



## The English Trip of 1910: Toronto, Sir Henry Pellatt, the Queen's Own Rifles and the Press Gang

**Mima Brown Kapches**

FriesenPress

(252pp)

978-1-03-831057-6

*A work of in-depth reflection that fills a gap in the historical record, The English Trip of 1910 places a reserve regiment's international tour in its cultural context.*

Detailed as it recounts volunteer military efforts against the historical and social backdrop of early twentieth-century Canada, Mima Brown Kapches's engrossing history book *The English Trip of 1910* chronicles the exhaustive overseas tour of the Queen's Own Rifles, an army reserve regiment.

In 1910, the Canadian regiment marked its fiftieth anniversary with parades and pageantry. The regiment's commander, Toronto millionaire Sir Henry Pellatt, financed the subsequent ambitious excursion of over six hundred reservists and officers to Quebec and England. In Great Britain, the soldiers participated in drills, marches, mock "war games," and royal regimental inspection. Their ranks made up of "students, bank clerks, [and] shopmen," the reservists were guaranteed job security and continued salary payments during the seven-week tour. The observations of the Press Gang, a group of journalists accompanying the soldiers, are included throughout the book.

Its prose evoking the reservists' certain excitement as they traveled across the Atlantic Ocean, the book zooms in to focus on details like glimpses of porpoises and whales while at sea and the feelings following the rousing welcome the troops received upon arriving in Liverpool. Often temperate, these "teetotaler" soldiers from "Toronto the Good" are imagined to have been shocked to encounter London women "serving drinks" and imbibing in "saloons." Indeed, the book captures the two cultures in terms of contrasts and impressions, as with Canadians disapproving of England's class-conscious social structure, or with Londoners regarding the visiting Canadians with polite curiosity. These clashes are also placed in the context of Toronto's prevailing attitude of superiority in Canada and the cultural tensions between the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Though Iroquois Six Nations tribal members were featured in the regiment's jubilee celebrations, one of the unit's marching songs extolled the dominance of white Anglo-Saxon culture: *Here's to the land of the golden sheaf, / here's to the Empire's flag unfurled, / Emblem of freedom around the world.*

The book also makes space to lionize Sir Henry Pellatt for his role in engineering and bankrolling the reservists' tour. The trajectory of his life is traced with narrative flair, including his later reversal of fortune in the 1920s, when "mismanagement and bad business decisions" eroded his wealth. By the 1939 reunion of the Queen's Own Rifles tour unit, Pellatt was living in a room at his chauffeur's home, the book notes. But it also points to the notable attendance at his funeral, seeing this as evidence of the impression that his lifelong devotion to his country and regiment made.

Though it's built on a firm foundation of newspaper articles, archival documents, and black-and-white photographs, there's a personal element to the text as well: Kapches's father, Jim Brown, was part of the Press Gang, and the book mentions that she has "few memories of him" before his death in 1964. Prompted by her personal intrigue, this work of in-depth reflection fills a gap in the historical record. The book balances personal thoughts on Kapches's father's journalistic coverage with mentions of other Press Gang members well.

A rousing but esoteric history text, *The English Trip of 1910* zooms in on a particular moment in Canadian history to fascinating effect.

MEG NOLA (December 6, 2024)

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