



Quebec's Anglophone Communities and the Legacies of the Quebec Act, 1774–2024

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Abstract

2024 marked the 250th anniversary of the Quebec Act, a landmark piece of legislation shepherded through the Westminster Parliament by then Governor of Quebec Guy Carleton, later known as Lord Dorchester. This paper explores the reactions of Anglophone communities in Quebec to Carleton's actions in the 1770s and also in the 1980s, when the disappearance of "Dorchester Boulevard" in Montreal caused mixed reactions. Despite having been raised in an Irish Protestant family that benefited from the punitive anti-Catholic Penal Laws of the 18th century, Carleton broke with established British imperial policies of forced assimilation and territorial expulsion. Instead, he promoted a more pluralistic vision for Quebec where French Canadian Catholics enjoyed civil rights unheard of in the rest of the British Empire. However, while Carleton's actions permanently affected future ideas of what defined "Canada," they also alienated many members of the Anglophone community in Quebec City and Montreal on the eve of the American Revolution.

L'année 2024 a marqué le 250^e anniversaire de l'Acte de Québec, une loi importante adoptée par le Parlement de Westminster sous l'égide du gouverneur de Québec de l'époque, Guy Carleton, futur lord Dorchester. Ce document explore les réactions des communautés anglophones du Québec face aux actions de Carleton dans les années 1770, ainsi que dans les années 1980, lorsque la disparition du « boulevard Dorchester » à Montréal a suscité des réactions mitigées. Bien que Carleton ait grandi dans une famille protestante irlandaise ayant bénéficié des lois pénales anti-catholiques du XVIII^e siècle, il n'a pas endossé des politiques impériales britanniques traditionnelles d'assimilation forcée et d'expulsion territoriale. Il a plutôt défendu une vision davantage pluraliste du Québec, accordant aux Canadiens français catholiques des droits civils qui n'existaient pas ailleurs pour les catholiques dans l'Empire britannique. Toutefois, si les actions de Carleton ont eu un impact durable sur la conception future de ce qui définirait le « Canada », elles ont également aliéné de nombreux membres de la communauté anglophone de Québec et de Montréal à la veille de la Révolution américaine.

René Lévesque, premier of Quebec, founder of the Parti Québécois, and a man often regarded as the central figure of Quebec nationalism in the second half of the 20th century, died on November 1, 1987. “We’re losing a father,” said Guy Chevrette, one of Lévesque’s former cabinet ministers. “He’s a man who gave us life by founding the Parti Québécois.”¹ Claude Ryan, then the Liberal Minister of Education in Quebec, noted that, because of Lévesque’s introduction of Bill 101—the controversial Charter of the French Language—the French character of Quebec “cannot be erased. In politics, Mr. Lévesque brought people together, but he was also a solitary man . . . unpitied, even cruel” with his opponents, but also “often unpredictable and enigmatic with his allies.”²

Within weeks of Lévesque’s death, Mayor Jean Doré of Montreal announced that the city would rename Dorchester Boulevard, one of the main east-west arteries on the island, Boulevard René Lévesque. The street was full of milestones from Lévesque’s life: he had become a public personality while working at the old Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) building on the corner of Bishop and Dorchester; his Montreal office as premier had been on the boulevard, and he had spearheaded the initiative in the 1960s to nationalize Hydro-Québec, whose company headquarters dominated the boulevard’s skyline.³

The reaction to the renaming of Dorchester Boulevard at the end of the 20th century forms a bookend to earlier controversies over the actions of Guy Carleton (known after 1786 as Lord Dorchester) in Quebec two centuries earlier. Raised in an Ulster Protestant military family, Carleton had become the governor of Quebec in 1768, with an expectation that he would continue the punitive measures enacted in the former colony of New France immediately after the end of the Seven Years’ War. In a move that shocked those in Quebec and the Thirteen Colonies in America, not to mention Westminster, he did just the opposite. The fact that some Anglo-Quebeckers in 1987 seemed ambivalent at best about how Carleton’s memory was treated was, in its way, an echo of how the Anglophone community had reacted to Carleton’s leadership during his years as governor, first from 1768 to 1778 and then from 1785 to 1795. This paper will examine the public discourse surrounding the change from “Dorchester Boulevard” to “Boulevard René Lévesque” before jumping back to more than two centuries earlier, when Guy Carleton’s decisions met with notable dissension among the Anglophone ranks in the then colony. Unlike many of his contemporaries and successors, Guy Carleton did not instinctively defend the rights of the Anglophone minority in Quebec or promote the assimilation of *les Canadiens*; rather, his defence of French-Canadian culture and Roman Catholicism broke with all imperial precedents. Through the pluralism inherent within the Quebec Act, Carleton permanently affected the very definition of being Canadian for centuries to come, but he also alienated many Anglophones in the colony who had expected him to defend their interests at the expense of their French Catholic neighbours.

1 “Ex-premier Lévesque dies of heart attack,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1987.

2 “Friends and foes pay tribute: Dedication recognized by leaders,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 3, 1987.

3 “Renaming Dorchester sounds great,” *The Gazette*, November 14, 1987.

In the weeks following Mayor Doré's decision to rename the boulevard, some voices from English-speaking Montreal did emphasize the fact that Guy Carleton had also protected the rights of French Canadians with the Quebec Act of 1774 and that, as such, commemorating his name in modern Quebec held historical merit. Writing an opinion piece in *The Gazette*, Don MacPherson admitted that he felt

*a slight twinge at the thought of another English name disappearing from the face of Quebec, particularly one of such historical significance. Baron Dorchester was a governor of Quebec after the British conquest who played a part in having the British Parliament adopt the Quebec Act of 1774, which protected the French language, the Roman Catholic religion, and the civil law system. But if the French-speaking majority of Montreal's citizens, presumably the principal surviving beneficiaries of Dorchester's action, have no objection in seeing his name disappear, then I certainly don't.*⁴

Others in the city were more ambivalent. Rabbi Simcha Zirkind agreed that honouring Lévesque was important, but the decision to rename the boulevard "will cause all kinds of problems for the business community. . . . All the addresses will have to be changed." There was also the price of the decision, with the city projecting a cost of \$12,480 to change affected street signs.⁵ Gordon McElligott of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce wondered, "Why not St. Denis St. or St. Laurent Blvd.? Dorchester is a historic street." Pierre Roy, manager for the Sheraton Centre, agreed with the idea to honour the late premier, but not the city's final choice: "We should dedicate something else to Lévesque, maybe a park, but not Dorchester Boulevard. Dorchester also fought for the French people. He deserves his place in Montreal."⁶

As Michael Farber later remarked, in the end, "it was no contest, no matter how splendid a fellow Lord Dorchester might have been in the eighteenth century."⁷ The name did not disappear entirely in Montreal: Dominion Square, across from Place du Canada in the very heart of the city, was renamed for the 18th-century governor, although no plaque or statue was ever created to convey its new dedication to Dorchester's memory. The mayor of Montreal East, Yvon Labrosse, refused to change the street's name, stating, "I have no intention of changing my credit cards and all that garbage."⁸ Most prominent of all the dissenters, however, was the city of Westmount, where the thoroughfare remains "Dorchester Boulevard" to this day.

To a round of applause from those in attendance, May Cutler, mayor of Westmount at the time of Lévesque's death, announced the city's refusal to change the name at a council meeting that November. She accused Montreal authorities of acting "rather rashly and impulsively, and we don't intend to do the same."⁹ At first glance, this perhaps appeared as the noted Anglophone enclave

4 "Renaming Dorchester sounds great," *The Gazette*, November 14, 1987.

5 "Ardor cools but mystique lingers," *The Gazette*, January 26, 1988.

6 "Levesque Blvd.? Not everyone likes the change," *The Gazette*, November 17, 1987.

7 "Ardor cools, but mystique lingers," *The Gazette*, January 26, 1988.

8 "By way of Dorchester," *The Gazette*, January 20, 2003.

9 "Montreal to rename Dorchester Blvd. after Lévesque," *The Gazette*, November 17, 1987.

within Montreal¹⁰ refusing to forget the 18th-century Anglo-Irish governor: a man who had fought at the Plains of Abraham,¹¹ who had respected the rights of minorities within the empire with the groundbreaking Quebec Act, and who had defended the province from invasion during the American Revolution. Certainly, public discussions into the following year characterized the renaming of the boulevard as yet another “battle” between Quebec’s Francophone and Anglophone communities.¹² The truth behind Cutler’s decision, however, was not quite so steeped in history. “It’s a dreadful street to name after anybody,” she clarified to reporters that same night, “a hard, cold business street.”¹³

A similar feeling was expressed at the end of the month in *La Presse* by Jean-Guy Dubuc, which was quickly translated and published by *The Gazette*: “We are losing our way. . . . It is high time to think of Mr. Lévesque, whom we wish to honor, rather than of Lord Dorchester, whom we wish to displace. . . . Has anyone thought of the coldness, the anonymity, the human aridity of this street?” Dubuc proposed that renaming a street like St. Laurent Blvd. was far more appropriate, since “it seems to separate east from west, but it unites the city’s peoples; it embraces all ethnic groups and all cultures; it runs in the midst of the people.”¹⁴

Graeme Decarie, then chair of the History Department at Concordia University, agreed: “Here is the death of a warm man who was loved by the people, and we’re naming a bleak street of sterile high-rises after him. We should be renaming a street of low-rises, spiral staircases and *depanneurs*, with a lot of people on the street.”¹⁵ Decarie also felt that the “rushed decision” to rename the boulevard had created unnecessary friction between the two solitudes and that Mayor Doré’s “stupid political sense made the English perceive this as an attack on another English place name.”¹⁶

Little of the commentary at the end of 1987—in the English or French press—underscored the fact that Carleton and Lévesque had a number of similarities. Both men had shared the same desire to safeguard the French character of Quebec; they also each had a knack for defying easy description. Just as Claude Ryan had spoken of Lévesque’s varied treatment of others, Carleton’s contemporaries described him as “cold, severe, sour, and morose, but also cool, intrepid,” and “incorruptible.” Historical characterizations of Carleton have been

10 Isa Tousignant, “Montréal Neighbourhoods: Discover Outremont and Westmount,” *Tourisme Montréal*, accessed January 8, 2025, <https://www.mtl.org/en/experience/tale-two-mountains>.

11 The battle of the Plains of Abraham on September 13, 1759, was the final battle in the British conquest of Canada during the Seven Years’ War, marking the end of the French monarchy’s control over its former colony of New France, although this was only finalized diplomatically with the Treaty of Paris in 1763. The battle has since become a key moment in both French-Canadian and English-Canadian historical memory. See Phillip Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *Revisiting 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 3–5.

12 “Battle lines drawn along Dorchester; changing name of street stirs up old animosities,” *The Gazette*, November 28, 1987; “Suburban mayors rebuke city over renaming Dorchester Blvd.,” *The Gazette*, December 3, 1987; “Montreal East mayor lives on Dorchester, says name stays,” *The Gazette*, December 4, 1987; “Ardor cools, but mystique lingers,” *The Gazette*, January 26, 1988.

13 “Montreal to rename Dorchester Blvd. after Lévesque,” *The Gazette*, November 17, 1987.

14 “Boulevard René Lévesque,” *The Gazette*, November 28, 1987.

15 “Montreal to rename Dorchester Blvd. after Lévesque,” *The Gazette*, November 17, 1987.

16 “Battle lines drawn along Dorchester,” *The Gazette*, November 28, 1987.

no better, ranging from “reactionary, ruthless, and vindictive” to “benevolent, honourable, humane, and just.”¹⁷

Carleton was seen by some as a man who favoured the French over the English in the province. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, which had been enacted following the Treaty of Paris that ended the Seven Years’ War, had stripped French Canadians of their religious and civil rights, treating them as a conquered people within the British Empire, rather than as equal subjects with the American colonists to the south or the British inhabitants of the United Kingdom. Carleton oversaw the dismantling of these punitive measures. His advocacy for French Canadians’ rights made him both a forefather of modern Canadian pluralism and a key villain to Anglophone colonists, both in and outside of Quebec, on the eve of the American Revolution.

The Quebec Act was Canada’s first constitution to enshrine minority rights and religious freedom, with Sir Guy Carleton acting as its champion. Instead of an elected assembly, which would be overrun by the Anglophone Protestant communities in Montreal and Quebec City, given that French Canadian Catholics had been stripped of the right to vote or hold public office in 1763, the colony was given an appointed legislative council that answered directly to the governor. Carleton firmly believed that “the better sort of Canadians” feared nothing more than elected assemblies, since they tended only to encourage rash and cruel behaviour. Even more importantly, he felt that elected assemblies almost always led to republicanism, something that Carleton, as a British military officer and imperial administrator, was determined to avoid wherever possible in British North America.¹⁸ The policy of anglicization, which had been paramount in the Proclamation of 1763 after the Conquest, was “not only retarded but reversed.”¹⁹ According to the text of the act, Canadians were given “the free exercise of the religion of the Church of Rome (Catholicism)” along with “their property and possessions, together with all customs and usages relative thereto, and all other . . . civil rights”; cases involving “property and civil rights” would be judged according “to the Laws of Canada” while criminal cases fell under English common law; and the boundaries of the province were extended to include what is now southern Ontario, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, and parts of Minnesota, restoring most of the former territories of New France.²⁰ Furthermore, the Quebec Act facilitated the participation of Catholics in the government and civil service of the colony by changing the wording of the oath of allegiance to remove clauses that required a renunciation of Catholic doctrine.²¹

17 G. P. Browne, “CARLETON, GUY, 1st Baron DORCHESTER,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 5, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed December 11, 2024, https://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/carleton_guy_5E.html.

18 Guy Carleton to the Earl of Shelburne, January 20, 1768, in Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty (eds.), *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada* (J. de L. Taché, 1918), 295. See also Willis, “Rethinking Ireland and Assimilation,” 173–4.

19 Browne, “CARLETON, GUY.”

20 *An Act for making more effectual Provision for the Government of the Province of Quebec in North America*, 14 Geo. III, c. 83.

21 Jessica L. Harland-Jacobs, “Incorporating the King’s New Subjects: Accommodation and Anti-Catholicism in the British Empire, 1763–1815,” *Journal of Religious History*, 39, 2 (2015), 210.

This was a monumental departure from British imperial precedent, which had previously employed policies of assimilation, exclusion, and expulsion rather than accommodation. Parliamentary debates at Westminster about the Quebec Act in the 1770s repeatedly referenced the failed precedent of the Irish Penal Laws, which had punished the Catholic majority population in Ireland and Protestant Dissenters, reducing them to second-class citizens in their own land, thereby creating a system that was both counterproductive and a breeding ground for unrest, religious division, and rebellion.²² Carleton clearly did not want to recreate the same system in Quebec. Although we no longer have his personal papers—on his death bed, he requested that Lady Dorchester burn them—Aaron Willis has argued that, because of Carleton’s Irish roots, one can read his support for Catholic inclusion in the Quebec Act as a “commentary on the failings of the Irish model. At the very least, his case was built on the same arguments deployed by critics of the Irish model. He certainly did not argue for the creation of an Anglo-Canadian elite to mirror his Anglo-Irish roots.”²³

When Carleton became the governor of Quebec in 1768, he began to advocate strategically for a pluralist approach to the province’s situation. His predecessor as governor, James Murray, had also seen the instability inherent within British imperial policies that would only alienate the French-Canadian population; however, Murray’s advocacy for “a policy of mollification” angered Anglophone merchants in Quebec City and Montreal, resulting in his removal from office.²⁴ At first, Carleton seemed to appeal to these same businessmen; however, once he had met with them, he took a swift dislike to their methods and aims. Carleton was a soldier and an aristocrat, not a born politician. His approach to the Canadians’ situation in the late 1760s seems to have been heavily influenced by his appreciation of Quebec’s strategic position, both geographically and in terms of manpower, should the Thirteen Colonies to the south rebel. By the time Carleton came to power in Quebec, the American colonists in Boston, New York, and the Carolinas were already incensed over a variety of British policies and taxes. The thought of more “colonial disturbances” was paramount to Carleton’s overall strategy in quelling further dissent, which in turn coloured his politics and his dealings with both the Francophone and Anglophone communities in Quebec.²⁵

At the end of 1767, Carleton wrote to Grey Cooper, Secretary of the Treasury, that he was already “well convinced that the present Situation of this Province, especially in Regard to its Laws and Revenues, is greatly prejudicial to the British Interests, and requires speedy and usefull [sic] Arrangements.”²⁶ He was particularly unamused by the “Destruction caused among [the First Nations] by the Quantities of Spirits carried up to their Villages.” Among other deficiencies, he noted the “ruinous Condition of all the Publick Buildings” and fortifications; lacklustre agricultural production; the “Distresses of many of the Individuals,

22 Ollivier Hubert and François Furstenberg (eds.), *Entangling the Quebec Act: Transnational Contexts, Meanings, and Legacies in North America and the British Empire* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2020), 27.

23 Aaron Willis, “Rethinking Ireland and Assimilation: Quebec, Collaboration, and the Heterogeneous Empire,” in Hubert and Furstenberg (eds.), *Entangling the Quebec Act*, 173.

24 Willis, “Rethinking Ireland and Assimilation,” 166, 169–70.

25 W. P. M. Kennedy, *The Constitution of Canada: An Introduction to Its Development and Law*, first published 1922 (Oxford University Press, 2014), 59, 62.

26 National Archives at Kew (NA), T 1/461, Sir Guy Carleton to Grey Cooper, Secretary of the Treasury, December 10, 1767.

by the unavoidable Calamities of War (as well as the Want of Industry among the People)”; and the need for granaries in Quebec and Montreal to stave off famine, which he felt was a great threat because of the severe climate.²⁷

However, it was his interactions with the small yet vocal community of Anglophone merchants that was a continual stumbling block to any progress Carleton wanted in terms of changing larger constitutional issues to ensure Quebec's loyalty if the other colonies revolted. Once settled in Canada, Carleton found “what I believe may be found everywhere, the People fond of the Laws and Form of Government they have been educated under, tho' scarcely a Man that Knows one sound Principle of Government or Law.” When he asked for the merchants' scheme for an Assembly and how it would be composed, they could never offer a workable solution.²⁸ They wanted political rights for themselves under the claim of “freeborn Englishmen,” but they were also determined to deny these same rights to the Canadians.²⁹ Carleton held up John McCord—progenitor of the notable Montreal family over the next two centuries—as a typical member of this lobby, a Presbyterian Irishman “who wants neither Sense nor Honesty,” and who had “formerly kept a small ale house in the poor suburbs of a little country town in the north of Ireland.” Now residing in Quebec, McCord had been selling alcohol to the British troops to such an extent that the soldiers were constantly drunk. When the magistrates closed down this liquor business, McCord “commenced Patriot, and with the Assistance of the late Attorney General, and three or four more, egged on by Letters from Home, are at work again for an Assembly.” Carleton was much more impressed with “the better Sort of Canadians” who feared “nothing more than popular Assemblies, which, they conceive, tend only to render the People refractory and insolent.”³⁰

“Refractory and insolent” were two words most definitely associated in Carleton's mind with one of the key leaders within the Anglophone community in Montreal: the notorious Thomas Walker. A key focal point for social discontent in the city, the English-born Walker had emigrated from Boston to Montreal in 1763 and quickly established himself as a spokesman for Montreal merchants in their ongoing quarrels with the military authorities. Recognizing Walker's charisma with his fellow merchants, Governor Murray had attempted to bring him into the fold by making him a justice of the peace. However, this move only emboldened Walker to become even more vocal in his disagreements with the authorities, especially over the billeting of British troops in the city. When Captain Benjamin Payne of the 28th Foot refused to vacate his lodgings, Walker had him arrested.³¹

Murray summoned Walker and three other magistrates to Quebec to explain themselves, but before they could leave, masked men attacked Walker in his home, beat him severely, and cropped one of his ears.³² He immediately

27 Ibid.

28 Guy Carleton to the Earl of Shelburne, January 20, 1768, in Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty (eds.), *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada* (J. de L. Taché, 1918), 295. See also Willis, “Rethinking Ireland and Assimilation,” 173.

29 LAC, Radio-Canada International Fonds, sound recording, “The Ordeal of New France.”

30 Guy Carleton to the Earl of Shelburne, January 20, 1768, in Shortt and Doughty, *Documents*, 295-6.

31 Browne, “CARLETON, GUY.”

32 Carolee Pollock, “Thomas Walker's Ear: Political Legitimacy in Post-Conquest Quebec,” *Lumen* 19 (2000): 203.

accused members of the 28th Foot of having perpetrated the attack, and four men from the regiment were arrested. When their trial resulted in an acquittal, Walker protested that the military authorities had permitted guilty men to escape justice. A second trial, accusing Captain Daniel Disney of the attack on Walker, drew strong public condemnation: a petition protesting Walker's insistence that Disney be denied bail bore the signatures of almost every prominent Montreal resident.³³ When the captain was acquitted, Walker "let loose such a flood of virulent abuse that moderate men were turned against him."³⁴ His belligerence fragmented the mercantile community in the city. By the time Carleton assumed the full powers of governor, he was already leery of radicals; Thomas Walker's adamant support for an Anglo-Protestant-dominated general assembly could only have further alienated Carleton from the idea.

Carleton was clear in his thinking on one major point: the futility of attempting to anglicize Quebec. Canada was not the desired destination for most British emigrants, so they would never supplant the Francophone population; the apparatus governing the province needed to reflect that reality. "Barring catastrophe shocking to think of," wrote Carleton to the Earl of Shelburne in Whitehall, "this country must, to the end of time be peopled by the Canadian race, who have already taken such firm root and got to so great a height, that any new stock transplanted would be totally hid in and amongst them, except in the town of Quebec and Montreal."³⁵ He believed the key to ensuring Canadian loyalty, especially with unrest growing in the American colonies, was to remove the English civil law that had been imposed through the Proclamation of 1763, "a Sort of Severity, if I remember right, never before practiced by any Conqueror, even when the people, without Capitulation, submitted to His Will and Discretion. . . . This much is certain: That it cannot long remain in Force without a General Confusion and Discontent."³⁶

Carleton left Quebec in July of 1770 for London, where he spent the next four years campaigning for what became the Quebec Act. The British House of Commons had many heated debates over its proposals. Lord Lyttleton wrote rather bluntly to William Pitt on why the act was necessary: war with the American colonies. The "affection" of the Canadians was paramount to secure because of "the present state of Boston."³⁷ Aware that the lobby of the Anglophone merchants was being lost in debates that focused on the act's consequences for French Canadians and the Thirteen Colonies, Thomas Walker and Zachary Macaulay also travelled to London to put forward their own petition for support to Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies. Walker alerted friends in Massachusetts as to what was happening in Westminster, stoking American fears that the Quebec Act would lead to the Catholicization of all of Britain's North American colonies.³⁸

33 Browne, "CARLETON, GUY"

34 William Wood, *The Father of British Canada: A Chronicle of Carleton* (Glasgow: Brook & Company, 1920), 44.

35 Carleton to Shelburne, November 25, 1767, in Shortt and Doughty, *Documents*, 284.

36 Carleton to Shelburne, December 24, 1767, in Shortt and Doughty, *Documents*, 289.

37 "A Letter from Thomas Lord Lyttelton to William Pitt, Earl of Chatham, on the Quebec Bill, 1774," quoted in Kennedy, *The Constitution of Canada*, 64.

38 Gustave Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774-1783* (George G. Harrap & Co., 1967), 23.

Guy Carleton saw the Quebec Act as a Magna Carta for the Canadian people, which would restore their religious and civil rights, extend the province's territory, and guarantee the seigneurial system and the future existence of the Catholic Church in Canada.³⁹ He returned to Quebec in the autumn of 1774, convinced that he had secured the loyalty of the Canadians for whatever troubles lay ahead with the American colonists. Certainly the Catholic Church and the Francophone elites were very pleased with the Quebec Act's guarantees, but the working classes were less enamoured of its feudal elements, something Carleton conceded the following year in a letter to General Gage.⁴⁰ Thomas Walker, James McGill, John McCord, Zachary Macaulay and other leaders of the Anglophone population in the colony were also vehemently opposed to what Carleton had done, looking at the Quebec Act "with horror" and aligning themselves against the governor as the "first contriver & great promoter of this Evil."⁴¹

With the Quebec Act now a reality, Carleton did not know what to do with the various Anglophone elements in the province. The majority, he believed, also wished "to see universal Harmony and a dutifull [sic] Submission to Government" and that they continued "to be the Characteristic of the Inhabitants of this Province, and assuring me, that nothing should be wanting, upon their Parts, to promote so desirable an End."⁴² But then there were the merchants in Quebec City and, most especially, Montreal, who were more irksome. Carleton did not know whether these men were "of a more Turbulent Turn, or that they caught the Fire from some Colonists settled among them," or if they had been in direct communication with American agitators. In his communications with Lord Dartmouth, he named Thomas Walker, "whose Warmth of Temper brought on him, some Time before my Appointment to this Command, the very cruel and every Way unjustifiable Revenge, which made so much Noise," as the man who "now takes the Lead" with organizing the Anglophone groups set against Carleton's governorship.⁴³

Having failed to stop the Quebec Act, Walker returned from London thoroughly turned against Carleton and the very notion of British authority in North America. In the aftermath of the Boston Tea Party, he sent 1,000 bushels of wheat to the city as a show of support, a gift which was officially acknowledged by the Boston Committee of Donations.⁴⁴ By the end of 1774, he was fully committed to the republican cause. Using his influence with other Anglophone merchants in Montreal and Quebec City, he organized coffee house meetings where he pressed that both cities should send delegates to the next Continental Congress.⁴⁵ Carleton was aware of these activities, informing the Secretary of State for the Colonies of their existence, but also noting that many Anglophones in both cities had "declined attending

39 LAC, Radio-Canada International Fonds, sound recording, "The Ordeal of New France."

40 Carleton to General Gage, February 4, 1775, in Shortt and Doughty, *Documents*, 661.

41 Browne, "CARLETON, GUY."

42 Carleton to Lord Dartmouth, November 11, 1774, in Shortt and Doughty, *Documents*, 586.

43 Ibid., 587.

44 Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution*, 20.

45 Lewis H. Thomas, "WALKER, THOMAS (d. 1788)," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. 4, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003–, accessed December 12, 2024, https://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/walker_thomas_1788_4E.html.

those Meetings, as soon as they discovered what they aimed at.” Still, Walker and other like-minded Anglophones appear to have been just as much of a problem for Carleton as they had been for James Murray.

Given all of his efforts to secure the loyalty and even affection of the French-Canadian elites, clergy, and habitants, Carleton was rather stricken when there was no great rush on their part to defend the Crown’s interests once the American Revolution began. While the “Gentry and Clergy have been very useful upon this occasion, and shewen [sic] great Fidelity and Warmth for His Majesty’s Service . . . both have lost much of their Influence over the People; I propose trying to form a Militia . . . but I have many Doubts whether I shall be able to succeed.”⁴⁶ Later in the war, after he had successfully defended Quebec City from an American invasion, but had also seen Montreal surrender to Benedict Arnold with hardly a shot fired, he lamented, “As to my opinion of the Canadians, I think there is nothing to fear from them, while we are in a state of prosperity, and nothing to hope for when in distress.”⁴⁷ Carleton held firm to the belief that the Quebec Act had been the appropriate course of action, both at the time and as a future template for governing the province, but he was also, perhaps, less idealistic going forward in the kind of loyalty he believed his actions could inspire among the rank-and-file of French-Canadian society.

June 22, 2024, marked the 250th anniversary of the Quebec Act. Very little fanfare accompanied the day. No major English- or French-language newspaper marked the occasion, apart from one article in *Le Devoir* a few days earlier stating that it was time for Quebec to have a modern constitution of its own.⁴⁸ Part of this is likely because of the passage of time, or perhaps Canadians’ notoriously bad knowledge of their own history.⁴⁹ Some of the reticence, perhaps, is also because the Quebec Act, and its gubernatorial champion, Guy Carleton, both have complicated legacies. The act of 1774 gave French Canadians religious and civil rights and freedoms that simply did not exist for Catholics in Britain, Ireland, or other parts of the empire.⁵⁰ Indeed, it later became a template used by the British around the world in order to integrate non-Anglo-Protestant territories as imperial possessions.⁵¹ However, those same rights were denounced as “unjust, unconstitutional, very dangerous, and subversive of American rights” by agitators in the Thirteen Colonies.⁵² They classified the Quebec Act as the last of the five “Intolerable Acts” and a key cause for the outbreak of the American Revolution.⁵³

46 Carleton to Lord Dartmouth, June 7, 1775, in Shortt and Doughty, *Documents*, 665.

47 Carleton to Lord Germain, September 28, 1776, in Shortt and Doughty, *Documents*, 675.

48 “Il est temps d’agir pour adopter une Constitution du Québec,” *Le Devoir*, June 18, 2024, available online at <https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/idees/815025/idees-il-est-temps-agir-adopter-constitution-quebec> (accessed December 12, 2024).

49 “Canadians don’t know their history, study shows,” *The Globe and Mail*, November 9, 2007.

50 *Discover Canada* (Government of Canada, 2021), available online at <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/ircc/migration/ircc/english/pdf/pub/discover.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2024).

51 Willis, “Rethinking Ireland and Assimilation,” 185.

52 Edmund H. Oliver, *The Winning of the Frontier* (The United Church Publishing House, 1930), 89.

53 Tristin Hopper, “Fourth of July Buzzkill,” *National Post*, July 4, 2017.

Closer to home, the Quebec Act split the Anglophone and Francophone populations of the province in the 1770s, although the former had already become fractured through the republicanism of Thomas Walker and his like-minded supporters. Even after the Quebec Act had been technically superseded by the Constitutional Act of 1791, splitting the province into Upper and Lower Canada, the distinct society created by Carleton's efforts remained intact, a fact that was further guaranteed by Westminster in 1828.⁵⁴ Without its protective parameters, the modern province of Quebec would not exist, and French Canadians would likely have been completely assimilated into either Anglophone Canada or the American republic, like those of French descent now living in Maine and New England.⁵⁵ The Quebec Act saved French Canada; it also created a permanent linguistic and cultural divide within Quebec's populations.⁵⁶ The act was not popular with Quebec's Anglophones in 1774; given the pluralistic vision for the future of Canada encapsulated within its provisions, and the ongoing fights to protect minority rights in modern Quebec, one might have expected *The Gazette* to have championed it a bit more loudly in 2024.

Carleton also has enjoyed a bumpy ride in the opinions of contemporaries and commentators. In 1968, historian A. L. Burt referred to Carleton's personal "defects of character," his "mean temper," and his propensity to "stop at nothing to cover up his mistakes."⁵⁷ Donald Creighton went even further, noting that Carleton had once been a cocksure and emphatic leader in his prime, but that he later became a baffled, irritable old man "with a complacent belief in his own importance and ingrained relish for authority."⁵⁸ This was a far cry from how Carleton had been described in the *Quebec Gazette* on his return to the colony in 1793: "Long and repeated experience has taught the Canadians to repose the highest confidence in his Lordship's fostering care of this Colony—they look to him as a Father; nor do they appear to intertain [sic] a more sincere wish than that he may be induced to spend the remainder of his valuable life amongst them, and that they may long enjoy the blessing of his mild and equitable Government."⁵⁹ Unlike René Lévesque, Carleton's eventual successor as the leader of Quebec who had earned a paternal soubriquet from Guy Chevrette, Lord Dorchester's place in the affection of communities in the province—both Francophone and Anglophone—was never guaranteed. Like his name on some Montreal street signs, Carleton's place in the memory of modern Quebecers was tidal: it came and went.

54 Oliver, *The Winning of the Frontier*, 91. In July 1828, the Select Committee appointed by Westminster to inquire into the State of the Civil Government of Canada confirmed that "Canadians of French extraction should in no degree be disturbed in the peaceful enjoyment of their religion, laws and privileges." See UK, Selection Committee of the House of Commons on the Civil Government of Canada, *Report from the Select Committee on the Civil Government of Canada* (London, 1828), 5.

55 LAC, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Radio: Ideas, ISN 513333, Accession 1972-0015, sound recording, "The Best Ideas You'll Hear Tonight," interview with Miller Stewart, journalist, by Bill Whitehead, Ideas Science Editor, November 12, 1965.

56 Oliver, *The Winning of the Frontier*, 92; Kennedy, *The Constitution of Canada*, 156-7, 161; Wood, *The Father of British Canada*, 54-6. See also A. G. Bradley's Lord Dorchester (1907).

57 A. L. Burt, Guy Carleton, *Lord Dorchester, 1724-1808* (Canadian Historical Association Booklet, no. 5, 1968), 3.

58 Donald G. Creighton, *The Empire of the St. Lawrence* (University of Toronto Press, 1937), 116, and Browne, "CARLETON, GUY."

59 *Quebec Gazette*, September 26, 1793.

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