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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ottawa, 1857–1860: the making of Canada's capital city on the eve of Confederation

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Abstract
Canadian historiography has long regarded the choice and elaboration of Ottawa as a capital city in the mid-nineteenth century as a political compromise between Ontario (Canada West) and Quebec (Canada East). This article suggests that this view be reconsidered in the context of Canada's expansion westward and the dispossession of Indigenous lands. The key goal of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of transforming Ottawa into a capital city in 1857–60, including not only its choice as the seat of government but also the elaboration of Canada's Parliament Buildings, which were to become the key symbol of its future statehood, as well as the visit of the prince of Wales to Ottawa in 1860. The prince's visit allowed the city to be legitimized and inaugurated as the new seat of government.

In October 1858, John Manners-Sutton, the lieutenant-governor of New Brunswick, wrote to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, then secretary of the British Colonial Office:

> It is possible that a Federative union of the British North American Provinces would afford to the Canadian Government the readiest mode of escape from the difficulties and embarrassments which now surround the settlement of the 'seat of Government' question, and I presume that…the Canadian Government have no less in view the severance of the bond which now joins the two Canadas in a Legislative Union, and the substitution for that bond of a more elastic tie of a Federal or a Federative character.[1]

Although Manners-Sutton was not an advocate of 'a Federative union', his words accurately conveyed the connection between the crafting of the Canadian Confederation and the settlement of its capital city in the late 1850s. Moreover,

[1]Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Carnarvon papers, questions of Federation of the British North America, copy of a dispatch from Lieutenant-Governor the Hon. John H.T. Manners-Sutton to Sir Edward Bulmer-Lytton, 10.

writing that 'a Federative union' was a way to sidestep 'the difficulties and embarrassments' of the 'seat of Government' issue, he came close to suggesting that the latter was no less crucial than the former, as it could provide conditions for a lasting political solution for a Canada that had been riven by animosities during the previous decade. Notwithstanding this connection, Canadian historians rarely discussed the making of the Confederation and the act of choosing its capital city in the late 1850s in relation to each other. Rather, the political history of Canada in its pre-Confederation period has been written without a meaningful discussion of Ottawa – as if the latter had emerged as the capital city *ex nihilo* in the middle of the nineteenth century.[2] The recent 150th jubilee of Confederation managed to draw attention to Ottawa's history per se, but the issues at the confluence of Ottawa's 'capital' history and Canada's state-building once again remained largely overlooked. Was the choice of the capital city truly a catalyst for the forthcoming Confederation? Or was it a concomitant or even peripheral process that accompanied the crystallization of the Dominion? What did a capital city like Ottawa reveal about the ideology and ambitions of a state like Canada in the mid-nineteenth century? In order to answer these far-reaching questions, this article will focus on the history of Ottawa *and* Canada between 1857, when the key Canadian cities prepared City Memorials to become the permanent seat of government, and 1860, when the British royal heir inaugurated Ottawa as the future capital city.

There has been a long-standing interest within the field of urban history in the history of capital cities.[3] As capitals abound in representative buildings, plans and designs, they provide rich material to explore the ways that states produce and convey power, symbols and ideologies.[4] Capital cities have been studied in relation to (and hence often as the product of) their locations and the system of the state and regional networks of which they were a part.[5] The study of capital cities' shifts, on the other hand, documented the reconfigurations of geographical and political networks and the transformations in decision-making that inspired or drove their relocations.[6] Fewer attempts, however, have been made to document the historical trajectories and profiles of the non-European capital cities.[7] This article uses the example of Ottawa to fill this gap. A classical view on the selection of Ottawa as

[2]A non-exhaustive review of recent general accounts of Canadian history only confirms this statement. The history of Ottawa as the (future) site of Canadian government is not mentioned or only receives a fleeting mention in most of them. See, for example, D. Creighton, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada* (Toronto, 1958), 297; W.L. Morton, *The Critical Years: The Union of British North America 1857–1873* (Toronto, 1964), 14–17; H.V. Nelles, *A Little History of Canada* (Oxford, 2004), 124; R. Bothwell, *The Penguin History of Canada* (Toronto, 2006), 212; M. Conrad, *A Concise History of Canada* (Cambridge, 2012), 150–2, etc.

[3]P. Clark and B. Lepetit, *Capital Cities and Their Hinterlands in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 1996).

[4]See, in particular, L.J. Vale, *Architecture, Power, and National Identity*, 2nd edn (Abingdon, 2008); D.L.A. Gordon (ed.), *Planning Twentieth Century Capital Cities* (New York and London, 2006); W. Sonne, *Representing the State: Capital City Planning in the Early Twentieth Century* (Munich, 2003).

[5]J. Gottmann, 'The study of former capitals', *Ekistics*, 52 (1985), 542; A. Rapoport, 'On the nature of capitals and their physical expression', in J. Taylor (ed.), *Capital Cities: International Perspectives / Les capitales: perspectives internationals* (Ottawa, 1993).

[6]V. Rossmann, *Capital Cities: Varieties and Patterns of Development and Relocation* (London, 2017).

[7]See, for example, N. Shelekpayev, 'Astana as imperial project: Kazakhstan and its wandering capital city in the 20th century', *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2018), 157–89.

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Canada's seat of government had been that it was 'the Queen's choice'.[8] An attempt to revisit that view consisted in reassessing the history behind the choice of Ottawa as a parochial conflict among five cities in the United Canadas (that is contemporary Ontario and Quebec).[9] But this, in turn, has rendered Ottawa a somewhat marginal object of study in Canada's political history. The first and only thesis on the political history of Ottawa as a capital city in the mid-nineteenth century – David B. Knight's *Choosing Canada's Capital* – was published in 1977.[10] From a broader perspective, Knight's attempt to frame his research in terms of 'conflict resolution' and 'compromise' in a certain sense reflected the turbulent circumstances of Canadian politics in the 1970s when the Quebec secessionist movement threatened the unity of the country.[11] The National Capital Commission, created in 1959, improved research prospects as it possessed the resources to develop and support professional research on Ottawa.[12] Yet, the aim of the commission and other federal entities was based first and foremost on publicizing Ottawa and creating a positive image of it (and, by analogy, of Canada), instead of providing critical accounts of Ottawa as capital city or problematizing the role it had played in the making of the Canadian state and those groups of people who became marginalized as a result of this process. Without refuting these previous perspectives, this article will situate the material and symbolic construction of Ottawa in the late 1850s in the larger context of the Canadian expansion towards western parts of North America, a process that preceded and accompanied the early history of Confederation. The key goal of this article is to write a comprehensive history of Ottawa as a capital city, including not only its choice as the seat of government but also the elaboration of Canada's Parliament Buildings (which were to become the key symbol of Canada's future statehood), as well as the visit of the prince of Wales to Ottawa in 1860 whose presence allowed Ottawa to be legitimized and inaugurated as the new seat of government. Such an approach might allow one to shift the focus from seeing the history of Ottawa's elaboration in the mid-nineteenth century as a compromise to analysing it as an entangled process that involved a number of agencies and events. Finally, this article also attempts to revisit the history of Ottawa as a long process of territorial dispossession.

Indeed, the fact that the Canadian federal capital city was erected on a territory that had never been granted, sold or donated by any Indigenous Nation to the Canadian government has become an object of controversy and critique only recently, and is the result of ongoing pressure from the former.[13] A typical description of Ottawa usually begins with European colonization or in the nineteenth

[8]See, for example, W. Eggleston, *The Queen's Choice* (Ottawa, 1961), 98–110. See also L. Groulx, 'Le choix de la capitale au Canada', *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 5 (1952), 521–30.

[9]D. Knight, *Choosing Canada's Capital*, 2nd edn (Ottawa, 1991), 1–33, etc.

[10]D.B. Knight, *Choosing Canada's Capital: Jealousy and Friction in the Nineteenth Century*, 1st edn (Toronto, 1977).

[11]Knight, *Choosing Canada's Capital*, 2nd edn, 344–5.

[12]For the planning aspects, a must-read is D. Gordon, *Town & Crown: An Illustrated History of Canada's Capital* (Ottawa, 2015).

[13]For the pre-colonial history of Ottawa, see, for example, J.-L. Pilon and R. Bothwell, 'Below the falls: an ancient cultural landscape in the centre of (Canada's national capital region) Gatineau', *Canadian Journal of Archeology*, 39 (2015), 257.

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century.[14] Such accounts would emphasize the heroism of the European trailblazers, their 'smooth' contacts with the Indigenous Nations, and the presumed willingness on the part of the latter to be 'saved' and 'civilized'. As is explained in the book *Bytown: The Early Days of Ottawa*:

> Along with the route of this waterway [Ottawa River], under the cliff of Parliament Hill, passed to the west and northwest Brébeuf and Lalemant, the Jesuit martyrs; and the explorers; Nicolet, Radisson and Des Groseillers, La Mothe Cadillac, LaVérendrye, Frobisher, McTavish, and Sir Alexander Mackenzie, the first to reach the Pacific. These courageous missionaries and adventurers penetrated the vast Canadian wilderness, the former to save the souls of the Indians, the latter to search for the elusive North West Passage, a search which eventually led to great discoveries and colonisation.[15]

'Penetrating the wilderness', 'great discoveries' and other such phrases were the usual tropes that described the European appropriation of what was presumed to be 'virgin' or 'wild' land – language that in fact conveyed the ways in which the Indigenous presence was dismissed through the use of circumlocution (at best) or through euphemisms for acts of aggression (at worst). While such figurative or tropological sleights of hand were being deployed, Ottawa was discursively transformed from a trading locale into a mono-industrial lumber town, before turning into a federal capital. And what is more, the linear shift 'from lumber town' to 'federal capital' constitutes a myopic analysis of Ottawa as a territory with a dubious proprietorship – what is sorely lacking in such an account is an attempt to clarify how Ottawa's role as the *capital city* echoed another aspect of Canadian history: that European settlers had appropriated Indigenous territories and then governed their peoples.

Choosing the capital city

The United Province of Canada was established by the British crown in 1841, and in 1847 it had set up a responsible government. Yet, by 1857, Canadians could still not decide on the permanent location for that government. The first capital in the Province of Canada was Kingston, but in 1844, it was moved to Montreal. However, in 1849, a group of angry Tories burnt down the Parliament Building and forced the governor general to flee the city. After that time, the capital city would alternate between Quebec City and Toronto every three to four years, as the two Canadian constituencies, Canada East and Canada West, could not agree on a permanent emplacement. In 1856, the governor general, Edmund Head, and the federal government almost succeeded in making Quebec City the capital. The vote in its favour was adopted – but the appropriation bill for the construction of the Parliament and Department Buildings was rejected by the Legislative Council on 28 June 1856.[16] Prime Minister John A. Macdonald then recommended breaking the deadlock with an address to the British throne. Soon after that, Governor

[14]See J.H. Taylor, *Ottawa: An Illustrated History* (Ottawa, 1986), 11–21.
[15]N. and H. Mika, *Bytown: The Early Days of Ottawa* (Belleville, 1982), 12.
[16]Knight, *Choosing Canada's Capital*, 2nd edn, 183.

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General Head asked representatives in Kingston, Montreal, Ottawa, Quebec City and Toronto to prepare Memorials in order to inform the queen and the Colonial Office about their intention to become the seat of government.[17] From a formal point of view, the key Canadian cities were thus offered an equal chance to compete for the status of capital city.

The Memorials that Canadian cities sent to the queen in 1857 contained concise information of what their key features were and how they saw their position and role in the country. They also witnessed how the local decision-makers saw the role that the capital city should perform. No prescription existed to indicate who exactly ought to prepare the Memorials – as a result, the authorship, content and form of the documents varied significantly. The common purpose, however, was to represent the advantageous sides of a given city as glowingly as possible, underplay its negative features and belittle other contenders. In the case of Toronto and Ottawa, the mayors penned the Memorials, while the dispatches from Kingston and Montreal were signed by the municipal 'Corporation' and 'Government', respectively. In the case of Quebec City, two Memorials were sent: one by the Quebec Board of Trade, and the other by the City of Quebec.[18] In the same vein, the authors used different discursive strategies to defend their cause. Some of them produced epistolary narratives that instrumentalized past events. For instance, both Quebec City and Kingston appealed to the fact that they had already been seats of government in the past. The Memorials of Montreal and Toronto resembled analytical reports as they relayed information that claimed to prove that they would be a better choice according to 'scientific' data. The length varied too: while Memorials from Quebec and Ottawa were relatively concise, those compiled by Kingston, Montreal and Toronto were lengthier and more detailed. Several topics such as centrality, infrastructure, commerce and the prospect of the forthcoming Confederation could be found in every document.[19]

Security and defence were the issues that all contenders took seriously. Given the post-war of 1812 context as well as the tensions related to the Oregon boundary dispute (1844–72), this was hardly surprising. The Memorials did not leave doubts about the source of potential threat: the United States, a 'powerful and rapidly-increasing Republic', was represented as the enemy that could attack Canada at any moment.[20] As a consequence, each city's rhetorical strategy aimed to argue convincingly that their territory would be the most easily defendable. Once again, the arguments were based upon different premises. While Kingston and Montreal mentioned 'an easily defensible landscape' and 'costly fortifications', which they already possessed, Ottawa insisted that its distant location from the American border would prevent the city from a sudden attack and provide the

[17]LAC, Carnarvon papers, papers relative to the seat of government in Canada, Colonial Office, Oct. 1857, 11–43.

[18]Toronto also sent a second 'Memorandum to the policy and justice of continuing the seat of government for the Province of Canada at Toronto'. See LAC, papers relative to the seat of government in Canada, 22.

[19]For the issues related to political, social and economic history of Canada in the nineteenth century, one should see D. Creighton, *The Empire of Saint Lawrence: A Study in Commerce and Politics* (Toronto, 2002); and P.B. Waite, *The Life and Times of Confederation 1864–1867* (Toronto, 1962).

[20]LAC, Carnarvon papers, papers relative to the seat of government in Canada, mayor of Ottawa to Labouchere, 18 May 1857, 41.

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government with time for military mobilization. Toronto's strategy consisted in rhetorically underplaying the entire issue of defence as such: 'The chances of war', its Memorial read, 'are so remote that it would be unreasonable to allow such a contingency to override the convenience of the whole country'.[21] Quebec City's argument on the matter was rather intriguing. One of its Memorials stated that Quebec City's commanding position had been 'formed by nature to be the capital of a vast *Empire*'.[22] Further, it skilfully interwove the issue of defence *and* expansion into the political relations between Great Britain and Canada:

> The ever-increasing [*sic*] power of the United States necessarily points to the Federal union of the British Provinces under the protection of England as a measure which will ultimately become necessary. England herself is interested, even in view of her European policy, that a power should exist on this continent to counterbalance that of the great American Republic, in imitation of the European system.[23]

The Memorial went on to state that in the future a 'Federal union' could be created. For Quebecers, the rationale behind unification was based on a need to create a 'counterbalance' to the more populous and powerful United States as well as to form a common defence against their neighbour to the south.

The decision regarding where the seat of government should be located was not adopted, however, solely on the basis of the Memorials. In addition to them, Governor General Head sent a confidential memorandum to the Colonial Office in which he argued that Ottawa would be the best emplacement for the capital city. While Head dispatched a confidential memorandum in keeping with his duties,[24] the Colonial Office also consulted other officials on the issue. These were: John Fox Burgoyne, the inspector general of fortifications, and two former governors, John Colborne, the 1st Baron Seaton, and Sir Francis Bond Head. While Burgoyne and Colborne considered that Quebec would be the best place to host the capital, Sir Francis Bond Head supported Toronto.[25] One can thus conclude that neither local elites nor past and present British administrators had a common point of view with respect to where the seat of government should be located.

The expansion of Canada and the designation of its capital city

In the previous pages, we have seen that Quebec City sought to combine its parochial interests with the geopolitical interests of both the British crown and Canada. While Quebec's arguments were forward-looking and emphasized the British connection, Toronto saw itself as a flagship for the upcoming expansion and colonization of the West:

[21]*Ibid.*, mayor of Toronto to Labouchere, 15 Jun. 1857, 21.

[22]*Ibid.*, Memorial of the City of Quebec, 25 May 1857, 14, emphasis added.

[23]*Ibid.*, 15.

[24]At the end of the memorandum, however, Head recognized that he 'may be expected not to avoid the responsibility of expressing an opinion of [his] own'. See LAC, papers relative to the seat of government in Canada, 46.

[25]LAC, Carnarvon papers, further papers relative to the seat of government in Canada, 24 Oct. 1857, 2–13.

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> In fact, therefore, the territory westward of the meridian of Toronto is greater in extent than that to the eastward of it; and if we take into account the vast prairies (and the magnificent uplands drained by the Saskatchewan and other rivers) within the British possessions, and if we add to the importance of these the value of the vast coal-fields and other mineral resources between this province and the Rocky Mountains, and bear in mind that the line of mean temperature before mentioned still trends towards the north, as *we advance westward* we shall be forced to the inevitable conclusion that the present generation will see interests in existence about the shores of Lake Superior equal in every respect to those which now render the trade of Lakes Huron, Erie, and Ontario so important an item in the commerce of America.[26]

Toronto represented itself as the most suitable capital for a *future* Canada, the one that would stretch all the way up to the 'vast prairies' and the Rocky Mountains. Ottawa's arguments were no less ambitious: 'as a centre it is equally distant from Kingston and Montreal, from Quebec and Toronto, and when, in the future that already seems to shadow forth the destinies of this country, the Red River Valley shall be united on the one side, and the Lower British Provinces on the other, it will still form an extensive Empire'.[27]

As this quote demonstrates, Ottawa's narrative was not limited to the issues of 'centrality' and 'compromise'. It was testimony to the ambition to spread westward. The mayor's rhetoric suggested that transforming Ottawa into a capital city was part of a far-reaching strategy to increase and improve travel across land and water and, finally, to populate the Ottawa River valley and the territories that lay to the west of it with European settlers. In September 1856, Montreal's newspaper *Gazette* published a report of the meeting between the citizens of Ottawa and Philip Vankoughnet, who was at that time running for election in the Rideau District.[28] In a reference to Vankoughnet, the report mentioned:

> Canada at the present time was like a skeleton which required to be clothed with a body. It was a long strip of frontier without a back country…Let any man study the map of North America, and he will inevitably come to the conclusion, that…Ottawa has such natural advantages over all others that, sooner or later, it must take precedence of them all. Only let a canal of sufficient capacity be constructed to connect Lake Huron with the Gulf of St. Lawrence, and it must inevitably almost monopolise the trade of the west during the season of navigation; and Canada would soon be felt to the prosperity of the great west. This was a project in which any government might safely go to the very utmost of their means and ability, for it was sure to succeed. Let the work be properly done, and the advantages to the whole country would be so great in every point of view, that they could not be over-estimated. It would bind together the two sections of the province, and [make] them indispensable to each

[26]*Ibid.*, 18, emphasis added.

[27]*Ibid.*, mayor of Ottawa to Labouchere, 41, emphasis added.

[28]For details, see *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (online), 'Philip Michael Matthew Scott Vankoughnet (1822–1869)'.

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> other, and thus destroy any feeling of sectional jealousy which might exist between them.[29]

Vankoughnet further claimed that the lands that belonged to the Hudson Bay Company as well as to the North-Western territories should be 'looked upon as a part of Canada'. While Vankoughnet's claims could be explained, at least partially, by the boosterism that was typical of mid-nineteenth-century Canada, the British colonial administration was not totally insensitive to such ambitions. At least, the memorandum by Governor General Head mentioned that establishing the capital in the Ottawa Valley would help to stimulate the economic development of the region and aid the territorial expansion of Canada. 'The settlement of the valley of the Ottawa is rapidly increasing', he wrote, 'and will be at once stimulated by making it the capital.'[30] Echoing Vankoughnet's speech and Ottawa's Memorial, Head also stressed that the route from – and *through* – Ottawa towards the Great Lakes might become useful when the Western territories would be added to Canada:

> Whichever section predominates, and however far westward the commerce of Canada may extend, Ottawa will be a convenient position. If the Red River Settlement and the Saskatchewan country are finally to be annexed to Canada, the Ottawa route to Lake Huron and Lake Superior will be available, and may possibly turn out the shortest and the most advantageous of all.[31]

Head included a map with his letter that situated the five contending cities, and contained information about fertile lands in the western and north-western parts of the province, which were easiest to reach from Ottawa. By doing this, Head probably hoped to demonstrate that Ottawa would indeed be the best choice once further expansion of the country took place.

The desired internal colonization of the West inevitably raised the issue of infrastructure for transportation. In the mid-nineteenth century, the key preoccupation of all Canadian cities was to get connected and speed up the delivery of people and goods. This is why the arguments about the ease of communication with other parts of the province, along with the focus on the *future* infrastructural projects, were important for every city that aspired to host the government, including Ottawa. The Ottawa River – on which the city that took its name stood and which became connected to Lake Ontario through the Rideau Canal by 1832 – played a crucial role in the economic development of its adjacent region.[32] In 1856, the Canadian Department of Public Works engaged Walter Shanly, a

[29]Bibliothèque et Archives Nationales du Québec (BAnQ), Collection nationale, 'Hon. Mr. Vankoughnet in Ottawa', *Gazette*, 9 Sep. 1856. The publication was probably reprinted partially or entirely from the *Ottawa Citizen*, or summarized in a free form as it indicates 'from the Ottawa Citizen' in its sub-title.

[30]LAC, Carnarvon papers, papers relative to the seat of government in Canada, confidential memorandum by Sir E. Head, containing reasons for fixing the seat of government for Canada at Ottawa (undated), 44.

[31]*Ibid.*, 46.

[32]For the general history of the Ottawa River and Ottawa valley, see, for example, J. Finnegan, *Guide to the Ottawa Valley: A Cultural and Historical Companion* (Kingston, 1988). For the history of the Rideau

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civil engineer who had previously supervised the construction of the Bytown–Prescott railway that had connected Ottawa with Montreal, to investigate the possibility of a navigation route between Montreal and Lake Huron via the Ottawa River.[33] Shanly produced an enthusiastic report which demonstrated that despite 'engineering obstacles to be overcome', the Ottawa River was 'a splendid piece of natural navigation'.[34] Moreover, the itinerary promised to be profitable from a commercial point of view as it was shorter and would presumably cost less than two other existing trade routes, the Welland Canal and the route which passed through Toronto and Georgian Bay.[35] Despite the fact that Shanly was hired to clarify technical issues, his report nonetheless made use of political and economic arguments. In particular, he described the possibility of navigation as 'a matter of destiny' to which his fellow compatriots had a natural right and through which their collective identity could be fully expressed:

> No wholly artificial revenue can keep pace in increasing capacity with the gigantic commerce which is growing up to the west of Lake Michigan, and which will force us Canadians into bolder undertakings than any we have yet embarked in. Canada lies directly across the leading route from the far west to the Atlantic seaboard, and over some portion of our territory the great tide of western commerce must for ever roll.[36]

An additional justification to reassert the importance of using the Ottawa River waterway was that it had already been one of the 'oldest' commercial routes in North America. Shanly wrote a romanticized narrative that evoked 'the gallant voyageur' Samuel de Champlain and his followers who had fearlessly travelled through Ottawa, 'impelled by the love of adventure'.[37] On one hand, such a narrative sought to increase the attractiveness of the project as it would create the impression that the route would pass through a known landscape. But it also aimed discursively to appropriate land that did not belong to the Province of Canada. In Shanly's narrative, the fact that the route had been used by the Europeans in the seventeenth century gave the settlers a 'natural' right to it in the nineteenth. Nevertheless, this act of appropriation paradoxically required that the territory would need to be referred to (if not performatively declared) as uninhabited, or 'empty'. At least Shanly had briefly referred in passing to a 'few dozen Indian families' – which, according to him, were merely a shadow of a mighty tribe that had once inhabited the shores of Ottawa in the days of Champlain.[38]

At the same time that Canada's domestic discourse tended to represent the territories around the Ottawa Valley as a void, in London, Canadians were actively

Canal, see R. Legget, *Rideau Waterway* (Toronto, 1986; orig. publ. 1955); and R. Legget, *Canals of Canada* (Vancouver, 1976).

[33]Toronto Public Library, Baldwin Collection, *Report of Walter Shanly, Esquire, on the Ottawa Survey. Submitted to the Legislative Assembly for their Information* (Toronto: T.J.J. Loranger, 30 Jul. 1858).

[34]*Ibid.*, 8 and 20.

[35]*Ibid.*, 12.

[36]*Ibid.*, 9.

[37]*Ibid.*, 8.

[38]*Ibid.*

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recruiting volunteers to inhabit their future capital city. The brochure *Ottawa, the Future Capital of Canada*, published in London in 1858, purveyed a promising prospect for future immigrants. According to the brochure, 24 million acres of land were available for settlement between Ottawa and the Georgian Bay, most of which was suitable for farming purposes: 'There is ample room for farming; and, during many years to come, it will prove exceedingly profitable, for the country largely imports both wheat and flour, as well as pork, to feed the large population of lumber-men, already estimated at 20.000, scattered along the river and its tributaries, and in the forests.'[39] Ottawa was depicted as a place where future immigrants would find prosperity, stable work and beautiful landscapes. Immigrants, in turn, were supposed to level off the timber-oriented economy of the region and help make the region self-sustainable, primarily in food products.[40] The labour was needed, for example, for the above-mentioned new canal that was expected to transform Ottawa into a strategic point between 'old' Canada and the 'new' West, which would be integrated into the country soon. 'When the canal which is required to connect the Ottawa River with the Georgian Bay is completed', the brochure read, 'the Colonial Government would possess the means of communication with those extensive districts from which the granaries of the old world are replenished.'[41]

To summarize, the selection of Canada's future capital city not only mirrored an intra-territorial logic regarding the existing boundaries of Canada but also put in motion the extra-territorial issues of its upcoming expansion in northern and western directions. Ottawa's strategic location at the confluence of the Gatineau, Ottawa and Rideau rivers must have been a crucial factor for its 'capital' ambitions. Last but not least, the discursive construction of the impending territorial expansion of Canada and of Ottawa as its future capital was an *exclusionary* project from the very beginning. Canadian authorities and the people who served them systematically represented the appropriation of the Ottawa Valley and its territories as a smooth and peaceful process (while also calling the territories that were inhabited by the Indigenous Nations a 'void'). This strategy further justified and enabled the exclusion of the Indigenous Nations, as they did not correspond to the government's definition of the kind of citizens it hoped to attract through its immigration policies. It should also be stated that the Canadian government was exclusive in its treatment of European immigration, too: Ottawa wanted white settlers from the British Isles.

The Parliament Buildings: representing the state of Canada

In December 1857, Queen Victoria's spouse, Prince Albert, wrote to Colonial Secretary Labouchere that Ottawa must have been 'a beautiful situation and all the detached descriptions must tend to confirm the impressions that the choice is the right one'. 'We must now trust that the Province will look upon it in the same light, when it becomes known', he added.[42] But the Province did not. Not

[39]*Ottawa, the Future Capital of Canada*, 13.

[40]*Ibid.*, 18.

[41]*Ibid.*, 17.

[42]LAC, seat of government memoranda and letter, 1857–58, Prince Albert to Labouchere (handwritten manuscript), 18 Dec. 1857.

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only were there attempts to reopen debates regarding the selection of the seat of government, but also the government was slow to enact the queen's decision. Moreover, in 1858, the parliament de facto rejected Her Majesty's choice. This led to the resignation of the Macdonald–Cartier government, whose leaders chose to represent the rejection as an insult to the queen. The new government, headed by George Brown and A.A. Dorion, intended to keep the alternating system and eventually move the capital city to Montreal. However, Brown's government soon lost the support of the parliament. When Brown and Dorian asked Governor General Head to call for a general election, the latter refused. In the end, Macdonald and Cartier came back to power and the debates concerning the seat of government went on until February 1859.

On the opposite side of the Atlantic, public opinion with respect to the potential choice of Ottawa was also far from unanimous. Nicholas Woods, a correspondent from *The Times*, who visited Ottawa in 1860, wrote:

> Ottawa, as the capital of Canada, seems such a monstrous absurdity, that, like all who have penetrated to it, I can never treat its metropolitan future as anything more than a bad practical joke, in which no one ever saw any meaning, but which, now that the Prince has solemnly laid the foundation stone of 'intended' Parliament buildings, is considered as having gone rather too far and is awakening a feeling of almost indignation throughout Canada…As well might Ventnor or Malvern be selected as the seat of government of England; and the change from the city of Montreal to the township of Ottawa, it must be remembered, was the act of the English Government, and almost thrust upon Canadians.[43]

Woods depicted Ottawa as a remote place, difficult to access without expending much physical effort, a place with no future, and disliked by the majority of Canadians. He stated explicitly that it was London that had chosen Ottawa, which per se indicated the hierarchy that stood between Canada and Britain. Ultimately, Woods' *cri de coeur* demonstrated that there was no consensus on either side of the Atlantic regarding the seat of government, and that the queen and Colonial Office had in fact not only failed to solve the Canadian crisis, but had also turned part of public opinion against them on the domestic front.

Meanwhile, the decision determining that Ottawa should be the permanent capital was adopted by the Legislative Assembly of Canada in February 1859, after long and exhausting debates. This decision, nonetheless, was fragile, and many felt that it could be overturned at any moment.[44] This led the government to start erecting the Parliament Building, in order to cement the shaky decision and avoid the reopening of the debates. On 7 May 1859, the Department of Public Works announced a contest for the design of the Parliament and Department Buildings, and the Governor's House (the construction of which was not initiated for lack of funds). Initially, Canada expected to spend £225,000 on the Parliament and Department Buildings. Later, this amount would quadruple: in 1862, a special committee was

[43]N. Woods, *The Prince of Wales in Canada and the United States* (London, 1861), 157.
[44]*Ibid.*, 159.

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created to investigate the mismanagement of the construction efforts. As David Gordon suggested, the initial amount had just been enough to put 'a shovel in the ground', so evidently much more money needed to be spent to complete the buildings.[45] The style required by the competition rules was described by the Department of Public Works as 'plain and substantial', a loose definition that left room for interpretation for those who would do the work.[46] The construction material, however, 'was to be found in the vicinity of the City of Ottawa'.[47]

By 1 August 1859 (the date of the competition deadline), 23 designs for the Parliament and Department Buildings had been sent to the Department of Public Works: 16 of them for the former and 7 for the latter. The contenders represented 18 architectural teams and included professionals at various career stages. Most of the contenders practised in Canada although they had been born and trained in Europe, but a few were local architects, such as Charles Baillairgé. All of the designs were exhibited in the Toronto Parliament Buildings for public viewing.[48] Two juries were selected to evaluate the projects: Samuel Keefer, engineer and commissioner of public works, and Frederick Rubidge, architect and deputy commissioner. Their role was to recommend the best projects so that the executive council and governor general could approve them. Three teams came out as favourites: Stent & Laver from Ottawa, along with two bureaus from Toronto, Fuller & Jones and Cumberland & Storm.

Aside from technical characteristics, the key criterion for the selection of the best projects was their appearance. The image of the new edifices needed to inspire respect and fit in with the picturesque landscape of their future location. Both winning projects – the Parliament by Fuller & Jones and Stent & Laver's Department Buildings – were drawn and eventually built in a Victorian neo-Gothic style. In view of the fact that both edifices were of great symbolic significance, they subsequently had an important impact on so-called 'federal' architecture throughout many parts of Canada. In a way, the Parliament and Department Buildings helped to create the impression that Victorian neo-Gothic was a 'natural' stylistic choice for subsequent Canadian public architecture. However, documents related to the 1859 design contest allow such a perspective to acquire a bit of nuance. First of all, among 16 proposals for the Parliament, only 6 were 'neo-Gothic' or 'Norman' in style.[49] Even Fuller & Jones, who argued that neo-Gothic was the most suitable for the site and function of the building, had nevertheless prepared two drawings for the design of the Parliament: one in neo-Gothic, and another in an 'Italian' style, in case for some reason the jury did not like their neo-Gothic proposal. Given this, one can argue that among the architects of that

[45]Gordon, *Town & Crown*, 89.

[46]LAC, appendix to report of the honorable the commissioner of public works, documents relating to the construction of the Parliamentary and Department Buildings at Ottawa, sessional papers, volume 2, First Session of the Seventh Parliament of the Province of Canada, session 1862 (volume XX).

[47]*Ibid.*

[48]C. Young, *The Glory of Ottawa: Canada's First Parliament Buildings* (Montreal, 1995), 28.

[49]Province of Canada, Department of Public Works, documents relating to the construction of the Parliamentary and Departmental Buildings at Ottawa, Samuel Keefer to Edmund Head, Aug. 1859 (Quebec, 1862).

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time there was no consensus or dominant opinion that neo-Gothic should be the 'chief' or 'sanctioned' style.

Yet, the key feature of any symbolic architecture consists in the fact that buildings usually remain long after the departure or death of the architect. Hence, architecture is not and never can be reduced to the meaning attributed to it by an architect or a contractor: it acquires meaning *as* it is experienced by those to whom it addresses itself and at the *moment* it is experienced. What was the audience's perception of the neo-Gothic projects approved by the judges of the Canadian Department of Public Works? Back in Europe, from where it was to migrate to Canada, the Gothic Revival had had clear connotations: it was about finding a lost ideal from the medieval past in a modern world that was changing rapidly as a result of the industrial revolution. Canada had no medieval past (in the European sense); the neo-Gothic signifier would thus be appropriated (in a literal sense) as a proxy in order to forge a national identity for a new Canadian state. The link, however, did not resonate in the same way for all Canadians. In anglophone and Protestant Ontario, the symbolic crown which Fuller & Jones placed at the top of the Parliament reinforced a feeling of belonging to the British empire. To Québécois, however, the crown was a reminder of the Conquest. The Indigenous Nations, to whom the land of Ottawa had belonged not too long before, had absolutely no presence in the Parliament's symbolic language. Of all the contest entries in 1859, only two submissions would evoke (and superficially, at that) the previous identity of the area where Parliament would stand. Two architectural firms had entitled their projects *Odahwah* and *Stadacona*.[50] The former referred to a regional First Nation people, the latter to a sixteenth-century Iroquoian village. Nothing in the actual project designs, however, referred directly to the Indigenous Nations.

Legitimizing the choice of Ottawa: the prince of Wales in Canada in 1860

Sanctioning the construction of the Parliament and Department Buildings was one strategy to make the choice of Ottawa permanent and inevitable. Another strategy was to make its own local citizens and Canadians on the whole believe that it would truly become the capital city. The rite of passage was made possible once a supreme authority for Canadians in the mid-nineteenth century could be enlisted and mobilized: the British royals. The final part of this article will thus focus on the visit of Edward, the royal prince and heir, to Ottawa in 1860.[51] It was during this visit, on 1 September 1860, that the royal prince laid the cornerstone for the future building of the Canadian Legislature. One may assume that the visit and the ceremony strengthened Ottawa's status as the newly established capital city, and for this reason the visit should be analysed as an integral part of the history of Ottawa as a

[50]Young, *The Glory of Ottawa*, 26.

[51]A vast number of publications were dedicated to the 1860 tour. The ones consulted for the purpose of this research include: R. Cellem, *Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to the British North American Provinces and United States in the Year 1860 Compiled from the Public* (Toronto, 1861); P.-O. Chauveau, *The Visit of His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales to America, Reprinted from the Lower Canada Journal of Education, with an Appendix Containing Poems, Addresses, Letters, &c* (Montreal, 1861); K. Cornwallis, *Royalty in the New World; or, The Prince of Wales in America* (New York, 1860); G. Engleheart, *Journal of the Progress of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales through British North America and His Visit to the United States, 10th July to 15th November, 1860* (London, 1860).

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capital city. While the literature that was produced during or shortly after the visit focused on the event itself (i.e. how it had transpired, what its secular and political aspects were, comments on the personality and characteristics of the prince and so on), this article aims to rethink these moments as a prism through which to explore the issues related to Ottawa's legitimation by way of the prince's presence in the new capital.[52]

Prince Edward visited Canada and the United States between 23 July and 20 October 1860. The prince was accompanied by an impressive suite, which included the colonial secretary, various advisors and assistants close to the royal family, a number of naval and military officers and a pool of journalists and columnists.[53] In the Province of Canada, the prince was also accompanied by Governor General Head and his staff. The manner in which the route was drawn, the reception the royal heir received and the amount of time he spent in British North America all indicate that the visit was an issue of significance on both sides of the Atlantic.

Edward arrived in Ottawa on the evening of 31 August. According to the *Ottawa Citizen*, the city presented itself to the prince as 'lovely and anxious as a bride awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom to complete her joy'.[54] The prince was greeted enthusiastically: 'where the lungs of the citizens are concerned', mentioned one of the observers, the inhabitants of Ottawa 'carried off the palm from every city in British America'.[55] On 1 September, the prince laid the cornerstone on the place of the future Parliament Building, in the presence of architects, clerks and politicians:

> The Prince then descended from the dais, and receiving a chastely worked silver trowel, stooped and spread the mortar over the foundation, immediately following which the block was lowered to its grave. The royal hand gave it three taps with the mallet; the Governor General came forward, and placing his hand on it said, 'Your Royal Highness, the stone is now laid;' there was a glorious cheer, repeated again and again, from the assembled multitude, whose uncovered heads were hot in the sun, and the ceremony was over.[56]

The ceremony was an event where much was at stake, and the organizers prepared everything carefully. Their key challenge was to persuade everyone that Ottawa was the *real* capital city, while all they had to work with were temporary structures and a symbolic agent who acted in Ottawa by proxy. For Prince Edward had in fact *replaced* Queen Victoria who was invited to inaugurate Ottawa (and sent her son to do so instead) while the neo-Gothic arch made of wood only *conveyed* an idea of the future Parliament Buildings – in 1860, the structure did not even

[52]For secondary sources related to the tour, see, in particular, I. Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto, 2004). See also the comparative essay by P. Buckner, 'The invention of tradition?: the royal tours of 1860 and 1901 to Canada', in C.M. Coates (ed.), *Majesty in Canada: Essays on the Role of Royalty* (Toronto, 2006).

[53]Cellem, *Visit of His Royal Highness,* 10.

[54]BAnQ, *Ottawa Citizen*, 1 Sep. 1860, 2.

[55]Chauveau, *The Visit of His Royal Highness*, 63.

[56]Cornwallis, *Royalty in the New World*, 129–30.

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have a single completed wall. Against such a backdrop, and to achieve maximum reliability, the organizers had to resort to several tricks. Above the stage, a giant wooden crown had been built, which symbolized the monarchy and the fact that Ottawa had been chosen by the queen. The ceremony thus not only occurred in the royal prince's presence, but was also staged under the crown. At the same time, the main symbolic element of the ceremony – a stone of white marble – was Canadian: two weeks earlier it had been delivered to Ottawa from Portage du Feu.

The ceremony attracted thousands of people, and yet it remained an exclusive event. Only a handful of men received an invitation to the altar where a symbolic bridegroom (the prince) transformed a symbolic bride (Ottawa) into a real capital with the help of a silver trowel. The rest of the audience was divided between comfortable seats for 'a few privileged individuals'[57] in the forefront and those crowded somewhere behind, trying to see what little they could past the heads and shoulders of the well-to-do.

While official sources are silent on the matter of whether the Indigenous persons had been invited to the stone-laying ceremony, various sources confirm that they attended other events in Ottawa during the prince's visit. In 1860, the presence of the Indigenous persons was meant to emphasize the diversity of the human landscape that Prince Edward and his suite encountered in British North America.[58] For example, the local game of lacrosse was presented to the prince not as a purely 'Indian' game yet part of *métissage* between the Indigenous Nations and European settlers and, for that reason, was performed by both 'white' and 'Indian' players.[59] Generally, the observers did not tend towards belittling the skills of the Indigenous participants (who the prince observed with curiosity and sympathy); rather, they were represented as childish and 'natural' remnants of Ottawa's pre-capital identity. And yet during the visit, their role was chiefly reduced to entertainment: rowing, lacrosse, military dances. Commenting on a show that was performed by the Algonquin persons, one of the observers noted that the latter 'were far more fantastic than terrible'.[60] One could thus imagine that carnivalizing the Indigenous people – and thus depriving them of their 'normal' subjectivity – was a strategy that ultimately strove to essentialize them and de-problematize their deliberately constructed otherness that would eventually aid in legitimizing the settlers' control of their lands and the broader colonial order. This being said, the fact that some Indigenous representatives participated in the events hints that to a certain extent they co-constructed the status quo that Prince Edward helped to give legitimacy to in 1860. To conclude, while politically the voice of the Indigenous Nations was not heard on the issue of the choice of Ottawa as a capital city, their presence was nevertheless instrumentalized by the settlers at the events that promoted its legitimation and acceptance.

[57]Cellem, *Visit of His Royal Highness*, 187.

[58]Chauveau, *The Visit of His Royal Highness*, 40.

[59]Engleheart, *Journal of the Progress of H.R.H.*, 72; Cellem, *Visit of His Royal*, 167; Cornwallis, *Royalty in the New World*, 118.

[60]Cellem, *Visit of His Royal Highness*, 167.

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Conclusion

In 2016, the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation filed a lawsuit against the Province of Ontario for the right of ownership over the territory of downtown Ottawa, including the land on which the Canadian Parliament Buildings currently stand. The lawsuit became another twist in a series of endless litigations, spanning over 30 years,[61] between the Algonquins and Canada over many a territory in Eastern Ontario. The reason behind the 2016 lawsuit was a new development project in an area of Ottawa called Lebreton Flats. The leaders of the Anishinaabe Nation stated that they do not claim to own the territory of the Canadian capital. Yet, at a symbolic level, it is important to them that the Canadian courts recognize that the federal capital city stands on an expropriated territory.[62] The lawsuit is likely to remain in the courts for a long time, and its outcome is far from predetermined. But if the Anishinaabe Nation wins its case, a precedent is likely to emerge. In collective imaginations, capital cities are accustomed to being seen as the sanctum sanctorum of nation-states. When one looks at capital cities, literally and figuratively, what is taken in is by default nourished by symbols produced by the ruling elites and dominant ideologies. Rarely are we made to recall that most capital cities – even those declared to have been built 'from scratch' – stand at places that had previously belonged to someone else.

This article has argued that the choice and construction of Ottawa, as a capital city, can be productively regarded as the corollary of Canada's westward expansion in the mid-nineteenth century. More research needs to be done to grasp the degree of connectedness of these contemporaneous processes as well as the extent of their co-construction. This article has also attempted to draw attention to the connection between the history of Ottawa as a capital city and the political history of the pre-Confederation Canada, including the issues of its symbolic politics. The massive neo-Gothic Parliament Buildings, sitting like a throne over the Ottawa River, were not just another landmark of a 'garrison mentality',[63] they became instead a place where that mentality took shape to convey a shifting – a more imperialist and exclusive – spirit of Canada. Going back to the initial questions that were raised at the beginning of this article, one could suggest that the crystallization of the Confederation and the construction of Ottawa had been connected processes which, as Manners-Sutton mentioned in his dispatch, stemmed one from the other, and mutually reinforced one another.[64] Moreover, the history of Ottawa's transformation into a capital city might provide yet another explanation of how a country 'long and narrow; in fact all frontier'[65] became in only a few years one of the largest countries on the planet.

Finally, the making of Ottawa also provokes intriguing questions about the kind of state Canada was in the mid-nineteenth century. For the establishment of many

[61]For details, see Government of [the Province of] Ontario 'The Algonquin land claim', Timeline, Ontario.ca, last consulted on 1 Feb. 2018.

[62]I. Austin, 'Vast Indigenous land claims in Canada encompass Parliament Hill', *New York Times*, 12 Nov. 2017.

[63]For more on the 'garrison mentality', see N. Frye, 'Conclusion to a literary history of Canada', 1965, in *Bush Garden: Essays on the Canadian Imagination* (Concord, ON, 1971), 213–51.

[64]LAC, Carnarvon papers, Manners-Sutton to Bulmer-Lytton, 10.

[65]LAC, Carnarvon papers, confidential memorandum by Sir E. Head, 44.

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capital cities in the last two hundred years and the ideologies that accompanied and justified their creation hardly reflected a predictable and unproblematic passage from external imperial rule to the ready-made consciousness of nation-states. Quite the contrary, we observe a series of crooked lines: instead of getting rid of the colonial past, many statesmen recycled its most off-colour practices to produce their own empires, in the image and likeness of the ones to which they once or still belonged. At times, this process was assisted by metropolitan actors. But even if some assistance took place, to consider the imperial ambitions of, say, Canada in the late 1850s as being simply a prolongation of British policies abroad would constitute a limited view. Rather, Canadian politicians used the empire and figures such as the prince of Wales as a springboard to make themselves and their country larger and richer, and in a way that they considered to be the most suitable for them. Indeed, the example of how Ottawa became a capital city in the nineteenth century may provide yet another illustration of how Canadian decision-makers sacrificed the rights of the many for the ambitions of the few.

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