

The Toronto Volunteers

tune and first two verses traditional
additional lyrics © 1984 Anne Lederman

The musical notation is written on a single staff in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is a simple, folk-like tune. The lyrics are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The first line of music corresponds to the first line of lyrics, and so on. The lyrics are: "In the year of eigh-ty five, sure the ti-dings did a-rrive in the ci - ty : To - ron-to they a - ppeared, From the sno-wy plains a - far where the pain-ted In-di-ans are, a - ssis - tence from our brave vol - un - teers".

"The Toronto Volunteers," is a song whose first two verses and melody are published in Edith Fowke's "Canada's History in Song." I wrote the rest of the verses in order to tell a more complete story, from the point of view of an Ontario boy who might have had enough sense to think twice about what he was doing, travelling thousands of miles to shoot at other farmers like himself. There is of course no real evidence to suggest that any of the easterners thought any further than what they were told - that is that the Metis were traitors. Not only that, but they were French, Catholic and half-Indian as well, which seemed to put them a little lower than a rabid dog on the social scale.

So the song stands as a perhaps over-generous view of history, but hopefully a sympathetic way to tell the story.

In the year of '85, sure the tidings did arrive,
To the city of Toronto they appeared,
From the snowy plains afar, where the painted Indians are
Assistance from our brave volunteers.

So the volunteers did go, to face the storms and snow,
With frostbit toes and hard frozen ears,
And when the drums do beat, well the rebels will retreat,
It's fun for our brave volunteers.

The Toronto Volunteers

Verses 1 and 2 traditional, additional words © 1984,
Anne Lederman



Oh Macdonald he did say that our troops would save the
day
From those dark-skinned brutes who seem to know no
fear,
Ah but how they all will run, when they hear our Gatling
gun,
It's fun for our brave volunteers.

So when we did arrive, and all were still alive,
Though the cold was worse than all of our fears,
The land was stark and bare, there was nothing anywhere,
But it's fun for our brave volunteers.

So we gathered on the plain, where nothing could be seen,
No sign of the enemy appeared,
But then their shots range out and our redcoats lay about,
And death came to our brave volunteers.

And then we saw the foe all through the storms and snow,
Men with ragged coats and tattered beards,
And in the midst of all, Riel in black rode tall,
Waving a gold cross above our ears.

So we fell back that day, and the rebels were gay,
This band of fifty men who fought so dear,
They dug our bullets from the ground, to fire another
round
Poor farmers all against our volunteers.

So back we had to fall, and twas then I did recall,
My father's voice from down through the years,
How once at Culloden, a band of ragged men,
Had fought to save their homes through their tears.

But in spite of all their prayers, our troops outnumbered
theirs,
Ten to one our generals said with cheer,
So come the next day, the redcoats won the day,
Success unto our brave volunteers.

But when all is said and done, and the journey home
begun,
I remembered their patched coats and ragged beards,
How they fought with cross above, to keep the land they
loved,
And sent our bullets back around our ears.

Oh, the volunteers did go, to face the storms and snow,
With frostbit toes and hard frozen ears,
And when the drums did beat, well the rebels did retreat,
But I was shamed to be Macdonald's volunteer.

