

THE

BEECHWOOD

WAY

MAGAZINE



**The South African War:
Canada's First Foreign Conflict**



BEECHWOOD

Funeral, Cemetery and Cremation Services
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The South African War: Canada's First Foreign Conflict

The South African War, also known as the Second Boer War (1899–1902), marked a critical turning point in Canada's emergence on the world stage. It was the first time that Canada, still a young dominion within the British Empire, sent troops overseas to fight in a foreign conflict. While often overshadowed by the world wars that followed, the South African War was a foundational moment in Canadian military history, testing national unity and beginning a tradition of international military engagement that continues to this day.

Fought between the British Empire and two Boer republics—the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State—the war was sparked by imperial ambitions, control over gold-rich territories, and growing tensions between colonial powers and settlers. As the British Empire mobilized, Canada responded. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, a compromise was struck: the federal government would equip and transport volunteers, but not enforce conscription. This decision sent over 7,000 Canadians—including soldiers, nurses, and scouts—to South Africa.

Canada's soldiers found themselves in a harsh, unfamiliar environment. They fought in brutal conditions: under intense heat, across vast plains, and in the face of guerrilla tactics employed by Boer fighters. Canadian troops were involved in major actions, including the relief of Mafeking and the capture of pivotal Boer strongholds.

The war had profound implications at home. For English Canadians, it was often seen as a noble duty to the Empire. For French Canadians, particularly those led by Henri Bourassa, it represented a dangerous step toward entanglement in Britain's imperial conflicts. The public debates over Canada's role in South Africa foreshadowed future divisions over conscription and foreign policy during the World Wars.

From Boer War to South African War - A Changing History

In Canada, the conflict historically referred to as the Boer War has, over time, become more commonly known as the South African War, particularly in official and academic contexts. This shift began in earnest during the late 20th century as part of a broader effort to adopt terminology that is more geographically accurate and less politically charged.

The term “Boer War” centres the perspective of the Afrikaner (Boer) republics, whereas “South African War” more accurately reflects the multinational nature of the conflict, which involved British forces, colonial troops from across the Empire—including Canada—and a diverse range of South African communities.

Canadian government agencies, such as Veterans Affairs Canada and the Department of National Defence, formally began adopting the term “South African War” in the 1990s to align with this broader, more inclusive historical framing.

This change also reflects Canada's growing commitment to presenting a balanced and nuanced account of its military history, recognizing all participants and the complexity of imperial warfare.

Honouring the South African War at Beechwood Cemetery

At Beechwood Cemetery—the National Cemetery of Canada—the legacy of the South African War is preserved through the lives of those who served and those who remembered. Beechwood is home to memorials, monuments, and the final resting places of veterans who participated in the war and sculptors who commemorated it. Among them is Hamilton Plantagenet MacCarthy, a renowned sculptor interred at Beechwood, who was commissioned to create more South African War memorials than any other artist in Canadian history. His works, found in cities across Canada, were instrumental in shaping the country's collective memory of the conflict.

Also buried at Beechwood are veterans who survived the conflict and later contributed to Canada's military and civic life. Their gravestones speak not only of their time in South Africa, but of a lifelong commitment to service, nation-building, and remembrance.

SAMUEL MAYNARD ROGERS - Section 48, Lot 14 NE

Samuel Maynard Rogers was born in Plymouth, England on April 14, 1862, to Samuel Rogers and Elizabeth Maynard. He came to Canada with his parents in the late 1860s, and like many young men of his generation he was attracted to military life. He joined the militia with the 43rd Regiment in the early 1880s and served as Staff Sergeant with the Ottawa Sharpshooters in the 1885 Rebellion. In 1895, he was called upon to lead a small contingent of militia to Low, Quebec to put down a tax revolt.

Duty called again at the outbreak of the South African War in 1899. Rogers commanded "D" Company, 2nd Special Service Battalion, 1889-1900. From 1905 to 1907, he was chief staff officer in charge of the Rockcliffe military camp and from 1904 to 1910 he was Lieutenant-Colonel commanding the 43rd Regiment.



During the First World War, Rogers offered his services again and was appointed officer commanding the Ottawa Garrison and in this capacity, he was responsible for the celebrations marking the 50th anniversary of Confederation in 1917.

In addition to his military interests, Rogers had several careers over the course of his long life. For many years, he was involved in the family undertaking business, and when asked about this, he would invariably answer that "he followed the medical profession." Prior to the First World War, Rogers was appointed the first permanent superintendent of Jasper Forest, later Jasper National Park, and when not involved in military matters, he sold insurance.

Rogers, long associated with Canada's military history, lived to see the outbreak of another world war; he died at Ottawa on June 30, 1940.

ALBERT JOHN CAWDRON - Section 24, Lot 72 SW

Albert John Cawdron was born in 1873 in Ottawa. As a young man, he joined the Dominion Police in 1897, and shortly after enlisted with the first Canadian Contingent going to South Africa for the Boer War. He returned to Canada in 1901, having been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel.

Back in Canada, Cawdron rejoined the Dominion Police and was put on plain-clothes detail – the secret service branch of the force. In September of that same year, he worked as a special operative for the royal tour through Canada of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York.

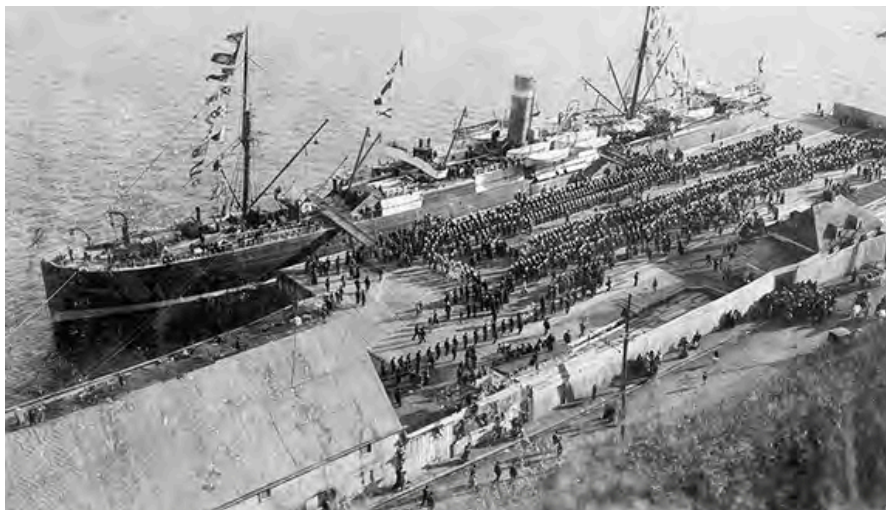
He held a similar position again, when they visited Quebec in 1908 as the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Cawdron continued to rise through the ranks of the Dominion Police, and when then-Commissioner Sir Percy Sherwood left Canada for England in 1915, Cawdron was appointed a Commissioner of Police in his absence. Only a few years later, in 1918, Sir Percy retired officially, and Cawdron became his successor.



As Acting Commissioner, Cawdron reorganized the military service police, which had been formed to prosecute evaders of the Military Service Act during WWI. In 1920 when the Dominion Police was absorbed in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Cawdron was named Superintendent and Director of Criminal Investigations.

During the Royal Commission on Customs and Excise in 1926, he was the chief investigator, appointed by the government for the Commission. Cawdron was promoted to Assistant Commissioner in May of 1932, a position he retained until his retirement in 1936. Sadly, Cawdron had little time to enjoy his retirement – he was killed in an automobile accident only a few years later, on September 8, 1938.



Pictured is the SS Sardinian at the dock in Québec prior to its departure in October 1899. Photo: Library and Archives Canada

CHARLES FRANCIS WINTER - Section 25, Lot 22 NW

Charles Francis Winter was born in Montreal on February 3, 1863 to William Winter and Jane McFarlane. As a young man, he departed for England, enlisted with the British Army and accompanied the 7th Fusiliers to Egypt in 1882 where he took part in the battle at Tel el Kebir and in the occupation of Cairo. Winter purchased his discharge and returned to Canada in 1883 where he joined the civil service at Ottawa and held positions in several departments, including Marine and Fisheries, Interior, Inland Revenue, and Militia and Defence.

Army experience, he made was a valuable addition to the Ottawa Sharpshooters when volunteers were called for in the spring of 1885. Winter served with distinction in the Northwest Rebellion and was severely wounded at the Battle of Cut Knife Hill.

Following the Rebellion, Winter pursued his career in the civil service while devoting considerable time to his militia duties. He was commissioned with the Foot Guards and served as Adjutant from 1896 to 1906.

The South African War, 1899-1902, provided him with another opportunity to serve his country and he did so with the 2nd Special Service Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment.



He took part in the capture of Pretoria and in guerrilla operations in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Following the war, Winter served as secretary of the Dominion Rifle Association, 1904-1909, and President of the South African War Veterans Association in Ottawa, 1905-1909.

Winter transferred to the Department of Militia and Defence in 1907. In 1910, he was appointed Deputy Assistant Adjutant General at Montreal and three years later, he returned to Ottawa as Military Secretary to the Minister of Militia and Defence, Sam Hughes.

Winter, now a Brigadier-General, retired in 1922. In 1931, he wrote a biography of Sir Sam Hughes, Lieutenant General the Hon. Sir Sam Hughes, Canada's War Minister, and maintained a lively interest in military matters for the remainder of his life. He died at Ottawa on October 20, 1946.

COL HENRY JOSEPH WOODSIDE - Section 17, PC 252

Born in Canada West on November 6, 1858, Woodside began his career at 18, contributing to the Thunder Bay Sentinel. He later became principal proprietor and managing editor of the Manitoba Liberal, which was the leading paper west of Winnipeg. Woodside was also a local and special correspondent for the Free Press and other Winnipeg dailies.

In 1898, he went to the Klondike as a special correspondent for many papers, including the Free Press, the Montreal Star and the New York Commercial Advertiser. In the following year, he became managing editor of the Yukon Sun and later of the Klondike Miner, making him the first Canadian editor in the Yukon.

In 1901-1902 Woodside joined the 2nd Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles, and saw action in South Africa during the Boer War, earning the rank of major.

He came to Ottawa in 1906, where he was appointed city manager of the Imperial Guarantee & Accident Company of Toronto. During World War I, he served again with the rank of colonel in the 5th Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles, and was wounded in France in May 1916. He remained an extensive contributor to the press from Dawson to Halifax and wrote articles for the Wide World Outing, a Canadian magazine.

Woodside died in Ottawa on November 8, 1929.



Photo by Henry Joseph Woodside of crowd assembled at Dawson Post Office, Yukon 1899

SIR EDWARD WHIPPLE BANCROFT MORRISON Section 29, Lot 16 N

Edward Whipple Bancroft Morrison was born to Scottish immigrants in London, Ontario on July 6, 1867. He served with distinction in two wars; first in 1900 in the Boer or South African War where he was an artillery lieutenant commanding the Left side of D Battery (it's worth noting that his close friend, John McCrae -writer of poem In Flanders Fields - commanded the Right side of D Battery).

He was awarded the D.S.O. (Distinguished Service Order) in 1901 for "skill and coolness" in saving guns during a retreat. In between wars, Earl Grey tasked Morrison with organizing the Boy Scouts in 1910. Then, from 1914 to 1919, Morrison served first as Lieutenant- Colonel commanding the 1st Brigade, CFA (Canadian Field Artillery), then the 2nd Brigade CFA and finally, late in 1916, he was promoted to Brigadier-General commanding all Canadian artillery until the end of the war and demobilization, and was promoted again to Major-General, and knighted. He completed his war service as Major-General Sir Edward Morrison.

Major-General Morrison commanded the Canadian Artillery at Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, Passchendaele and the pivotal battles of "The Last 100 Days," that brought WWI to an end.

In the back of his World War One Officer's Book there is a hand-written accolade by the Canadian Corps Commander at the end of WWI: "I desire to record here my appreciation of the outstanding qualification of Maj Gen Morrison, CB DSO as a gunner. He knows his work thoroughly and loves a fight. He is keen, energetic, gallant, capable and loyal. He is a good organizer, farseeing, fair and just." - A.W.Currie Lt Gen [Canadian general, and Commander of the Canadian Corps, General Sir Arthur Currie].

Edward Morrison's other career was that of a journalist and editor. He began as a reporter in 1888, first with the Hamilton Spectator, eventually becoming its editor. On July 1st, 1898 he then moved up to become the editor-in-chief of the Ottawa Citizen until 1913, just before World War One.

Upon returning from Europe after the war, in 1919 he became Deputy Inspector- General of Artillery and was on a committee to reorganize the militia. In 1920 he became Master General of Ordnance and served as Adjutant-General in 1922-1923.

He retired in 1924 and died the following year, May 28, 1925 in Ottawa.



JAMES W. WOODS - Corridor B, Room A, Crypt C

Born in Kildare, Quebec on April 10, 1863, Woods was the son of a local farmer and lumberman. He was educated in Montreal, and started his career there working for various firms.

In 1885, Woods established his own outdoor supply company, and by 1895 he was running the largest and most successful contractors' and lumberman's supply company in Canada. Known as Woods Manufacturing Co., the firm occupied a large factory in Hull, QC and produced items such as tents, sleeping bags, and canvas bags of all kinds. A large part of Woods' success was due to his innovative new light canvas – the material was so effective in its waterproofing that it was not long before his company's reputation was international.

Woods' company was chief supplier of canvas to British forces during the Boer War (1899–1902). The company outfitted troops with almost everything, including tents, clothing and horse blankets. Woods' products were also much in demand back in Canada – his packs, tents and other supplies were popular with Klondike prospectors. In 1898, notable geologist and mining consultant Joseph Burr Tyrrell wrote to Woods to “testify to the excellence of the Eiderdown sleeping bag obtained from you,” which he declared “the most comfortable bed that I have ever had in the field.” Through his connections with both the National Geographic Society and the Royal Geographic Society in the U.K., Woods Manufacturing Co. outfitted many of the most important exploratory ventures of the early 20th century, including Amundsen's successful navigation of the Northwest Passage in 1906, the Roosevelt Field Expedition through Central Asia and the first ascent of Canada's highest peak, Mount Logan, in 1925. The company was also a major supplier of tents and other goods for Allied soldiers in both World Wars and created the first gas masks for the Canadian army.

Woods was also very involved in charitable and civic concerns, and owned extensive real estate in Ottawa. At various times, Woods was the Vice-President of the Canadian Manufacturers Association, President of Ashbury College, President of the Ottawa Board of Trade from 1907 to 1908 and was involved with the raising of \$200,000 for the YMCA of Ottawa. Woods was also a lieutenant colonel in the Governor General's Foot Guards.

Woods passed away on December 20, 1930.



The Beechwood Way

ELLA HOBDAY WEBSTER BRONSON - Section 50, Lots 119, 120, 128

Ella Hobday Webster was born on September 1, 1846 in Portsmouth, Virginia to Nathan Burnham Webster a prominent Southern American educator. The family moved to Ottawa in 1862, where, at some point, Bronson met her future husband, Erskine Bronson.

The couple married in Virginia in 1874, before returning to the Canadian capital and starting a family. Bronson focused on her role as a mother, and began her public career in earnest only after her primary domestic and child-raising duties were behind her.

Between 1890 and 1892 Bronson served on several informal committees to furnish the new nurses' institute building.

She was also treasurer for funds raised to provide Ottawa soldiers with comforts during the South African War.

A staunch member of St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, she was active in its women's missionary society and sat on a number of committees.

In 1893 Ella Bronson answered a call from Lady Aberdeen to help establish the National Council of Women of Canada. Although she served as a delegate to several national conventions, she was more consistently involved at the local level, where most of the council's work was centred. Local councils were associated with the national one in a loose federation.



These councils served to educate potential female leaders such as Bronson; through them, women learned about the economic and social needs of their community and acquired a network of female contacts; they also provided a legitimate forum from which women could exercise authority and defend the Christian family as they saw it.

A vice-president of the Ottawa Local Council of Women from 1894 until 1911, Bronson served on committees to lobby for the teaching of domestic science in the city's high schools, the creation of a free library system, and the establishment of cottages for consumptives. In 1894 she pioneered the Associated Charities of Ottawa, a scheme intended to coordinate the efforts of various agencies, set standards for recipients of charity, and provide work-placement programs for the unemployed.

The culmination of Bronson's public projects was the foundation and successful operation of the Ottawa Maternity Hospital. With Bronson as president and an all-female board of directors, the hospital opened in 1895, and it functioned until the mid 1920s, when it was absorbed into the Civic Hospital. Much of its funding was raised by Bronson through her contacts in the elites of government and the lumber industry, and she served as its president for nearly 30 years. Fashioned on a new, medical, model of hospital, the Ottawa Maternity Hospital provided obstetrical services to women, most of whom paid a small fee.

It eschewed any religious agenda, although it accepted support from church groups, and did not concern itself with its patients' moral purity as some institutions did. Professionalism was stressed, and from 1897 a three-month certification course was offered for nurses from other hospitals. They were educated in post-natal medical and nutritional care for new mothers as well as in pre-natal and obstetrical matters. By the hospital's 25th anniversary in 1920, it had trained 600 nurses, and by its closing it had served more than 10,000 patients. On 3 Feb. 1925 Ella Bronson signed over its property to the city; she took ill the next day and died a week later.

Ella Bronson's contribution to her community, in a private life of duty and kindness and a high-profile public career, was representative of that made by a legion of women who were intent on reshaping society. The Ottawa Journal commemorated her life of engagement when it praised her as "a notable figure, who had given her best in public service." Bronson died on February 11, 1925.

HAMILTON PLANTAGENET MacCARTHY - Section 29, Lot TG 78

Born in London, England in 1846, Hamilton Plantagenet MacCarthy was renowned for his busts of British political and military dignitaries. Leaving England for Canada in 1885, ostensibly to take up farming, he found his artistry in much greater demand. He made a reputation sculpting busts and monuments celebrating Canada and Canadians, and in 1892 he joined the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts.

After the Boer War, Canada's first time sending a contingent to fight in a foreign war, memorials were much in demand to commemorate those killed as a result. MacCarthy was called on to make more Boer War Memorials than any other Canadian sculptor, and these statues can be found throughout Canada. His body of work also includes a statue of Alexander Mackenzie and the Samuel de Champlain statue on Nepean Point in Major's Hill Park. MacCarthy passed away on October 24, 1939 at the age of 93.



*South African War Memorial,
Province House, Nova Scotia*

A Lasting Tribute to Canada's First International Volunteers

The South African War was more than Canada's first overseas military engagement—it was a formative experience that tested the young Dominion's unity, character, and evolving sense of nationhood. It laid the groundwork for Canada's future role in international affairs and its commitment to collective service and sacrifice beyond its own borders.

At Beechwood Cemetery, the legacy of those who served in this distant but defining conflict is preserved not just through monuments and gravestones, but through the enduring stories of duty, courage, and national purpose they represent.

From Victoria Cross recipients to the nurses and scouts who served with quiet bravery, these early defenders embodied a commitment that would come to define Canadian service abroad.

Figures such as Hamilton P. MacCarthy, whose commemorative sculptures continue to shape Canada's remembrance landscape, and numerous veterans whose lives after the war enriched Canadian society, remind us that the impact of this conflict did not end on the battlefield.

As Canada's National Cemetery, Beechwood stands as a living memorial—linking generations through remembrance and reflection. It reminds us that the freedoms and global responsibilities we carry today were shaped in part by the legacy of those who answered the call during the South African War. Their stories are foundational to our national narrative, and their memory remains a solemn duty for all Canadians to uphold.

