

Becoming Native in a Foreign Land

Becoming Native in a Foreign Land
Sport, Visual Culture, and Identity
in Montreal, 1840-85

GILLIAN POULTER



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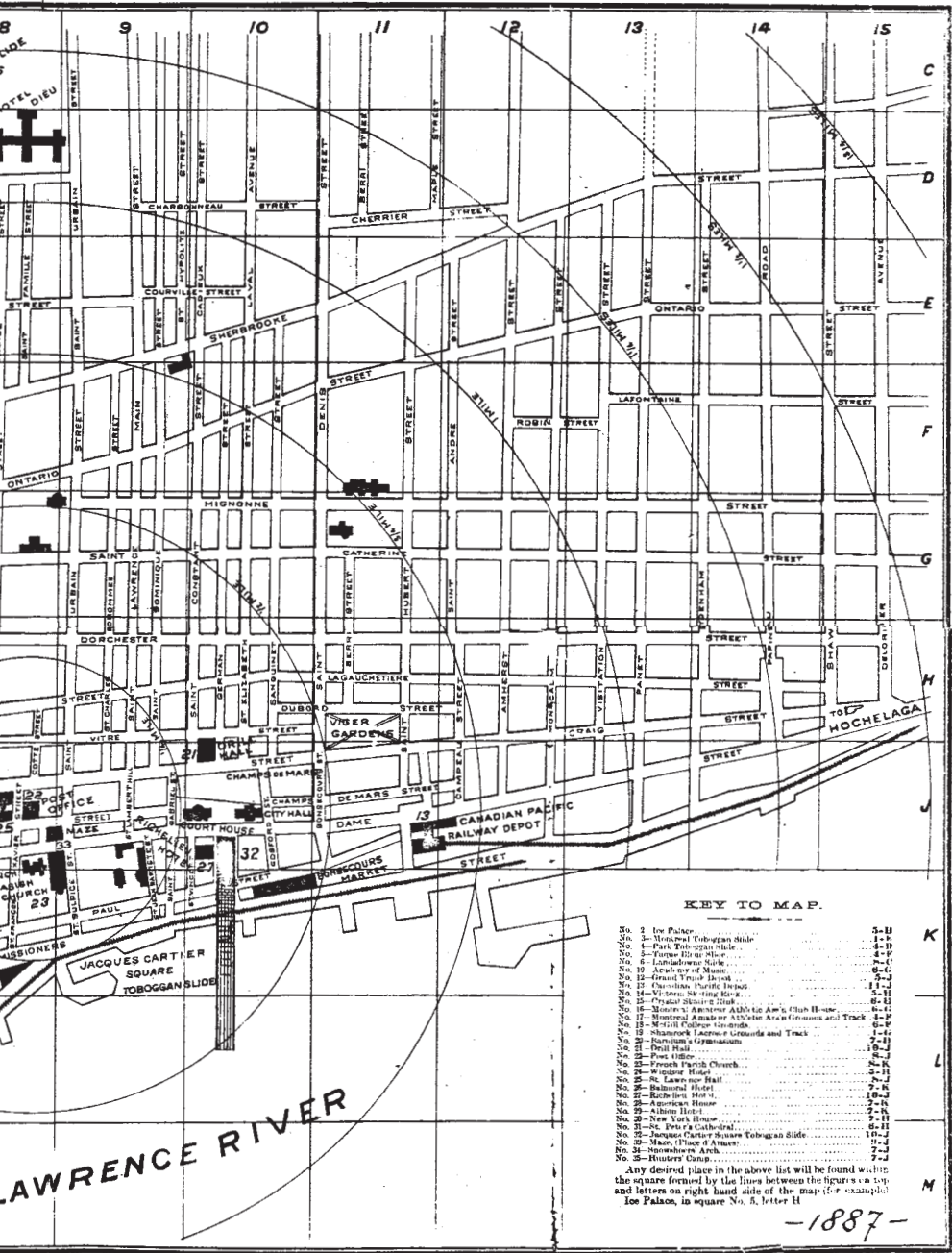
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Map, 1887, showing the location of the Ice Palace, club slides, and other attractions.



KEY TO MAP.

| | | |
|--------|-----------------|------|
| No. 1 | Ice Palace | 3-11 |
| No. 2 | Hotel Dieu | 1-1 |
| No. 3 | Hotel Dieu | 1-1 |
| No. 4 | Park | 4-10 |
| No. 5 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 6 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 7 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 8 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
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| No. 27 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 28 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 29 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 30 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 31 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 32 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |
| No. 33 | Fort St. Joseph | 4-10 |

Any desired place in the above list will be found within the square formed by the lines between the figures in top and letters on right hand side of the map (for example) Joe Palace, in square No. 8, letter H

-1887-

Becoming Native in a Foreign Land

Introduction

Colonialism, one might say, does not operate through principles of “exchange.” Rather it appropriates, decontextualizes, and represents the “other” culture, often with the complicity of its colonized subjects. It legitimates its authority only by asserting its cultural superiority.

Ruston Bharucha, *Theatre and the World*

IT TOOK ME a while to realize it, but this book is about people like me. Admittedly, my subjects are mostly men, and they lived in Montreal in the nineteenth century, but many of them shared my experience of leaving Britain and emigrating to Canada. Were they seeking a new, better, more adventurous life? Improved circumstances, wider horizons? Probably. Were they escaping poverty, the law? Some may have been – one of the key figures in my story probably was, although I hasten to add that wasn't *my* objective. What I shared with them, a century later, was the need to remake my national identity. What follows is my interpretation of how a large group of British immigrants and their Canadian-born English-speaking peers in Montreal made the social and psychological transition from “British” to “Canadian.” It is therefore a study of Canadian national identity, and I show that long before the disaster of the Somme and the triumph of Vimy Ridge, before the debates over imperialism in the 1890s, and even before Confederation, Canadians in Montreal were “making” their new identity. What made this new Canadian identity distinctive and led to the construct of the ideal “Canadian” was the appropriation of Indigenous cultural activities. During the period between the Rebellions of 1837-38 and the North West Rebellion of 1885, a transformation occurred in what constituted “Canadianness” and who Canadians were. Let me begin by tracing the contours of that transformation.

French settlement of what became Canada had begun in the seventeenth century, and by the time of the British Conquest in 1760 there were 70,000 or so descendants of the original French settlers, all of whom thought of themselves as “sons of the soil” – understandably so, since they could look back on many generations of history in the colony. British colonists arrived in rather small numbers after 1760, although the anglophone presence was bolstered by the influx of American Loyalists during and after the American Revolutionary War; but it was not until the 1820s that large numbers of immigrants from the British Isles began to have a dramatic effect on British North American society. By 1837 political, social, and economic tensions between francophones and anglophones, backwoods farmers and urban elites, and the colonial legislatures and the London Colonial Office reached a climax in the Rebellions of that fall and the next. Jolted into action at last by these outbreaks, the British Parliament sent the celebrated liberal John George Lambton, Earl of Durham, to take control of the rebellious colony.

On the strength of a brief sojourn in Upper Canada, with only a scanty ten-day visit to Lower Canada, Durham came to the conclusion that the colony’s strife could be blamed on ethnic tensions and the deficiencies of French Canadian culture. His famous *Report on the Affairs of British North America* was published in Britain in 1839 after he had returned home in a fit of pique because Lord Melbourne, the British prime minister, had interfered with his handling of captured rebels. In his report, Durham criticized the French-speaking inhabitants of British North America for their lack of literature and history and for their inferior language, laws, and character. He judged them unfit to succeed in the modern, progressive industrial world and thus proposed to swamp them in a sea of anglophone immigrants and to “elevate” them by “giv[ing] them our English character.”¹ Hence, for Lord Durham, “Canadians” were the French-speaking inhabitants of British North America.

However, within a generation of Durham’s report, English-speaking immigrants and their offspring were calling themselves “Canadians” and designating their French-speaking neighbours as “French Canadians.” A public meeting held in Toronto in 1860 demonstrated that Canadian identity was being further complicated by recent waves of immigration from different parts of the British Isles. The meeting was called in order to discuss the participation of English-speaking residents who had been born in Canada in the welcoming parade planned for the upcoming visit of the Prince of Wales. Organizers were anxious to find a way to differentiate these self-styled “Native Canadian” participants from the contingents of

English, Scottish, and Irish fraternal societies that would also march in the parade. Some members of the audience complained that a distinction was necessary because American colonists were readily identified abroad as Yankees, whereas Canadian colonists had no recognized separate identity and were looked down on as “colonials.” According to the press report, J.H. Morris told the meeting: “This was not as it ought to be; and in his opinion, Canadians should have a nationality of their own, and be known to the world as Canadians [cheers].” He contended that the recognition of this nationality was necessary to the progress of our common country.² Although it was decided that silver maple leaf pins would be used to distinguish “Native Canadians” at the parade, the meeting degenerated into an unresolved dispute over who qualified to wear them. Opinion varied as to whether Canadians were only those born in the Province of Canada or also those who had been resident since their youth in *any* of the British North American provinces. Thus Canadian citizenship depended on the eligibility of English-speaking immigrants, and no consideration was given to the status of French-speaking inhabitants, who were clearly no longer *the* Canadians. No thought at all was given to the status of Indigenous peoples.

Only three years later, Montreal member of Parliament Thomas D’Arcy McGee, one of the future Fathers of Confederation, urged English-speaking colonists to take on a “new nationality” as British Americans. Federation, he argued, would create a sovereign nation state in North America that would be of the empire rather than belonging to it.³ After Confederation in 1867 this cause was taken up by Canada First, a group of young nationalists that included Robert Grant Haliburton. Their objective was to foster the growth of national spirit and promote British immigration through literature, art, and the writing of Canadian history.⁴ At first, there was some space for French Canadians in their vision. In an 1869 lecture, Haliburton characterized Canadians as “Men of the North ... a healthy, hardy, virtuous, dominant race” of men whose toughness, strength, and vigorous energy had been instilled and maintained by the country’s climate and geography.⁵ According to Haliburton, both French- and English-speaking inhabitants of the new Dominion manifested these particular characteristics because they were all descended from northern races, whether they were Celtic, Saxon, Teutonic, or Norman. Northernness was, therefore, a unifying factor that would allow all the European inhabitants of Canada to share a common national identity. Not everyone agreed with this view. It co-existed uneasily with more aggressively anti-Catholic and anti-French attitudes toward who belonged to the nation.⁶ Moreover, in the years

since the Rebellions, French Canadians had reacted to Durham's criticism by energetically commemorating their own history and culture in North America and by articulating their own vision of Canadian identity. Young French Canadian intellectuals took Lord Durham's accusations as a challenge to demonstrate the existence of a French Canadian national culture. This had resulted, for instance, in the publication of F.-X. Garneau's *Histoire du Canada, depuis sa découverte jusqu'à nos jours* (1845); the first novels of the land (roman du terroir), such as Patrice Lacombe's *La terre paternelle* (1846) and Pierre Chauveau's *Charles Guérin* (1846); and the patriotic poetry of Octave Crémazie.⁷ The Institut canadien, formed in 1844, had become an influential platform for liberal, patriotic, and intellectual debate, and an opposing vision of French Canadian culture had been promoted by the ultramontane clergy, who encouraged French Canadians to turn inward and identify themselves with the land and their special religious mission. However, by the time divisions between French and English Canada reached a head in the aftermath of the North West Rebellion in 1885, it was the image of the physically robust, English-speaking "Johnny Canuck" that had been disseminated abroad and had become the popular cartoon symbol of Canadian nationhood.⁸ There are many theories about the origin of the term "Canuck." It was used in New England as a possibly offensive term for French Canadians, but when the figure of Johnny Canuck appeared in English-language newspaper cartoons in the 1860s, he was a personification of Canada depicted as "a wholesome, if simpleminded young man wearing the garb of a habitant, farmer, logger, rancher or soldier ... often drawn resisting the blandishments or bullying of John Bull or Uncle Sam."⁹ It is the transformation from *canadien* to Canuck that this study examines. What, then, were the values and stereotypes that British immigrants brought with them to the colony? What did Lord Durham have in mind when he prescribed a dose of "English character" to "elevate" French Canadians? The physical, moral, and mental qualities that made Britain so dominant and (in British eyes) such a civilizing force in the nineteenth century were described by Samuel Smiles, a well-known moralist and reformer, in his book *Self Help: With Illustrations of Conduct and Perseverance* (1866). He asserted that national character depended on individual character. He explained that "national progress is the sum of individual industry, energy, and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness, and vice."¹⁰ The belief in the value of independence, industry, self-discipline, and moral behaviour was part and parcel of middle-class Victorian respectability, while order and progress were essential ingredients of British rule throughout the empire. These

were all qualities that Victorians believed to be inculcated by sport, so this is one of the cultural sites I examine. Specifically, I trace how the Indigenous cultural activities of snowshoeing, lacrosse, and tobogganing were appropriated and adapted as Canadian sports. Beginning in 1840, sports clubs emerged – initially in Montreal but shortly thereafter in other major cities and towns¹¹ – in which British colonists “elevated” these activities by transforming them into modern, organized sports through the imposition of rules and regulations.¹² Since the clubs were the preserve of the growing numbers of merchants, businessmen, professionals, and managers, they promoted middle-class values. They valorized order and discipline, stamina and pluck, moral virtue and fair play, and through them members constructed class and gender identities, as well as coming to see themselves as members of a new nation with characteristics that differentiated them from the British and the Americans. In individual and club portraits, newspaper illustrations, and textual representations of public spectacles and military actions, we can see this new nationality being promoted and displayed to a wider audience at the Montreal Winter Carnivals held in the 1880s and being put to the test in the Rebellion of 1885.

People rarely articulate or record verbally how they perceive themselves as national subjects, so I trace the way British colonists came to feel and think of themselves as Canadian by looking at how they represented themselves visually and how this identity was envisioned, performed, and disseminated. The nature of identity might be posited on an ideological or intellectual level, but it does not become an identity until it is made real through cultural practices, which in turn construct identity in relation to and against others. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the construction of national identity at the level of everyday practices of ordinary people rather than at the level of the political, legislative, or economic elite. My historical sources are therefore primarily visual images – particularly photographs and illustrations in the popular press – along with contemporary accounts of visual spectacles. I have focused my analysis on four cultural sites: Montreal sports clubs, photographs of sportsmen taken at the William Notman Photographic Studio, the Montreal Winter Carnivals, and representations of the North West Rebellion.

In taking this approach, I am indebted to Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities” and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger’s concept of “invented traditions,” which are theoretical touchstones for any discussion of nations, nationalism, and national identity.¹³ They moved

attention away from the discussion of nationalism as a political and intellectual force, understanding it instead as a social and cultural construct. This study is greatly indebted to both concepts, while simultaneously departing from them. If communities are “imagined,” they are also “envisioned” because mental imagery combines both visual and verbal representational systems.¹⁴ So, whereas Anderson and others have examined the construction of national identity through Protestantism and print-capitalism, I show how it was also envisioned (represented visually) through visual images and realized (made real) through performative acts.¹⁵ The concept of “the nation” as the product of a collection of “invented traditions” that inculcate particular values and norms of behaviour has been equally fruitful. Through repetition of these ritual or symbolic practices, continuity with the past is implied and constructed, and by inserting these new traditions into a real or invented historic past, the nation is naturalized and legitimized. This is immensely useful as an explanation of how national subjects come to feel themselves part of the nation. Judith Butler takes this one step further by arguing that identity has no essential or natural existence but is something we put on or perform; it is the act of performing that constitutes who we are.¹⁶ To create and maintain the fiction that a certain privileged and therefore powerful identity is “natural,” this performance has to be continually repeated and can be challenged or changed by a different or alternative performance. She further adds that “an account of ... [identity] as ritualized, public performance must be combined with an analysis of the political sanctions and taboos under which that performance may and may not occur within the public sphere free of punitive consequence.”¹⁷ Thus performative acts are social acts that are shared with the collective and require an audience in order to produce meaning, but they are constrained by the limits of respectable behaviour. I examine each facet of this process, namely the performance of Indigenous activities as individual, physical acts; as visual spectacles observed by audiences; and as representations in photography and the popular press.

Another crucial component of identity in nineteenth-century Canada was religion. Historians of religion agree that all churches promoted loyalty, order, and respectability.¹⁸ But based on their detailed demographic study of Montreal, Sherry Olson and Patricia Thornton caution that culture is a package deal and that religion alone “is not sufficient to define the effective network of group interactions.”¹⁹ Ian McKay has challenged historians further to imagine Canada in the late nineteenth century “as an extensive projection of liberal rule across a large territory” and

to investigate the processes by which a new subjectivity was constructed that internalized and normalized liberal assumptions. He calls for work “on the ways in which Protestantism, British ethnicity and Imperialism fused into the image of the ‘ideal Canadian individual’” – a challenge that I try to take up.²⁰ Although I am convinced that religion was a determining factor in constructing national identity, my primary sources are remarkably quiet on the issue, suggesting that the sports clubs were part of an early secularizing tendency or else that they “managed” religious differences by divorcing religion from their activities. Ethnicity, class, and gender are more evident than religion in my study, but with the unstated assumption that both liberal and religious ideologies were part and parcel of the bundle of interdependent cultural practices that constituted identity. As I will show, it is no coincidence that religion became an issue at points when French Canadian or working-class participants resisted the hegemonic influence of the middle-class, anglophone clubs.

This new “Canadian” identity was a very particular creation in the ways that it was identified, imagined, and manifested. Even though it claimed to be “national,” it was the identity envisioned by a particular class at a particular time and place.²¹ It envisioned an idealized image of what I term a “native Canadian” – that is, an overwhelmingly masculine figure of robust health who delighted in rugged, outdoor physical activity and espoused British ideals of order, hierarchy, and fair play. I derive the term “native Canadian” from the 1860 meeting of “Native Canadians” cited above and use it to refer to British colonists who became indigenized – a transformation in identity that I suggest occurred through participation in Indigenous cultural activities that had been transformed into modern sports. This ideal Canadian was white and conformed to contemporary definitions of middle-class respectability and moral rectitude. Consequently, the performative acts and visual representations that are the subject of this study were agents in the making of this class.²² The men who joined the Montreal Snow Shoe Club after its formation in 1843 did include the occasional scion of one of the elite families, but more usually these men were from a lower social and economic rung, although still able to command respect for their positions as professionals, businessmen, merchants, shop owners, and contractors. With circumstances ranging from wealthy to only just comfortable, they can be considered the emergent urban middle class. The number of men who participated in the early snowshoe and lacrosse clubs was quite limited, but in the course of a few decades, more and more men participated in these sports and adopted the behaviours and values they promoted. Over time, therefore,

the membership of this group widened to encompass men from the lower ranks: bookkeepers, clerks, sales personnel, and other salaried employees who were sons of members or worthy young men sponsored by their employers.²³ Furthermore, although the sports clubs catered to and promoted this middle-class constituency, team supporters who did not share their class interests could still identify with the gendered and racialized dimension of the national identity that they constructed. There is no one term that signifies this wide social spectrum of employment and financial status: “middle class” is too vague, and salaried employees could hardly be called “bourgeois.” “Petite bourgeoisie” is the term used by Paul-André Linteau in his history of Montreal,²⁴ but even though it is somewhat more cumbersome, I prefer the covering term “professional and commercial middle classes.” The advantage of this description is that it is less homogenizing; it indicates the employment status of the top ranking members of the group, while the use of the plural hints at the existence of a lower rank that included salaried employees.

Moreover, the ideal Canadian was not neutral but gendered male. Women are largely absent from the narratives of nation building, and women were certainly restricted in how they could participate in the sports activities I examine. In fact, it was precisely because they did *not* participate that “masculinity” could be defined in opposition to “femininity.” When they did participate, it was usually as privileged spectators. Women were desired at snowshoe races and lacrosse matches to witness (and hence memorialize) their men’s exploits and to encourage proper, civilized decorum. Near the end of the period studied, attitudes toward women’s participation in physical activity were changing, and modified participation became more acceptable. This was especially true of a comparison between Canadians and Americans. But the difference between white and Indigenous males widened over time, with Native people increasingly excluded from club sports, just as they were being excluded from white society on a series of Indian reserves. Hence British colonists were not just refashioning the identity of Canadians but also constructing class, gender, and race hierarchies.

The colonial project is two-fold: the colonizers have to dispossess the colonized while establishing a distinctive settler colony in its stead.²⁵ This was complicated in Canada by the fact that there was already a long-established French colonial society in place when the British arrived, so they had *two* Indigenous peoples to conquer and supplant: French Canadians and First Peoples. In order to become naturalized themselves, the British could either incorporate the Indigenous inhabitants into their own

culture and worldview or reject these “others” entirely. Both avenues were problematic. The perceived primitiveness of Native peoples and backwardness of French Canadians would undermine the colonists’ claim to be a civilized nation, but rejecting them entirely would cut colonists off from learning their shared skills and perceived natural affinity with the landscape and would forgo the possibility of appropriating their distinctive characteristics. Ethnologist Eva Mackey contends that national identity in Canada has not been so much about erasing racial and cultural differences as about controlling and managing them.²⁶ I would agree that in this early period, before the massive influx of immigrant settlers that occurred at the end of the century, the domination of French Canadians and Indigenous peoples and the appropriation of their distinctive attributes were central to the colonial project.

British dominance was clearly represented on the sports fields of Montreal. The vast majority of men who played organized sports were English-speaking, many were born in Canada, and some were recent immigrants from the British Isles. Few French Canadians belonged to the Montreal sports clubs between the Rebellions, and even fewer belonged to organizations set up outside Montreal. A few clubs were formed specifically for the French Canadian community, but it was only after 1890 that French Canadians participated in organized sports in numbers comparable to their English-speaking counterparts.²⁷ Consequently, the national identity constructed in Montreal had little direct input from French Canadians, although it did appropriate aspects of French Canadian culture and history. Early visitors to New France and British North America had painted a picture of French Canadians as fun-loving, indolent people, as backward farmers ignorant of the latest developments in agriculture, and as a people held in thrall by their priests and seigneurs – an image popularized in the mid-nineteenth century by the “happy habitant” paintings of Cornelius Krieghoff.²⁸ We will see that British immigrants sought to acquire a similar reputation for hospitality and enjoyment of outdoor recreation, but in other ways this new Canadian national character was constructed in direct contrast to prevailing negative stereotypes about French Canadians. Every public performance of “improved” and “elevated” sports activities was intended to demonstrate both the superiority of British society and culture and the benefit they were having on colonial/national character. At one stroke, this justified British domination of the colony and legitimized claims for its political autonomy. It also marginalized French Canadians and created the perception that if they were not actually dying out, they were at least an increasingly assimilated race.

The other “dying” race to be dispossessed was of course Aboriginal peoples.²⁹ Despite the importance of Native culture and knowledge in facilitating the construction of a new identity, Native peoples were virtually excluded from the records of sports clubs and public spectacles. When they were present, it was to demonstrate the mastery that “native Canadians” had gained over Indigenous activities or to act as exotic spectacles for commercial purposes. Native people’s inferior and subordinate status bore witness to the “natural” superiority of the middle-class white males. The perception of Indigenous peoples as indolent, ignorant, and unmanly was a common trope throughout the British Empire, as was the belief that they were doomed to extinction in the modern world dominated by the progressive British Empire. This functioned to highlight British superiority as well as to construct the ideal of the “manly Englishman.”³⁰ In British North America the same was true. Aboriginal peoples were viewed through the lens of European stereotypes, which imagined Natives as either “noble” or “barbarous” savages. British colonists attempted to become the new “native Canadians” by incorporating the idealized image of the former while rejecting the perceived irrationality and uncivilized behaviour of the latter.

Appropriating and mastering the skills required for travelling and hunting in the bush enabled white colonists to navigate and survive in the North American natural environment.³¹ Taking this one step further, British colonists “improved” on these Native skills by imposing upon them their own notions of science and order. Although in reality snowshoeing, hunting, lacrosse, and tobogganing were not imperative life skills for British colonists living in an urban environment, they were strenuous physical activities akin to the manly sports popularized by British public schools and so were transformed into uniquely Canadian organized sports, governed by rules that ensured discipline and fair play. This intervention justified the colonists’ claim to have invented the sports and legitimized their claim to be “native Canadians.” These physical activities also produced (and allowed for the representation of) the colonists as the ideal national/imperial body. This justified the elevation of colonists above the status of “colonial,” a term that reeked of the same derogatory implications as “provincial.”³² In Britain to be deemed “provincial” was to be dismissed, whether a person or an institution, as backward, uninformed, ignorant of modern progress and technology, far from the centres of power, indolent, deficient in culture, and lacking the niceties of modern urban society. These were precisely the qualities that the British identified with colonists and that colonists in turn identified with Aboriginal

peoples. The sports field was an ideal public arena in which to transmit British values and display industry, energy, and uprightness, and by appropriating and “improving” *Indigenous* activities such as snowshoeing, hunting, lacrosse, and tobogganing, British colonists could demonstrate both how “primitive” these activities were and how the application of British scientific know-how and organization could turn them into modern, progressive sports. Every public performance of these transformed sports was then an object lesson in the superiority of British society and culture and in the progress and advancement made in the colonies due to British influence, as well as living proof of the legitimacy of British rule. The other side of this coin was that by taking up and performing *Indigenous* activities, British colonists could think of themselves as being indigenized and thus take on the identity of “native Canadians.”

So British colonists did not so much assimilate French Canadians and *Indigenous* peoples, making them, in Homi Bhabha’s formulation, “almost the same, but not quite” British; instead, they constructed for themselves a Canadian identity that was almost but not quite Native.³³ What Montreal colonists claimed as “their” national identity was in fact greatly indebted to the very cultures they were at pains to supplant. The new “native Canadian” identity constructed between 1840 and 1885 drew on both metropolitan and *Indigenous* characteristics – reflecting one and rejecting the other while mimicking its activities. Canadian identity was hybrid; it had two poles. It was imbued, as Lord Durham had desired, with British values and the ideology of order, discipline, and fair play, but at the same time it was distinctively Canadian because of the appropriation and transformation of *Indigenous* and indigenizing cultural activities. They were *Indigenous* in that they were activities appropriated from the *Indigenous* peoples (French Canadians and First Peoples) rather than being imported from Europe.³⁴ They were indigenizing in that participation in the sports involved repeated and stylized interaction with the natural environment. Becoming conversant with and comfortable in the colonial landscape was one way colonists could feel themselves to be *indigenous*.³⁵ In effect, performing as a Native made you native. It was ironic that although both French Canadians and Natives were subordinated and marginalized, it was the cultural traditions of these “others” that provided the distinctive characteristics of a new Canadian identity.

The term “Canadian” is slippery when used in the context of the nineteenth century. Before Confederation in 1867, it referred to the United Province of Canada, which consisted of Canada East (formerly Lower Canada) and Canada West (formerly Upper Canada). After 1867 it applied

to the whole of the new Dominion of Canada, which consisted of the Canadas plus Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and by 1873 the new provinces of Manitoba, British Columbia, and Prince Edward Island as well as the lands in the North West acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company. Thus "Canadian" lost its original sense and was used instead as an umbrella term for a much larger territory. The rhetorical effect was to impose a central Canadian identity on provinces that in actuality already had, or were developing, their own identities. This ambiguity was evident even before 1867, as witnessed by the dispute over the qualification of a "Native Canadian." In the interests of economy, the term "Canadian national identity" is employed in this study but with the understanding that what constituted Canada and what constituted the nation were in flux.

Use of the term "British" also needs justification. There has been considerable debate about the validity of referring to a "British" identity in the nineteenth century given that Ireland, Scotland, England, and Wales each had its own national identity.³⁶ Linda Colley argues that a sense of "Britishness" emerged in the eighteenth century as a consequence of the series of wars that Britain fought between 1689 and 1815. The experience of fighting a common enemy and of being exiled from home made Britishness a viable identity; it allowed the inhabitants of the British Isles "to focus on what they had in common, rather than on what divided them."³⁷ It has also been argued that Britishness was a product of empire.³⁸ In practice, there was much ambiguity in contemporary usage of the term. Victorian travellers from England, Scotland, and Wales carried passports stating they were "British subjects," and they were universally thought of as "English" by Europeans because of their common language,³⁹ but how they styled themselves changed depending on the circumstances. In political, military, commercial, imperial, or geographic contexts, they showed a shared sense of Britishness. But when the context was personal or had to do with specific cultural characteristics, they referred to their regional identity.⁴⁰ If we generalize this finding to North America, it explains very nicely the "in-between" situation of my Montreal subjects. When it was beneficial or a matter of patriotism, colonists assumed their British connection.⁴¹ Yet in local matters, in family and leisure activities, in fraternal organizations, and in other cultural circumstances, colonists identified themselves as Scots or English or Irish or, I would add, Canadian.⁴² For simplicity's sake, when referring to my subjects in general, I use the covering term "British" since they were from various parts of the British Isles.

I should make a point here about intentionality. I try to make it clear throughout that I am not claiming my subjects always self-consciously

intended to act as object lessons, or to indigenize themselves, or even to turn themselves into “Canadians” – although I will point out times when this was the case. Instead, I see them as acting consciously and unconsciously in ways that seemed “natural” to them. My objective is to examine what activities came to be naturalized and how they worked to construct meaning for the individual actors and their audiences. My methodological and theoretical approach draws on the now not-so-new “new” cultural history, which was fuelled by the fields of linguistics and cultural studies.⁴³ Insights from cultural studies have been particularly important in shaping my work, notably the notion that people are active agents in their own lives and the recognition that culture does not just reflect other forces in society but is itself a realm in which meanings are constructed and contested. As Raymond Williams points out, “culture” is one of the most complex words in the English language.⁴⁴ I am using it in the sense that culture is the forum in which a society’s discourses are realized and, at the same time, is the product of those discourses.⁴⁵ I use the term “discourse” to mean a coherent body of ideas and statements that produces a “self-confirming account of reality by defining an object of attention and generating concepts with which to analyze it.”⁴⁶ When discourses are put into practice, they materialize and institutionalize those bodies of knowledge within a social, political, and economic context. Thus discursive practices work in a subtle and systemic fashion; they are an “invasion from within,” to use James Axtell’s term in a different context.⁴⁷ The ways that sports, public spectacles, and military actions were practised and represented constituted strands in the bundle of discursive practices that accomplished the two-fold colonial project in Canada.⁴⁸

The linguistic “turn” and cultural studies have also disrupted art history and spawned the field of media studies. The modernist dichotomy between high art and low art has become an anachronism, and many art historians would subscribe to Griselda Pollock’s claim that “art is constitutive of ideology; it is not merely an illustration of it.”⁴⁹ Visual images are receiving more attention from historians, but they are still generally being employed as illustrations rather than as objects of analysis. Even in picture histories, this is the approach taken.⁵⁰ I come to this study as a historian with graduate-level training in art history, and I draw on the tools and insights of this new art history to employ visual images as historical primary sources, including photographs, carnival brochures, sports club records, newspaper reports, and illustrated periodicals. I construe “the visual” widely to include visual spectacles such as sports events, parades, theatrical presentations, and civic celebrations. These events were ephemeral and have

come down to us represented in visual images and texts that were mediated three times – once by the actor(s), a second time by the recorder, and a third time in the mind of the viewer. As such, they are not so much objective records or reflections of social reality as enactments of discourses – the performance of a negotiated script for a knowing audience. The art historical tools of formal analysis of composition and use of light, colour, and line as well as consideration of representational style, genre, pose, and scale reveal the decisions and mediations made by the producers of the images.⁵¹

Once we have “seen through” the representational strategies employed in these texts – whether they be written or visual – we can analyze the structures within them that create meaning and trace how the same representational strategies operate in other spheres of practice.⁵² James R. Ryan, for instance, argues that the ideologies of imperialism were articulated and sustained by photographic practices.⁵³ My objective is to interpret not just the meaning of cultural products but also how they represented meaning to their participants and audiences. It is therefore necessary to subject visual sources to the same rhetorical and textual examination that we would apply to the analysis of written documents. Issues of genre, context, authorship, production, circulation, and reception all have to be considered for visual images, just as they do for textual ones.⁵⁴ By understanding images as mediated representations rather than objective records, historians can be more sophisticated in their use of visual images as primary documents for historical study. This book is offered in part as an example of how this might be done.

The Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes three peoples as Aboriginal in Canada: Indians, Métis, and Inuit. Although they have no legal definition, the terms Indigenous, First Peoples, and Native are also commonly used to refer collectively to the descendants of the original peoples of North America, and I have used them interchangeably. I use the term First Nations to refer specifically to those Aboriginal people who are not Métis or Inuit. Contemporaries invariably used “Indians,” “red-skins,” and other names we now recognize as derogatory and racist, so they will be used only when referring to specific sources.⁵⁵ I reserve the uncapitalized terms “native” and “indigenous” to convey the general sense in which they were used in contemporary sources. Thus when George Beers coined the term “indigenous sports,” he was referring to Native and French Canadian cultural activities that had been turned into European-style sports, and he was also claiming that these were home-grown sports native to Canada. Primary sources in general are quoted verbatim, reproducing the original

spelling, punctuation, and emphasis unless otherwise stated. To avoid peppering the text with inverted commas, I have omitted their use for constructed terms such as “primitive,” “civilized,” “race,” “British,” “Native,” and so on, except where I wish to emphasize the point. I trust the reader will supply them mentally instead.

This is an interdisciplinary project that enters into many debates, so let me sketch out where I place my work and what I consider my contributions to be. Postcolonial studies of imperialism and the intersections of race, gender, and empire have pointed out that colonial identities are multiple, contextual, relational, and always in the process of being remade. Gender and race are “always already” imbricated in national identity, as is social class.⁵⁶ In this study, I foreground national identity but with the awareness that it was bound up with/by those other identities. Primarily, then, this is an investigation of colonialism and national identity in a British white-settler colony. I have responded to Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler’s injunction “to treat metropole and colony in a single analytic field” by examining the complex interplay both between metropole and colony and between colonizer and colonized.⁵⁷ I am contributing a Canadian example to the studies of local encounters that examine “the rule of colonial difference.”⁵⁸ Catherine Hall has demonstrated that “the identity of the colonizer is a constitutive part of Englishness.”⁵⁹ I would argue, equally, that in Montreal the identity of the colonized became a constitutive part of the colonial identity.

I have also relied heavily on Homi Bhabha’s notion that to legitimize their existence, nations have to claim historical roots and continuity in their precolonial past. They do this through the creation of originating myths of origin that are inserted into the national historical narrative, which he calls “narrating the nation.”⁶⁰ Martyn Bowden explains the four-stage process by which myths of origin are formed:

In the first phase (image formation), an indistinct view is formed about the past, from which a complex set of symbols emerge, which in turn fictionalize the initial experience of the society in either positive or negative images. In the second phase (myth creation), a historically suitable interpretation takes form to explain this experience and the role it played in the development of that particular society. It often benefits from a critical event such as the publication of a book with a wide readership. In the third phase (invented tradition), this interpretation is taken for granted by most writers, who assume it to be “fact,” and who perpetuate the interpretation

through repetition. In the fourth phase (universalization), the interpretation becomes a paradigm.⁶¹

The first phase, in which Europeans formed images of Native peoples in the course of exploring the New World, has been well documented.⁶² In particular, the competing stereotypes of “noble” and “barbarous” savage were central to the repertoire of mental images that governed the way British immigrants interpreted their experiences in British North America. Likewise, they formed preconceptions about the other inhabitants they encountered. French Canadians were viewed as backward-looking and primitive people, wedded to a rural agricultural lifestyle and unable to capitalize on modern industrial developments. In contrast, the British saw themselves as progressive, scientific, and business-savvy. French Canadians had a corresponding image of themselves and the British but with a different interpretation. They saw their agricultural past as a rural utopia that had been disrupted and usurped by the predatory British invaders. These competing images were consolidated as myth by F.-X. Garneau and Lord Durham in their respective publications. How these myths of origin were built on, worked out, and appropriated as invented traditions in the construction of competing national identities is another focus of this book.

Whether it was through the communal act of remembering a “real” past or through the construction of myths of origin for an imagined nation, I show that writing a history of *British* North America was a constituting element of the Canadian national identity that evolved in the period under study. To construct a new narrative of nation that would validate British rule, the histories of both Native peoples and the French Regime were appropriated and elided by English-speaking colonizers. Hence the history that these new “Canadians” wrote was not, as Frantz Fanon has pointed out, “the history of the country which [they plundered] ... but the history of [their] ... own nation.”⁶³ Writing history was another of the discursive practices that produced Canada as a body of knowledge and thereby naturalized and legitimized the exercise of both imperial and colonial power. My discussion therefore makes a modest contribution to the growing body of work by historians such as Cecilia Morgan, Patrice Groulx, Donald Wright, and Alan Gordon, who examine the writing of Canadian history and public commemoration in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁴

Montreal is the geographic focus of my study for several reasons. It was there that Indigenous sports were appropriated and transformed on a large scale by first- and second-generation British immigrants who rejected the imported British sports played by the elite and visiting British

military. It was Montreal where the effects of industrialization were first manifested in British North America and where cultural and political tensions among the British and French were most directly felt.⁶⁵ During the period studied, the number of anglophones fell below that of the francophone population for the first time, and in 1880 anglophones lost control of the municipal government.⁶⁶ The co-existence of four ethnic groups – French, English, Scottish, and Irish – two language blocks, and two major religious denominations created tensions. In addition, Montrealers were in close contact with inhabitants of two nearby Native reserves at Caughnawaga (present-day Kahnawake) and St. Regis (Akwesasne), who regularly attended city markets to sell craft items. This means that Montreal was what Mary-Louise Pratt calls a “contact zone,” where transculturation (or cross-cultural exchange) happened.⁶⁷ Moreover, Montreal was an immigration centre, so the need to differentiate oneself from “others” was much more pressing for Montrealers than for citizens of urban centres with a more homogeneous population. The need for a “native Canadian” identity may have been a way to create unity between Scottish, Irish, and English immigrant groups as well as a way to differentiate “Canadians” from Natives, French Canadians, Britons, and Americans.⁶⁸ This is not to say that this happened only in Montreal. Clearly, the desire for a distinctive identity was felt elsewhere too, as witnessed by the objectives of the Toronto meeting. The illustrated periodical that is the primary source for Chapter 5 further demonstrates the connection between Montreal and Toronto because many of the reports and images reproduced and circulated by the Toronto publishers were taken from Montreal newspapers.

Chapter 1 traces the beginnings of Canadian sport history to the snowshoe clubs that emerged in Montreal in 1840. The Act of Union was passed in that year in an attempt to deal with the recent social disorders. It united the old provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, but they nevertheless maintained separate identities as Canada West and Canada East. This political divide was reflected in a social and ethnic divide in the clubs. I discuss the exclusive makeup of club membership and the middle-class nature of the values and behaviours promulgated within them. Dressed in their characteristic uniforms, snowshoers were engaged in a cultural performance that emulated life in the fur trade and provided an indigenizing experience in a national landscape.

Through examination of a series of photographs of staged hunting trips, I discuss in Chapter 2 the construction of the idealized figure of the “Great Northern Hunter,” which I suggest was the visual vocabulary that formed the basis for Haliburton’s vision of Canadian “Men of the North.”

Owing to photographer William Notman's efforts at self-promotion, these particular images were seen by a huge international audience and thereby propagated widely a particular image of Canadians. Whereas hunting had been an activity available to all classes, imposition of the British ideology of sport hunting restricted its use. In Chapter 3 I show how the new nationality was displayed and acted out on the lacrosse field. Lacrosse was a "primitive" Native ritual that was "tamed" and "civilized" through the imposition of rules and regulations. It was the means by which the male body was re(s)trained "scientifically." Women were desirable spectators whose presence provided an aura of respectability and emphasized the masculinity of the game, but Natives – the original players – were excluded. Furthermore, by taking teams abroad, Dr. W. George Beers publicized and enshrined lacrosse as Canada's "National Game."

Readers may wonder why hockey is not included in a text examining winter sports. Simply put, ice hockey may have been played informally during the period between the Rebellions, but it was rarely mentioned in the public discourse of sport and identity during the period under study. Ice hockey began to emerge as an organized sport in Montreal in the 1870s, with the first recognized game being played at the Victoria Rink in 1875 and the first club being formed in 1882. Over the next decade, standardized rules were worked out. A hockey tournament was held at the 1883 Winter Carnival, and this publicity led to increased interest in the game. In 1886 the Amateur Hockey Association of Canada was formed, and ice hockey began to spread across the country. The game really took off after Lord Stanley presented his Cup in 1888. So after 1885, while lacrosse was losing support because of dissension over amateurism and violence, ice hockey was growing in popularity among a wider range of groups – not just the middle classes who figure in this study but also teams made up of workers, French Canadians, and even "other" groups such as the Eureka and Young Jubilees who played for the Coloured Championship of Halifax and Dartmouth in 1895.⁶⁹ Ice hockey took over from lacrosse and snowshoeing as the modern home-grown sport, becoming emblematic of Canada in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It was a perfect expression of "native Canadian" identity. It was played on the natural ice abundantly available in the Canadian climate, and it was an indigenous game, invented and played by Canucks – the British "native Canadians" who were now the true Canadian indigenes.

Since identity is not just embodied and enacted by individuals but also needs to be displayed and acclaimed by an audience, the means by which

the proposed national identity produced through snowshoeing, hunting, and lacrosse was disseminated via public spectacle are examined in Chapter 4. The repertoire of public performances invented by the snowshoe clubs in the 1870s formed the basis of the program for the five Winter Carnivals held in Montreal in the 1880s. Turning from the visual record to textual representations of public spectacles, I show that, although the organizers strove to convey the impression of social and cultural unity for foreign visitors, different and often conflicting meanings were constructed by performers and local spectators. The social and ethnic cracks visible in the 1885 carnival were deepened in the events of the North West Rebellion later that spring. In Chapter 5 I analyze a series of representations of the Rebellion published in the popular press. The viability of the national identity constructed in Montreal was tested in 1885, when Canadians watched themselves being Canadian in the pages of the popular press. When a nation-state perceives itself to be threatened, it is its ability to inspire citizens to “make the ultimate sacrifice” that is a test of nationhood. I show that the new Canadian state passed this test. The successful defeat of the Métis and Native peoples in the North West in 1885 marked an important moment in the construction of Canadian identity. On the battle fields in the West, men from diverse regions of the Dominion came together as Canadians and showed their ability and character. The suppression of the Rebellion was portrayed as a Canadian venture, in which success was achieved through Canadian rather than British leadership. The soldiers overcame the enemy and proved able to survive even in the worst conditions; they showed themselves to be true “sons of the soil,” real “native Canadians.” As a result, the internal boundaries of the nation were redrawn and colonial rule could be renounced. I contend that 1885 marked Canada’s cultural birth, which coincided with the initiation of activities by the Imperial Federation League. Once the Canadian identity had been worked out on the playing fields of Montreal and elsewhere, the new question to be answered after 1885 was what relationship Canada would have with the British Empire.

Although by 1885 the middle-class sports clubs had invented a distinctively Canadian national identity, Lord Durham’s vision had not been totally fulfilled. Canadian character had certainly been redefined as a combination of Anglo-Saxon cultural traits and the vigorous, northern outdoor physique of the Canadian-born male, accented by a soupçon of French Canadian “genial hospitality and domestic joy.”⁷⁰ The contribution of Aboriginal culture was unrecognized, and First Nations had been effectively swept out of view on reserves. Even so, this putative national

identity was not universally accepted; it was contested and rejected by those French Canadians who asserted their own history, culture, and religious identity and by those immigrants who saw themselves as British subjects rather than Canadians. French Canadian identity had not been submerged, nor had the French population been overwhelmed politically. Haliburton's pan-Canadian formula neither reconciled French and English nor won the emerging struggle between Canadian nationalists and British imperialists. Even so, a transformation in Canadian identity did occur between 1840 and 1885. This book attempts to trace the process by which this was effected, looking especially at the contribution of sport, visual culture, and public spectacle in the task of becoming native in a foreign land.

CHAPTER I

“Brave North Western Voyageurs”: Snowshoeing in Montreal

Human lives are shaped not only ... by the ideas we have in our minds, but even more by the actions we perform with our bodies ... we constitute ourselves through our action.

Tom F. Driver, *The Magic of Ritual*

CHEERS, APPLAUSE, AND a rousing rendition of “God Save the Queen” filled the air in November 1878 as the royal carriage passed under the ceremonial arch erected and manned by dozens of men dressed in the uniform of the Montreal Snow Shoe Club in honour of the arrival of the newly appointed governor general of Canada, His Excellency the Marquis of Lorne, and his wife, Her Royal Highness Princess Louise (Figure 1.1). To be sure, triumphal or commemorative arches were not a new feature of public celebrations in nineteenth-century Canadian cities. In Montreal they were erected at significant sites along the route of the annual Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day parade, and elsewhere they were potent political symbols for groups such as the Orange Order. Elaborate arches decorated with evergreen boughs, flags, royal emblems, and crests had been positioned at significant sites along routes taken by both the Prince of Wales and Prince Arthur during their visits in 1860 and 1870, but this was the first one built specifically by snowshoers. Moreover, it was not just a flimsy little structure but a tripartite triumphal arch covered with green boughs, with a circular arch in the centre and a tower on either side. “A Hearty Welcome” was emblazoned across the top around a rosette of snowshoes, dozens more snowshoes and lacrosse sticks decorated the surface, and the Union Jack and Red Ensign flew overhead. The novel aspect of the design was that members of the Montreal Lacrosse Club and



FIGURE 1.1 *Illustration: A Hearty Welcome. The Graphic* (London), 28 December 1878. | Source: Library and Archives Canada, Montreal Amateur Athletic Association fonds, MG28 I351, vol. 16, Scrapbook 2, 188.

members of the Montreal Snow Shoe Club, all dressed in their snowshoe costumes, had climbed up onto the structure and were waving heartily, creating a “living arch.”¹

In subsequent years, snowshoe arches became a regular feature of major Montreal civic celebrations because they were a satisfying solution to the problem of displaying Canadian identity. In 1840 Lord Durham had sought to impose English character on the French-speaking inhabitants of the United Province of Canada and to swamp them politically and demographically in a sea of British settlers. This presented the new British colonists with a challenge: how to become “Canadian” and how to show French Canadians how to be British Canadians. In the political realm, this embroiled provincial politicians in a struggle against the British Colonial Office for the right to responsible government – a struggle that was, nevertheless, in line with British beliefs in the principles of parliamentary democracy. In asserting the right of provincial legislatures to self-determination and rule by elected representatives, British colonists were asserting their identity as a special type of Briton and, in contrast to the United States, as a special type of North American.

But national identity is not just a political construct; to be realized (made real), it must be imagined and envisioned, embodied and performed by national subjects. Further, this performance has to be witnessed, accepted, and emulated by an audience in order to achieve widespread recognition that it constitutes a distinctive national identity. Therefore, to find out how people came to feel and know themselves to be “Canadian,” we need to look beyond the political to the cultural realm and to sources that indicate how people *represented* themselves as Canadian. For anglophone immigrants and the new Canadian state, creating a national identity was problematic. Internationally, it had to distinguish Canadians from the British and Americans, with whom they shared a language and cultural and political traditions. It is certainly true that “British liberties” were highly prized and seen as a point of difference from the United States. But a British-style parliament and shared monarch gave rise to the problem of how to assert Canadian autonomy and independence and how to distinguish the nation from its imperial parent. What form that autonomy would take, whether Canada would become part of a continental union, and on what terms she would retain her imperial umbilical cord were all hotly debated, as Carl Berger shows in *The Sense of Power*.² Domestically, the foreseen national identity had to unify English, Scottish, and Irish immigrants, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, as well as incorporate French Canadians and Aboriginal peoples, all of whom were

proving difficult to assimilate. Montreal was the place where the cultural and political tensions between colonizer and colonized were most directly felt, and this relationship was made more complex by the fact that French Canadians were not only colonized subjects but also had themselves been the original colonizers of New France.

By the time of the British Conquest in 1760, the long history of settlement in New France meant that French Canadians felt themselves to be as much native "sons of the soil" as the Native peoples they had colonized. Nevertheless, by 1885 Canadian-born descendants of immigrants from the British Isles also felt they had a legitimate claim to call themselves "native Canadians."³ The snowshoe arches provide clues to the ways that Montrealers grappled with the problem of distinguishing themselves from Britons and Americans to forge the "new nationality" called for by Thomas D'Arcy McGee and Robert Grant Haliburton. Mingled together on these structures were decorative elements chosen by the clubs as suitable symbols characteristic of both Canada and Britain. The evergreen boughs, snowshoes, and lacrosse sticks referred to the environment and Indigenous peoples; the snowshoes and blanket coat uniform referred to the fur trade and French Canadian culture; and the flags, royal emblems, and national anthem proclaimed loyalty to the queen and empire. As they stood waving from atop the arch, the club members were displaying the constituents of their new hybrid identity, central to which was the appropriation and transformation of the Indigenous activities of lacrosse and snowshoeing.

THE MONTREAL SNOWSHOE CLUBS

Snowshoeing was the first Indigenous activity to be taken up by British colonists. The earliest sports clubs formed in British North America had promoted the favourite sports brought across the ocean by newly arrived Scottish, English, and Irish colonists. For instance, the Montreal Curling Club was established in 1807, to be joined in 1829 by the Hunt Club. Cricket was played wherever the military was garrisoned, and cricket and football were played in the private schools. Snowshoeing began as an organized sport in 1840, when a group of twelve young Montrealers began meeting together on Saturday afternoons to tie on snowshoes for a ten- or twelve-mile tramp in the environs of the city.⁴ By this time the fur trade era was beginning to draw to a close, and because of increasing settlement in the St. Lawrence Valley, the network of roads was making the cart or sleigh a popular and viable means of transport. Snowshoes,

the indispensable winter tool of the Nor'Westers, were already becoming an anachronism in the developing urban areas and were no longer a necessity but a *divertissement*.⁵ Yet we can imagine that the young men of the newly united Province of Canada who read about the life of traders like John Jacob Astor or read the journals of explorers such as Sir Alexander MacKenzie may have yearned to share the thrill and adventure of the fur traders and explorers and to earn respect and renown by participating in the same heroic activities.⁶ Thomas Carlyle's *On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) and his admiration for men of strength, energy, and action were particularly influential, and this admiration was taken up and elaborated by Charles Kingsley in advocating "muscular Christianity."⁷ Physical prowess as demonstrated through sport was thus an avenue by which young Montrealers could show their worth.

In 1843 the Montreal Snow Shoe Club (MSSC) was officially organized and began to hold annual competitive races. During the next two decades, ten more clubs were started, although some, like the Beaver, Aurora, and Dominion clubs, had a fleeting existence of only a few seasons.⁸ During the winter season a group of MSSC members would muster every Wednesday evening at their club rooms on Mansfield Street (see map in front matter, 6G) for a tramp to an inn or hotel, and on Saturday afternoons they might go for a longer tramp outside the city. Until the first snow, they walked to their destination via the Côte-des-Neiges road (see map, 3F), but once snow had fallen members donned their snowshoes and began their regular weekly tramp over the mountain. At their destination they enjoyed a meal followed by some merrymaking before their return home. Enthusiasm for the sport increased over time, and by the 1880s snowshoeing was at the peak of its popularity in Montreal and other major Canadian towns and cities. In the mid-1880s there were approximately twenty-five clubs in Montreal, of which the MSSC alone had 1,100 active members.⁹ The possibility of enjoying this activity was limited, however, to a privileged sector of society, for membership in the nineteenth-century snowshoe clubs was contingent upon social class, race, and gender.

Between 1840 and 1860 Montreal was emerging as an industrialized city, and her citizens were regrouping to form new alliances along ethnic and class lines in order to fit changing working and living conditions. Population was doubling every twenty years and industrialization was rapid, fuelled by changes in manufacturing technology and power supply. By 1871, 40 percent of the industrial workers in the St. Lawrence Valley worked in Montreal. Population increases also stimulated the expansion

of the market economy, and the number of merchants throughout the region grew faster than the total population. Sixty-four percent of them were in business in the Montreal area, where 54 percent of the population of Quebec lived.¹⁰ Historian Andrew Holman characterizes Canadian society in this period as "a democracy with ranks," in which there was opportunity for social mobility in either direction, and the high number of business failures in the period attests to the latter point.¹¹ Before industrialization, land and old wealth had legitimized social dominance, but the growing group of men made wealthy through business enterprises now challenged the old hierarchies. Professional men – lawyers, doctors, engineers, and architects – who had once served and identified with the aristocracy, now saw their interests shared more closely by the new entrepreneurial classes and formulated their own ideal of service as justification for working for a living. Small-scale entrepreneurs – merchants, storekeepers, contractors, and businessmen – as well as salaried managers, journalists, accountants, and clerks, shared the liberal leanings of the professional men and saw themselves as distinct from both the landed elite and the working poor. It was this middling group, which I describe as the professional and commercial middle classes, that made up the bulk of sports club membership in the second half of the nineteenth century. Club membership was a way for these men to publicly claim and display their status. Inspired by liberal individualism and evangelical zeal, the members jealously guarded their reputations as respectable, hard-working citizens. This distinguished them from the ultra-rich, members of what Brian Young calls "the patrician elite,"¹² namely the wealthiest, most powerful, and most well-connected families, such as the McCords, the Molsons, the Redpaths, and the Allans. These families were a colonial aristocracy, and their interests and allegiances were often oriented toward Britain rather than Canada. They belonged to exclusive sports clubs such as the Montreal Hunt Club or the Montreal Curling Club that promoted British rather than Indigenous sports, and they were much less interested in asserting their Canadian identity than they were in maintaining their ties and allegiances to England.¹³ As a commentator in the *Toronto Globe* so aptly put it, "Though living among the other settlers they were not of them."¹⁴ In contrast, the vast majority of members of the snowshoe clubs were either new immigrants from the British Isles or Canadian-born, English-speaking Montrealers who felt strong ties of loyalty to the empire while still desiring to make for themselves an identity as Canadians, as demonstrated by the public debate over the participation and identity of "native Canadians."¹⁵

French Canadians made up only a small percentage of club members, even though they constituted almost half of the population of Montreal at mid-century. They were not actively discouraged from joining, but the need to be sponsored by two existing members mitigated against their membership, as did the fact that there were far fewer francophones than anglophones in the professional and commercial middle classes, which accounted for the bulk of snowshoe club memberships. Sports facilities were concentrated in the anglophone West End of Montreal, and clubs often appealed to specific constituencies (the St. George's, St. Andrew's, and Emerald clubs would hardly have appealed to French Canadians), so this too mitigated against francophone participation. Exclusively French Canadian clubs such as *Le Trappeur* and *L'Union Commerciale* were not formed until the end of the 1870s and gained greater popularity in connection with the Winter Carnivals in the 1880s. Admittedly, the Canadian Snow Shoe Club was founded in 1870 "in the hope that it might encourage the practice of the sport among young French Canadians," and by 1873 half of its fifty members were French-speaking. However, it is apparent from a newspaper account of the annual dinner of that year that the leadership and conduct of the club were dominated by English-speaking members.¹⁶ It was re-formed in 1878 as *Le Canadien*, a French Canadian club.¹⁷ In general, before 1880 French Canadians were either uninterested in participating in snowshoeing, rejected it because it was dominated by anglophones, or were respectful of the Catholic Church's disapproval of organized sports as being a morally dubious and subversive force.¹⁸

What of the original snowshoers? After having lost their status as military allies at the end of the War of 1812, First Nations had been marginalized in Canada East. By 1830 increased immigration from Britain and Ireland had put pressure on land prices, resulting in an overabundance of white, unskilled workers and leaving no place for "others" as wage labourers. Making the situation of First Nations worse, the British government wanted to abolish yearly tribute payments to Native tribes and sought to "protect" Native peoples by removing them to isolated reserve lands, where it was perceived they would not be adversely affected by close contact with Europeans. Native people were not consulted during the Confederation debates, and the British North America Act of 1867 and the Indian Act of 1876 put Native lives and affairs under the control of the Department of Indian Affairs. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of Caughnawaga survived through farming, selling their produce and crafts in Montreal markets, or leaving to work in the forests or on the railways. Performing

at exhibitions and fairs or later in the century in Wild West shows and rodeos was another option chosen by some.¹⁹

Native people initially participated in the annual races that were a feature of the Montreal snowshoeing season but were increasingly excluded when the number of snowshoe clubs grew dramatically after 1868. Whereas in the early years Native people competed with whites in all the events, over time they were restricted to entering a few specific "Indian Races," retained largely because they were a crowd-drawing spectacle. Native people had little power to resist their exclusion but took whatever opportunities they could to turn the situation to their advantage. For instance, at the 1873 Maple Leaf Snow Shoe Club races, the white contestants protested when a race was won by Peter Thomas, a Native snowshoer. The protest was decided in favour of Thomas since the race had been advertised as "open," although the race organizers had intended this to mean open to members of other clubs. Thomas had challenged this by entering the race, and the principle of fair play overrode racism in this case.²⁰ It was probably not a coincidence that shortly afterward the Montreal Pedestrian Club became the first Canadian sports club to adopt a definition of amateur status. This excluded anybody who had ever competed for money, or had ever been paid for any reason in connection with athletics, or "is a labourer or Indian." This effectively disqualified all the celebrated Indian runners, snowshoers, and lacrosse players.²¹ There was further controversy at the 1875 Caledonia Snow Shoe Club races over the running of the "Indian race" owing to a rumour that the first and second contestants had shared the prize money. White members were "outraged," mostly through fear that this would have a deleterious effect on the viability of the races because the "Indian races form one of the attractions of a snowshoe race, and should be contested fairly and honestly." Even more blatantly contrary to white intentions was the running of the Indian race at the 1875 Grand Military races, when the leading snowshoer fell and the next runner waited for him and let himself be overtaken, thus losing the race. Although the protestations made by white commentators in these cases were probably the result of concern over fair *gambling*, they were couched in terms of the need for fair *play*. At other times, for instance when Native snowshoers entered the "open" race or when players did not "dress up" as the white man's Indian, Native people refused to be complicit in their own oppression. This, for instance, led white commentators to complain that the war costume worn by Natives in the Ottawa Snow Shoe races of 1873 "was not calculated to strike awe into the hearts of strangers."²²

Women were generally excluded from participation in the snowshoe clubs and team sports because they were considered unsuited to women's supposed physical and mental frailty. Members of "the fair sex" were mostly associated with snowshoeing as desired spectators, especially at the annual club races, when efforts were made to make them more comfortable by spreading the stand with tarpaulin.²³ On occasion, clubs grudgingly made room for female guests at their banquets. The MSSC instituted a ladies' night dinner once a year but not until 1884; Le Trappeur held a ladies' night at Frigon's, Back River, in January 1885; and ladies were invited to dinner by the Winnipeg branch of the St. George's Snow Shoe Club after the annual steeplechase.²⁴

It is unclear when women began actively snowshoeing with the clubs. An illustration titled "Snowshoeing with a chaperone on the mountain at Montreal" by Charles Caleb Ward is dated 1841,²⁵ and a letter in the *Montreal Gazette* indicates that women were snowshoeing in small parties, albeit "accompanied with a protective male friend," as early as 1842. The writer was decidedly against this practice, however, on the grounds that it was not exercise "fitted for ladies, even as matter of healthful amusement, nor ... affording the most advantageous display of the graces on their part."²⁶ In an article entitled "Canada in Winter," first published in 1863, Dr. W. George Beers, a Montreal dentist and sport journalist whose name and articles will be referred to repeatedly in my discussions, mentioned that there were "in the aristocratic clubs many lady members who are proficient in the sport."²⁷ In an 1877 article entitled "Canadian Sports," he further remarked: "A few years ago a party of Quebec ladies tramped on snowshoes into the bush with their husbands, camped for two nights in the snow, and returned better than ever."²⁸ The Prince of Wales Ladies Snow Shoe Club existed briefly in 1861, but it was not until a decade or so later that women participated in any number, and even then they were confined to "strolling" or spectating rather than racing. The Holly Snowshoe Club had ladies' nights, and the Emerald Club held monthly ladies' nights when dozens of ladies wearing the blanket costume "mingled with manly forms."²⁹ In any event, by the 1880s some women were active snowshoers, albeit not as club members. In 1889 an illustration from the *Dominion Illustrated Monthly* depicted women snowshoers mustering at the McGill Gates (see map, 6F), and in 1903 N.M. Hinshelwood reported: "the ladies are as enthusiastic as the men."³⁰ At times women were included for the rhetorical purpose of proving the vigorous nature of Canadians as a race. A cartoon of 6 April 1872 in the *Canadian Illustrated News* showed Canadian women as proficient snowshoers, while a male visitor failed miserably,



FIGURE 1.2 *Illustration: A Moonlight Tramp with the Snowshoe Club.* | Source: Library and Archives Canada, *Canadian Illustrated News* 23, 13 (196), 26 March 1881, no. 218.

which indicates that nationality could transcend gender when a patriotic comparison was desired.

To be sure, there was also an element of sexual titillation involved in women participating in the manly sports of snowshoeing and, later, tobogganing. In fact, by the 1880s sports activities had become an opportunity for young people to mix socially. Writing in 1928, W.S. Humphreys claimed that private couples' clubs had existed fifty years earlier, thus affording the opportunity for courting.³¹ This was also the purpose of the skating parties initiated by Lady Dufferin at Rideau Hall in the 1870s, and Beers commented that the skating rink "has become a sociable club for both sexes, where they may meet and enjoy a chat, etc, as well as skate."³² A snowshoe club was even formed to facilitate social intercourse for young Montrealers – the policy of the Mary Bawn Club was apparently to enrol brothers and sisters jointly so that every girl would have an escort on the weekly tramp, but this did not always turn out to be her brother.³³ An illustration in the *Canadian Illustrated News* shows men and women on a romantic moonlight outing in Halifax (Figure 1.2), and the writer of *Bishop's Winter Carnival Illustrated* positively revelled in the titillating possibilities snowshoeing presented for publicly touching female flesh:

“the foot of feminine gender looks its prettiest in a well-fitting moccasin. It is more attractive, and tying on the snowshoe the thongs pass over the arched instep and around the neat ankle; and the strings get loose so often, and the shoe comes off at the fences. Thus the gallantry of the stern escort is called forth very often. In this kind of snowshoe tramp, needless to say, they do not walk in Indian file, they saunter along two by two, and very often continue to do so through their after life.”³⁴

Men, of course, never needed help with their laces!

THE SNOWSHOE COSTUME

Just as snowshoeing was appropriated because it was considered a characteristically Canadian activity, the uniform adopted became a characteristically Canadian “look.” The snowshoe clubs adopted a uniform that consisted of a white blanket coat tied with a long sash around the waist, worn with leggings, moccasins, and tasselled tuque. By the mid-1870s each club had its own distinguishing colour scheme for the epaulets and trim on the coats and for the matching tuque and stockings. Dr. Beers, for instance, was photographed in the William Notman Photographic Studio wearing the uniform of the St. George’s Snow Shoe Club: white coat with distinctive membership badge, purple epaulets, and purple and white tuque (Figure 1.3). Since the snowshoe clubs from time to time made rules regulating the colour, style, and detailing of their respective uniforms and stipulated when they should be worn, it is clear that these clothes were not just everyday winter wear but actually a special set of clothing that one wore when snowshoeing.³⁵ In putting on this uniform, the snowshoe club members were dressing up as “composite natives”: the moccasins and leggings were Aboriginal, the woven sash was a French Canadian *ceinture fléchée*, the tuque was a French liberty cap, and the blanket coat resembled typical habitant winter clothing cut from the blanket cloth associated with the North West fur trade.³⁶

The existence of cross-cultural exchange between Native and European is well recognized, but emphasis is usually placed on the impact of European tools and technology on traditional Native culture. Similarly, attempts to assimilate Indigenous people to white culture have been discussed in many different contexts,³⁷ whereas the cultural appropriations made by Europeans of Indigenous cultural activities and the assimilation to Native culture by the colonizer have “not been made much of,” according to Olive Dickason.³⁸ In snowshoeing, we can see the ways that the



FIGURE 1.3 *Photograph:* William Notman and Henry Sandham, "Dr. W. George Beers, St. George's Snowshoe Club, Montreal, 1881." | *Source:* Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, Montreal, II-60469.1.

culture of the colonized determined national culture. As the British were not the first colonists of North America, in appropriating Native culture they were also appropriating aspects of French Canadian culture. For if we look back in the history of snowshoeing in Canada, we find a succession of erasures. Early explorers who arrived in the New World were at first startled by the strange “guttled shoes” worn by Native peoples but quickly realized what an efficient method of transportation they had devised. During the French Regime, the military, habitant farmers, engagés in the fur trade, and unlicensed coureurs de bois all used snowshoes as a matter of course. So when British merchants and settlers arrived after the Conquest, snowshoes in their eyes were as much an attribute of French Canadian culture as they were of Native peoples, and they considered both groups to be “native.” During his travels in New France in 1750, Peter Kalm remarked on the fact that Natives dressed like the French, but also claimed that the French “dressed much like the Indians.”³⁹ This is illustrated in the increasing conflation of Native and French Canadian figures in paintings made in Quebec by British artists after about 1830. In a watercolour entitled *Canadian Farmer* (Figure 1.4), painted in 1840 by Millicent Mary Chaplin, the clothing of a typical rustic figure made it no longer possible to distinguish between Native, mixed-blood, and French Canadian; a generic Native/farmer figure stood for all.⁴⁰ To be sure, extensive transcultural borrowing had occurred between voyageurs, coureurs de bois, habitants, and Native peoples since the sixteenth century. Both habitants and voyageurs had adopted elements of Aboriginal clothing, particularly in foot and leg wear. Both used pipes and beaded tobacco pouches, and, of course, both had adopted Aboriginal means of transport – birch-bark canoes, snowshoes, and toboggans. The uniform chosen by the snowshoe clubs was remarkably similar to the winter clothing worn by these “Canadians of old.” It also bore a close resemblance to the winter dress of the other “composite natives,” the Red River Métis, as depicted by an 1851 traveller (Figure 1.5). Even the ladies borrowed their dress from Native sources. In John Lesperance’s story *Tuque Bleue: A Christmas Snowshoe Sketch* (1882), a young snowshoer “used to trick herself out in a costume borrowed from the young squaws of Little Lorette – beaded moccasins, chamois leggings, striped petticoat, tasselled sash, checked shawl crossed over the breast, and knitted hood.”⁴¹

As the song “The Snow Shoe Tramp” suggests (see below), the snowshoe club tramps were not just a form of exercise – after all, there were easier ways to travel to an inn or meet friends. One could do gymnastics or bicycle or skate if one wanted exercise, and there was nothing essential



FIGURE 1.4 Watercolour: Millicent Mary Chaplin, *Canadian Farmer*, c. 1838-42. | Source: Library and Archives Canada, Millicent Mary Chaplin fonds, C-000866.



FIGURE 1.5 The notation reads “winter dress of Red river half-breeds – coat of buff. Lappels embroidered on light color’d doe skin – red sash or belt embro^{ed} Buff trousers fringed and garnished – mocassins – fur collar and trimming.”

Drawing: Frank Blackwell Mayer, *Winter Dress of Red River Half-Breeds*, 1851. Ayer Art Mayer Sketch Book No. 44, 9. | Source: Edward E. Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago.

about the snowshoe outfit if socializing or exercising was the goal. Obviously, there was a reason that snowshoers chose to dress up like Canadian Natives, and there was something about the act of snowshoeing that made it a particularly satisfying way to spend leisure time. This could be ascribed to an early emanation of the antimodernist impulse outlined by Jackson Lears; however, it was not associated with the sense of helplessness and cultural confusion he describes, at least in the period before 1885.⁴² In fact, much attention was focused on the advantages and improvements modernization would bring to Indigenous activities. The more immediate explanation seems to be that the snowshoe tramps were cultural performances in which members envisioned themselves as Nor'Western voyageurs. The Nor'Westers were members of the North West Company, which had originated as a loose association of Scottish, English, and French fur traders based in Montreal. They were in competition with the British-run Hudson's Bay Company until the two outfits merged in 1821. Imagining themselves as members of a fur brigade linked snowshoers to the history of the fur trade, in which Native peoples and French Canadians had a shared history. Thus snowshoers were enacting a cultural fiction, and their clothing invented memories of Canada's "olden days," linking British colonists to the Aboriginal and French Canadian past of the continent. Snowshoers positioned themselves within an invented mythological national past and appropriated the visual attributes of both the Aboriginal and French "real" Canadian Natives in order to do so. Organized club snowshoeing functioned to usurp and erase the Aboriginal and French Canadian histories of snowshoeing, rendering them instead as part of the British history of Canada. Organized club snowshoeing therefore allowed colonists to link themselves with selected aspects of the history of the continent, and since the activity itself was Indigenous, performing it naturalized them as "native Canadians," whether they were Canadian-born or not.

THE TRAMPS

The Snow Shoe Tramp

Up! Up! The morn is beaming,
 Through the forest breaks the Sun,
 Rouse ye Sleepers, time for dreaming
 When our daily journey's done.
 Bind the snow shoes,

Fast with thongs too,
 See that all is right and sure.
 All is bliss to, naught's amiss to
 A brave North Western voyageur, oh ...

Chorus:

Tramp, tramp on snow shoes tramping,
 All the day we marching go,
 Till at night by fire's encamping,
 We find couches on the snow.

On, on let men find pleasure
 In the city, dark and drear.
 Life is freedom, life's a treasure,
 As we all enjoy it here.
 Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,
 see the novice down once more;
 Hear him shout then, pull him out then,
 Many a fall he's had before, oh ...

Chorus⁴³

The snowshoe clubs enjoyed a high profile in the social life of the Montreal middle class and reached a wide audience. Their tramps, steeplechases, and race days were regularly reported in the city newspapers, and in the 1870s some of the clubs organized very popular charity concerts at which they sang club songs such as "The Snow Shoe Tramp" and presented re-enactments of their tramps and activities. H.W. Becket was a long-time member of the MSSC executive and compiled a series of scrapbooks documenting the activities of the Montreal Amateur Athletic Association (MAAA), of which the MSSC was a founding member.⁴⁴ Carefully pasted into the pages of the first scrapbook is an illustration published in the *Canadian Illustrated News* entitled *Grand Concert of the Montreal Snow-Shoe Club, at the Academy of Music*, which took place on 25 January 1878 (Figure 1.6). This composition of eight vignettes tells the story of a typical snowshoe tramp. It is the final stage in a series of re-presentations: it represents the concert tableaux, which represented the real club tramps, which were themselves enactments of an imagined history of the new Dominion of Canada and its Canadian inhabitants.

The concert was organized as a series of *tableaux vivants* interspersed with solos and choruses sung by members of the MSSC and designed to

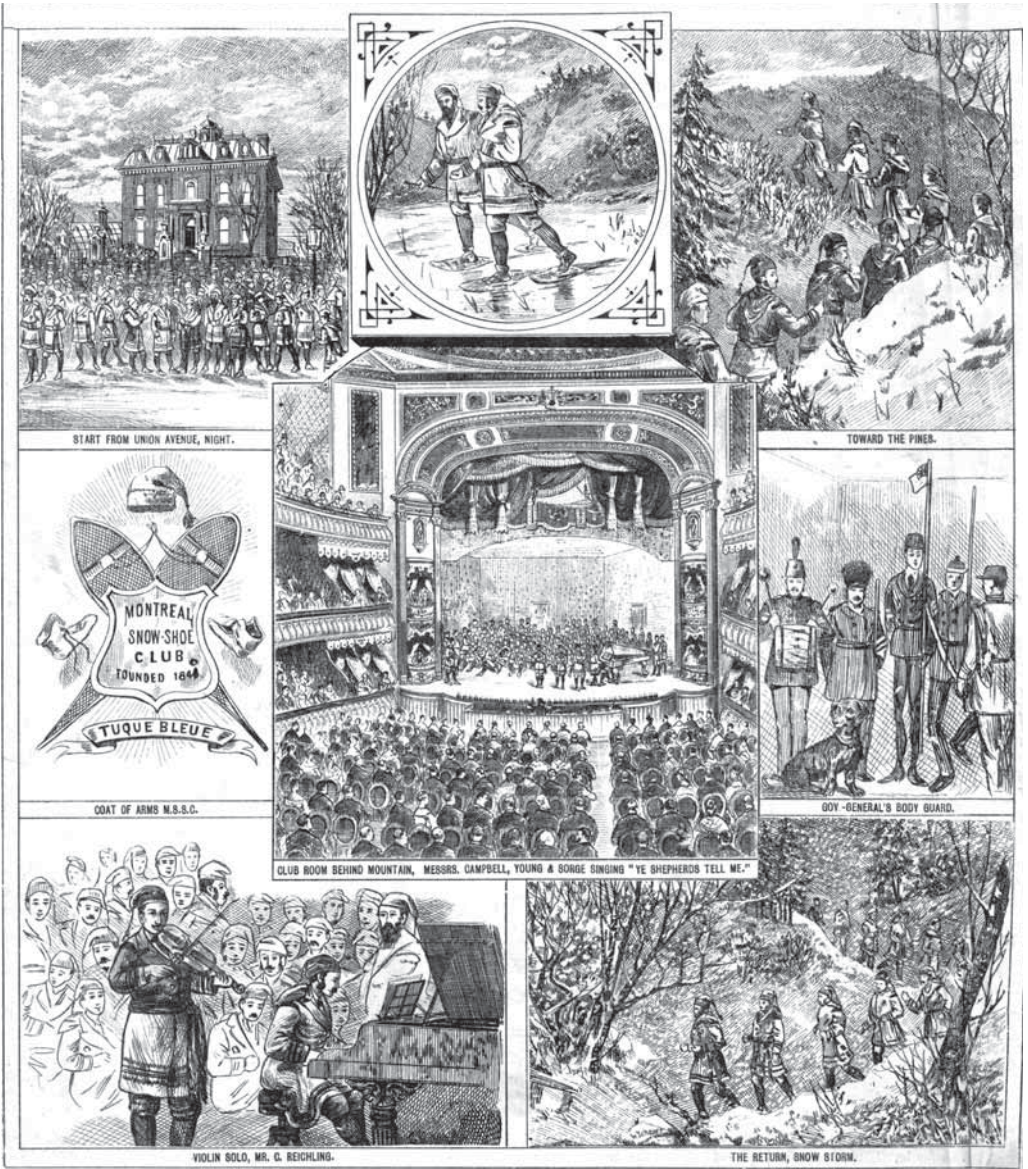


FIGURE 1.6 Illustration: Grand Concert of the Montreal Snow-Shoe Club, at the Academy of Music. | Source: Library and Archives Canada, Montreal Amateur Athletic Association fonds, MG28 I351, vol. 16, Scrapbook 2, 9 February 1878, 24.

present “as near as possible an illustration of our weekly tramps.”⁴⁵ The first scene shows the club members gathered at their rendezvous dressed in their blanket coat costumes, ready to depart. During the 1870s and 1880s, when a plethora of snowshoe clubs were in existence, their members mustered on different week nights to make the trek “over the mountain.” This regular route and routine made the presence of snowshoers a common occurrence on the streets of Montreal. They were considered a novel and picturesque sight and constituted a distinctively Canadian “look” that was photographed extensively. “Picturesque,” a term associated with painting and drawing, was popularized by William Gilpin in the late eighteenth century and persisted throughout the nineteenth century.⁴⁶ It referred to a system of composition by which a landscape was made “pleasing” through a careful combination of “rough” and “smooth” elements. Rustic figures were positioned in specific areas of the composition to provide interest and indicate scale. Art historians John Barrell and Ann Bermingham have persuasively demonstrated that since picturesque paintings were carefully constructed to produce an ideal view, they were not innocent descriptions of an existing reality; rather, they were normative ideological prescriptions imposing the viewpoint of the dominant classes. For example, in England the use of increasingly indistinct rustic figures by painters such as John Constable functioned as an apologia for rural dispossession. Similarly, Kim Ian Michasiw has argued that in Canada “the picturesque [w]as an essential determinant in the dehumanization of Native peoples and in the exploitation of the environment.”⁴⁷ When nineteenth-century newspaper writers recorded the “picturesque sight” created by snowshoers, it implied that the figure of the snowshoer evoked rustic connotations, namely that these were figures reminiscent of a rural idyll from days gone by, nostalgic reminders of “Old Quebec.” Thus, if the snowshoers were considered picturesque and rustic, it meant that they were seen, and saw themselves, as engaged in re-enacting historical activities closely linked to the rural landscape.⁴⁸

The usual route of the weeknight tramps took the clubs through the McGill College grounds and up McTavish Street, and as we see in the third tableau of the concert, in “Indian file” they then ascended the steep eastern face of Mount Royal. On reaching the top, they might “take a breather” at the summit, an area popularly known as “The Pines,” before coming down the more gentle slopes on the other side of the mountain and passing through the cemetery (dodging the big dogs that roamed about in search of body snatchers) to arrive at the club house on the Côte-des-Neiges road.⁴⁹ One of the many songs Beers composed followed. Its

chorus featured a piercing "Indian" call, and then the audience saw the stage transformed into the interior of the Club Room at Prendergast's, a hotel on the Côte-des-Neiges road on the other side of Mount Royal.

Harkening back to the days of the fur trade, when it was the custom for traders to meet at posts in the North West, sociability was always a principal feature of MSSC routine. The destination of every tramp was an inn or restaurant. Once arrived, the snowshoers would enjoy a meal punctuated by toasts, then someone would start up a tune on a piano or other musical instrument, and the members would join in with songs and dancing. To convey a sense of their activities at the club rooms for the concert audience, several members performed a series of musical entertainments, including piano and violin solos, duets and choruses, and a comedy turn called "The Governor-General's Body Guard." Similar stories of sociability are told about the voyageurs in their winter camps and about the Beaver Club, whose meetings were held in Montreal in the winter season, beginning at four o'clock on Wednesday afternoons and often going on into the small hours of the morning.⁵⁰ The Beaver Club was founded by elite members of the North West Company in 1785 and lasted until the early 1820s as a dining club whose membership was restricted to active and retired fur traders who had wintered in the *pays d'en haut*. Those members who were not wintering in the North met at various hotels or taverns in Montreal for "winter bacchanalian feasts" at which they would sing voyageur songs and reminisce about their adventures in the trade. As Carolyn Podruchny has demonstrated, those occasions celebrated the masculinity and fraternal ties of the trade.⁵¹ The snowshoe club socials played a remarkably similar role: after a meal some songs would be sung, the men might dance (a red armband being used to denote the "female" partner), or they might tell tales of club exploits from "long ago." But unlike the notoriously riotous Beaver Club meals, this was decorous and temperate carousing, as befitted the respectable image cultivated by middle-class men of their time.⁵²

Snowshoers adopted a less inebriated approach to music than the fur traders they emulated. Singing was important on the tramp; it helped the men to keep in step and passed the time enjoyably. Songs were written specially for the clubs by their members and were often the means by which club stories were passed on and club identity created. French Canadians had a reputation for hospitality and love of merrymaking, and French songs were often adopted by the snowshoers.⁵³ "En roulant ma boule" was a particular favourite, as it had been at Beaver Club dinners. Aboriginal traditions were also emulated. Travelling through the Canadas

in 1817, John Palmer noted that “Indian manners, customs and language, especially war whoops, were closely imitated at Club dinners,” and many of the snowshoe songs ended with a “snowshoe call” modelled on an “Indian shriek.”⁵⁴ At the first Montreal Snow Shoe Club concert given in February 1873, Nicholas “Evergreen” Hughes sang “En roulant ma boule” while the chorus of fifty snowshoers imitated the paddling of voyageurs in canoes.⁵⁵ This parallels the description of a Beaver Club soirée where members “met at Dillon’s Hotel to drink toasts in madeira, sing the old songs of the voyageurs – the ‘sonorous’ voice of James McGill was mentioned – and do a little play acting: sitting on the floor and pretending they were paddling a canoe de maître up river.”⁵⁶ In other words, there was a striking similarity between the social activities of the snowshoe clubs and those of the Nor’Westers. In developing these traditions of physicality and sociability, the snowshoers represented themselves as the natural heirs of the fur traders, French colonists, and Native peoples.

After an hour or so of merriment at the hotel, the snowshoers would make their way home – some “lazy bones” taking the road but others retracing their steps to the summit of Mount Royal, where they could take a different kind of shortcut. A newspaper report from 1873 captures their homeward journey:

The Queen of Night sheds her light on nature’s spotless winter carpet; in a few minutes they pass over the silent city, and a rough hill tries their wind, but led by their worthy President, the gaps are quickly closed and in Indian file they swing along, pushing up the steep mountain side steadily; they have reached the top of a tremendously steep hill known as The Slide, on they go but soon the pace becomes of necessity too swift for ordinary locomotion, and falling back on the tails of their shoes, they enjoy a swift and exciting slide ... and, bounding along, they soon reach the spot they started from two hours before.⁵⁷

The final concert tableau shows the snowshoers returning in a snow-storm down the mountain to Union Avenue. Sung to a rousing martial tune, the accompanying “Snow Shoe Tramp” chorus clearly indicated their identification with the fur trade. It expressed in verse the nature of the journey members imagined themselves to be on as they ventured into the countryside around Montreal on their weekly tramps. They envisioned themselves as Nor’Westers, Canadian “men of old” enjoying the freedom of living away from the “dark and drear” confines of the industrial city. In

this tuneful re-creation, or simulacrum, Mount Royal and the environs of the city of Montreal became the wilderness landscape of the Canadian North, and snowshoeing was a performance of national identity.

THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

The snowshoers did not just look the part of "native Canadians"; they were at pains to act it too, and the terrain in which they gave their performance was part of the equation. Studies of tourism have pointed out that nineteenth-century travellers attempted to understand foreign landscapes by likening them to those with which they were already familiar. Their perceptions were also influenced by what they had read about places they visited – whether it be from official, fictional, or promotional sources – and by how they had seen foreign lands represented visually.⁵⁸ However, the snowshoers were not tourists; this was not a "foreign" landscape but one that they claimed as their own. Cultural geographers such as Brian Osborne have shown that the connection between the formation of national identity and a national landscape is particularly significant. He suggests that the collective memories that are "invented" to tie a nation's people to their mythic past are "grounded" in what he calls "fabricated landscapes." National landscapes are fabricated in the sense that they are idealized and generalized in representations so that they may be easily recognized and constitute a common experience for all members. Thus national landscapes "become both geographical prompts for, and actual constituents of, any distinctive group's shared consciousness."⁵⁹ Serge Courville, Jean-Claude Robert, and Normand Séguin have a similar conception of the link between culture and geographical surroundings. They suggest that the identity/territory/community matrix "can also function literally as a mine, from whence widely different scripts of the past can be reconstructed."⁶⁰ I would add that if a certain landscape represents a national territory/space, then what happens in it is a national performance. Hence, on their tramps over Mount Royal and into the countryside, the snowshoe club members were imaginatively refiguring the landscape of the city and environs as the Canadian national landscape and physically performing as a new kind of "native Canadian."

Although at 759 feet Mount Royal is in reality not much more than a large hill, in the popular imagination "the mountain" is a key feature of the city and its history. Situated one and a half miles outside of the old city walls, Mount Royal was originally regarded as being out in the country. In the 1850s urban development reached the southern slopes, where the

first large mansions were built, and by the 1870s commerce and housing were well developed along Sherbrooke Street at the base of the eastern slope of the mountain and along St. Laurent Boulevard to the north.⁶¹ Until the twentieth century, Mount Royal was believed to be an extinct volcano, and Dr. Beers, who was never averse to a little hyperbole when it suited his purposes, likened the snowshoers to “Basque Mountaineers” as they “scale the mountain and descend the farther side,” a distance he reckoned at two and three-quarter miles.⁶² A composite photograph produced by the Notman Studio portrayed the club’s destination in 1872 as an isolated country outpost, when in fact it was situated on the well-travelled Côte-des-Neiges toll road, only a short sleigh ride from the club rendezvous at the McGill Gates (Figure 1.7). This tendency to exaggerate the size and ruggedness of Mount Royal is evident in reports of the Torchlight Snowshoe Parade held in honour of Lord and Lady Dufferin in 1873: “The route lay along the mountain slope, over hill and dale, fence and wall, occasionally through the bush, here a gully had to be jumped, there a steep descent made, requiring all one’s agility to avert a tumble. On, on went the line of fire, the irregularities of the ground adding to the effect as the procession now meandered through the trees and again broke into a jog trot across the plain.”⁶³ This litany of geographic features – slope, hill, dale, bush, gully, steep descent, meander, plain – has the effect of moving Mount Royal far outside the city, expanding the size and scale of the landscape, and increasing the apparent difficulty and isolation of the tramp. In fact, in very successful years, such as 1878–79, when there was snow from the end of December right through to the beginning of April, the weekly tramps of the numerous clubs would have taken only thirty or forty minutes on an easily followed, well-beaten track over the mountain to the well-established and growing rural communities on the other side.⁶⁴

These representations of the landscape of Mount Royal imagined it as more than just a large, treed hill and portrayed it instead as a wilderness space apart from the city: wild terrain in which men experienced the harsh and unforgiving Canadian climate. Symbolically, surviving and triumphing in this environment were part of a cathartic indigenizing experience through which the snowshoers proved themselves worthy successors of the Nor’Westers. That the route over the mountain began with an ascent of the steepest face, which was also the route of frequent steeplechases, was not coincidental. The vigour of the performance trained and transformed the body. The snowshoers’ ability to reach the top demonstrated their “bush masculinity.”⁶⁵ They had the qualities of endurance, stamina, and skill admired in the *hommes du nord*, the most experienced



FIGURE 1.7 This is one of a series of composite club portraits produced by the Notman Studios for the MSSC. It represents the club members assembled outside Lumkin's Hotel on the Côte-des-Neiges Road opposite Brother André's shrine. The tramp would have taken thirty or forty minutes at the normal pace of about four miles per hour, and a few snowshoers can be seen still making their way down the slopes of Mount Royal. To produce this composite, each club member was photographed individually in the Notman Studio; the portraits were arranged on a painted background, and the whole was then rephotographed. Note the skill with which the photographer and painter have handled scale and lighting in the composition of the figures.

Composite photograph: William Notman, "Montreal Snow Shoe Club, 1872." | *Source:* Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, Montreal, I-73685.o.

and skilled of the voyageurs.⁶⁶ It proved they had the manly "pluck" and Native ability required to overcome Canada's natural obstacles and could claim to be Haliburton's "Men of the North" themselves.⁶⁷ Furthermore, when members arrived at "The Pines," they had reached the summit. They had physically conquered the mountain and were in a commanding position, being visually and strategically in possession of the city and its

environs. This conquest of space was graphically illustrated in November 1862 when Captain A.A. Stevenson, a city councillor and frequent guest at snowshoe club dinners and events, led the Montreal Field Battery, including horses and cannons, to the mountain summit and fired off a few salvos. Edgar Andrew Collard suggests that Stevenson was a supporter of the proposal to designate Mount Royal as an urban park and made this assault to demonstrate its accessibility.⁶⁸

The designation of Mount Royal as an urban park demonstrates contemporary recognition of the site's cultural significance. Far from attempting to turn it into manicured park land, the interpretation of the mountain as primeval wilderness was central to the park's design. Frederick Law Olmsted's plans for the park reflected the desire "to preserve and enhance its 'charming natural scenery.'"⁶⁹ That Olmsted was successful in his efforts is indicated in an article written for *Garden and Forest* in 1893 by M.C. Robbins, who declared that "from a short distance the mountain appeared 'so wild and inaccessible' that he was surprised 'that it was really a planted and cultivated park.'"⁷⁰ To late-Victorian Montrealers, a wilderness park would be perceived as offering the recuperative qualities of the natural countryside to counteract the increasingly negative qualities ascribed to "the city, dark and drear" of the "Snow Shoe Tramp." But it also illustrates how fundamental the character of the landscape in general was to Canadian identity. In the nineteenth century Canada was characterized and distinguished abroad by its northern climate and landscape. Canada was popularly believed to be a snowy wilderness, a land of vast, impenetrable forests and rugged landscapes, with a bracing climate that bred a healthy, hardy, and physically vigorous people. The design of Mount Royal Park and its use by snowshoers and tobogganers in the winter months confirmed and acted out these stereotypes. In fact, the snowshoe club tramps provided a template for Olmsted's design since he included an entrance at Peel Street and a serpentine path along a route similar to that taken by the snowshoe clubs, as well as designating "The Pines" as a lookout point.

Mount Royal also had historic significance. According to F.-X. Garneau's history of Canada, published in 1845, it was from this spot in 1535 that Jacques Cartier had gazed enchanted at the magnificent view before him and given the mountain its name. In 1867, during debate over the designation of Mount Royal as an urban park, "a French Canadian" demanded that a monument to Cartier be erected at the summit of Mount Royal to commemorate this founding moment.⁷¹ Captain Stevenson's military conquest of the mountain offered a competing narrative that

attempted to write over the history of the French colony and supplant it with a new, British version. Yet another interpretation attempted to reconcile French and English history in Canada. This was made by John Reade in a poem published in the *Montreal Daily Star* in which he hailed Cartier as a shared hero who had founded the city and named Mount Royal.⁷² For the snowshoers and others, Mount Royal was therefore a significant national and historical site/sight that commanded the city and its rural surroundings and mediated between the two, acting as a synecdoche for the "real" national wilderness landscape.

The rural landscape outside the city was likewise represented as wilderness terrain by the snowshoers, even though it was cultivated farmland. This is evident in reports of the longer tramps the clubs organized on Saturday afternoons "into the wilds of the country." According to Becket, these weekly tramps originally had no set route or destination, the members "merely tramping along after their leader till some one not quite so robust as the rest, would cry, 'hold' and the 'route' home was taken up."⁷³ But as snowshoeing grew in popularity during the 1860s and 1870s, tramps became more formulaic, and an inn or hotel at which they could enjoy food and fellowship became an important ingredient in this routine. Twelve tramps were held by the MSSC on Saturday afternoons in the 1878-79 season, with an average of twenty-three members participating on snowshoes and another nine members joining them at their destination via sleigh. On average, the destinations were about ten miles away from the Club House, taking about two and a half hours each way, although the members favoured closer destinations such as Lajeunesse's Inn at Back River (Sault au Recollet), which they reckoned was six miles across country and took only one and a half hours to reach. Membership stood at 407 that year, so it was only a small proportion of members who participated in the Saturday tramps. Nevertheless, the tramps dominated newspaper reports of club activities.

The terms in which these tramps are described indicates that the snowshoers saw themselves as latter-day pioneer explorers, facing down obstacles of terrain and climate to reach their destination. The ability to survive and navigate in the wilderness was a skill lauded by snowshoers, and mapping was an important modern skill in Victorian Canada, but there is no mention of the use of maps in the records or reports of the MSSC. Instead, club tales commemorated feats of instinctive navigation, as for instance in March 1879 when President Angus Grant "made an exact beeline" from the eastern promontory of Mount Royal to the church spires of St. Vincent de Paul. "It was one of the best calculated 'lines' in

the history of the Montreal [club].”⁷⁴ This was considered all the more remarkable since the spires would have been out of view for most of the tramp and he did not use a compass, just his “natural” or “Native” sense of direction. Not needing navigation aids demonstrated the degree to which the snowshoers were “at home” in the environment – only a “native Canadian” could show such ability. Times when the troop got lost – such as on another visit by the MSSC to the village of St. Vincent de Paul when they “went 15 miles astray” and on the famous race to St. Hyacinthe when one group made three miles in twenty-five minutes, while another “found themselves, after half an hour’s hard running, further from the ‘Mountain House’ than at the start” – were also memorable because they illustrated the difficulty of navigating in “the wilds” and demonstrated the pluckiness and stamina of the snowshoers who survived the difficulties.⁷⁵ In one of his articles, Beers conjured the image of intrepid snowshoers finding their way through uncharted territory in bitter winter weather while refusing all assistance:

A real Canadian winter day, my friend! How the nipping wind whistles ... snow blows a blinding storm, like a shower of needles in your face, obliterating any track if there was one. But stiffening your lip you never think of once giving in ... you have to cross country, taking fences and brush on the way, directly due north ... The snow has filled the roads, and in many places tracks are made for sleighs ... but the snow-shoers turn up their noses at beaten tracks and keep on due north. As you cross a highway some habitant ... offers ... a drive in his sleigh, but to drive now would be dishonour ... The lay of the land is indistinct in the sweeping storm. The wind whistles as at sea. But for your snow-shoes you might resign yourself to an untimely cold end.⁷⁶

Beers emphasizes that in potentially fatal cold the snowshoers were travelling across country, eschewing tracks or roads, cutting across lines of settlement in a northerly direction. In doing this, they were enacting a pioneering expedition, going where no white men had gone before, or as “The Snow Shoe Tramp” song indicates, re-enacting the cross-country treks of the Nor’Westers by leaving Montreal, the home base of the fur trade, and making their way across country to the rural hotel, which stood in for the fur trading post.

Despite representations of the landscape as sublimely wild and rugged, Beers’s description makes it clear that snowshoers were well aware that

they were actually tramping over domesticated farm land. Cabbage stalks were a hazard until the snow was deep, and there are references in their reports to the farms they passed, curious farm dogs, and the birds and small game they noticed on the way. Yet this did not stop them thinking of themselves as intrepid explorers in the northern wilderness frontier. This was particularly true on the longer and thus less familiar tramps, such as the visit to St. Vincent de Paul in February 1874:

The recent fall of snow had covered those enemies of cat-gut – stubble and cabbage stalks – and made the tramping more comfortable to the toes ... The wind blew keen and biting ... – through brushes and over brush, up hill and down vale, scorning ready-made tracks of human feet or sleigh, keeping time with the leader, in regular Indian file, they reached the top of a hill on the Island of Montreal, a hill about on a level with the high lands of Isle Jesus, and there before them as some one graphically observed “lay the promised land.”⁷⁷

Here again, the snowshoers deliberately chose to traverse an untravelled route on fresh snow that had covered up evidence that this was already domesticated land. This was a convenient artifice that allowed them to imagine themselves as tramping free and unfettered across country. Tramps were palimpsests: the lines of settlement inscribed in the landscape by the French settlers and the seigneurial system were erased by the fresh snow, and the country could be explored, conquered, and surveyed anew by these British colonists. By creating new travel routes, they were exploring, describing, and ordering the countryside. They were transforming space into territory, a process that was completed in political terms by the expansion of the city boundaries in the 1880s.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the snowshoers had no sense that they were trespassing. Fences and hedges were conceived as natural obstacles, not as markers of private property – despite the fact that the delineation and protection of private property were key concerns of this class and had been enshrined in the law and state. The act or performance of tramping over the land (and no doubt marking the territory in the way that animals do) was an act of colonial conquest, especially significant because the snowshoers were penetrating the French Canadian rural stronghold from which the Rebellions of 1837-38 had sprung. Now they were creating a new, British network of historical and spatial connections between the city and surrounding villages and towns. By exaggerating the features of the landscape and climate, snowshoers were able to envisage their tramps as

symbolic explorations of the larger Canadian wilderness. Frequent interaction with this imagined geography developed an awareness of belonging.⁷⁹ It created a cultural difference between themselves and the rural French Canadian “others,” as well as confirming their sense of themselves as manly, plucky, and stalwart “muscular Christians” who were worthy successors of their fur trade predecessors. By making their own routes, they demonstrated their ability to navigate in the landscape and climate, thus legitimizing their symbolic possession and colonization of “the promised land.” Furthermore, their rejection of any easy way, whether it be taking the road, hitching a ride with a local farmer, or following a beaten path, maintained the artifice.

The snowshoe tramps can, therefore, be read on several levels as what Richard Gruneau has termed “a meaningful dramatization” of the Canadian past.⁸⁰ The city was the modern metropolis from which snowshoers set out to colonize the surrounding wilderness. At the same time, they were acting out symbolic treks from modernity into the historical past. The repeated penetration of the wilderness and return to the city simulated life in the North West fur trade and thus linked snowshoers to the French Canadian and Aboriginal histories of the nation. The indigenizing experience of the tramps further transformed foreigners into Natives; these middle-class merchants and professionals were substituting themselves as the new “native Canadians” and writing themselves into the history of the colony.

This symbolic conquest of the land and the skills learned on the snowshoe tramps made the contemporary political objective of colonizing the North West and creating a transatlantic nation all the more possible. It provided urban snowshoers with the knowledge and confidence required to imagine the possibility of settling the Prairies, where frontier conditions required a more intimate connection with the land. American and Canadian sport historians usually assume that the survival skills of the frontier – hunting, canoeing, snowshoeing – became leisure activities in the emerging cities and were imbued with the survival skills required in industrializing societies, namely time discipline, team work, physical fitness, and the like.⁸¹ In a nice twist, it seems that although Montreal snowshoers did indeed make a survival skill into a rational pursuit, they then used it as a springboard to success on the frontier. The argument that the western provinces were influenced by British sport culture because of the influx of immigrants from Ontario⁸² overlooks the important distinction between imported and indigenous sports. In the case of snowshoe clubs, Montreal was the major influence. Snowshoeing originated there as a club

sport and diffused to other major centres. Club networks facilitated emigration because branches of Montreal snowshoe clubs newly formed in Winnipeg and other western cities helped their eastern members to get settled and integrated them into the community. Through the club they would quickly make or renew social and business contacts. When members of the St. George's Snow Shoe Club inaugurated a branch in Winnipeg, the Montreal club provided departing members with a big send-off, while the new branch welcomed them on their arrival. Seventy-seven members of this club alone moved from Montreal to Winnipeg in 1882, taking with them the practical skills and the class-based ideals of character and behaviour that the clubs propagated.⁸³ The activities of the Winnipeg clubs were recorded by local newspapers and followed very closely the pattern of events and rituals established in Montreal. Since all the snowshoe clubs organized similar activities, espoused like values, celebrated with each other at annual races and dinners, and read about each other's exploits in the newspapers, members had a common set of interests and a common culture and were readily able to imagine themselves as a larger, national community, one that shared the interests of snowshoers in Winnipeg, Brandon, Toronto, Ottawa, Quebec City, Saint John, Halifax, St. John's, and other cities and towns.

Snowshoeing was a cultural performance that worked to construct national identity because it was an Indigenous and indigenizing activity that brought members into contact (and sometimes conflict) with the landscape. The *performance* of snowshoeing was vital to members because it was a romanticized re-enactment of the historical past of the nation and thus a way to become and to feel oneself native in a foreign land. Snowshoeing and the imaginative re-creation of the landscape allowed the snowshoers to imagine the nation as a space and themselves as a people. The reports of their activities and the publicity their concerts received in the local press allowed this identity to be recognized by others. Hence, just as the exaggeration of geographic features extended and generalized the landscape around Montreal and represented it as a national space, so too did the physical performance of the tramp and the landscape in which it was enacted become characteristic of the nation and its citizens.

The significance of the active performance of snowshoeing should not be underestimated. To be sure, social relationships and power hierarchies are constituted and made explicit through bodily practices; but there is more to such practices than this. Paul Connerton has persuasively argued that physical performance plays an essential role in the construction of social memory. As an activity that became habitual through repetition and

clearly observed rules of decorum, snowshoeing constituted what he calls a “mnemonics of the body.”⁸⁴ The physical act of performance constructed cognitive knowledge and memory of the “proper” characteristics of the white, male Canadian body. Moreover, acting out these myths of origin caused the performer to feel himself part of that history on a conscious, cognitive level, and through bodily knowledge this feeling became a matter of fundamental belief, a sensation of physical rootedness in the land. Through performance in a fabricated national landscape, the snowshoers could believe themselves to be authentic natives. It is not surprising, therefore, that Mount Royal was designated in 1873 as an urban wilderness park and that one of the key arguments used to support this decision was that its historic importance should be recognized. Mount Royal was for the snowshoers a symbolic wilderness that stood in for the “real” frontier, a place where they could act out a putative Canadian identity. And the countryside around Montreal was an extended simulacrum of this wilderness frontier landscape – even when farm fences and protruding cabbage stalks insisted on its real identity as domesticated farmland.

SNOWSHOEING AS AN “ORGANIZED” SPORT

As will be discussed in more detail in relation to lacrosse, modern organized sports are differentiated from premodern folk games and children’s play by the way that a hierarchy of clubs, teams, and leagues is established with shared rules and regulations that govern the game as well as apparel, equipment, site, behaviour, and so on. Snowshoeing straddled the divide between premodern and modern sport. Sport historians Don Morrow and Kevin B. Wamsley call snowshoe clubs “the pivotal and transitional activity through which Montreal sport was ushered into the modern era of commercial organized sport.”⁸⁵ It was not a team sport, but once snowshoe clubs were founded, it was transformed into an organized sport with increased emphasis on competition. Regular races were organized, and clubs competed with each other on an inter- and intracity basis. The snowshoe clubs were run in a modern, businesslike fashion. There was a written constitution, membership was carefully controlled through a voting system, and a group of executives was in charge of scheduling tramps, arranging banquets, renting rooms, formulating regulations, accounting, recordkeeping, and so on. Furthermore, technical “improvements” such as lighter, narrower shoes were adopted to make the sport a more “modern,” “civilized,” and “scientific” activity. Club members favoured these new shoes because they facilitated competitive racing, but they were

inadequate for the needs of hunters or lumberers, thus completing the transformation of snowshoeing from utilitarian to leisure activity, from historical to modern.

The clubs were formed not just to promote physical exercise, for that was not their only cultural function. They were also instrumental in promoting and inculcating desired behaviours and values. The "English character" that Lord Durham sought to impose on French-speaking Canadians combined manliness and a desire for order and hierarchy with admiration for modern progress and science. Manliness was an ideology that combined physical prowess, stamina, and "pluck" with mental discipline, loyalty, and moral virtue. Although industrialization did not get fully underway in Montreal until the 1860s, even by the 1840s ideas about class, gender, and race had created a masculine, white, colonial, bourgeois identity based on the belief that hard work was its own reward, and moral conduct rather than material wealth was a measure of success and usefulness in society. As recent scholarship shows, this was a profoundly gendered identity, one in which the male was the measure of all things and women were considered the subordinate repositories of moral virtue.⁸⁶ Similarly, the manliness of the strenuous outdoor activities of the snowshoe clubs was emphasized by the exclusion of women from active participation. Whereas women's virtue was located in the home, middle-class men demonstrated their virtue in the fraternal associations and networks that gave their lives meaning and conferred status. Sports clubs, and associational life in general, were a place outside the home in which this code of middle-class, respectable, manly behaviour was formulated and inculcated.

As early as 1842 snowshoeing was referred to as "manly exercise," a term that would be reiterated countless times over the next five decades as its status became increasingly elevated and linked to the nation. In 1868 snowshoeing was called "the manliest and best of all sports." In 1872 it was "a healthful and manly exercise, besides being a purely national pastime." And in 1870 a commentator in the *Toronto Globe* opined that national greatness was not just dependent on commerce or intellectual and moral training but also required "*the development of the physical energy of the people*. Let Canada ... learn that health-giving and sport-elevating recreations tend to dispel effeminacy from any people."⁸⁷ Hence strenuous sport and the homosocial character of club activities were considered antidotes to feminized society.

Manliness had several connotations. The ideal snowshoer was "plucky" with a "never-say-die" attitude; he had tremendous stamina and a healthy

constitution, and he was loyal to his nation and the empire and ready to fight when called. These were essential components of what sport historian Don Morrow has so aptly called “the snowshoe ethos,” and they were encouraged and imbued by vigorous outdoor exercise and the exclusive company of men.⁸⁸ This code of manliness assumed its members would also be models of moral virtue. Thus when an article appeared in the *Montreal Daily Witness* on 6 February 1873 that condemned the presence of “an unlimited supply of champagne” at the dinner given for the governor general by the snowshoe clubs, which purportedly had disastrous effects on the young boys present, it was considered a serious black mark. An editorial a few days later informed readers that the “presidents of two of the snowshoe clubs” denied there was any “uproariousness as the result of the use of champagne,” but the criticisms were apparently deemed so damaging that a libel suit was filed against the *Witness*. A subsequent letter from “an old snow-shoer” published in the *Montreal Gazette* of 27 February 1873 indicated that the suit had been decided against the *Witness*. The writer claimed that most of the snowshoers at the tramp were married men, not “lads.” He affirmed that “snow-shoers are proverbially small drinkers, and do not look to intoxicating drinks for that strength of wind and limb so necessary to carry them over our tough mountain track, our weekly tramp to Lachine, or elsewhere.”⁸⁹

This incident illustrates the gravity with which the snowshoe clubs viewed accusations impugning their moral propriety. The Temperance Movement was strongly supported in Canada East, where half the population were teetotallers in 1850. The MSSC was particularly jealous of its reputation, and its executive asserted that the club was not an excuse for intemperate drinking. This was not the first time snowshoeing had been linked to drinking, for a newspaper report of the annual steeplechase held a month earlier had defensively averred that “a tramp across the mountains is not, as some think, an excuse for liquor drinking, a cup of good hot coffee being all that the boys desire.”⁹⁰ In March, after another steeplechase up Mount Royal, a reporter noted “the frugal meal snowshoers affect.”⁹¹ In fact, liquor and wine were always forbidden from MSSC meetings, and even malt beer was prohibited in the mid-1870s. The St. George’s Snow Shoe Club’s rules also prohibited “card playing and the use of spiritous liquors in the Club room.”⁹² However, complaints continued to plague the clubs from time to time, and Beers came to their defence again in an 1877 article. He claimed that at the weekly club suppers, there was “never a breath of vulgarity, perhaps too much smoking, but never any drinking; always the restraint of gentlemen with the *élan* of healthy

athletes."⁹³ Notwithstanding these avowals of temperance, there were again complaints about drinking and misconduct, notably the firing of guns on the streets after an annual MSSC dinner held at the Windsor Hotel in February 1878, at which drinks were again allegedly available to youths.⁹⁴

In her study of fur trade culture, Podruchny has argued that the Beaver Club fulfilled the dual function of being a transition from life in the bush to polite society, while also being a private outlet for the hard drinking and rowdy behaviour that would contravene the respectable standards of polite, urbane society.⁹⁵ The snowshoe clubs can be seen as providing a similar service for their members. They facilitated indigenizing forays into the countryside, as well as being a space in which the newly emerging professional and commercial middle classes could construct and rehearse their class and gender identities. However, they were also a place where members could safely transgress these identities. James Scott argues that the powerful have a vital interest in keeping up the appearances appropriate to their form of domination within their own social circle. They demand a performance of deference and loyalty by subordinates, and in public they show themselves as they want to be seen in order to affirm their power and euphemize their misdeeds. He calls this the "public transcript." What they keep hidden from subordinates in order to maintain their claim to power – their "dirty linen" – he calls the "hidden transcript."⁹⁶ Since middle-class values eschewed drinking and excess, the public transcript proclaimed by the snowshoe clubs officially proscribed such behaviour; thus the struggle these men had with sobriety could be concealed in the safe space of the club. The clubs may have been a refuge in which they could from time to time indulge in alcohol privately, without compromising their respectability by being seen drinking by subordinate "others."⁹⁷ The whole range of practices that the snowshoe clubs invented were ways that the public transcript instilled, proclaimed, and maintained their social status – although not always with total success.

English character also demanded patriotism and loyalty, and at every dinner toasts were raised for the queen and the empire. Whether or not the cheers and patriotic speeches were as genuinely heartfelt as the newspaper reports suggest, they were part of the established ritual of snowshoe gatherings – an element that had to be included in order to complete the performance. Public displays of loyalty affirmed the connection to Britain, while the activity of snowshoeing denoted Canadian identity. From early on in their existence, snowshoers had always showed themselves ready and willing to fight. In 1861, in response to the threat of a

Fenian invasion, the Victoria Volunteer Rifle Regiment 3rd Battalion was formed by members of the MSSC, the Aurora Snow Shoe Club, and the Beaver Lacrosse Club. In fact, snowshoeing became part of militia training. An item in the *Montreal Herald* of 19 February 1864 reported that 130 men of the Victoria Volunteer Rifles were going to Chambly with snowshoes for the weekend, and a composite photograph of the “Officers of the Rifle Brigade, Montreal 1870” featured Prince Arthur (who was stationed in Montreal for two years of officer training) and other officers with their snowshoes.⁹⁸ Not infrequently, protestations of readiness to fight – the “Ready! Aye Ready!” – were made. For instance, in February 1878 one of the speakers at a dinner pledged the support of “the lacrosse and snowshoe men of the Dominion, should they at any time be called upon to defend that empire whose integrity was their pride.”⁹⁹ Moreover, medals were awarded at club races, and rules controlled the wearing of the club uniform. Quasi-military discipline was part of the snowshoe ethos. There was a strict hierarchy of club officers. Conduct and the pace of the tramps were under the control of the senior club officer present; and there were rules against overtaking him or breaking ranks unless told to “go as you please.” Another senior member followed in the rear as “whipper-in” to make sure no one lagged behind. It made sense to stay in single file because it made travelling easier and was safer when the party was large or when the weather or going was bad. But it can also be read as the “primitive” connotations attached to the concept of “Indian-file” being overwritten by the “civilized” British ideology of order and discipline. The snowshoers shared the voyageurs’ physical strength and native abilities but imposed self-control and discipline on their reputation for unruly passions. No doubt, however, some leaders were less martial than others, so out of sight of the city the snowshoers may have been much less disciplined than club records report.¹⁰⁰ In the hands of the snowshoe clubs, snowshoeing was not just an enjoyable activity; it defined a masculine national identity, built stoicism, and taught men the skills and discipline they might need in the event of war.

THE DISSEMINATION OF IDENTITY

To loud applause and admiration, the Snow Shoe Club concert ended with the customary “God Save the Queen,” and the Montreal newspapers were subsequently full of praise for the admirable display of talent that had been enjoyed. Ostensibly about helping the poor, the concerts were successful in spreading a vision and an image of middle-class deportment and in telling

a national story. By the time a member of the MSSC proposed a week-long winter carnival in the fall of 1882, a veritable genre of cultural performance had been invented by the snowshoe clubs, including torchlight processions on snowshoes, living arches, concerts, competitive races, picturesque costumes, songs, and verse. Through repetition, the connection between snowshoeing and Canadian character was forged into a national identity that may have been particular to Montreal and urban centres while excluding a significant proportion of the population but that was powerful nevertheless because it had high visibility and circulation. This definition of essential Canadian characteristics was represented visually in photographs and periodical illustrations and acted out repeatedly by hundreds of snowshoers on city streets. Along with reports in the press, these constructed a powerful and pervasive discourse of Canadian national identity, which became thoroughly embedded in the mentalité of both participants and spectators – understood, but not necessarily consented to, by all members of society. Ultimately, then, the performers and spectators alike knew what it was to be Canadian because they all learned the same script, rehearsed over and over again in a ritualized manner.

This consciousness of kind was repeatedly realized in material form by group portraits. William Notman, one of the leading photographers of the day, was very active in producing composite club photographs. Members would pose individually in his studio, and then their portraits were assembled en masse against an appropriate painted background. This was a very cumbersome and technically demanding method of production. An example can be seen in Figure 1.8, where the MSSC members are portrayed "At the Pines."¹⁰¹ The benefit of this type of portrait was that it produced a sharply focused, unobscured portrait of each member of the club. In an essay entitled "The Group Portrait," Alan Trachtenberg observes that in a group portrait, the subjects have double identities as individuals and as members of a group, and he adds that "a symbolic meaning overshadows the particulars of personhood."¹⁰² In the snowshoe composites, everyone was given his individual due, but together all the members made up the corporeal body of the snowshoe club, and given that the snowshoe costume had become a visual identifier or attribute, they also represented Canada, Canadians, and Canadianness. Inversely, although each portrait was individualized, a member's position within the composite indicated his position in the club hierarchy. This spatial configuration realized in photographic form the snowshoe ethos and the liberal ideology espoused by the professional and commercial middle classes. Since snowshoeing was the preserve of this class, and since women, workers,



FIGURE 1.8 Notman attempted to solve the problem of composing a picture with so many figures by dividing them into several circular groupings, foregrounding key figures such as leading MSSC members Nicholas Hughes and Angus Grant, and highlighting Lord Dufferin by placing him in a relatively empty space between two groups, framed on either side by snowshoes. The presence of Lord Dufferin added tremendous recognition to snowshoeing as a respectable pursuit and increased public interest in the portrait. The men are posed “At the Pines” with a mansion visible in the background, suggesting a less remote area than the 1872 version and thus portraying snowshoeing as a leisure activity rather than as a quasi expedition.

Composite photograph: William Notman and Henry Sandham, “Montreal Snow Shoe Club, 1877.” | *Source:* Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum, Montreal, II-44798.1.

and Natives were excluded from the portrait, the image that emerged of the ideal Canadian citizen was white, male, and middle-class.

Notman was not motivated to create these composite club portraits solely by the promise of profit from sales. The subject of the 1877 MSSC portrait was apparently sufficiently novel and the technique sufficiently demanding for Notman to submit it to the Paris World Exhibition. As a result, the image of distinctively dressed Canadians as physically vigorous lovers of winter sports received widespread international circulation. The visual image of Canadian winter sports as a defining characteristic of the nation was further disseminated abroad by souvenir portraits taken for visitors and residents to send back to England. An advertisement for the services of the Notman Studio dated 10 April 1867 indicates that elements

of the snowshoe costume became *the* Canadian winter costume (at least for urban dwellers) as well as a national signifier.

Portraits in Winter Costume

This style is very effective, and has the additional advantage of affording to friends at a distance an excellent idea of our Canadian winters, and of the following Canadian sports and out-door amusements:

Snow-Shoeing
Tobogganing
Sleighting¹⁰³

More than 450 photographs of sitters wearing blanket coats were taken by the Notman Studio between 1860 and 1900. As many of these were taken during the summer months, it is apparent that customers specifically wanted to be portrayed in an outdoor Canadian-winter setting.¹⁰⁴ Military men posted in Montreal often sent home a portrait of themselves dressed in outdoor winter clothing. A photograph of Captain Hawkes and Captain Howe suggests that an outdoor setting, a sash, and snowshoes were enough to signify the scene as "Canadian." Families also chose the outdoor setting and snowshoe "theme" for their souvenir portraits. General Wyndham and family, for instance, posed in an outdoor winter setting. Mrs. Wyndham and her daughter held snowshoes, and the youngest child was seen sitting on a sleigh and wearing a miniature snowshoe costume. Children were frequently photographed as "Young Canada." A reminder of the Native and French Canadian contribution to Canadian identity is the popularity of the sash, or *ceinture fléchée*, in these images. Art historian Jana Bara has shown that it was ubiquitous in photographic portraits in this era: "It hung from the furniture, it was bundled on the top of bookcases, it streamed from the chairs, it cascaded from the tables. Pensively fingered by women, tolerated by men, it was to be seen everywhere, except in the portraits of clergymen."¹⁰⁵ As a synecdoche for the whole costume, especially when worn in combination with snowshoes and sleds, the sash was a powerful visual attribute of Canada and Canadians.

Canadian national identity was further disseminated abroad through the popular press. From the 1860s on, articles about "Canada in Winter," "Canadian National Sports," and "Canadian Sports" appeared in abundance in popular newspapers and magazines. Through these reports, the

notion of Canadians as a hardy, northern race given to outdoor winter sports became familiar to American and British readers. The repetition of these themes is striking, and all are basically variations on those first articulated by Beers in an 1863 article for the *British American Magazine*, in which he distinguished imported sports like skating and curling from Canadian sports like snowshoeing, tobogganing, ice-boating, and moose and bear hunting.¹⁰⁶ The distinction between imported (British) and indigenous (Canadian) sports was reiterated by subsequent newspaper and magazine articles for Canadian, British, and American audiences.¹⁰⁷ Such insistent repetition of a link between national identity and themes of climate, geography, distinctive sports, and character indicates that these had become the distinguishing characteristics of Canadianness. By 1886 American readers had evidently accepted this formula. In an article entitled “Our Winter Sports: How They Are Becoming Popular in Uncle Sam’s Domains ... An American Picture of Our Leading Pastimes,” Newell B. Woodworth of the Saratoga Toboggan Club explained: “The hardships and physical exercise of early Canadian life gave little time or inclination to the people to use the snowshoe and toboggan for pleasure. It was not until some forty years ago that a leisure class having developed, the Anglo-Saxon element, with their Norseman blood and natural love of out of doors sports, seized upon the Indian snowshoe and toboggan wherewith to utilize for sport the deep snows of the long Canadian winter – climate conditions which the French habitant long considered on the darkest side.”¹⁰⁸ Implicit in this history are a link between the present and the long-distant past and the assumption that snowshoeing was an Indigenous activity improved and modernized by the innately predisposed British colonists. In taking up snowshoeing and organizing sporting fraternities, Montrealers were engaging in an “improved” Native activity that dated back further than the recorded history of the continent and had strong links both to the French Regime and to the history of the British in North America. In the act of snowshoeing, they were constituting themselves as a new type of “native Canadian” and in the process writing a British history of the nation.

PERFORMING IDENTITY

A political cartoon in *Grip*, a satirical magazine published in Toronto, indicates how well established the connection between snowshoeing and the nation was by the 1880s. Entitled *The True State of Her Feelings*, the cartoon shows Miss Canada, dressed in a blanket coat, sash, and tuque, in dialogue

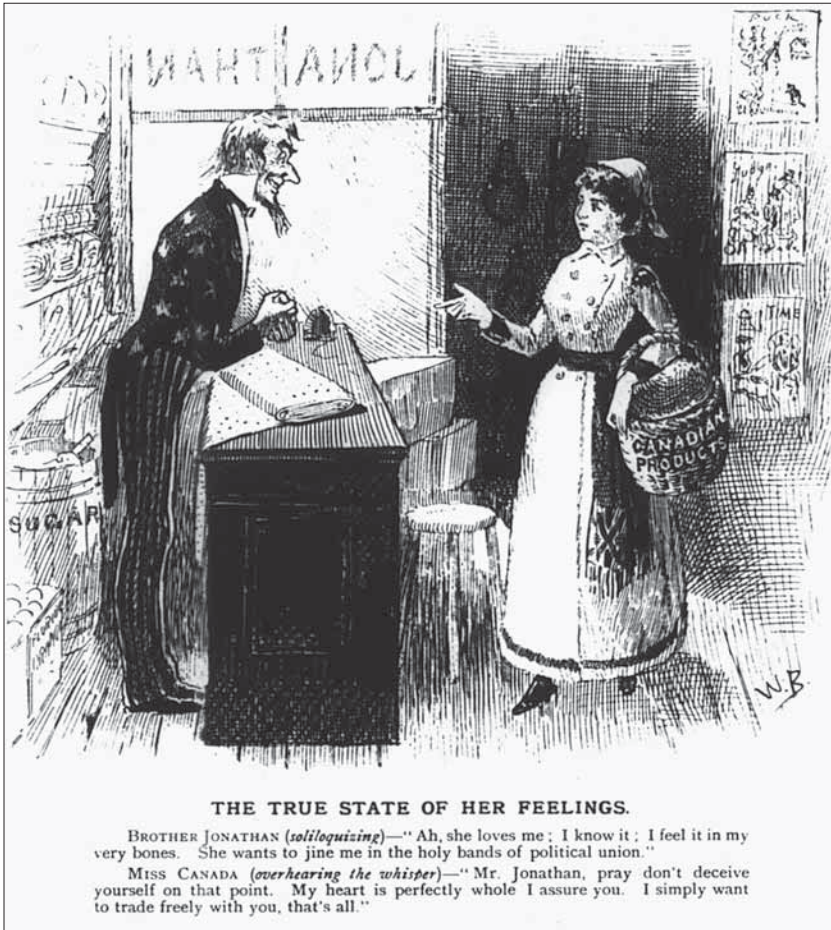


FIGURE 1.9 Cartoon: William Bengough, *The True State of Her Feelings*. | Source: Grip, 19 January 1889.

with American Brother Jonathan (Figure 1.9). Even in England the snowshoe uniform signified Canadian identity, although it was provincial enough to be the object of ridicule. A *Punch* cartoon from 1883 poked fun at Lord Lansdowne, the newly appointed governor general, dressed "in his new Canadian costume, specially adapted to remaining for some time out in the cold" (Figure 1.10). Lansdowne's appointment to Canada was considered political exile because he had broken with Gladstone over Irish policy.¹⁰⁹ Ironically, it was his enthusiastic participation in the 1884 Winter Carnival, where he wore the blanket coat and tried out the toboggan



FIGURE 1.10 Cartoon: Lord Lansdowne, in his new Canadian costume adapted to remaining for some time out in the cold. | Source: *Punch*, 2 June 1883, 262.

slide, that ensured him tremendous good will from the Canadian public, or at least from the public represented by the Montreal newspapers.

The rules and regulations of the snowshoe clubs promoted particular characteristics and values that provided the basis of a shared group identity – how “an ‘I’ became a ‘we,’ a ‘me’ became an ‘us.’”¹¹⁰ Through club membership and the interaction between clubs, men were able to recognize a consciousness of kind that was middle-class, masculine, and predominantly Protestant. In a time when the Roman Catholic proportion of the population in Montreal was growing due to the influx of Catholic Irish immigrants and rural French Canadians, indigenous sports clubs may have been a way to forge a Protestant/Scots/British identity, but they also established a new Canadian stereotype – the physically vigorous, outdoor-loving “Canuck” who was at home in the iconic northern landscape and rigorous winter climate. By demonstrating their ability to survive and navigate in the Canadian environment, the snowshoers justified their claim to be a new type of autochthon.

Historians have paid some attention to the idea that class is “presented,” “demonstrated,” “exhibited,” and “displayed” (i.e., made visible), but few take it seriously as an enactment – a performative act that is constitutive.¹¹¹ On the tramp, identity, time, and space intersected and blended together;¹¹² by emulating the heroic past as signified by the exploits of the Nor’Westers and Beaver Club members, the snowshoers wrote over the history and contributions of both French Canadian and Native peoples and constructed myths of origin that constituted the foundation of a new British history. This was a highly restricted, middle-class notion of citizenship that did not include women, Native peoples, the labouring classes, or even the majority of French Canadians. However, for the middle-class, male, mostly anglophone snowshoers and for the members of the public who saw them on the streets, attended their concerts, or read about their exploits in the local press, the regular repetition of snowshoe activities on a weekly, seasonal, and yearly basis constantly reinforced this Canadian identity. Club stories, carefully compiled and repeatedly retold through reminiscences and songs, confirmed for participants a sense of their own identity and history while constituting what I will call, with thanks to Homi Bhabha, a narrative of nation.¹¹³ Postcolonial scholarship has recognized that cultural power is as important as political, economic, or military policy in maintaining colonial rule and gaining the consent of the ruled. Stories and narratives are a “method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history,” but in

white-settler colonies like Canada, the colonizers can use the same strategy to assert their domination and make their own claims for autonomy from the metropole.¹¹⁴

To be sure, it is unlikely that the significance of snowshoeing as a cultural practice was consciously understood in this way. For one thing, snowshoers did not always take themselves completely seriously. Their club songs and tales are often humorous, poking fun at themselves and the mishaps they suffered on the trail or, as in “The Snow Shoe Tramp,” laughing at the antics of those new to the shoes. They valued snowshoeing as a physical rather than social pursuit, as was illustrated by the active members’ disapproval of “driving members,” those who joined the club for its social benefits but did not actually participate in the weekly tramps, and by their disdain for “hippodroming” – parading the streets in snowshoe costume rather than engaging in “bona fide” snowshoeing.¹¹⁵ This was why some disgruntled veteran snowshoers formed Our Club in 1874 and organized a forty-five-mile tramp to St. Andrews, which was recalled as an epic journey for years to come. Evidently, snowshoeing had been getting too soft in “these days of light shoes and well-beaten tracks.” One reporter commended the participants “for their pluck” and trusted “that the example they set will be worthily followed, and that before long we may return to the days of legitimate snow-shoeing.”¹¹⁶ Hence we can infer that it was crucial that the snowshoers actually performed the activity, and it was equally important that this performance took place outside the city in open countryside, preferably on fresh snow. Otherwise, the performance (and hence the identity constructed) would not be authentic. An account of a historic snowshoe tramp given in *Dawson’s Supplement* of 1884 shows that snowshoeing had been constructed as a historically Canadian activity. The writer claimed that “the first great snow-shoe tramp on record is the expedition under M. de Courcelles in 1666,” during which “the regular soldiers suffered much, but of the Canadians not a man was frozen.”¹¹⁷ By claiming this as the first “recorded” tramp, the text erased the Aboriginal origins of snowshoeing, or at least categorized them as prehistoric. In addition, the author claimed that the regular soldiers, who were French, could not withstand the climate but that the Canadians could. Rhetorically, the author thereby categorized “Canadians” as “not Indian” and “not French” – thus legitimizing the British claims to native Canadian identity and history. In his speech at the MSSC Jubilee celebrations in 1890, Sir Donald Smith, governor of the Hudson’s Bay Company, went a step further, totally erasing the history of snowshoeing before

1840 by describing the "early days of snowshoeing when there were no clubs," as though snowshoeing began just before the British colonists founded snowshoe clubs and not centuries before that.¹¹⁸ This is the equivalent in text to what I have shown happened in images. The strategy of eliding both the Native and French Canadian pasts is also evident in William Notman's hunting and trapping series of photographs, which are the subject of the next chapter.