most busy border crossings along the Canada–US boundary.

So what was the border-crossing experience like in the years just before the First World War? Klug tries to answer that question in his article, which shows how immigration law was put into practice by agents actually working at the border and what impact it had on the lives of daily commuters. For instance, in Detroit prior to the construction of the Ambassador Bridge (1929) and Detroit–Windsor Tunnel (1930), most travellers arrived in the Motor City by way of ferry, forming in long queues at the foot of Woodward Avenue along the Detroit River. This meant that a team of two or three officers faced an immense challenge picking out undesirables with hundreds of people pouring off a single ferry. The solution, INS administrators believed, was to force passengers to line up two abreast, forming manageable lines for inspectors. But that did not sit well with the travellers, as revealed by a Bureau of Immigration investigator who noted that the process “causes constant irritation and resentment” among ferry passengers and was “naturally productive of impatient and insulting remarks” launched at the inspectors.<sup>36</sup> Klug also reveals that immigration agents were members of the transnational Detroit River community and used their knowledge of local people and businesses to help distinguish between suspicious outsiders and regular commuters. In this way, Klug demonstrates that understanding the Canada–US border is not as simple as studying immigration policy or migration trends.<sup>37</sup>

This book is about that border, but it also concerns the impact of the First World War era on local communities straddling it. Not only did the war present

Canadian and American governments with a reason to protect their borders, but also it caused the citizens of both countries to rethink their place in the world. Patriotism and nationalism reached new heights in Canada as the nation underwent its “trial by fire,” starting with the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915. Canadian historians have established useful models for a study focused on the home front, but this is a recent phenomenon: for decades following the emergence of Great War literature in the 1930s, the focus was on the military side of the equation, first at the broad, strategic level and then eventually “at the sharp end.”<sup>38</sup> Only in the past decade or so have examinations of home front Canada emerged, including Ian Miller’s *Our Glory and Our Grief* (2002), Robert Rutherford’s *Hometown Horizons* (2004), James Pitsula’s *For All We Have and Are* (2008), and Jim Blanchard’s *Winnipeg’s Great War* (2010). The collective message of these books – from Miller’s study of Toronto’s Great War to Blanchard’s examination of wartime Winnipeg – is that every community had a unique wartime experience.<sup>39</sup>

But if each city, town, and county had its own war experience, they all shared a new relationship with the state. Invisible to most Canadians and Americans before the war, the government (both federal and provincial) established after August 1914 a real presence in people’s day-to-day lives. Today Canadians’ extensive and comparatively intimate relationship with the state can be seen in our payment of income taxes, our use of passports, and the evolution of a visible international boundary presided over by customs and immigration officials. All of these measures were either introduced or widely expanded during the Great War era.

To date, a number of books have examined how the citizen-state relationship developed in the United States during that era. In *Uncle Sam Wants You*, Chris Capozzola reveals how obligations to the local community – including family, church, employer, and school – were all subsumed under obligations to the state during wartime. According to Capozzola, the war initiated a visible transition in which the citizen looked beyond the immediate locality when identifying a community of like-minded people.<sup>40</sup> A similar message can be found in Craig Robertson’s *The Passport in America*, which shows how the expansion of the passport system during and after the First World War helped to fuse once disparate local and national communities. According to Robertson, the process of regulating the passport and the border-crossing experience marked an important transition away from a time when the government remained “a stranger in the lives of its citizens.”<sup>41</sup>

Studies of Canadians’ evolving relationship with the state during the First World War remain rare. Jeffrey Keshen has examined the emergence of Canada’s censorship network in *Propaganda and Censorship during Canada’s*

*Great War*, and Gregory Kealey has examined the rise of state surveillance in a series of articles, including “State Repression of Labour and the Left in Canada, 1914–20.” Unfortunately, a comprehensive study of this topic remains absent from the historiography.<sup>42</sup>

There are similar gaps in the historiography dealing with changes at the Canada–US border during the twentieth century’s early years. With the exception of Klug, no scholar has yet examined how changes to border security affected border-crossing culture in communities located along the international boundary. This study, one of the first of its kind, focuses on the Canadian side of the boundary. It shows that the Great War’s emphasis on efficiency, patriotism, and protection of Canadian citizens put great strain on border-crossing culture. It finds that those people who protested radical changes to the administration of the boundary were members of communities – such as Windsor and St. Stephen – that could trace their cross-border ties to the period well before the development of immigration law and, later, the outbreak of war. These were the communities where border-crossing culture survived and was even enhanced by the war. In comparison, the vast majority of White Rock’s first settlers arrived as immigration law was implemented in the twentieth century’s first decade. Furthermore, prewar attitudes toward cross-border liquor trafficking and Asian immigration on Canada’s west coast helped to dictate rather different conceptions of the border.

These findings rely heavily on primary research, including municipal council minutes, archival files (e.g., diaries, correspondence, and oral interviews), and, in large part, newspapers, including the *Semiahmoo* (later *Surrey*) *Gazette*, *British Columbian*, *Blaine Journal*, *Windsor Evening Record*, *Detroit News*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Saint Croix Courier*, and *Calais Advertiser*, among others. These newspapers were not only the primary source for local, national, and international news during this historical period but also a forum that allowed members of the community to express their opinions through letters to the editor. Each of these newspapers included at least an editorial section, and the *Windsor Evening Record*, *Detroit Free Press*, and *Saint Croix Courier* included sections where letters to the editor were published. Studying these letters and editorials helped me to uncover multiple viewpoints from within the wider population.

In addition to newspapers, this study uses municipal council minutes to investigate the operations of local governments. These records reveal some of the major concerns of local citizens; for example, the protest by Windsor City Council against the Ontario provincial government’s ban of Sunday newspapers from Detroit in 1916 reveals that heated letters to the *Windsor Evening Record* on the subject were representative of a majority of the people.<sup>43</sup> Where

possible, I have used city council minutes and other source materials to verify and supplement reports in the local newspapers.

Also of use was correspondence between local immigration inspectors and Canadian Superintendent of Immigration W.D. Scott. Correspondence found on microfilm reels acquired from Library and Archives Canada includes general memoranda between Scott and the various officers in charge at White Rock, Windsor, and St. Stephen.<sup>44</sup> These records outline the challenges facing officers stationed at the border before and during the war, including the search for undesirables and enemy aliens from Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Germany. The latter task proved to be particularly troublesome since so few of the travellers from these countries looked any different from their Canadian or American counterparts. The correspondence reveals that patrolling the border was by no means an easy job during the war; not only were officers expected to weed out undesirables and enemy aliens from a flood of permanent and temporary travellers, but also they were paid a low wage and constantly criticized by their superiors, who found easy scapegoats in their front-line agents for policy failures.

Although I investigate a number of different themes in this study, I have attempted to keep the structure simple. The book proceeds through three separate case studies, investigating first Windsor and Detroit, then St. Stephen and Calais, and finally White Rock and Blaine. Each case study examines the extent of a border-crossing culture before the war, the war's impact on this culture, and finally local reactions to changes to the border's administration during the war years. A conclusion provides a comparative examination of the different regions studied and a brief look at each of the border communities in the years after the war.

This book marks a meeting point between two vibrant and continually evolving historical fields focusing on Canada's Great War and the Canada-US border. Because of the conflict's important place in Canada's journey toward nationhood, interest in the Great War remains high. My hope is that this study provides an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the Canada-US border and helps us to better understand an important period in North American history.

## Part 1

# Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit, Michigan

DETROIT WAS FOUNDED in 1701 by a charming Gascon adventurer named Antoine Laumet de Lamothe Cadillac. He named the city for its geography, *de troit*, or “the strait,” which linked Lake Erie with Lake St. Clair and Lake Huron. Cadillac was an unscrupulous tradesman who sold brandy to the nearby Indigenous peoples against the wishes of local chiefs and Jesuit priests. He dealt with fur smugglers, ignoring the strict regulations placed on the fur trade by his superiors in Paris. Cadillac cared nothing for rules – his goal was to use the Detroit River to dominate the trade of all goods across the Great Lakes. He saw this river not as a line between empires but as a tool that could be used to enhance his own power and prestige.<sup>1</sup>

In time, many residents of the Detroit River region would embrace this attitude, dismissing the idea that geography should restrict, rather than enhance, the region’s economic and cultural development. As the following chapter demonstrates, a unique transnational relationship between Windsor and Detroit was not spawned by the Great War but merely evolved during these years. The seeds for a border-crossing culture had been planted generations earlier, starting with the French *habitants* and *voyageurs* who made the Detroit River frontier their home. Through war and revolution, these original families, as well as the British, American, and European settlers who joined them much later, maintained positive relations with their friends and kin across the river.

Initially, the challenges facing Cadillac’s company must have seemed ominous: almost 1,000 kilometres from the safety of Montreal, their presence in the *pays d’en haut* (or “upper country”) could have been conceived as an obscene gesture made against their traditional enemies in the Great Lakes region, the powerful Five Nations Confederacy. But, surprisingly, the gamble paid off: a period of peace with the Five Nations during the early eighteenth century allowed the town to flourish, its population increasing substantially in that first decade.<sup>2</sup> Their years along the St. Lawrence were visible as the settlers made homes for themselves in this new land; the local economy that emerged was heavily influenced by the seigneurial system of Quebec, with farmers cultivating long, narrow plots running great distances back from the river. The demand for riverside lots soon led settlers to spill over the river onto the opposite shore, into what would later become Windsor and surrounding Essex County.

Crossing the river was no great hardship; the French used their sturdy canoes to move from shore to shore. Occasionally, the river would freeze over, allowing travellers to cross by foot.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the eighteenth century, the Detroit River region continued to grow, partly because the area remained comfortably isolated during both the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution.<sup>4</sup> For practical purposes, little changed for Detroiters after the Treaty of Paris in 1763; Britain maintained control of the city along with several other strategically vital forts in the northwest.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the Jay Treaty in 1794, however, the redcoats finally left Detroit, retreating to Fort Amherstburg in British territory.

Britain's abandonment of the city represented the first divergence of character between Detroit and the area that would later become Windsor. Many of the French and English residents of the town who preferred life under the Crown followed the redcoats across the river and were replaced by a significant contingent of New Englanders pushing west. Although the presence of the French in Essex continued to be considerable throughout the first part of the nineteenth century, in Detroit their numbers would soon be overwhelmed by Americans and later Germans, Poles, and Irish.<sup>6</sup>

But these changes came slowly. In the early nineteenth century, both Windsor and Detroit remained very French.<sup>7</sup> Those living on the Canadian shore continued to share a much closer relationship with their Detroit neighbours than with residents of distant York (later Toronto) or London, primarily because communicating with or visiting these latter communities meant travelling hundreds of kilometres through unbroken wilderness. The immense distance between Windsor and other villages in Upper Canada, in addition to the region's French-speaking heritage (80 percent of its 4,000 settlers traced their heritage back to the St. Lawrence Valley), meant that the area was considered rather distinct, even isolated, from the rest of the colony.<sup>8</sup>

These factors concerned colonial administrators as tensions mounted with the Americans during the first decade of the nineteenth century, and it was unclear whether the French Canadians of the Detroit River region would fight in the event of war. Indeed, in the eyes of many of these French-speaking people, there was little incentive to do so. They identified with neither Britain nor the United States, viewing both as alien empires based on cultures distinct from their own.<sup>9</sup> In the event of war, it remained unlikely that the people of Essex would casually dismiss a century of good relations with their neighbours in Detroit in order to protect Britain's holdings in Upper Canada.<sup>10</sup>

The American invasion of Essex County and the Western District began in July 1812.<sup>11</sup> US Brigadier-General William Hull, perhaps sensing weakness among the poorly trained and ill-equipped militiamen standing between Detroit and

York, decreed in a proclamation spread throughout the district that “no white man found fighting by the side of an Indian will be taken prisoner” and that “instant destruction will be his lot.”<sup>12</sup> The result was that, by mid-July, an officer of the Essex militia complained that half his men had abandoned their posts and returned home. It remains unclear whether this action was motivated by Hull’s threat, the need of militiamen to care for their crops, or both.<sup>13</sup>

Regardless, the American commander and the men serving under him failed to keep their promise that they would not harass the people of Windsor. Twice they occupied Essex County during the war, and in both instances they looted the personal property of locals. Horses, flour, lumber, furs – all were grabbed up by American troops during their stays in the Windsor region, first over the summer of 1812 and again after the defeat of York in April 1813.<sup>14</sup> For their part, Americans living in Detroit during its siege, capitulation, and occupation in August 1812 were embarrassed and embittered by the British victory. They were further enraged by the January 1813 Frenchtown massacre, when British officers allowed their Aboriginal allies to slaughter a group of wounded American prisoners.<sup>15</sup>

The hardships brought on by the War of 1812 reinforced the Jay Treaty in making the Detroit River a meaningful boundary, but over time hard feelings dissipated. First, in Essex County, much of the blame for the hardship brought on by the war was lumped on the British, who had failed to supply locals with the tools and training needed to make an effective defence possible. Indeed, from the beginning, the colonial administration acted as though the entire region between the Detroit River and London was expendable.<sup>16</sup> Second, many of the Americans who attacked and looted Essex homes during the war were not Detroiters but militiamen recruited in Kentucky.<sup>17</sup> In other words, rarely was it a familiar face that wandered off with the last of the grain or firewood in the middle of the night. And third, in many communities across the Michigan Territory and Upper Canada, blame for the war fell on opposing governments, not the people living under them.<sup>18</sup> After all, it was not an event in Detroit or Essex that had sparked hostilities but the squabbles of two distant governments, mostly over the subject of American neutrality and sovereignty at sea – issues not close to the hearts of the settlers of Detroit and Essex County.

Border troubles returned to the county in 1866 with the arrival of the Fenian threat.<sup>19</sup> The Fenians, a well-funded organization of Irish Americans, sought the independence of their homeland from Britain through the occupation of British North America. Today their scheme sounds ludicrous, but by no means was Canada prepared at the time to repel an invasion. Its militiamen could be kept from their farms for only a few weeks at a time and, like the general population, were thinly spread out across a vast territory. Unlike the Fenians,

many of whom had served under the Union flag during the US Civil War, the Canadian militiamen were poorly trained and had little combat experience. Canadians, then, were rightly afraid of what might happen if the Fenians succeeded in breaking through at two or more points along their frontier.<sup>20</sup>

But the Fenian threat largely failed to disturb relations between Windsor and Detroit; indeed, throughout these tense years, ferries continued to cross the river at regular intervals. This led to one particularly anxious morning when it was reported that a ferry carrying pious Detroiters to Windsor for a religious festival was, in fact, filled with Fenians. The town shut down in a matter of minutes, and local men prepared to repulse the attack. The boat was turned around before it could dock – no doubt greatly annoying the many peaceful pilgrims on board.<sup>21</sup>

The Fenian threat represented a few brief moments of excitement in an otherwise tedious period for residents of Essex County. In comparison to Detroit, economic progress remained sluggish. Completion of the Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, canal allowed Lake Superior iron and copper to flow into Detroit, fuelling the expansion of several manufacturing industries in the 1850s, including steel production, brewing, tanning, and sawmilling.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, in Windsor and Essex County, the absence of effective transportation routes prevented most residents from rising out of abject poverty.

That finally changed with the completion of several important transportation links, notably the American-owned Great Western Railway in 1854, which connected these communities with Hamilton, London, Niagara Falls, and Toronto. Importantly, it also brought Windsor and Essex County into a rapidly evolving American manufacturing zone between Michigan and New York. As other rail lines were extended to the county, Windsor became the primary marketplace for the region's bountiful agricultural harvest.<sup>23</sup>

The Great Western Railway had an immediate impact on settlement in Essex County. Windsor's population rose steadily after completion of the line, from just 300 in 1846 to nearly 5,000 two decades later. Construction of the line created a demand for labourers to lay the track, while the need for rail ties helped to expand the region's lumber industry. The business of moving people and goods became lucrative for Essex County, through which thousands of settlers would pass en route to the burgeoning industrial metropolises of the American Midwest.<sup>24</sup>

Soon after the railway was completed, the Detroit River's steamship business grew to meet the demand for transportation across the waterway.<sup>25</sup> Not until the interwar period of the twentieth century would a bridge and tunnel be constructed to facilitate such heavy traffic, but the ferry companies were capable of moving people across the border. The first ferries were little more



FIGURE 2 The Detroit River, seen here in 1900, would become an increasingly busy place as Windsor and the Motor City boomed during the first half of the twentieth century. Source: “Water Front, Detroit, Mich.” c. 1900, <http://www.loc.gov/item/deti994021211/PP/>.

than commercial canoes; in the 1820s, François Labalaine used just such a craft to transport pioneers from one side of the river to the other, listening for the sound of his wife’s four-foot-long tin horn as the indication that passengers were ready on the Canadian side.<sup>26</sup> Later in the decade, Captain John Burtis tried his hand at the trade with the river’s first horse ferry. As the horse walked along in an enclosed space, it drove the boat’s propellers. Onlookers said that it looked like “a large cheese box on a raft,” which might explain why Burtis reported a deficit of \$378.67 after his first year on the river.<sup>27</sup> In the 1830s, steam replaced horse power as the fuel of choice, and the number of ferries traversing the river increased steadily. By the late 1860s, three ferries were in operation, two working 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. shifts, another working from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m., meaning that transportation was available all but seven hours a day. In the 1880s and 1890s, Detroit companies produced several enormous ferries to handle the growing load of passengers, none bigger than the *Columbia*, which could carry 3,500 people in a single trip.<sup>28</sup> It was a cheap and convenient ride, and in the early 1890s a one-way ticket cost just a few pennies.<sup>29</sup> Ice was rarely a factor since the Detroit River was so fast flowing that complete freeze-ups of the area between downtown Windsor and Detroit occurred only a few

days each year.<sup>30</sup> By 1914, at least twenty-two different ferries were operating at different points along the Detroit River, with passenger totals surpassing 40,000 on busy holidays, such as the Fourth of July.<sup>31</sup> The ferries' names (two were called *Olive Branch*, one *Alliance*) and appearance (many boats, such as the *Essex*, flew the Union Jack, Red Ensign, and Stars and Stripes together) indicate just how important these vessels were to the development of a border-crossing culture in the nineteenth century.<sup>32</sup>

Although most travellers used the ferries to cross the Detroit River, many of the commercial and industrial goods moving between Windsor and Detroit went underneath the dividing waterway via the Michigan Central Railway Tunnel. Completed in 1910, the 8,390-foot tunnel helped to fuse the economic relationship between the two border communities and drew Windsor deeper into the industrial sphere of the rapidly growing American Midwest.<sup>33</sup>

But it was not just transportation and communication that contributed to Windsor's development in the late nineteenth century. Equally important was the federal Conservative Party's National Policy, introduced in the late 1870s. Based on three main platforms, including railway construction, populating the west, and high tariffs, it was designed to stabilize the national economy and protect Canadian manufacturers from US competition. To avoid the policy's high tariffs, US companies established separate operations, called branch plants, north of the border.<sup>34</sup> Because of Windsor's proximity to the border and Detroit, branch plants became a crucial part of its economic development in the late nineteenth century. By the 1880s, several major Detroit companies had established operations across the river, including pharmaceutical firms Parke-Davis and Stearns.<sup>35</sup> By 1914, the number of American branch plants operating in Windsor, population 20,000, would be twenty-six, a greater per capita rate than any other medium or large city in Canada.<sup>36</sup> The war did little to prevent American businesses from streaming into Windsor, and by 1920 the Border Chamber of Commerce estimated that, of the city's 206 manufacturing concerns, "practically all ... represent American capital and enterprise."<sup>37</sup>

The most important of these American-owned plants was Ford Canada, incorporated in 1904.<sup>38</sup> Henry Ford, who had opened Ford Motor Company in Detroit only a year before, hoped to circumvent the Canadian government's strict tariff restrictions and gain access to the British market. After being approached by Windsor's Gordon McGregor, manager of the unprofitable Walkerville Wagon Works facility, Ford decided to use the site as a base of operations. He had several reasons for establishing a plant in the Windsor region. First, it was close to Detroit (and McGregor, who would become the new company's general manager, would later consult Ford on a regular basis for advice on labour issues and production).<sup>39</sup> The proximity meant that a significant



**FIGURE 3** The Ford Motor Company of Canada, established in Walkerville in 1904, just a year after Henry Ford opened Ford Motor Company in Detroit. Although annual profits were initially low (just over \$4,000 in 1906), by 1914 they were well in excess of \$1 million. *Source:* “Ford Motor Co. Factory,” June 1914, <http://www.loc.gov/item/det1994022188/PP/>.

contingent of the company’s early managers were Detroiters, while most of Ford Canada’s design and engineering expertise came from across the river.<sup>40</sup> Second, Windsor had many of the same geographical advantages of Detroit, being positioned along the main water route of the Great Lakes in addition to five major railways.<sup>41</sup> And third, Ford liked McGregor: the latter had shown considerable initiative by approaching the Detroit manufacturer, and his family pedigree – his father had been a prominent businessman, mayor of Windsor, and Member of the Provincial Parliament – also reflected well on the young entrepreneur.<sup>42</sup> Ford also recognized that the Wagon Works facilities were suitable for an assembly operation, that Windsor was rapidly becoming an industrialized city with several companies that could take on support contracts, and that there was significant interest in the project from various Windsor investors.<sup>43</sup>

From there, the Detroit River region’s automotive industry evolved at a dizzying pace.<sup>44</sup> Within five years, several other prominent automotive manufacturing concerns emerged in the region, including Maxwell (later incorporated by Chrysler), General Motors, Buick, and Oldsmobile. All of these companies would have impacts on Windsor in some form or another (opening plants there or hiring Canadian “day labourers” to work in Detroit facilities), but none would have both the economic and the cultural impacts of Ford.

At first, Ford Canada's achievements were modest. The company's first automobile, a Model A, rolled out in late October 1904 to the applause of just seventeen employees.<sup>45</sup> In 1906, the company produced 101 vehicles with profits of just over \$4,000. Since sales of the company's more luxurious models, such as the Model B and six-cylinder Model K, were low, Ford Detroit began working on a car that would be cheap, reliable, and easy to repair. The result was the Model T, unveiled in 1908 (but not produced in Walkerville until mid-1909). It came in a single colour (black), had few of the creature comforts of the Oldsmobile or American Benz. But at \$975, it was half the price of the Cadillac (\$1,850) and the Toronto-built Russell (\$1,950). Despite not starting work on the Model T until the summer, in 1909 Ford Canada built 458 of them, smashing the previous year's production record of 327.<sup>46</sup> By 1912, Ford Canada's earnings were over \$1 million.<sup>47</sup>

Ford's impact on the border cities – which before amalgamation in 1935 included Windsor and the surrounding municipalities of Ford City, Sandwich, Walkerville, and Ojibway – was widespread. In December 1912, an Essex County bylaw created the municipality of Ford City, encompassing the Walkerville plant. As the company grew, so did Ford City, quintupling in population over a two-year period.<sup>48</sup> Growth was so rapid that the municipality experienced a housing shortage so intense that the company sought permission to house its workers in tents outside the factory walls.<sup>49</sup>

Despite these issues, more people flocked to Ford – and for good reason. The company not only paid well (four dollars a day by 1915 or twice the industrial average), but Henry Ford also showed a genuine interest in the welfare of his employees.<sup>50</sup> A July 1914 baseball game between single and married Ford men at Put-in-Bay represented the first of many pleasure activities funded by management.<sup>51</sup> Although McGregor ran the Canadian operations, by 1914 Henry Ford was clearly the face of business and culture in the border cities.<sup>52</sup>

Throughout the mid to late nineteenth century, Windsor's proximity to and economic dependence on Detroit facilitated the development of unique social relationships and a distinct border-crossing culture. Vital services regularly brought members of these communities together. In 1857, they were linked by submarine telegraph cable and, twenty-three years later, by telephone exchange. Windsor relied on Detroit's fire protection service to quell blazes until the 1880s.<sup>53</sup> Throughout this period, Windsor families sent their children to Detroit art and music colleges.<sup>54</sup> During the summer months, Americans and Canadians met for picnics at various island parks along the Detroit River, including Bois Blanc (later Bob-Lo), Sugar Island, and Belle Isle.<sup>55</sup>

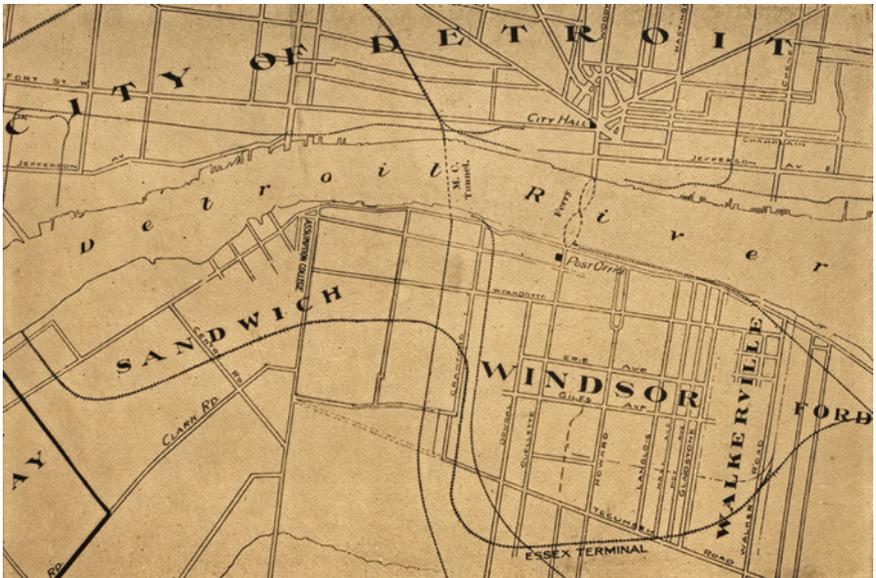


FIGURE 4 A map of Windsor and the rest of the border cities – including Ojibway, Sandwich, Walkerville, and Ford City – in 1913. By the start of the war the following year, roughly 20,000 people lived in the area. *Source:* Southwestern Ontario Digital Archive.

Windsor and Detroit also shared similar ethnic characteristics during the prewar period. Today “Motown” is one of the most segregated cities in North America, with racial tensions between whites and African Americans lingering for generations after riots in the 1940s and 1960s.<sup>56</sup> But in 1910 the American border city was markedly white.<sup>57</sup> According to that year’s census, native-born white Americans accounted for 65 percent of the total population, followed by Germans (9 percent), Canadians (9 percent), Britons (4 percent), and Russians (4 percent). African Americans represented just 1 percent of Detroit’s population, and just ninety-nine people of Asian and “other” descent lived within city limits.<sup>58</sup> Windsor was similarly white in the period leading up to the war, though it possessed considerably fewer Germans and more Britons (10 percent).<sup>59</sup> But it was by no means a British city; as in Detroit, the vast majority of people living there were native born.<sup>60</sup> Just as 9 percent of Detroiters claimed Canada as their place of birth, so too roughly the same percentage of Windsorites reported being American born. Residents of Windsor and Detroit also attended similar religious institutions; on the Canadian side, most were Roman Catholic (34 percent), with Methodists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians

accounting for the remaining churchgoers.<sup>61</sup> In Detroit, heavy immigration by Poles and Irish in the nineteenth century also made Roman Catholicism that city's predominant faith during the Great War era.<sup>62</sup>

In distinguishing Windsor from other cities in Ontario, it is worth comparing some of these findings with Toronto, Ontario's most populous city and economic and political capital. According to the 1911 census, nearly one-third of Toronto's population hailed from the British Isles, about three times the number found in Windsor. Less than 60 percent of Toronto's residents had been born in Ontario, considerably lower than Windsor's 76 percent.<sup>63</sup> In comparison to Toronto, roughly three times the number of Windsorites reported having been born in the United States. Windsor was also home to many more French Canadians, who accounted for nearly one-fourth of the city's total population (4,113).<sup>64</sup> Their presence in the city directly affected its religious breakdown, with Roman Catholics forming the dominant religion. In comparison, Catholics represented just 13 percent of Toronto's churchgoers, the majority of whom attended Anglican (31 percent) or Presbyterian (20 percent) services on Sundays.<sup>65</sup>

Essentially, in the early twentieth century, Windsor's demographics more closely resembled those of Detroit than those of the provincial capital. In large part, this was the result of late-nineteenth-century conceptions of the state and the international boundary in the Great Lakes region. In the search for better jobs and farmlands, residents of Ontario and the American Midwest treated the international boundary in much the same way that we might treat a provincial or state line. The absence of a border protection scheme contributed to this conception of the boundary as an imaginary divide and would have an enormous influence on perceptions of immigration regulations during the First World War era. (In comparison, travellers eventually settling in fiercely pro-British White Rock would admit to having never felt entirely comfortable while living under the Stars and Stripes.)

Whether they crossed the international boundary for business or pleasure, for the long term or a daily excursion, the people of Windsor had become accustomed to life along a permeable border by the turn of the twentieth century. Without knowing it, they were about to enter a period that would challenge this tradition. Rising concerns about racial purity and competition in the labour market would lead to the implementation of immigration inspection stations all along the border, from the Maritimes and New England to the Pacific Northwest. By 1910, both countries had agents stationed at regular intervals along this immense frontier. At first, the inspections were relaxed, and most Canadians and Americans passed through without difficulty. But the war changed that. It aroused new ideas about the border and what crossing it

represented. For Windsorites, the act of going to Detroit to work, shop, grab the Sunday newspaper, or take in a game of baseball suddenly had unexpected consequences. For some members of the local community, this made sense. When the home country is at war, one should support it, they said, even if that only meant frequenting Windsor rather than Detroit businesses. For others, these kinds of official and unofficial restrictions were strange, unwelcome, and unnecessary. These members of the border cities community would continue to advocate closer relations with the people and businesses of Detroit and to oppose any legislation that disrupted traditional cross-border lifestyles. In some cases, this position brought them into conflict with Canadians from outside the immediate region, people whom they attacked as “outsiders” who did not understand the economic and social circumstances of the Detroit River region. In Windsor, the question of border security would become the basis for a war at home between these opposing factions.