

**Building a Narrative:
Uses and Misuses of Antiquity at the Manitoba Legislature**

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Abstract:

Toppling the statue of Queen Victoria in July 2021 did not end the reign of colonialist memory on the Manitoba Legislature's grounds, but simply marked the removal of its most accessible symbol. This paper examines the sculptural programme of the Legislative Assembly and how its engagement with the classical world glorifies the role of European settlers while erasing the contributions and experiences of Indigenous people. It details the exclusionary narrative told by these statues through the lens of ancient art and modern architectural history, tying Beaux-Arts architecture and the City Beautiful movement to the White supremacist classicizing aesthetics of the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. It argues that the imagery used on the Legislative Building was intended to recruit White settlers into a colonial and capitalist vision of Manitoba. More specifically, it examines the connections between images from antiquity and the idea of Manitoba as the centre of a powerful colonial enterprise, through an architectural nostalgia that distorted the realities of both the ancient past and the present. Using the ancient Roman practice of *damnatio memoriae* ("condemnation of memory"), this paper contends that statuary like that found on the Legislative Building offers a pretense of permanency and authority that has in reality been challenged as long as monuments have been used for this purpose. Ultimately it considers more dynamic forms of commemoration, such as the orange flags planted around the plinth where Queen Victoria once stood, and how communal memory can be more responsive and reflective of the people it represents.

Keywords: Manitoba Legislature, Winnipeg, Beaux-Arts, White City, City Beautiful movement, Frank Worthington Simon, neoclassical architecture, pedimental sculpture, colonial monuments

On July 1, 2021, a commemorative walk to mark the recent reports of children's unmarked graves at the sites of former residential schools across Canada was held in Winnipeg ending on the grounds of the Manitoba Legislative Building. A group of people in attendance then pulled down statues of Queen Victoria and Queen Elizabeth II on those same grounds as a response to the ongoing legacies of colonialism in Manitoba. Among the myriad responses to the statues being removed and damaged (Queen Victoria's head was cut off and tossed into the Assiniboine River while the statue of Queen Elizabeth II was toppled and lay by its plinth for several days before being removed) were the words of Belinda Vandebroek, an Elder and residential school survivor who was present that day:

This queen is the one that gave our land away just like that to her merry gentlemen — her fur traders, so I really have no place for her in my heart. I never did. She means nothing to me except that her policies and her colonialism is what is dictating us right to this minute as you and I speak.

(CBC News, July 2, 2021)

For Vandebroek, the two statues commemorated a long and painful history that dominated life in Manitoba for Indigenous people and settlers alike. As a variety of opinions circulated in the days following, Brian Pallister, then the premier of Manitoba, stepped forward on July 7 to address the events of Canada Day and to admonish those who had brought the statues down with the following comments:¹

The people who came here to this country, before it was a country and since, didn't come here to destroy anything, they came here to build. They came to build better, to build, they did. And they built farms, and they built businesses, and they built communities and churches too. And they built these things for themselves and for one and another, and they built them with dedication and with pride. And so, we must dedicate ourselves to building, as well, and yet again, because what these people have done, our ancestors, is they've given us a heritage, and heritage is a complicated thing... Canada is a land of hope. Manitoba is the special heart of Canada. And we continue to draw people here, to this centre of our beautiful country, because we are focused on building that hope... It takes a negative will to tear down. It takes a positive will to build up, and we need to focus on building up.

(CBC News, July 18, 2021)

The premier's comments offered a very disparate perspective on what the statues of the queens commemorated, adhering to a narrative that ran counter to Vandebroek's commentary. It is precisely this difference in narratives of commemoration that this paper intends to interrogate, since the version offered by Pallister is reinforced by the very building that he went to work in for so many years. If one stands on the spot where the statue of Queen Victoria once stood on its plinth (which has been removed as of December 2022) and looks up at the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, a narrative that can easily be missed from ground level presents itself, with another seated female figure, the embodiment of Manitoba, at the centre. The province-turned-icon sits at the centre of a series of other sculptures on the pediment above the entrance and all around the building that have encoded colonialist nostalgia right into the building. The classicizing

architecture of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, especially the sculptures on the exterior of the building, tell a story of the province's history that glorifies the role of European settlers while erasing the contributions and experiences of Indigenous people as well as other non-White groups who have settled in Manitoba.

While this narrative may not be immediately apparent to viewers, the fact that it continues to resurface, as in Brian Pallister's comments, means that it merits a careful exploration. It is because this narrative has been internalized and become a "second nature" to Manitobans like Pallister (cf. Francis, 2011: 11) that we ought to expose the intention behind its creation. Certainly, this historical moment of reassessing the meaning of monuments that found its expression in the damage to the two queens' statues calls for a reckoning with the story told by Manitoba's most notable building. The statues at ground level were simply the most physically fragile symbols of colonialism, especially compared to the intended permanence of the structure itself; the statue of Queen Victoria, for example, had been moved in the past to be reoriented when the current structure was built. The references to the classical world that litter the building's exterior were used to offer this pretense of permanence and authority, and so the Legislative Building, its origins, and the narrative that its exterior tells are intimately tied up in imperialism and colonialism.

In what follows, I survey the history of the building itself and its tangled relationship to classical antiquity in order to examine its commemorative role as a monument, its use of architectural nostalgia, and how this distorts the realities of both the ancient past and the present day. I also include a consideration of the concept of *damnatio memoriae*, the Roman practice of removing or remaking images and names of dead individuals who were no longer considered to accord with mainstream values. I use this practice as an instructive example of how we may deal with sculptural narratives like the ones found on the Manitoba Legislative Assembly that encode false or damaging ideals.

The Origins of the Legislative Building, Beaux-Arts Influences on the Prairies, and the "White City"

The current Manitoba Legislative Assembly, the third legislative building in Manitoban history, was built between 1913 and 1919, on the grounds of the second iteration. From its very inception, the building was a colonial undertaking: a competition to design the building had been established by the provincial government in 1911 for architects who were subjects of the British Empire. A prize of \$10,000 and a \$100,000 commission were at stake, and \$2,000,000 was budgeted for the eventual building (Baker, 1986: 29). Sixty-seven entries were submitted, with Liverpool architects Frank Worthington Simon and Henry Boddington III winning the commission. The two architects had only begun working together the year prior (the Legislative Building was their only major collaboration), and both were present in Winnipeg for much of the construction.²



Figure 1:
Image of Manitoba Legislative Building.
Credit: Canucks4ever83.

The winning design is a massive neoclassical building in the ornate and impressive Beaux-Arts style, faced in local Tyndall limestone, with Ionic columns and triangular pediments in the style of a classical Greek temple on the façade of each of the cardinal directions (Figure 1). Sitting atop the building is a copper-domed cupola that reaches 77 metres above the ground, with the famous Golden Boy at the very apex. The primary entrance, with an elaborate pedimental sculpture I will address in detail, faces north, and the south aspect of the building faces the Assiniboine River. Once complete, the building was unofficially inaugurated by the Prince of Wales in September 1919, with official opening ceremonies taking place on July 15, 1920 as part of the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Manitoba entering Confederation (Baker, 1986: 126).

Construction was troubled from the outset, with the government initially refusing to allow Simon and Boddington to supervise and insisting on having a provincial architect in charge. This arrangement then turned out to be part of a plot to divert money intended for the Legislature into Conservative party funds that ultimately led to the resignation of then-Premier Rodmond Roblin. Once the scandal had settled down, Simon returned as supervising architect, while Boddington enlisted in the Canadian army to aid in World War I efforts (“Frank Worthington Simon,” 2016). The budget ultimately ran to over \$9,000,000 (The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, 2020). The Manitoba Legislature is one of the last great monuments of this type on the Prairies, as at that moment the vagaries of World War I and class divisions such as those expressed in the 1919 General Strike in Winnipeg had worn on the population. By 1920, the vision of the Canadian West as a settler utopia had dissipated (Melnik, 1993: 117).

In the context of this discussion, Simon, the lead architect, is of particular interest. After completing his architectural apprenticeship in 1882, he spent a year training at the highly influential *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris (“Frank Worthington Simon,” 2016). Although it had existed since the 17th century, the *École*, and particularly its architectural academy, were coming into a period of major international influence just at the time that Simon attended. Specifically, at that time the hallmarks of the *Beaux-Arts* style were being established: symmetry, classicizing details that often combined both Greek and Roman motifs, heavy decoration, use of stone, and most important to this paper, statuary as a major focus point on building exteriors (Ching et al., 2017: 679).

Simon’s training placed him at the centre of the international *Beaux-Arts* trend as it was cresting at the turn of the century, with buildings in that style being erected around the world, from the Grand Palais in Paris (1900) to the Palace of the Argentine National Congress in Buenos Aires (1900). With their overwhelming facades and references to powerful empires of the past, *Beaux-Arts* buildings were popular in colonial centres like London as well as in cities wishing to reinforce their international connections like Kobe; they were typically used for governmental purposes and capitalist institutions like railroads and banks. Canada was not immune to this trend and by the time Simon’s design was under construction in Manitoba, two other *Beaux-Arts*-style legislatures had been built on the Prairies, in Regina (completed 1912) and Edmonton (completed 1913).

In fact, Winnipeg itself had also seen a blossoming of *Beaux-Arts* buildings during the first years of the 20th century, including stations for both major railroads (CPR in 1905 and CN in 1911) and several major banks (including the Bank of Montreal building at Portage and Main in 1910 and the Bank of Commerce in 1912). Most significant buildings erected in Winnipeg in the first two decades of the 20th century had features designed to recall the classical world and thereby to remind their viewers that Manitoba’s capital was the chief economic centre on the Prairies, sitting at the centre of a recently completed cross-country rail network. Finance and the grain trade had turned Winnipeg into a boom town for its settler population, who were very optimistic about its economic and cultural future and were eager to present it as the peer of larger cities like Chicago.³

At the same time, cities like Winnipeg were also perceived as the frontier, both by settler residents and those back east, and the local government and railroads in particular were anxious to bring in European settlers to the Prairies after a slowdown in European immigration due to a years-long recession beginning in 1873 (Gagnon, 2022). Classicizing architecture, as in the *Beaux-Arts* examples I have just listed, was commonly used at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in newly wealthy areas around the world to reinforce connections to European aesthetics and culture in order to “civilize” the frontier. In North America specifically, a lot of the classicizing architecture that appeared in cities in the Midwest and on the Prairies was a response to the World’s Fair held in Chicago in 1893, its so-called “White City,” and the City Beautiful movement that it inspired.



Figure 2:

Image of the “White City” of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

Credit: C. D. Arnold and H. D. Higinbotham.

The 1893 World’s Fair, also known as the Columbian Exposition, was intended to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus’ arrival on this side of the Atlantic by showcasing recent scientific and technological developments. The fairground and its buildings were designed as an ideal prototype of a city, following Beaux-Arts principles and featuring neoclassical architecture that was mostly covered in a white gypsum mixture referred to as “staff,” from which the nickname the “White City” originated. Throughout the White City were a set of classicizing sculptures meant to reinforce the connections between antiquity and present-day America. (Figure 2) It is worth pausing here to emphasize just how colonial an event this particular World’s Fair was, even in comparison to other iterations: the Columbus Day holiday was proposed to allow people to attend the fair and the Pledge of Allegiance made its debut there, but most notably, like many similar exhibitions at the time, non-White cultures were kept out of the main exhibition (in this case, the White City).

The one exception was a display in the Anthropology building devoted to establishing the physical characteristics of different races. In Chicago, cultural displays of non-White peoples were found separately in an area known as the Midway, where in addition to attractions like a Ferris wheel, one could also find an elaborate set of so-called “ethnic villages” with inhabitants dressed in traditional attire. These people would recreate culturally significant performances for fairgoers but could also be observed going about their exoticized everyday routines. (One more common term for such exhibits is a “human zoo.”) Specifically, Indigenous peoples of North America (only a few nations were featured) were very intentionally not housed in the neoclassical buildings of the White City, but in reconstructions of traditional homes as well as a model Indian school that hosted delegations of Indigenous students for weeks at a time. Here,

they were meant to display a lifestyle “in the exact way their forefathers lived before the white man invaded their lands” (Flinn, 1893: 40).⁴ The Indigenous displays such as the so-called “Esquimaux Village” were listed alongside historical displays like the recreation of a Viking ship, suggesting that such peoples and cultures were equally historical and no longer a part of the modern White-dominated world the exposition sought so fervently to promote.⁵ Just outside of the fairgrounds, Buffalo Bill Cody hosted his own displays, with his Wild West show and accompanying Indian encampment, open to visitors. This show featured re-enactments of conflicts between Indigenous peoples and settlers, often starring the actual people who had taken part in the original conflicts, which in turn suggested that they had been pacified (Deloria, 2004: 63).⁶ Visitors commented regularly on the differences between the Midway and the White City, the former a place of fun and sensational presentations, the latter a space to quietly contemplate a glorious (White) future (Valance, 2009: 432).

In the words of classicist Rebecca Futo Kennedy, the organization of the Columbian Exposition and its pairing of White supremacy and classical imagery, especially sculpture, “recruited (white Americans) on a journey to a great white utopia” (Kennedy, 2017) in which America married industrial progress with divine will; this utopia was supported by a racial hierarchy with settlers at the top. Perhaps Kennedy’s most important point, and one that is salient to a discussion centred on the imagery on the Manitoba Legislative Building, is that the utopia presented at the Chicago fair was not a purely elite space, but one that was ultimately intended to appeal to the White working class. The Agriculture building from the White City illustrates this appeal, with its grandiose exterior (described as a “temple to Ceres” in the fair’s guidebook) topped with a gilded statue of Diana, and its displays of such quotidian products as pickles, condensed milk, and flour. In such a building and in the White City as a whole, an elevated classical past could be aligned with the interests of the White working class and used to shape a future vision of America.

The vision that Chicago’s White City presented proved so appealing to governments around the world, particularly in colonized areas, that it ushered in the “City Beautiful” movement, a new philosophy of urban planning and architecture that valued beautification of urban spaces with the aim of inculcating civic virtue among their populations. The White City was in fact considered the first example of the City Beautiful: a grand city that was modern and had no visible poverty. North American cities, especially those on the Canadian Prairies and in the American Midwest, embraced this philosophy, creating or remaking grand spaces and vistas in city centres, surrounded by the requisite Beaux-Arts buildings and monuments, as seen in examples ranging from the McMillan Commission’s 1902 reworking of the National Mall in Washington, D.C. to the 1907 creation of Wascana Centre Park to accompany the Saskatchewan Legislative Building. Turn-of-the-century Winnipeg was not immune to the Beaux-Arts trend, as Broadway, the grand avenue leading from the legislative grounds up to CN’s Union Station, shows.

Thus, in 1911, at the height of these trends in North American architecture and urban planning, that Simon and his partner should propose a building on the scale and in the style of the current Manitoba Legislative Assembly was not only likely but also incredibly commonplace, especially in those places keen to self-fashion images of prosperity and virtue. Bigger plans along these lines were already afoot in Winnipeg, and the intention was to include a

wide boulevard (what is now Memorial Boulevard) that led several blocks north to a large stone city hall based on Buckingham Palace.⁷ Many of the other competitors entered designs similar to that of Simon and Boddington in the competition, making it a near certainty that Manitoba would have a neoclassical stone legislative building topped with a dome.

But it is the specific choices made by Simon, Boddington, and the team of sculptors they commissioned to decorate the building, as well as the image of Manitoba that emerges from these choices, that merit further examination here. As such, in my discussion of the building itself I will begin with an overview of the major classicizing features of the exterior before turning to an extended discussion of two sculptural choices that reveal a very specific narrative about Manitoba's foundation and future.

Classical Features and Statuary on the Exterior of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly

The overall design of the Legislative Building is overtly Beaux-Arts, including the raised first story that makes the building seem to sit atop a podium, the emphasis on symmetry, the grand entrance featuring Ionic columns and a triangular pediment above with a set of sculptures, and the statuary placed around the top of the building, often in groups that highlight specific themes related to industry and the economy. For example, at the base of the dome are four statuary groups of classicizing figures allegorizing Agriculture, Art, Science, and Industry.



Figure 3:
Allegory of Peace, west side of Manitoba Legislative Building.
Credit: Melissa Funke.



Figure 4: Allegory of War, east side of Manitoba Legislative Building.

Credit: Melissa Funke

Above the east and west entrances to the building are two pairs of figures, each arranged so that both figures are kneeling on either side of a large chest. Those on the west side are female figures in an allegory of Peace, with a chest topped by a crown, presumably signifying the pacifying effect of British rule. (Figure 3) On the east side are two male figures in a similar pose, signifying war, on either side of a chest with a drum and trumpets, instruments typically found on the battlefield, on top of it. (Figure 4) These two figures, to whom I will return later in this discussion, are more distinct than the rather generic female figures, with the one on the right meant to be a Roman soldier and the one on the left an Indigenous figure with a war bonnet.

On each side of these entrances at ground level are statues of men considered by settlers to be heroes of Canadian and Manitoban history, specifically as explorers and colonizers: Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, sieur de La Vérendrye, who began the process that added Western Canada to New France; General Wolfe, the victorious general at the Battle of the Plains of Abraham who paved the way for British rule of Canada; Lord Selkirk, who created the Red River settlement;⁷ and Lord Dufferin, who was the first Vice-Regal Representative to visit Manitoba and gave the province its nickname, the “Keystone.” These four statues in particular follow the Canadian pattern of using monuments to express a “nostalgia for colonial conquest” (Abraham, 2021: 6). Standing atop the very apex of the building itself is the famous “Golden Boy,” more formally known as “Eternal Youth and the Spirit of Enterprise,” created by the French sculptor Georges Gardet under strict instructions from Frank Worthington Simon and based on Giambologna’s 16th-century bronze of the Roman god Mercury. Hoisted into place in 1919 as the finishing touch on the building, this statue, in keeping with Simon’s overall economic emphasis, symbolizes Manitoba’s economy and prospects, carrying a sheaf of wheat (the fruits of labour) and a torch to call the youth to an eternal pursuit of economic prosperity, and facing the North of the province with its abundance of natural resources (Baker, 1986: 126-7). When read in combination with the allegorical figures at the base of the dome, the Golden Boy reveals the ongoing connection of capitalist enterprise to the colonial project of Manitoba (cf. Said on

imperialism and its need for continuous enterprise and profit, 1994: 11), which is further reinforced by the agricultural references in the pedimental sculpture.

The Narrative on the Pediment

I now turn to the pedimental sculptures, the portion of the exterior with the most elaborate narrative, offering an account of Manitoba's place within Canada and the formation of the province. Because they are located on the front façade of the building, right above the main entrance, we might also consider how those using the building are invited to endorse such a narrative, effectively merging with it as they enter the building (cf. Warner on entering the interior of the Statue of Liberty, 2000: 11). These images were sculpted by Albert Hodge, a British sculptor working under the direction of Simon. According to a 1925 guidebook to the Legislative Building, the sculptures on the pediment symbolize "an ideal on which a nation is being built and embraces the whole of the Dominion of Canada, even as all Canadians should do in thought and action, if we purpose to grow as a Nation" (Leslie & Pitcher, 1925: 19). The pediment, in representing a narrative of Manitoba and mythologizing its origins, follows in the tradition of temples like the famous Parthenon of classical Athens by offering not just a story about the state but through it an identity for the inhabitants of that place. An Athenian visiting the Acropolis in the fifth century BCE would have seen images of the famous contest between Athena and Poseidon over who would become the tutelary deity of the city and been reassured that Athena had won with her gift of the olive tree, its products central to the Athenian economy.

As an alumnus of the *École des Beaux-Arts*, with its emphasis on the classical canon, Simon was sure to have studied buildings like the Parthenon in great detail and was very likely to have visited the pedimental sculptures from it on display in the British Museum. Even the style of the sculptures on the Manitoban pediment, their poses and drapery, mimic those from the Parthenon. The Parthenon was built at a time when Athens thought of itself as powerful and prosperous, so the images on this building, the centre of Athens' most important civic cult, were doing a very similar type of self-fashioning to the images on the Legislative Building in Manitoba.



Figure 5: Left side of the pediment.

Credit: Melissa Funke

Such self-fashioning is easily seen in the figures that fill the pediment. On the far left of the pediment is a ship's wheel symbolizing the Atlantic Ocean, beside which is a reclining figure known as the "Contented Man" or alternately the "Indolent Man." (Figure 5) A female figure beside him, the "Spirit of Progress," beckons the Contented Man toward Manitoba in the centre. Next to this pair is a bull led by a young woman, recognizable as Europa and the Bull from classical myth (to which I will return in more detail shortly). Nestled between Europa and Manitoba itself are the Man, Woman, and Child, identified in the 1925 guidebook as the "vital unit in the social structure," signifying Manitoba's concern for the welfare of humanity (Leslie & Pitcher, 1925: 19).



Figure 6: Right side of the pediment.
Credit: Melissa Funke

In the far-right corner of the pediment are two figures entwined beside an urn with water flowing out of it, personifications of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers and their conjunction at the Forks, as well as a trident to indicate the Pacific Ocean. (Figure 6) Next to the rivers, a man works the earth with a plow and horses to symbolize cultivation and agriculture, and finally next to him a man and woman deliver the bounty of agriculture to Manitoba herself, in keeping with the economic/agricultural focus of many of the sculptures at the Legislature. We might consider the influence of imagery used by the Canadian Pacific Railway in its campaigns to encourage immigration to the Prairies from eastern Canada, the United States, and Britain on these figures, as well as on the idealized family that appears on the pediment, with that ideal represented by White farmers growing wheat, itself presented as a "source of national and racial strength" (Francis, 2011: 62-3).

The centre of the pediment is a female figure representing Manitoba. The rays of the sun are behind her and she wears military garb similar to that of the figure Britannia, in turn connecting her to the goddess Athena, who had become a common visual reference in architecture across Europe by the end of the 19th century (Warner, 2000: 125). This connection is especially apparent in her triple-crested helmet similar to the one believed to have been part of the statue of Athena Parthenos that stood in the Parthenon during the Classical period, which is not typically found on depictions of Britannia. Just as Britannia was usually employed in the

19th century to signify Britain and to inspire pride in the benefits of being British (Warner, 2000: 46), this version of Manitoba receives the bounty of the figures around her while embodying rule through law: in keeping with the Beaux-Arts tendency to mix Greek and Roman motifs, the figure of Manitoba also holds Roman fasces across her lap (a common means of symbolizing governmental authority also found in the interior decoration of the law courts across the street from the Legislature). Lady Manitoba sits calmly in the middle of the pediment, with no suggestion of movement, reinforcing the message of permanence that the entire structure works to present. Therefore, the basic narrative told by the pediment is one of European settlement and agricultural dominance over the land leading to the prosperity and strong government of Manitoba, or as the guidebook from 1925 states, “This building stands as a symbol of faith and belief in the future greatness of the Great West” (Leslie & Pitcher, 1925: 8).⁹

I would now like to further interrogate the narrative of the pediment as well as the cumulative narrative of all the sculpture on the Legislative Building’s exterior in order to consider what is and is not represented on it, beginning with a closer look at the image of Europa and the Bull. In classical myth, Europa is abducted by the god Zeus, who comes to her in the form of a tame bull and lures her onto his back. He then swims away with her to Crete, where she bears him three notable sons who go on to become heroes and rulers.

The story seems to be relatively straightforward, and images of Europa and the Bull appear commonly in the modern world, from Euro coins to a Leo Mol sculpture found in Winnipeg’s Assiniboine Park (the same sculptor who created the statue of Elizabeth II damaged in 2021), but upon closer examination the kidnapping and sexual assault in the story become more apparent. The darker aspects of the story of Europa and the Bull have been acknowledged since antiquity, as seen in this passage by the Roman poet Ovid, in which Europa becomes aware that she is being abducted:

The royal maiden, unaware of what she was touching,
 Dared to sit upon the bull’s back
 While the god bit by bit took deceptive steps
 From the sandy shore into the waves;
 Then he went farther and bore his prey
 Across the waters of the Mediterranean.
 Shaking with fear she looked back at the shore as she was carried off
 And grasped his horn with her right hand,
 While she placed her left on his back.
 Her fluttering dress waved in the breeze.

(Metamorphoses 2.868-75)

Using such an image to symbolize the impact of European settlement on Manitoba then becomes rather muddled on one hand because Europa is being taken away from her home by force. But on the other, using a myth centred on assault in this way seems apt, if unintentionally so, to signify a process that has ultimately been exploitative and harmful to many. Nor does this Europa represent the entire continent: northwestern European immigrants, those from Britain most of all, were welcome on the Prairies, while eastern and southern Europeans were often a cause for concern to Canadian leaders (Hall, 2007: 92).

Europa's placement on the pediment is also important to its narrative; she and the bull are nestled between the Spirit of Progress and the family, with the plowman in the corresponding position on the other side (symmetry being key to Beaux-Arts buildings and their decoration). This arrangement emphasizes the European settlement of Manitoba, especially the massive expansion of agriculture that had occurred in the decades prior to the construction of the Legislative Building, but it also effectively erases the contributions of any other group to the foundation of the province as it tells a story of noble, hardworking Europeans arriving to tame an empty wilderness through agricultural enterprise.

It manages simultaneously to ignore the true power structure of early Manitoba (i.e. those who directed and profited from the labour of the agricultural workers depicted on the pediment) while celebrating the violence of its settlement, a common feature of colonial monuments (Abraham, 2021: 5).

The narrative from the pediment is reiterated in the 1925 guidebook:

A little more than 50 years ago, this whole country from the Great Lakes ... and out to the Pacific Coast was nothing but a vast fur preserve.... A few years ago Rudyard Kipling visited Winnipeg and said, "The visions that your old men saw years ago, I saw translated today into stone and brick and concrete."... The people of this day are reaping what those pioneers, those dreamers, those men of vision saw, and seeing, worked to make their dreams come true so that the doubters would be convinced and this country come to the fulfillment of its destiny and become the breadbasket of the world.

(Leslie & Pitcher, 1925: 8)⁹

The inclusion of the Contented Man and the Spirit of Progress in the pediment operates in much the same way as the sculptures and architecture from the White City at the Chicago World's Fair did; both work to draw non-elite White settlers into a fantastical narrative of an empty land awaiting cultivation by Europeans, who in turn use the products of their capitalist economy to lead it to civic glory. Eurocentrism as embodied by these images pushed the working class to align their interests with the wealthy elite through the mechanisms of colonialism (Said, 1994: 222). These images mirror the promotional materials from shipping and railroad companies as well as the government's own *Canada West* magazine, which were produced to lure immigrants to the Prairies.

Like the White City and these promotional materials, the pediment on the Manitoba Legislative Building offers what amounts to a White supremacist narrative that effectively ignores and erases any other presence in the area prior to European settlement, while the monumental nature of the building and its pediment drives an interaction of the past, present, and future that further buttresses that narrative (Bellentani & Pedico, 2016: 38).

The Lone Indigenous Figure



Figure 7: Indigenous figure, part of allegorical grouping “War,” east side of Manitoba Legislative Building.
Credit: Melissa Funke

There is one Indigenous figure included in the exterior decoration (as mentioned earlier), and it is to this figure that I wish to return now. (Figure 7) This image was the only Indigenous representation on the exterior or the grounds of the Legislature until a statue of Louis Riel, itself quite controversial, was placed between the Assiniboine River and the building in 1971. The Indigenous figure is placed atop the eastern entrance to the building, in the grouping symbolizing war, alongside an ancient Roman soldier. Like his Roman counterpart, this figure crouches beside the chest with a drum and trumpets on top of it. He is dressed only in a loincloth and moccasins, holds a quiver of arrows, has a cloak or blanket slung over his left shoulder, and wears a war bonnet on his head. As far as I am aware, this is a very generic depiction and has no connection to any specific First Nation; it is more in line with romanticized images of indigeneity and the often abject Black and Indigenous figures found on colonial monuments (Abraham, 2021: 6-7).

Placing this image alongside one of a Roman soldier has the same effect as relegating Indigenous peoples to the Midway at the Chicago World’s Fair: it suggests that Indigenous people are distant in time, mythologized, and that they are no more a presence in Manitoba’s vision of itself than an ancient Roman might be. But there may be more to the temporal distancing of this figure than a simple dismissal of Indigenous peoples’ roles in the history of Manitoba. By turning this figure into a generic image of indigeneity, Simon and the sculptors he worked with were able to assimilate Indigenous peoples into this image of Manitoba, since they could not be completely excised from it (cf. Francis on the use of nationalist emblems to

construct a banal version of the past, 2011: 6 and Ryan on the generic tomahawks depicted above the Opposition entrance in Parliament, 2019: 150). This version has been tamed and othered by being relegated to the past while reminding the settler viewer of the aggressive behaviour of Indigenous peoples, thereby justifying that relegation (cf. Deloria on justifications for settling Indigenous lands in the United States, 1998: 101-3). Read against the allegorical figures of science and industry, the Golden Boy, and the agricultural imagery, the Indigenous figure also illustrates the progression of the colonial enterprise.



Figure 8: Postcard from the 1913 Winnipeg Stampede labeled “Indian War Dance.”

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(Indian War Dance, Winnipeg 1913)

This depiction of indigeneity places the sculpture firmly within Thomas King’s (2012) concept of the “Dead Indian,” the term he uses for the “stereotypes and clichés that North America has conjured up ... out of its collective imaginings and fears” (53), that is to say the kind of Indigenous figures that we see in advertising, in North American place names, in Westerns, and in countless other media. Such romanticized ideas were not hard to come by in a place like Winnipeg at the beginning of the 20th century, as demonstrated by a postcard from the Winnipeg Stampede of 1913 (a forerunner of the current Calgary Stampede). (Figure 8) The cultural performance here with White men in suits watching on and a neoclassical colonnade in the background is all too reminiscent of Buffalo Bill’s show at the World’s Fair and its relation to the White City. The ultimate implication of displays like this was that Indigenous peoples were not of the same space and time as the White people who came to watch them and so the performances “foreclosed other stories” about indigeneity for their audiences (Deloria, 2004: 67).

What carving a figure like this into stone and placing it atop the Manitoba Legislative Building in this particular allegorical grouping amounts to is best understood through revisiting the Parthenon and its sculptural programme. Beyond the pedimental sculptures, its exterior also featured a set of metopes that ran around all four sides of the building depicting a set of wars: the centaurs against the Lapiths (a tribe of humans), the Gigantomachy, the Amazonomachy, and the

Trojan War. The overarching theme here is of course war, but war against mythologized others, most of whom represent a lack of civilization and chaos, especially when contrasted with the orderly Athenians. Once again, I would like to reiterate how familiar Simon would have been with these metopes, many of which are on display at the British Museum alongside the pedimental sculptures of the Parthenon.

With this in mind, I suggest that we cannot read the Indigenous figure without also contrasting it to the image of peace on the west side of the building and then thinking through the narrative of European settlement presented in the pediment. Its inclusion in the war grouping, along with the glorification of European settlement on the pediment, suggests that the designers and builders of the Legislature viewed the local Indigenous population as something of the past, a source of conflict, and certainly not as contributors to Manitoba the peaceful colonial enterprise. Such a choice was in keeping with the kind of sentiments expressed by various leaders around that time, such as Sir Clifford Sifton, the Manitoba-raised federal Minister of the Interior under Laurier, who saw Indigenous people as obstacles to the development of the Prairies (Hall, 2007: 82). Placing that statue on the side of the building enacts and attempts to make permanent the metaphor of marginalization of Indigenous peoples.

All of the images that are found on the exterior of the Legislature were chosen with great care and a deep knowledge of the canon of classical art and architecture as well as with clear political purpose. Simon, his partner Boddington, and the sculptors they directed were working in the idiom of the Beaux-Arts movement so popular at that time, and they were using it to offer a message that employed nostalgia for a jumbled-up and romantic version of an antiquity that had never really existed. In turn, they used that nostalgia to conjure up an image of Manitoba as the centre of a powerful colonial enterprise, with these images and the building itself, being, in the words of Boddington, “permanent, unaffected by time and tide” (Baker, 1986: 85). But in the current moment, especially in light of the renewed attention to the horrors of residential schools, it becomes clearer every day that this was never the case and that nostalgia for such an historical moment is misplaced at best and actively harmful at worst.

The current Manitoba Legislature was built at a time when the province’s political and economic leaders were eager to prove themselves on the global stage. By erecting impressive and elaborate monumental buildings, they were asserting the authority of the government and claiming a pretense of stability for their arrangement of the province. It has long been the case that architecture and statuary, especially in combination, have been used for such purposes. In the case of the classical Greek world, this tradition goes back to at least the 6th century BCE with the rise of Panhellenic sanctuaries like Olympia and Delphi.

It is the Roman approach to commemorative statuary that I would like to take up here, however, as it offers an instructive example of the limits of this method of commemoration. In the Imperial period, Roman emperors and other powerful figures used images of themselves and their families and monuments extensively as a means of confirming their power and presence, both within the city of Rome and around the Empire. Of course not every leader was able to maintain the favor of the Roman people and so, after their deaths, the Senate or a subsequent emperor could work to have traces of that individual removed from the public eye, typically destroying or reworking their statues and removing their names from any inscriptions through a

process that modern historians refer to as *damnatio memoriae* (“condemnation of memory”).¹¹ Although it was impossible to erase all traces of an individual in practicality, removing or defacing public monuments was a powerful statement that the individual in question was no longer representative of mainstream Roman values. In a sense, this sanction functioned like a post-mortem exile (Flower, 2006: 5).

While an imperfect process that could be just as politically motivated as the undertaking that erected the statues in the first place, *damnatio memoriae* was a way of looking to the future through a reconsideration of the past, and so history can offer a means of reckoning with colonial narratives to those of us in the modern day who are reconsidering monuments like the Manitoba Legislature or the statue of Queen Victoria (Millions and McCallum, 2021: 3). As with the Romans, we are not bound to commemorate a set of values forever simply because they have been carved into stone or forged in bronze. Manitobans are not tied to the settler vision their legislative building presents.

The practice of *damnatio memoriae* shows us that public memory is actively created and has specific political purposes (Flower, 2006: 278). In the case of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, clarifying the process behind its creation, the narrative it presents, and the racial dynamics at play in that narrative does not mean that we have to excise all classical references from the building (which would frankly mean tearing the entire thing down), but it does mean revisiting what we are comfortable with including and what needs to be modified to reflect Manitoba as it is and, in doing so, reckoning with the damages continuing to be inflicted by our colonial foundation. In the most hopeful possibility, a new generation of artists and architects might redeploy the visual vocabulary used on the Legislative Building to signify a new, more fulsome version of Manitoban history.¹²

A shift in what we choose to commemorate or the narrative of ourselves that we present through monuments does not impede our collective understanding of history. As illustrated by the origins of the Manitoba Legislative Building, creating monuments is a deliberate process that involves fragmenting and shaping memory; in the words of Bellentani and Panico (2016), “the knowledge embodied in monuments is inevitably biased” (33). The aesthetic choices of Simon may seem beautiful, but they also obscure a more comprehensive version of Manitoba’s history. It follows that when we modify those monuments we are not interfering with “a perfect view, as if of a landscape on a cloudless and sunny day” (Flower, 2006: 2), rather we are revising what we want to emphasize about our history and reconsidering what the implications of previous monuments are.



Figure 9: Manitoba Legislative Building, Summer 2021.
Credit: Melissa Funke

In the time after July 1, 2021, the grounds of the Manitoba Legislature became the site of several types of dynamic commemoration that can also expand ideas of public memory beyond monuments and statues. (Figure 9) The first is the Indigenous encampment on the east lawn, which sat in the shadow of the lone Indigenous figure carved in stone high above. The encampment featured a sacred fire that was intended to burn until all residential school grounds in Canada have been searched; extinguishing the fire under those circumstances would have marked a shift into a new means of commemorating the lost children as collective grief develops and changes with new knowledge and the passage of time.

The next form of commemoration is the set of orange flags placed in front of the plinth where the Queen Victoria statue once sat, memorializing the lost children. Prior to its removal, the plinth was covered in red hand prints, slowly weathering away. The hand prints on the plinth in particular acted as a modern *damnatio memoriae*, especially in combination with Queen Victoria's beheading on July 1, 2021. The British crown's involvement in the colonization of Western Canada and its treatment of Indigenous peoples was reintroduced into the story represented by that statue (i.e. glorification of the monarchy and the woman who sat on the throne when Manitoba was formed). Unlike the more bureaucratic Roman version that was compelled by elite displeasure, what happened that day was a spontaneous push on the part of protestors, but one that did result in significant change (the removal of the statue) and ongoing conversations about commemoration in Manitoba.

Now that the encampment with the sacred fire and the plinth with the handprints have been removed at the request of the provincial government (itself a choice to alter the narrative that the grounds of the legislature currently tells), all that remains is the group of orange flags on the front lawn, sitting below the pediment. All of these commemorations were made more poignant by their impermanency and responsiveness to the environment around them, especially when contrasted with the massive edifice they surround. Put in place largely by Indigenous

people, not requiring any massive expenditures of social or economic capital, they offered a necessary correction to the narrative that the building tells and one that reflects a truer history of Manitoba, making visible “in a bid for remembrance” what the original Legislature had excised from Manitoba’s story.¹³

The dynamism of these commemorations did not seek to impose a narrative on the land but responded to the people who actually live there. Even now, the presence of the orange flags alone urgently questions the narrative of the European settlement of Manitoba that is so often repeated unquestioningly, as seen in Brian Pallister’s comments, and forces a reconsideration of why a building that is meant to be the assembly of the people of Manitoba features Europa and European settlers front and centre, while the lone Indigenous figure is mythologized, associated with war, and relegated to the side. Queen Victoria was merely the most accessible symbol of that worn colonial narrative.¹⁴

Notes

¹ The following comments have been abridged in the interest of space. Pallister’s full comments from July 7, 2021 can be found here: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/brian-pallister-comments-colonization-indigenous-1.6106977>. These comments and subsequent comments by members of Pallister’s cabinet are credited with hastening the premier’s resignation later that summer.

² Simon commuted between Liverpool and Winnipeg, while Boddington moved permanently to Winnipeg and started his own architectural partnership there.

³ The popular nickname “Chicago of the North” had already been in use since the 1880s as real estate speculators raced to take advantage of the incoming railway. One of its earliest uses comes from a Free Press interview with Sir Charles Tupper in 1882 (*Sir. Chas. Tupper’s Opinion of the North West*, Winnipeg Free Press).

⁴ This village was actually set up just outside of the fairgrounds by Inuit who were upset about unfair treatment by exposition organizers and wanted to profit directly from these performances (Sanders, 2015).

⁵ Given that events like Wounded Knee (1890) had happened in recent memory, shows like Buffalo Bill’s were key to revising American memories around Indigeneity almost simultaneously with their formation.

⁶ A pioneer log house could be found behind the Dairy building in the White City, included with the intention of “bringing out by comparison with greater force the advances made during the past four centuries, as shown in the great buildings devoted to the material and educational interests of man” (Flinn, 1893: 55).

⁷ This plan was never fully realized due to a lack of funds for the new city hall and the refusal of the Hudson’s Bay Company to cede some of their property, which jutted out slightly into the planned path of the grand avenue, where they built their own flagship department store in 1926, itself a neoclassical monument (Baker, 1986: 139). For this reason, Memorial Boulevard does not run directly straight from the Legislature but is at a slight angle.

⁸ This settlement was the source of a great deal of conflict with the local Métis population due to its disruption of long-standing trade with the North West Company, which in turn led to a strengthened identity, flag, and anthem for the Métis.

- ⁹ Manitobans in particular will be familiar with the term and mythology of the “Great West,” adopted by the local insurance firm the Great-West Life Assurance Company that had its offices across the street from the Legislature for many years.
- ¹⁰ The idea of open land and the frontier as it applied to the American West and cultural identity, which in turn was adapted in conversations about the Canadian Prairie West, was popularized by Frederick Jackson Turner in an essay titled “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” which he presented to the American Historical Association at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago.
- ¹¹ Although some forms of memory sanctions were practiced in Classical and Hellenistic Greece, as well as in the Republican period of Roman history, *damnatio memoriae* reached its most fulsome practice under Imperial rule, perhaps as a result of the increased use of statuary and monuments by the emperors. It could be invoked by an emperor on his own or more typically through a decree of the Senate. The emperor Nero is the most famous victim of *damnatio memoriae*; although others subjected to it include Mark Antony, Caligula, and Domitian.
- ¹² My consideration of a potential re-use and re-interpretation of the classicizing features on the Legislative Assembly is a response to Margot Francis’ (2011) discussion of the Ojibwe artist Rebecca Belmore’s video *Fountain*, which Francis contemplates as making use of a “particular economy of signs and works metaphorically to unleash other energies for reading those signs differently in the present” (167).
- ¹³ “Re-editing” of the past through new forms of commemoration is discussed in the context of a map of Black accomplishments in Virginia by Leah Dickerman (2018) in her discussion of Confederate monuments in the American South as propaganda (189).
- ¹⁴ In 2022, Belinda Vandebroek, the residential school survivor quoted at the beginning of this piece, was part of a group of Indigenous Elders and youth who collaborated with artist Jackie Traverse on a multimedia mural intended to draw attention to MMIWG2S, victims of residential schools, and Indigenous children in the child-welfare system. Entitled *Layers*, it was on display inside the Manitoba Legislative Building until fall 2022.

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