

Book Review

British Regulars in Montreal: An Imperial Garrison, 1832-1854: by Elinor Kyte Senior, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1981, price \$29.95.

As a centre for commerce, military and government, Montreal was the most important metropolis in Canada between 1832 and 1854. The city's location on three major waterways, the St. Lawrence, Ottawa and Richelieu Rivers, made it strategically valuable to the British military charged with the responsibility of the colony's defence. As a result, a garrison of rarely less than 1500 British soldiers were stationed at the city which had a population of about 50,000 by the 1850's. In this book Elinor Senior examines various ways in which the presence of the garrison affected the city and the lives of its citizens.

The period Dr. Senior chose for study was a troubled one in the colony. The city of Montreal was sharply divided among opposing forces in society. Antagonisms between the French and English were aggravated by the organization of Louis Joseph Papineau's politically radical Patriote party.

An influx of immigrant Irish, of both Protestant and Catholic persuasions, added a volatile new element to the unstable situation. Serious outbreaks of violence began in Montreal in an election campaign in 1832, and continued sporadically through the rebellion of 1837 to the burning of the parliament buildings in 1849 and the sectarian rioting of the Gavazzi affair in 1853. Inadequate police forces in the city meant that the British regular soldiers were called upon to restore order in crises.

Dr. Senior traces a fascinating evolution in the British military response to the problem. At first the military was aligned with the British, or Constitutional, party in the city to suppress the violent radicalism of the Patriotes. But after the rebellion, as the British government became more responsive to moderate French liberals, the British party became the disaffected element. Now the British soldiers faced mobs of avowed loyalists who burned the parliament buildings and stoned the Governor General. Also, over this period there were changes in the British military reactions to riot situations. In earlier incidents the soldiers were permitted to close with a crowd using bayonets and rifle butts to disperse its ranks. However, by 1853 new practices caused the

regulars to fire into mobs of Catholics and Protestants in a pitched street battle sparked by the lecture of an apostate Italian priest, Alessandro Gavazzi, on the evils of Catholicism. The gunfire killed nine and wounded at least twelve. Most of the victims were English-speaking Protestants and the storm of controversy which followed the incident ended only with the complete withdrawal of the garrison regiments in 1854 to fight in the Crimea.

The British garrison was dragged continually into disorders in Montreal because of the failure of the government to develop adequate police services. Before the rebellion, Montreal had a small force of policemen in the watchmen tradition which disbanded in 1837 because of lack of funds. When the rebellion broke out a local militia cavalry unit was mustered for temporary duty as mounted police in the city. Then in 1838 the colonial government passed a police ordinance providing the city with a new force of over 100 men. But within two years the size of the corps was cut in half for financial reasons. Still, Dr. Senior contends that under the able direction of former British military officers the unarmed policemen kept the peace except when riots occurred. In these emergencies the thirty-man force of Water Police, which usually patrolled the harbour and canals, could be pressed into service. In the wake of the disturbances of 1849, a mounted police force modelled on the Royal Irish Constabulary was experimented with but soon disbanded. In all cases of widespread trouble no combination of the existing police institutions could eliminate the need to call out the garrison troops.

This book examines in some detail the considerable social and economic impact which the British soldiers had on Montreal. The regiments provided spectacle for the colonial city with parades, theatricals and sporting events. The officers married into the most prominent French and English families. The other ranks boosted trade in grogshops and brothels, as well as supporting local churches. Dr. Senior concludes that despite the bitterness incurred by the occasional violent confrontations between civilians and the military, most Montrealers perceived the presence of the garrison as beneficial to the community.

To those interested in police and military history, this book is recommended. The author