Conclusion

When the massive meeting for the replacement of Brock's bomb-blasted first monument was called to order on Queenston Heights in July of 1840, each of the resolutions adopted was prefaced by fittingly eulogistic remarks. Among the leading lights called upon to exalt Brock's name was Judge James Buchanan Macaulay of Toronto, whose discourse also proved the most introspective. Suitably impressed by the masses gathered to honour "the unforgotten victim of a war now old in history," Macaulay poetically asked "how it happens that the gallant general who has so long slept the sleep of death, left the lasting impression on the hearts of his countrymen which this scene exhibits: how comes it, that the fame of Brock thus floats down the stream of time—broad—deep—and fresh, as the waters of the famed river, on whose banks we stand—and with its waters it might without hyperbole, be almost said, his life's blood mingled[?]"[1] Without giving pause to his oratory, Macaulay proceeded to rhyme off the positive character traits usually assigned to Brock's civil and military virtues. Included was "his patriotic self-devotion, his chivalrous gallantry, and his triumphant achievements"—references to his conquest of Detroit and martyr's death at Queenston.

But there was something more to this mystique of greatness, and Macaulay pressed the point by rhetorically questioning the source of Brock's "talismanic influence and ascendancy over his fellow men."[2] With his answer at the ready, Macaulay demanded to know if there were any seamen among the crowd. When the cheers of "yes! yes!" subsided, he proclaimed, "then I say, it was the *Nelsonian* spirit that animated his breast with its exciting impulses. It was the mind intuitively to conceive, and the soul promptly to dare, incredible things to feeble hearts—with a skill and bearing which infused that chivalrous and enterprising spirit into all his followers—and impelled them energetically

to realise whatever he boldly led the way to accomplish."[3] In other words, it was Brock's military genius, and specifically his courage as well as his charisma, both of which were major factors in his ability to inspire the confidence of his followers—whether on the battlefield or the colony at large. But after nearly twenty-eight years since Brock's death, there was obviously more at play than the Nelsonian spirit or any other combination of innate leadership qualities comprising military genius. As this book has revealed, "the fame of Brock"—or rather his enduring popularity—did not so much float down the "stream of time" on a wellspring of patriotic remembrance, as it was swept along by the Militia Myth—a national creation story that found form in the mass appeal associated with battlefield sacrifice, political expediency, and ideological aspirations. The essential component of this mythology was Brock's heroic legacy, which the Loyalists of Upper Canada exploited in confecting a collective sense of nationalistic pride and purpose.

Brock's enduring popularity had its origins in his spirited defence of Upper Canada during the War of 1812, and specifically his conquest of Detroit. Although risky, his successful initiative not only secured the colony militarily but improved the morale of its loyal inhabitants and quashed the disaffection of would-be traitors. While a similarly risky initiative at the Battle of Queenston Heights backfired in stunning fashion, his fame lost none of its lustre. Rather, Brock's legendary status overshadowed both his defeat and the battle's actual victor. By having died the death of a noble sacrifice, Brock transcended heroism to become a secular saint whose acolytes—especially those in the colonial militia—bathed in his reflected glory through a blind adherence to a politically motivated colonial ideology, not to mention an early form of social engineering. Such was the beginning of Brock's enduring popularity. Encouraged by the Family Compact, or ruling conservative elite, the unassailable belief that the Upper Canadian yeomanry had borne the brunt of colonial defence was utilized to form the basis for a national creation myth. As an outgrowth of the highly romanticized Loyalist tradition, the Militia Myth served a crucial purpose in maintaining Upper Canada's British sense of itself—and nothing was deemed more consequential for the colony's future development than a Loyalist identity that sustained an aversion to American influences. The continual threat of domination by this dangerous, contiguous, and ever-expanding republic helped to shape the Upper Canadian world view. Central to this outlook was a fixation

on Brock's dashing, if reckless, deeds and the preservation of British interests in North America. While Brock's main concern in 1812, besides glory seeking, was his duty to defend British territory from American aggression, loyal Upper Canadians saw his motives in terms of a broader and longer agenda—one that was political, social, and decidedly homegrown. As their very own saviour and martyr, the champion of their preferred British way of life, Brock was held in the highest regard, and they communicated their undying appreciation through various means, both private and public.

Capitalizing on the fear of American hegemony, the Loyalist ruling class took advantage of the reverence Upper Canadians felt for Brock by using his heroic legacy to influence colonial development. Along with the Militia Myth, Brock's determination to defend the colony reinforced the soundness of Loyalist arguments in favour of a strong British connection. Although generally vague and increasingly autonomous in their sentiments, especially after Confederation in 1867, these pro-British proponents retained an entirely favourable attitude toward Brock. They were no less devoted to the conservative values they associated with the British constitutional monarchy, which Brock had reinforced by his sacrificial brand of heroism. With the cult following of Canada's most populous region to bolster his image, Brock's popularity kept pace with Ontario's rise as the nation's most influential province. A major cultural export to the rest of the country was an abiding respect for Brock and the British Empire he represented. It was part of a nationalizing process that utilized a favourable recollection for political and societal purposes, including an informal partnership between Ontario's United Empire Loyalists' Association and the Conservative minister of education, who was keen to advance Canadian patriotism through educational indoctrination. Under Robert A. Pyne's administration between 1905 and 1918, the patriotization of Ontario schools in accordance with the Militia Myth and Loyalist tradition was intensified. Brock, as the inspirational icon for both the British imperial and Canadian nationalist schools of thought, was seen as the ideal role model in an increasingly militaristic classroom setting. Much of this Ontario-style patriotism spread to other provinces through the Canadian educational publishing industry, which was mainly centred in Toronto. The added prospect of lucrative sales was not limited to the many editions of history textbooks that presented Brock as a commendable figure, and his biography was a major selling point

for several series of books published with a view to providing Canadian schools with supplemental reading materials.

With the end of Pyne's tenure as minister of education in May of 1918, Ontario's influence in promoting a militarized form of curricular patriotism continued unabated into the interwar period, much to the frustration of anti-militaristic crusaders like Agnes Macphail. Despite this opposition, lessons drawn from the Militia Myth, the Loyalist tradition, and Brock's heroic story were viewed by most Canadians as essential for the development of a robust nationalism, especially when it became obvious that another war in Europe was looming. Throughout the Great Depression and the Second World War, Brock remained one of the leading role models for Canadian schoolchildren. Beginning with a severe economic downturn in the late 1920s and continuing with a general mobilization at the end of the 1930s, these catastrophic events caused severe upheavals in the nation's publishing sector, effectively putting an end to the seemingly endless stream of new Brock biographies. Yet, the country's youth still had an abundant supply of such books in the form of public library copies, as well as school textbooks and other reading materials, to reinforce their youthful notion of Brock's significant contribution to Canada's history.

The return of peace in 1945 brought economic prosperity and new educational publishing ventures featuring prominent historical figures, including Brock. But by the mid-1960s, there was mounting concern that Canada's cultural shift from a British nation to one based on multiculturalism, riven by English-French sectionalism, regionalism, and Americanization, would result in a general disconnect with the country's Anglo origins and a corresponding disregard for Brock. Nor did it help that this new sense of Canadian identity meant a further loss of political clout for the United Empire Loyalists' Association and a growing apathy toward the Loyalist tradition. Given Brock's strong imperial association, he might have suffered a similar demotion, one commensurate with the anticipated loss of his role model status. But because his War of 1812 exploits inextricably linked him to the history of Canada, he was guaranteed a place in the nation's history lessons and textbooks, if only in passing. Notwithstanding trends in the teaching of history, which aimed to elevate non-elite historical figures who would otherwise have been omitted from the historical record, Brock's enduring popularity was so thoroughly rooted in the Canadian mindset that he continued to be viewed

favourably throughout much of the nation. This attachment was due in large measure to lingering vestiges of his firmly established recognition as a great Canadian hero.

When the rise of a more self-assured style of Canadian nationalism should have had a generally deleterious effect on Brock's relevance, his name still had a tendency to evoke a positive response—this despite the increasingly regionalized nature of his heroism, which seemed to confine a recognition of the importance of his exploits to southern Ontario. But to many Canadians, no matter how far beyond the Niagara Peninsula they lived, there was still a desire to experience the landscapes that Brock would have known, and particularly those of his final days. It was a new type of history tourism, one that was driven by the country's postwar prosperity and a mania for automobile travel. Enhanced by the interpretative plaques and signage that came courtesy of Parks Canada, historic sites like Brock's Monument left a memorable impression on visitors seeking tangible evidence of the country's past. Included among this segment of the population were several generations of older Canadians, whose public school education included high praise for Brock and left them with an indelible if indistinct appreciation for his contribution to Canadian history.

A more direct boost to Brock's enduring popularity came in 1980 with the publication of *The Invasion of Canada*, the first installment in Pierre Berton's wildly successful two-volume history the War of 1812. Nationalistic in tone and sentiment, it set about debunking myths surrounding the war while at the same time popularizing traditional views of Brock. Although seemingly at cross-purposes with himself, Berton's usurpation of the professional historian's craft achieved an important, if unintended, objective: It focused academic attention on a largely overlooked aspect of Canadian military history—namely, Brock's military genius. While much of the aura surrounding his tactical leadership would be lost to criticisms of his conduct at Queenston, there was no corresponding diminution of admiration for Brock's personal qualities. Heroism and humanity were hallmarks of his generalship, and they continued to endear him to anyone sufficiently well versed in Canadian history to know his name. So strong was the attachment, particularly among English-speaking Canadians, that Brock remained firmly—if misleadingly—entrenched as the person most responsible for the preservation

of Britain's North American colonies, and also their eventual political unification.

While many types of remembrance, ranging from ephemeral to imperishable, helped to keep Brock's memory alive, none of them would have resonated beyond Upper Canada without the impetus of a conservative elite espousing a strong attachment to British institutions and traditions. By the time of Confederation in 1867, this same element of society continued to promote Brock's reputation as the Hero of Upper Canada—but in terms of the new dominion, and in order to accommodate an expanding sense of Canadian nationalism as independent but pro-British. Coinciding with the resulting broader interpretation of Brock's significance were three distinct and officially sanctioned experiments, each meant to reinforce, reaffirm, or recall the importance of former Anglo-colonial associations. First among them was the Militia Myth, fabricated and popularized by the Upper Canadian elite (or Family Compact) in the decades following Brock's uplifting victory at Detroit in 1812. The second of these experiments came about during the first two decades of the twentieth century, when executive members of the United Empire Loyalists' Association co-operated with Ontario's Conservative minister of education to use the teaching of history as a means of patriotic and militaristic indoctrination of Canadian schoolchildren. More recently, the third such experiment involved the federal Conservative government of Stephen Harper and its attempt to militarize the Canadian identity through commemorations of the bicentenary of the War of 1812.

The utilization of Brock's heroism to promote a greater sense of national identity had long been a favoured means of social engineering in Canada, but the Harper Conservatives took the exercise to extremes in a classic case of political opportunism. By celebrating the War of 1812 as a foundational moment in the history of Canada, there was also an obvious attempt to influence societal attitudes based on a preference for British traditions. While there was an implicit respect for Brock's heroism that rose above political differences, its exploitation was predominantly a conservative phenomenon meant to shape and strengthen the idea of a British nation in North America. Earlier, however, and well in advance of the bicentenary of the War of 1812, a multicultural approach to the teaching of Canadian history effectively levelled the importance of great men like Brock. Critical reappraisals of his battlefield competence, particularly those supplied by specialist military historians, furthered

the revisionist attitude toward him. But, despite the negative impact on his heroic legacy, Brock's enduring popularity remained intact.

Having revealed the range and activity of those vested interests whose members engaged in social engineering to exploit and manipulate Brock's legacy, this book has also grappled with the nagging question of his generalship: Was it a true reflection of military genius, or a false image? The incongruities between Brock's enduring popularity and the quality of his command have bedeviled this project from its very outset. Yet, as Arthur R. M. Lower would have recognized (had he been so inclined), Brock's military genius was a necessary component of the national creation myth—otherwise known as the Militia Myth. Moreover, and apart from the notable exceptions of Charles P. Stacey and Keith Walden, most military historians specializing in War of 1812 studies failed to consider the importance of mythology in shaping our perception of Brock's tactical and strategic abilities. Neither did they—or any of their colleagues, for that matter—recognize the extent to which social engineering was employed to promote the idea of Brock as a military genius, or its usefulness in exaggerating the role of the Upper Canadian Militia in defending the colony during the War of 1812. Instead, they tended to concentrate their efforts on Brock's tactical errors, especially at Queenston, where solid evidence of events during the early phase of the battle is sorely lacking. Assumptions filled the void and Brock was made to suffer the scapegoat's fate. But, if not a military genius, then neither was he a battlefield incompetent. Rather, Brock was a zealous and courageous commander, and both of these qualities were considered highly commendable in his day. While leading from the front was extremely dangerous, it was also notably charismatic, and generals like Brock had every right to undertake such actions. This gung-ho style of leadership certainly rewarded him handsomely at Detroit. But just as victory suppresses criticism, defeat invites blame. And so it was with Brock's downfall at Queenston.

Whether a carefully considered decision or an involuntary reaction, Brock's zealous leadership led him to an early but gallant death. And having died at the height of his fame, his defeat was made all the more victorious by its characterization as a crowning glory of self-sacrifice. It was heroic legacy made legendary, and it served a useful purpose by promoting Canadian nationalism in all its various manifestations. Yet, Brock's supposed part in bringing about Confederation by having saved

Upper Canada from American conquest is pure myth. He died far too early in the War of 1812 to have influenced its outcome—something that was left to succeeding British commanders who lacked his charismatic, heroic, and messianic qualities. Those generals who failed to defend Upper Canada as forcefully as Brock had done were severely denounced or simply forgotten by colonists and descendants alike. Brock, however, was never at risk of suffering one of these fates, because his style of leadership was bound to result in a spectacular victory or a glorious death, either or both of which the Loyalist elites of Upper Canada could put to good use in conjuring up a national creation myth.

Just as the war was resolved without Brock's further involvement, Canadian Confederation would have come about regardless of his success at Detroit and, more tellingly, his death at Queenston. The obvious inference is that Brock's contribution to the defence of Upper Canada—indeed, his lauded place in Canadian history writ large—was not so crucial as the Loyalists would have us believe. Like the Militia Myth, Brock's role in the War of 1812 was exaggerated. Other events during the war played a greater part in deciding the colony's fate, as the loss of its western frontier in October of 1813 demonstrates. This vast expanse of land became a veritable no man's land for the rest of the war, controlled by neither American nor British forces. At the end of 1814, it was diplomatic negotiations that restored the disputed territory; but Brock's great achievement earlier in the war had no bearing on the terms and provisions of the Treaty of Ghent. His significance lay, rather, in his inspirational qualities. By his dauntless defence of Upper Canada and bold capture of Detroit, Brock became a source of unbridled hope and confidence to the colony's loyal inhabitants. Suddenly, they had good reason to believe that their old and conservative way of life might yet prevail. Even if Brock's achievements were undone through the vicissitudes of war and a less-than-inspired leadership, his heroic legacy offered a viable and lasting means for securing a bastion of the British Empire in North America, even if it meant a fair degree of mythmaking.

Given the fame Brock achieved for his spectacular victory at Detroit, it must have seemed unlikely to most Upper Canadians that his heroic death at Queenston could ever be forgotten. If so, it was an assumption dramatically buttressed by the dastardly bombing of Brock's first monument and persuasively reiterated in Judge Macaulay's charge to the grand jury that assembled in response to the outrage. Brock's fame, he insisted,

could not be "obliterated from remembrance, though his monumental pile were crumbling in the dust."[4] It was "embalmed in the hearts of his countrymen; he lives in the historic page; and will survive in traditionary legends, faithfully transmitting his name, his exploits, and his fate, from sire to son, and from generation to generation."[5] But far from a natural outpouring of respect and admiration, one that was continually reinvigorated over time based on Brock's sterling worth, what Macaulay described was largely the result of social engineering—a term unknown to Upper Canadians in 1840, and a concept they would have naively viewed as the result of a spontaneously patriotic reaction. Yet, as the judge perhaps sensed, and this book definitely concludes, Brock's enduring popularity had more to do with Loyalist aspirations than with Brock himself.