

## Unit 2: Video 1 Transcript

### Introduction

A: I'm Ian Radforth. I teach history in the Department of History at the University of Toronto. I've been at the University of Toronto for more than 30 years now. I teach in a number of areas, the history of immigration to Canada, the-- I teach a course on political issues in Canada, I teach on spectacles in the Canadian past and well, I've done-- I teach a social history course at the graduate level. My research areas have moved quite a bit over time. I began as a labour historian and did research on Northern Ontario and the bush workers who worked in the forest industry up Northern Ontario. I was interested in the transformations in their world over the course of the 20th century. And then I went back and looked at the 19th century for woodworkers in Ontario, a very important occupational group in Canada in the 19th century and Ontario in the 19th century, certainly. I moved from there to working on state formation, particularly in the mid-19th century in central Canada. And then I got interested in cultural history and the particular angle I took was on public spectacle and I wrote a big fat book called *Royal Spectacle* on the first royal visit to Canada. That took place in 1860 and it was a visit by the Prince of Wales, Queen Victoria's eldest son. He later became King Edward the VII and he traveled from Newfoundland through the Maritime colonies and through Quebec and Ontario. And then through the United States and I followed him on his tour and talked about the way in which communities tried to greet him and represent themselves to him and how the press played up all kinds of conflicts that developed along the way.

**Q: What is an example of a public display of opinion or emotion?**

A: Public opinion was expressed very forcefully in the streets of Toronto at the time of the 1885 Riel Rebellion in the northwest. Torontonians were thrilled to think that they would be able to send some of the volunteer militia boys from the City of Toronto to the northwest to suppress Riel and his troublemakers who had-- were a threat to law and order. And as soon as it was announced by Macdonald, Sir John A. Macdonald at Ottawa that there would be a military force sent from central Canada to the northwest to suppress the rebellion, why people came out into the streets of Toronto in huge numbers

to celebrate that thought. And as soon as the militiamen began to rally in the streets, why they were the object of great adulation by the public. People said these are going to be the heroes of this conflict and we'll show Riel and those half breeds in the northwest our power. And so they came out in massive numbers, by the tens of thousands, quite spontaneously because the military force had to be organized on the fly very quickly. And so this was not so much a kind of top-down imposition of street behaviour. It seemed to come up from the public and it was certainly encouraged by the newspapers of the day that really got behind this idea of our boys going to the northwest to suppress the rebellion. Didn't matter whether they were liberal papers or conservative newspapers, whether they thought the government had made a mistake or not in the connection with the northwest. They said there's trouble out there now. The trouble has to be put down and our boys are going to do it. We have boys who are courageous, who are well trained, who have military discipline from their Sunday outings. And they're going to show Riel what's what. When the troops left Toronto, again, they traveled by train to the northwest. This was when the Canadian Pacific Railway, the CPR, was nearly finished and it was able to carry the troops to the northwest from central Canada. Why when the troop trains left the station here in Toronto, tens of thousands of people came out to cheer them. All of this was repeated upon their return when there was more time to prepare, to welcome the heroes home from their triumph. And again, in the streets elaborate arches were built to welcome these triumphful troops home. This arch building goes way back to Roman times when arches were built to bring the conquered into Rome. So this was a long tradition that was readily picked up by the people in Victorian Toronto. And they came out again in huge numbers in the streets, tens of thousands of people came in from the countryside to welcome the troops home. Of course there were speeches by notables that spoke very patriotically about the heroism of the time. There were many religious leaders, clerics who gave sermons of thanksgiving for the way in which our troops had been brought home. There were also, though, during this time some tragic moments and public funerals around those who fell. And at least on the side of the volunteers and authority, people ignored those who fell on the Metis side, of course. Two local boys from Toronto had massive funerals where, again, people came out spontaneously on a very solemn occasion and

organizations lined the streets. The various voluntary associations and the funeral orations were carefully printed in the newspapers. These were a great loss. And there was also at Port Hope, outside Toronto, one of the military officers who had fallen was brought home and buried there. And huge numbers, again, came to Port Hope for that occasion. This was a time when you really felt you had to show your support for the country and for this kind of endeavour. And really quite conservative values seemed to bubble up from below. I like to think the people were-- challenged authority and they often did. But on these occasions you really see respect for authority coming through in a very emphatic way.

**Q: How did the Canadian identity emerge?**

A: Toronto was a receiving centre for militia units from other parts of the country. Men who had been recruited in Halifax and vicinity and in the vicinity of Quebec City traveled home through Toronto and they arrived in the city on days other than the days when the Toronto boys came home. And so there were huge celebrations in the streets, again, for these other Canadians who weren't local at all. And this was an opportunity for people to talk about our common interests across the country in seeing law and order prevail and seeing Her Majesty's authority shored up. And they spoke about this occasion as a learning experience for the militia boys. Because they met one another and they endured the same hardships traveling to the northwest and in the battles. And this created a sense of common endeavour and it was an opportunity to say, you know, we're all in this together. It doesn't matter whether you're from Halifax or Quebec, it doesn't matter whether you speak French or English, doesn't matter. On this occasion whether you're Catholic or Protestant this is a time when Canadians can come together. And we can see that we have a country worth fighting for, worth standing up for.