

Pushing the Boundaries: Canadian Women's Experiences in World War II

by

Susan Hale Rafuse

**A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Theory and Policy Studies in Education
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Abstract

Pushing the Boundaries: Canadian Women's Experiences in World War II

Master of Arts, 2004

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University of Toronto**

This thesis contextualizes the use of oral narratives with the academic and popular literature written during World War II and since 1945. The work focuses upon the experiences of various Canadian women during the war. The thesis illustrates how the circumstances of the war provided many women with new found opportunities which were created from the disruption and loosening of numerous social conventions which defined the gender order. Expanded freedom allowed some women to push the boundaries relating to their mobility, their living spaces, and the regulation of their sexuality. The experiences of the interviewees demonstrates the nature of femininity and the structure of gendered and non-gendered roles of women during this period. As well, the interviews illustrate that through the disruption of the gender order shifts were created which allowed some women to make important advancements towards gender equality.

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Pushing the Boundaries: Canadian Women's Experiences in World War II



Photo courtesy of the Mann Collection.



Photo courtesy of Jean Wade.

Introduction

We could explore and break the bonds that bound us by the tradition that woman's place was in the home. We could leave the home with respectability and honour as we were serving our country. War represented the beginning of freedom for me.

Melodie Willis-O'Connor Massey, RCAF, WD

I began to think about this thesis as an undergraduate student when, in a Canadian Women's History course, we discussed the activities of Canadian women during World War II. I was especially drawn to the work of historian Ruth Roach Pierson and her book, *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*. It piqued my curiosity about the shifts and changes that took place within the lives of this generation of women because of the war. This particular generation of women included my mother Elisabeth Hale, my aunt Allaneen Murray, and both my grandmothers Grace Shay and Margaret Hale, all of whom were deceased when I began to investigate the topic of this thesis. All these women worked in various ways during World War II. My mother was a registered nurse who, according to family stories, may have been involved in performing illegal abortions with her uncle, a surgeon. My aunt was a dietician who worked as a food editor for various newspapers and followed her husband on his wartime military postings. Both my grandmothers were involved in war-related volunteer work: my maternal grandmother was the Chairwoman of a Red Cross chapter in Port Hope, Ontario and my paternal grandmother was a member of the Salvation Army in Toronto, Ontario.

Collectively these women influenced who I am and what I have accomplished in my life. Their wartime work aroused my interest in the broader issues regarding how World War II affected women's lives. At the time of my undergraduate studies, with the exception of Pierson's work, I had located little material about the lives of ordinary women during wartime. In my research for this thesis I located additional Canadian resources which will be discussed throughout this chapter.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to contextualize my work within other academic and popular literature written since World War II regarding the involvement of Canadian women during that

period (1939-1945). Until I began this thesis I did not realize the number of resources which were available. After a critical examination of this literature I recognized that one of the most important themes emerging from these works was the disruption caused to the gender order. War “presented the conditions for sexual and economic challenge, spatial disruption and potential liberation for women at an individual, experiential level.”¹ As Ann Hall says in her book *The Girl and the Game: A History of Women's Sport in Canada*:

The long wartime period had disrupted the entire society, especially the gender order – the pattern of relations between men and women and what it means to be masculine or feminine. The loss of hundreds of thousands of young men, many permanently, to the battlefields in Europe and elsewhere and the mobilization of equally large numbers of women into the war effort at home sharply challenged long-held social conventions of men as bread winners and women as wives and mothers.²

The primary themes of this thesis emerge from the disruption and loosening of numerous social conventions which defined the gender order. These are the changes in women's lives relating to: (1) their mobility, (2) their living spaces, and (3) the regulation of their sexuality. Although travel, living accommodations, and the moral regulation of both men and women have been discussed in other works, these themes, with the exception of moral regulation, have not been the main focus of other scholars' analysis. If it had not been for the upheaval created by the war and the necessity for women to support the nation by assuming non-traditional gender roles, it is likely that many women would not have experienced new found freedoms through their mobility, their living spaces, and their sexuality.

The primary objective of this thesis is to illustrate how the circumstances of war provided women with new found freedoms furthermore, by pushing the boundaries of these new freedoms in travel and living spaces this also further extended their wartime experiences. Even though their sexuality and morality were regulated, statistics associated with venereal disease, abortion and illegitimate pregnancy show that many women transgressed the dominant norms of femininity by overstepping socially constructed boundaries in regards to their morality. I will show through numerous regulations regarding women that a double standard existed in regard to their expanded

freedom. Women were embracing greater freedom and pushing boundaries while at the same time boundaries were also protecting and regulating them. I would argue that some women accepted protection because they lived under powerful social constraints and societal ideals regarding their respectability which were reinforced through the popular media. For example, a Tangee Lipstick advertisement in August, 1944, featured an American service woman in the background and the beautiful Constance Luft Huhn, head of the House of Tangee, espousing “We are the weaker sex...it is up to us to appear as alluring and lovely as possible.”³ On the one hand some women reinforced the idea of women as the weaker sex as it had been instilled in them for so long, and provided familiarity and comfort within some of the old boundaries that provided safety and protection. On the other hand for some women the war presented opportunities for new and liberating experiences. They crossed gender boundaries striving for equal opportunity and in the process became the first of their gender to enter primarily masculine work positions. These new experiences and freedoms provided some women the opportunity to push the boundaries which had previously regulated them and maintained their position as the weaker sex.

Canadian Women's Wartime Experiences: Historiography, Academic and Popular

Pierson's book *“They're Still Women After All”: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* analyzes the status of some Canadian women during the war. Her work provides the major Canadian scholarly study with the exception of articles by Barbara Winters and Jeff Keshen and an M.A. thesis by Heather Moran. These three latter historians have expanded upon Pierson's study. Pierson's work provides a significant foundation for my thesis. Her book was extensively researched, particularly in its use of primary sources such as letters, memoranda, minutes, directives, census, magazines and newspapers. She examined a number of long held opinions towards women's social roles including volunteerism, the social construction of gender, governmental procedures regulating women's place in the labor field and the military, and the federal government's approach to moral issues relating to women's wartime roles. Her work also provides statistical data regarding the number of women involved in the three military services, the industrial labour force

and the agricultural sector.

In her book Pierson attempts to answer the question did the war “shake the foundation of the male-dominant sex/gender system of Canadian Society?”⁴ Pierson concludes that there was only a slight shift to that foundation. The post-war years witnessed a return of women to home and motherhood and the acceptance of the male as breadwinner and head of the nuclear household thereby reinforcing pre-war gender stereotyping. To arrive at this conclusion Pierson examined women’s sexual status, tenets of femininity, the significance of women’s work force participation, their job-training opportunities and volunteerism.

In her analysis of the structure and functions of the Canadian Women’s Army Corps Pierson focuses upon the social tensions that arose concerning the femininity of women wearing a uniform. Women in uniform brought with it a fear of them becoming sexually independent beings which, in turn, created a moral panic due to the fear that there could be an end to the existing societal sexual divisions. Pierson investigates this moral panic through an analysis of sexual promiscuity, venereal disease and the double standard relating to these issues for men and women in the Canadian military. Although her work examines these issues regarding sexuality, she fails to mention birth control or abortion.⁵

Pierson argues that the women’s military services would never have been formed if it were not for the critical manpower shortages. They were created to provide the support positions the military required, positions which mainly paralleled the gendered jobs women were already performing, for example waitressing, laundressing, clerking and cooking.⁶

According to Pierson women’s military and volunteer experiences were not liberating. She provides an overall impression that women’s volunteer work did not advance their position in society. She states that it was a government expectation that women should contribute their unpaid labour support. Women were not part of the decision-making process and this reinforced their gender inequality. Pierson states the Canadian Government created temporary incentives during the war for women in the workforce. Various tax incentives were created and child care facilities established to encourage and facilitate women to join the work force. However at the end of the war both

of these incentives were rescinded. Pierson argues that there were two reasons why these incentives were removed thereby reinforcing the fact that women remained in an unequal status: women were no longer needed in the workforce and government policies lacked coherence with regards to women's workplace role.⁷

Other literature argues against Pierson's contention by concluding that the war did provide a stepping stone toward's women's gender equality. Winters in her article "The WRENS of the Second World War: Their Place in the History of Canadian Service Women" presents a different consideration of the women's military services. Winter's argues that Pierson's observations lacked scope as she primarily focused upon the CWAC and did not consider the experiences of the women in the other services. Winters said the Navy provided women with more job opportunities and respect than did the CWAC.⁸ Winters work analyses the difference in organization of the women's naval service with 6,781 members and that of the women's army service which was much larger with twenty-two thousand members. Her observations regarding the liberating effects of military service differ from those of Pierson as the naval service held up many forms of gender equality.⁹

Keshen's work also suggest that women's war efforts made some headway towards liberation. In his article "Revisiting Canada's Civilian Women During World War II," Keshen states that through their volunteer efforts women gained "enhanced recognition and self confidence" which they "acquired through voluntary activities or within the confines of the family unit." These attributes "were important, if not crucial, in the personal development of numerous women."¹⁰ Keshen's article focuses upon revising Pierson's conclusions regarding volunteerism and the role of women in the work place. He accomplishes this by providing evidence that women did indeed have greater authority and did share some power with men. Women were forced to appropriate additional responsibilities and acquire new skills which had typically been considered part of the male sphere. Women assumed control over family finances, cleaned furnaces, chopped wood, organized coal and ice deliveries and even learned how to make small repairs on household appliances.¹¹

Moran in her M.A. thesis, "And Still They Answered the Call: The Women of Waterloo County 1939-1947," compares these women's experiences to the existing historiography. Her work

considers the changing role of women during the war in Waterloo County by regarding regional information rather than national information. Waterloo County not only was an industrial centre, it also was home to two large women's military bases, the army and the navy. Based upon her evidence located from within Waterloo County, Moran argues that Pierson underestimated both qualitative and quantitative changes in the role and image of women during the war. Moran further argues that employment data and other evidence from Waterloo County contradicts the view advanced by Pierson that women failed to build upon their wartime experience to achieve liberation in the post-war world. In contrast to Pierson's conclusion regarding women's liberation, Moran suggests that women accomplished much and that most of these accomplishments were of lasting value.¹² She supports this statement with the following employment data. A report from the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber of Commerce indicated the majority of women in Waterloo County could remain in a variety of jobs at the war's end. This was based on an employment survey which indicated there would be a thirty-two percent increase in female jobs in that area in the post-war, a figure which was only five percent lower than that reported in 1943 regarding women's employment. Furthermore local Waterloo County industries experienced man power shortages in the post-war years which enabled women the opportunity to continue working if they wanted. Women who continued in the work force were able to command higher wages in industry in comparison to traditional female types of employment.¹³ In the post-war era women's enhanced voice in community decision-making continued to develop. One example Moran cites is the Local Council of Women who continued to have decision-making authority within the community. Their projects included the establishment of a local recreation committee which provided them a stronger voice and leadership opportunities.¹⁴

In addition to the academic historiography of Canadian women in World War II, the following authors focus their resources primarily upon individual biographies and oral narratives. Authors Carolyn Gossage and Jean Bruce's books, *Great Coats and Glamour Boots: Canadian Women at War (1939-1945)* and *Back the Attack! Canadian Women During the Second World War - At Home and Abroad* cite helpful primary sources for this thesis. Between them, Gossage and Bruce

interviewed almost four hundred women about their wartime experiences. Their books provide photo essays of the lives of civilian and military women at home and abroad. Many of the images document the wartime resourcefulness and diversity of Canadian women. The photographs project a positive propaganda similar to that seen in government posters and advertisements during the war. Many of the archival images and private photographs depict daily activities. For example, military photographs include basic training, living accommodations, social functions and sports activities whereas civilian women are mainly observed working in war-related industries. The photographs also show the versatility of wartime fashion, such as women in uniforms, coveralls, bell-bottoms, pants, aprons and glamorous evening wear. What is missing from these photographic collections are women who were exhausted from double duty, looking after their families and also working outside of the home. The images do not incorporate the negative aspects of some of these women's daily lives.



Photo courtesy of Betty Baxter.

In order to complement the oral narratives both authors incorporated sketches by the official CWAC's war artist, Molly Lamb. Gossage takes her reader through the process of war by providing a frame work for the personal narra-

Striding in style in 1939, women's fashion takes on a masculine appearance. Betty Baxter poses in trousers in keeping with the new fashion trend.

tives she collected. Her chapters are organized with an editorial about each phase of the three women's military services; they commence with the conception of the services through to the conclusion of the war. Her overview uses archival resources which included statistical data, memoirs, newspaper editorials and official documents. In each chapter, the voices of her interviewees are grouped in what she terms a notebook. Bruce adopts a thematic framework in her book similar to Gossage by using statistical data, memoirs, newspaper editorials and official documents. Her interviewees include military personnel and civilians. Their narratives are diverse. Bruce's main

theme is that a women's place was everywhere; in the home, on the farm, in military service, volunteering and working in industry. The interviewees voices are juxtaposed with letters, diary entries and newspaper advertisements.

Authors Mary Hawkins Buch, Phyllis Harrison and Rosamond Greer have all written about their wartime experiences. Buch's book *Props on Her Sleeve: The Wartime Letters of a Canadian Air Woman*, was written in collaboration with Gossage who provided an overview of the times through contextual sidebars. Buch relates her experiences as a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division (WD). Personal correspondence provides the main text of her work. A series of one hundred and fifty letters describe the daily routines and events which she experienced during the war. Similarly, Harrison in her self-published personal narrative, *Saga of an Air Woman*, describes her wartime experiences. Her book provides historical information concerning the RCAF WDs. Greer's volume *The Girls of the King's Navy* relates her wartime naval memories. With the support of archival research and an expansive photographic collection, Greer's work also provides background information concerning the origin and operation of the WRCNS. The military life style, the adventures of travel and the camaraderie experienced in the service form the main themes in Buch, Harrison and Greer's memoirs.

Oral History, Methodology, Women's History

Oral history allows for a change in the way history is regarded by "opening up new areas of inquiry" built from a personal perspective.¹⁵ Pierson suggests that oral history provides an opportunity, and often the only opportunity, for retrieving women's history by allowing these persons to speak on their own behalf. In order to understand women's perspective, their individual oral histories provide a method for capturing their past in the absence of any form of prerecording, either written or verbal. By using oral history in this manner women's lives gain some sanction of validity.¹⁶ Historian Vera Rosenbluth concludes: "We're really just specks in the great scheme of things. Seeing yourself as part of something larger can give you a sense of identity, a sense of connection, of being laminated into history."¹⁷ Kathryn Anderson and Dana Jack state: "Oral history interviews

provide an invaluable means of generating new insights about women's experiences of themselves in their worlds."¹⁸ This methodology embraces women as insightful people who express their feelings, emotions, daily lives, environment, culture and other aspects of their individuality, which together create a collective history of various aspects of World War II. Oral interviews such as the ones used in this thesis allow these women's voices to be recovered. Their experiences demonstrate the nature of femininity and the structure of gendered and non-gendered roles during wartime.

My thesis provided an opportunity to explore and examine the personal experiences of some Canadian women during World War II. Due to the elderly age of many of my interviewees I felt it necessary to record their memoirs with some dispatch. I initiated the interview process by approaching friends of my mother's generation as my first interviewees. Through a snowball technique they in turn suggested other women whom I could contact. As this process advanced I became bolder in my quest and approached customers in my ladies' wear retail business who, from their appearance, suggested they might be the appropriate age. I was fortunate in the response to such inquiries and when I asked them to discuss their lives during the War, I was only turned down by one woman. I was favoured when one woman heard of my project and approached me on her own suggesting her story would be important to my research. Less formally, I have had several occasions at my retail business where I discussed casually with women what they had done during this time frame.

In order to provide structure to the interviews and an opportunity for open discussion I compiled a list of topics for consideration and response during the interview process. All interviews were recorded on audio tape from which a subsequent transcription was made. Many of these women did not require much questioning and once the dialogue commenced, they talked with enthusiasm about subjects many stated they had not thought about for some sixty years.

Further important sources for primary data reside in video cassettes, newspapers and magazines. The video cassette *Love and Duty: Canadian Red Cross Women in World War II* and the book *Women Overseas: Memoirs of the Canadian Red Cross Corps (Overseas Detachment)* have been particularly helpful. The fifty-five women's personal interviews about their wartime work in both

these media, when juxtaposed with my oral narratives, help provide a more comprehensive snapshot of the subject matter. *Chatelaine*, a magazine for Canadian women, provided another important resource. I went through the microfiche looking at issues from 1938 through 1946. Articles, advertisements, editorials, and photographs provided a wide perspective of information which in many cases tended to reflect and reinforce gender stereotyping. For example, advertisements promoted the need for women to be feminine and attractive through a variety of beauty products and fashions. Advertisements also promoted numerous products to assist women in maintaining a clean and healthy domestic environment. Editorials and lead articles accompanied with photographs also reported on the many activities women took on as a means of supporting the war effort. Several articles in the wartime issues of *Chatelaine* reflected the expanded opportunities and changes in lifestyles many women experienced. They included articles about the women's services, numerous volunteer organizations and women taking on roles in community leadership.

Some of the women I interviewed have had their narratives published in books and journals, and also through presentations to local historical societies; other narratives were subsequently printed in local historical reviews. For example, Vi Warren's experiences flying with the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) have been published in Bruce's book *Back the Attack! Canadian Women During the Second World War-At Home and Abroad*, in the *Journal of the Canadian Aviation Historical Society* and in *Air Force Magazine*. Melodie Willis-O'Connor Massey's air force experiences are included in Gossage's book *Great Coats and Glamour Boots, Canadian Women at War (1939-1945)*. Stella Tate and her naval family are the subject of a chapter in John Harbron's book *The Longest Battle, The Royal Canadian Navy in the Atlantic 1939-1945*.

The detail gathered from the interviews provided abundant information. Some themes became obvious while other themes emerged through analysis. Due to the large volume of information compiled from my interviews, as well as the oral narratives in the primary literature and on video cassettes, it was necessary to determine how best to organize the material. This was achieved through a cut and clip process. The material was then filed under twenty topic headings. Some examples of these include sexuality, volunteerism both locally and overseas, rationing, fashion,

uniforms, work, wages, adventure, sports, patriotism, social life and double standards. Considering all the interviews and organizing the information into various topics revealed scant data related to some topics, while others afforded more detail. For example, the theme of Chapter Four, the moral management of women, evolved directly from my list of predetermined interview questions. I specifically asked the interviewees whether they had any knowledge of birth control. All except one woman were adamant in their response that they did not. Due to their apparent lack of knowledge regarding birth control, the Canadian military's stance on venereal disease and the double standards regulating men and women's sexuality, I felt women's sexuality was an important topic to explore. Both extensive wartime travel and unique living conditions were themes which became obvious at the end of this sorting process; these themes emerged as having been an important part of these women's wartime experiences and have not been explored in depth in other histories. Therefore I felt these two topics would specifically add to the collective works concerning women during war-time.

All women interviewed were excited about the idea they had made valuable contributions during World War II. They were astounded that someone was genuinely interested in their lives and what they had done. They took great pride in their accomplishments, and particularly in the knowledge that many of them had crossed a variety of boundaries into what at the time were considered male bastions.

The interviews took place mainly in their homes or mine. The location was determined by where they felt most comfortable. Sometimes we met together for lunch and the afternoon; on other occasions we sat with a tea or coffee in hand and chatted amicably about their lives and times during the war years. I expressly stated before the interviews commenced that if I asked anything they felt was inappropriate or embarrassing, they only needed to say so and I would not continue with my inquiry on that topic. However as the interview process proceeded I discovered that this potential issue never appeared. All the women gave their signed consent to use their own identities and they completed the appropriate documentation as established by the UT/OISE Ethics Review Committee. The text and narratives are accompanied with photographs from private and public

collections for which I have received permission to reproduce in this thesis.

Many women in both World Wars donated their time and energies to various volunteer organizations. During World War I, however, women's roles remained well within the confines of tradition. The opportunity to serve their country was restricted. Women served overseas as nursing sisters and when manpower shortages developed women entered the work force as munitions workers. World War II was not nearly as restrictive for women. Many of the women interviewed for this thesis crossed gender boundaries by performing functions hitherto regarded as male vocations. The most significant instance of women crossing socially constructed gendered boundaries during World War II was due to the formation of the three women's military services. Fifty thousand women served in the three Canadian armed services.¹⁹ Of these twenty-two thousand enlisted in the Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC), seventeen thousand were in the Women's Division (WD) of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and 6,781 in the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS). The remaining 4,518 women were members of the medical corps.²⁰ Statistics indicate that only one in nine of Canada's enlisted women served overseas.²¹ This proved to be a small percentage as Newfoundland was classified as an overseas posting for the Canadian military.

When Canada entered World War II in September 1939 the country was still suffering from the difficulties associated with the Depression. Employment statistics indicated only six hundred thousand women were employed accounting for seventeen percent of the labour force. One third of these jobs were in the field of domestic service, an occupation traditionally associated with women.²² According to historian Joan Sangster domestic service was the only occupation for women at that time where the demand exceeded the supply and "the only retraining program offered to women by the federal and provincial governments" was for domestic service.²³ Canada's entry into World War II brought with it increased demands for industrial production which necessitated more women to join the labour force. In the industrial sector Canada's female labour force grew from 638,000 in 1939 to 1,077,000 by October 1, 1944.²⁴ In total 261,000 women had been recruited for jobs in war-related industries such as munitions and aircraft factories.²⁵ The largest portion of women hired in any war industry was in the aircraft industry which employed thirty-three thousand women.²⁶ This

number represented thirty per cent of the aircraft industry's work force. Almost one half the labour force in the artillery manufacturing factories were women.²⁷ By June 1943, traditional male jobs opened a floodgate for 255,000 women who by that time were working full time in war industries. Labour shortages continued during that summer until the summer of 1944. Thousands more women were employed on a part-time basis in war industries due to these shortages.²⁸

The agricultural sector was also actively recruiting women to take the place of absent male labourers. In all provinces farmer's wives and daughters took over farm work replacing male relatives and farm workers who had left the land to join the armed forces or to work in war industries.²⁹ Special farm labour programs were established in various provinces utilizing volunteer labour which included female students, teachers, housewives and professional women. A National Selective Service report indicated that in Ontario alone over eighteen thousand women were involved in the Ontario Farm Service Force.³⁰

Millions of Canadian women, regardless of their occupation, created a larger place in the public sphere for themselves by focusing their time and energy towards establishing various volunteer organizations to support the war effort both at home and abroad. These volunteer organizations included the Canadian Red Cross, both locally and overseas, who had 484,000 women involved in its work.³¹ Other organizations included the Norwegian Red Cross, the Canadian Auxiliary Territorial Service (CATS), the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Women's Service Training Detachment (WSTD), the Salvation Army, the Imperial Orders of the Daughters of the Empire (IODE), and the Ca-

Posing in their uniforms in 1940 are Helen Thompson right and a friend. Both were members of the Canadian Auxiliary Territorial Service (CATS).

Photo courtesy of Helen Thompson.



nadian Girl Guides. Some women volunteered to sell victory bonds, planted victory gardens, laboured on farms and worked through church groups and hospital auxiliaries to support war-related activities.³² I would agree with Keshen when he argues that women's volunteer activities helped to raise respect for women and their status which helped to achieve "a degree of authority within the community" by contributing to decision-making.³³ Women's unpaid domestic work can be considered one of their greatest wartime contributions. Many women were left alone to provide for children while maintaining their homes and farms, and many were employed outside the home as well. Through these efforts Canadian women played a key role in World War II.

Introducing the Women

The twenty-four women interviewed either resided in the Port Hope or Cobourg area, or were staying at cottages at White Lake, near Sharbot Lake, Ontario. These communities drew a large percentage of retirees. Originally these women came from various places throughout Canada.

The interview time spent with these women often evolved into the formation of a common bond – their interest in my work and my interest in their lives. Their continual support and interest has allowed me to conduct follow-up interviews to explore further questions or to provide additional input into certain topics. Conducting subsequent interviews allowed me the opportunity to validate the narratives and verify the accuracy of the information they provided initially.

Due to the snowball technique employed in locating the interviewees and the fact that all were part of the national majority ethnic and racial group at the time, there is an absence of minority women in the sample used in the thesis. All women interviewed were from primarily middle-class, Anglophone and white backgrounds, and were born between 1914 and 1925. Their educational and class backgrounds varied: some had not completed high school, several were business school graduates trained for secretarial and clerical roles, and four obtained university degrees. Others were professionals whose backgrounds included nursing, teaching, and occupational therapy, and one was a pilot. Two thirds of the women interviewed were single during the war while the remaining women were married. Only three of the married women had children during the wartime period.

Approximately one third of the interviewees joined the newly created Canadian women's military services, the highest percentage becoming members of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS). Six of the interviewees served overseas.

The following women were in military service: Stella Tate, Babs Gardner, Sage German, Barb Jones, Jean Wade, Mavis Dure, Kay Mann and Melodie Willis-O'Connor Massey. Tate became the Royal Canadian Navy's first woman occupational therapist. WRCNS Gardner and German broke the male cipher barrier by becoming two of the first women German and Japanese Morse Code operators. Prior to their enlistment both the women previously mentioned worked as Volunteer Aid Detachment (VAD) members with the Red Cross. While attending university Gardner was a member of the Canadian Auxiliary Territorial Service (CATS). German at age fifteen, and having completed high school, took the place of a male employee and drove a milk truck. Jones worked as a naval regulator, a position which was a combination of administration and ship's police. Wade was graded as a captain's writer at RCN Strathcona, Halifax, Nova Scotia and was later posted as a gunnery writer, both positions being clerical in nature. Sports played a significant role in her naval career as she was a member of the Navy basketball team and a cheerleader for the Navy football team.

Two women were members of the CWAC. Dure supervised the typist pool at the Medical Stores in Ottawa, Ontario. This unit supplied Canada and overseas with medical supplies. Mann was a member of the first Canadian Women's Army Corps Pipe Band formed under the auspices of the Women's Service. Canada was the only wartime nation with an all-female pipe band. Massey was the only woman interviewed who was a member of the RCAF Women's Division (WD). She was an ambulance driver both at home and overseas. She also participated as part of a concert party which travelled and entertained throughout England. Audrey Lindop went to England to be married, joined the Women's Royal Navy Service (WRENS), and helped deliver the D-Day invasion orders to several captains of naval ships at Southampton.

Most of the women interviewed were associated in one way or another with the Red Cross and other volunteer organizations previously mentioned in war-related support roles. Civilian Jean

Migotti wore a uniform in her workplace as one of the six hundred and forty-one women belonging to the Red Cross Overseas Detachment.³⁴ Migotti drove ambulances at a British German prisoner of war camp. The following women also worked for the Red Cross as well as other volunteer agencies: Betty Baxter (homemaker), Ede Burger (homemaker), Doris Burton (homemaker), Margaret Creighton (homemaker), Helen Fulford (homemaker), Helen Thompson (typist, Noorduyn Aviation Limited) and Helen Strathy (laboratory technician, Radio Bell).

Some interviewed women followed their husbands to military and civilian postings. As a result of such transfers Jean Long and Kate Hall travelled extensively throughout Canada. Prior to their marriages, Long was employed at the Bank of Toronto in Port Hope, Ontario, and Hall was the head nurse at a Vancouver, B.C. Venereal Disease Clinic. Toad Gould also followed her military husband until he was posted overseas. She then accepted a position in Toronto, Ontario at the Provincial Parliament Building working in various stenographic capacities.

Single, civilian women pursued traditional and non-traditional careers. Pat Richan's stenographic skills took her to Washington, District of Columbia, U.S.A. where she worked throughout the war with the British Supply Mission. Richan, a sprinter, was in training hoping to be a participant in the 1940 Olympic Games in London, England, which were cancelled due to the war. Until 1945, Ev Miller taught grades one through nine in a rural one-room school. Pilot Vi Warren, prohibited from flying in the Royal Canadian Air Force, became an aircraft ferry pilot with the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) and flew more types of airplanes than did her male counterparts. Grace Brackenbury was the only Canadian woman involved directly with the U.S. Corps of Army Engineers in the Manhattan Project, the secret development of the atomic bomb.

These twenty-four women's oral narratives represent only a small segment of the lives of Canadian women during the war. However they are representative of the changes which took place during this period. These women accomplished remarkable things. They not only crossed gender boundaries striving for equal opportunity but in the process some became the first of their gender to enter predominantly masculine work positions.

Organization of Thesis

Chapter Two focuses on travel, and the significant changes in mobility women experienced due to their war-related activities. Many women felt considerable freedom and a loosening of restrictions when travelling alone, and some took advantage of this freedom by pushing boundaries and behaving in socially unacceptable ways. As an indicator of this new mobility women enjoyed I have included maps denoting the movement of both the military and civilian women interviewed.

Chapter Three examines the variety of accommodations many women experienced during the war whether as civilian or enlisted women. These situations are detailed in this chapter and include barracks, Nissen huts, tent camps, mobile accommodations, living on subsistence allowance, boarding and staff houses and recycled and salvaged housing.

Chapter Four considers the means by which women's sexuality was both controlled and exploited by military and civilian institutions during the war. For example, most women seemed to lack any knowledge regarding birth control and contraception, yet men were provided with the means to prevent pregnancy. Unwanted pregnancies and/or venereal disease witnessed further double standards and these are examined in this chapter.

Chapter Five provides a few concluding comments regarding the impact of women's travel, living accommodations, their sexualization and how these primary themes contributed to the disruption of social conventions which defined the gender order during World War II. I also give a brief synopsis of the post-war lives of the twenty-four women interviewed for this thesis.

Women's Liberation Through Wartime Travel

We landed in Aldershot England...then we played all over Holland then Germany and then we went to Brussels and we went to Paris... It was the happiest time of my life.

Kay Mann, CWAC Pipe Corps

World wide events such as colonization and war often result in widespread displacement and/or travel. My interviews with Canadian women regarding their experiences during World War II contribute to the already existing body of literature that portrays how women created new places for themselves in the public sphere during the war. One of the recurring patterns in the interviews is how many of them found themselves suddenly on the move. In most instances the first time they travelled any significant distance resulted from their involvement in activities related to the war. A 1943 announcement by the United Church of Canada acknowledged the significance of such travel by stating that “the demands of Wartime related industry have necessitated the greatest migration in history.”¹ Canadian women were significantly involved in that migration. Many of them believe they travelled to an extent far beyond what would have been society's expectation for women during that time.²

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how travel was one of the ways in which the gender order was disrupted and how gender relations impacted upon people's lives. Until World War II, most of the women in this study had been physically constrained by being in one place. Two explanations for this lack of travel are: women's job opportunities were more limited than that of men; and the “parental fear of what might befall an unaccompanied female is one critical underpinning of the sexual division of labour within the patriarchal system.”³ Through travel, these women created new places for themselves in the public sphere and dramatically altered their relationship to the world. They contested ideas of women's traditional place by challenging spacial constraints. Travel also presented an opportunity for some women to challenge societal restrictions. Their war-related activities took them to new locations and brought new and different life styles. Many women disrupted gendered strictures by evading or challenging feminine societal boundaries such as dependence, respectability, sexual propriety, and protection. Breaking through these boundaries proved

to be liberating, but this liberation also created concerns by family, military and government officials regarding their well-being. Interviews and other documented first hand accounts convey some of the contradictions of their wartime experiences. On the one hand, women were kept safe and secure, and bound within the confines of respectability and sexual propriety. On the other hand, the war placed some women in very dangerous and unprotected situations.

Historical Precedents: Women's Pre-war Travel

Between the late nineteenth century and the 1920s there were challenges to the cultural norms for women. Spectacle provided an avenue for women to challenge cultural constraints by providing a new view of women. The American May French-Sheldon, explorer and colonizer, symbolized herself as a white queen representing modern womanhood at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. She captured public attention through her "sensational costume and glamorous persona" and created an aura of womanhood as spectacle.⁴ Historian Angela Woollacott also examines the attraction that travel to the imperial metropolis London, England, held for white, colonial, Australian women at the turn of the twentieth century. Many of the women Woollacott discusses in her work travelled to London for the purpose of establishing new lives and careers for themselves. Travel provided new opportunities for these women when they lived in London by allowing them some escape from gender expectations of the time.⁵ A city environment "allowed them slightly greater freedom of movement and their culturally based self-definition as confident and capable made them willing to traverse the city alone."⁶ Similarities can be seen in changes in the lives of colonial Australian women and Canadian women during World War II, as both travelled to new locations and/or experienced new employment opportunities. In her conclusion Woollacott argues that travel provided one way in which women's identities and behaviours changed.⁷ By stepping into the role of a social explorer or voyager of the urban scene women were able to challenge the "patriarchal cultural constraints" that limited their environment. This role allowed some women to become more involved in the public domain without a loss of respectability.⁸

Colonial travel not only provided employment opportunities for women, it also allowed

them to challenge their societal status quo. In her work on young working women in Toronto between 1890 and 1930, Carolyn Strange describes how women's respectability was changed by social and economic circumstances. Historically, domestic service had been the standard employment for young women during that period. However, Strange comments, this "could no longer be relied on as an anchor for women adrift in a city that offered working girls so many alternatives."⁹ Thousands of Toronto women discovered different forms of employment ranging from factory to retail work. Many of these women had travelled from rural or small town Ontario to the city which allowed them to explore new environments and experience economic and social change.

Labour Demands Provide New Opportunities

Similar opportunities to experience alternative types of employment, such as joining the women's military services or working in wartime industries, occurred for many women due to the social and economic circumstances of World War II. These new job opportunities inevitably required some form of travel, which affected the behaviour of Canadian women, and proved liberating for many. Travel in Canada and overseas expanded their national and global knowledge and provided opportunities for new social, educational and cultural perspectives. Another result of these new job opportunities, very apparent through the oral interviews, was the challenging of stereotypes. Such challenges occurred, for example, when some of these women performed the types of jobs heretofore considered to be in the male preserve. They experienced: "the gender climate changes brought on by the demand for men in fighting jobs."¹⁰ Penny Summerfield, in her work *Gender and War in the Twentieth Century*, observes through these changes that war enhanced the status of women because of the "increased demand for women's labour in wartime."¹¹

Another theme emerging from the oral interviews is the contradiction between the accepted norms of behaviour, and what women were asked and expected to do. These expectations encroached on their personal lives, their social interactions, and the protection of their reputations. Many women were aware of the contradictory views associated with their wartime involvement. Several of the women interviewed for this thesis and in other documented oral histories describe the ways in

which they were protected and how their respectability was regulated and guarded by family, government and social ideals. The methods and instruments of governance were activated through procedures for the moral management of women, “drawing upon social relations of class, gender, sexuality and race.”¹² The image of respectability was very important, as historian Jennifer Stephen notes: “Women could not be left to traverse the nation on their own, walking strange city streets in search of appropriate accommodation, let alone travelling to war jobs outside city limits on a limited budget.”¹³

In this chapter I will outline some of the reasons why both civilian and military women travelled so extensively and explain how this travel occurred. Travel included moving from a rural to an urban residence, or from one work location to another, to take advantage of increased pay and for the novelty of obtaining a man’s job. In some situations, civilian travel was associated with women’s involvement in volunteer organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross. Travel included that associated with training and posting for those who enrolled in the Women’s Services of the Canadian Armed Forces, as well as for married women who followed their husbands as they moved from one job, or military posting, to another. (See Figures 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5)

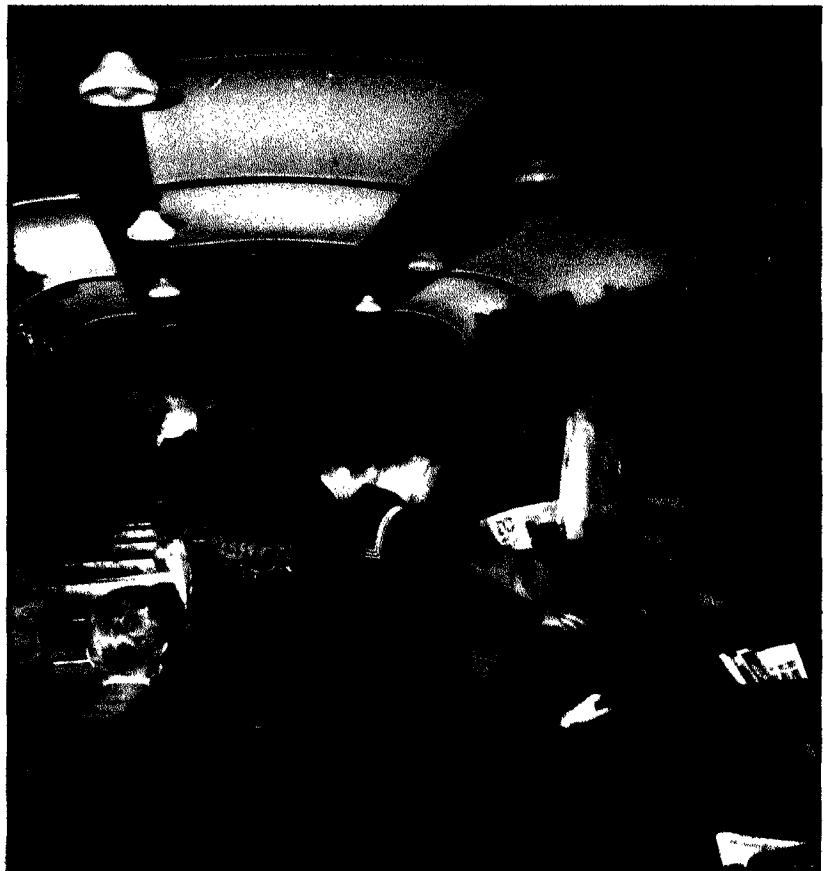
During World War I Canada’s military services did not encourage the participation of women, either through enlistment or volunteer service. A generation later there was a marked change in philosophy. Of Canada’s approximately three million adult women, fifty thousand served in the three armed services during World War II.¹⁴ Some Canadian women travelled great distances in order to enrol in the military services operating in other countries. For example, some women enlisted in the British Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRENS) and the para-military Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) that ferried planes in England and Europe.

Trains Connect the Country

Within Canada most women travelled by train. Isolated rural areas dominated Canada’s expansive topography and, in the years 1939 to 1945, major cities were considerably smaller in size than now and isolated by long distances between them. During the late 1930s and early 1940s there

was no trans-Canada highway for long distance motor travel. Also, trans-continental air service was in its infancy and not readily available to most people.^{15 16} Train travel, on either a Canadian National Railway (CNR) or Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) passenger train, was the most accessible form of transportation for most Canadians during the War. Both railway companies provided local, intercity and trans-continental links.

In October 1939 the magazine *Canadian Rail* reported that \$25,000,000 was to be spent to acquire new rolling stock to meet anticipated wartime traffic demands. Included in the rolling stock orders were a very limited number of passenger cars, along with only several dozen new steam locomotives.¹⁷ By mid 1943 a comparison with 1918 statistics was available. These figures indicate that the total mileage of passenger cars was 433,828,200, an increase of forty-nine percent over that of 1918. For short distances, passenger travel increased 104.5% to 6,525,064,366 miles. The average passenger journey in miles increased eighty-one percent to an average of one hundred and fourteen miles. Along with the additional increase in volume and distance of passenger trains, the size of the average passenger train increased from five point eight cars to nine point two cars. This latter figure indicates a definite increase in passenger train travel. The additional carrying capacity was accomplished with essentially the



National Archives of Canada PA116128.

With both civilian and military personnel travelling by train during World War II, passenger cars were very often crowded to the point that it was standing room only.

same number of passenger cars.¹⁸ By mid 1943 the two transcontinental railways announced that they had carried 20,000,000 new passengers.¹⁹ In 1944 Canadian railways carried 44,000,000 passengers.²⁰

Military Travel by Train

Regardless of where a young female recruit was sent, the mode of transportation was invariably the train. Training facilities were scattered throughout the country, and for most of these young trainees, the journey to their designated location for basic training was their first, extensive travel experience.²¹ Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC) recruits travelled either to Vermillion, Alberta, or Kitchener, Ontario. Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Women's Division (WD) facilities were in Ottawa and Toronto, Ontario. Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCN) recruits went to HMCS Conestoga in Galt (Cambridge), Ontario. For example, interviewee WRCN Sage German was posted to Galt for her basic training. She was then sent, by train, to St. Hyacinthe, Quebec for Japanese Morse code training after which she was posted to Ottawa. From there she was transferred to Bainbridge Island on the west coast, just outside of Seattle, Washington, for more intensive training. In the space of six weeks she travelled by train to and from Victoria, then to



Pipe Band of the Canadian Women's Army Corps marching en route to the City Theatre in Amsterdam, Netherlands, July 25, 1946.



Photo courtesy of the Mann Collection.

This publicity photograph illustrates the regimentation and discipline of the CWAC Pipe Band at a practice session.

Canadian Women's Army Corps Pipe Band

Members of the CWAC Pipe Band enjoy female socialization while relaxing in the lounge of the Hotel du Quai Voltaire, Paris, 1945.



Photo courtesy of the Mann Collection.

Ottawa and back, three times.²²

During the war many Canadian women travelled because they became national representatives for their country. Kay Mann, a member of the CWACs Pipe Band, tells of the hectic life they led as the band members toured across Canada twice by train in their own coaches. The creation of the only women's pipe band by Canadian military officials during World War II appears to have been a means to provide a form of spectacle. Government officials considered these women as representatives contributing to a national event by a display of young, attractive, uniformed women.²³ The objective of the CWACs Pipe Bands travel was recruitment and public relations and to that end they played at bond drives, army camps, military parades, and met hospital ships and planes. When not travelling by train they toured by army transport truck.²⁴

Another military group, which enjoyed wide-spread travel within Canada, was the Meet the Navy show, a touring troupe that required fifteen railway coaches to move its props, equipment and large cast. The women who were a part of this troupe performed as showgirls and dancers.²⁵ Their objective was to inform the public about the roles of men and women in the navy through a musical performance. The RCAF had similar travelling entertainment troops: All Clear, The Blackouts and The W-Debs, all of whom also travelled by train throughout Canada and overseas until the end of 1945.²⁶ Clearly the above groups provided a form of spectacle in order to support Canada's involvement in the war through recruitment and to promote Canadian nationalism.

Protection was an important issue for women travelling by train during the war. It was generally expected that they would be protected by both military and non-military organizations. Mrs. Edgar D. Hardy, President of the National Council of Women of Canada, "assured Canadian mothers that their daughters joining the forces will receive supervision, physical, mental and moral in every way equal to that which they had in civilian life."^{27 28} The military command during the war also feared the lack of protection or supervision, and it was brought to the attention of the military hierarchy that there was a distinct need to provide surveillance and attendants for these recruits and other female personnel travelling long distances by rail to their assigned training facilities. The following memorandum pertaining to escorts for WD recruits was released May 18, 1943.

Escorts for WD Recruits

During my recent inspection trip of western Canada a subject of some concern brought forward was the deportment of newly enlisted young women, travelling to the manning depots. It was the consensus of opinion that an escort was required to maintain discipline. The unaccustomed freedom of these enlisted girls, some of them leaving home for the first time, very often finds expression in behaviour which is unbecoming to the personnel of the Air Force. This youthful spirit is understandable especially when they come in contact with other inexperienced Air Women bound for the same destination.²⁹

The women interviewed for this study reflected their belief that, on the one hand, they matured significantly through their travel experiences, while on the other some continued their youthful, vigorous behaviour. The directive for WD recruits must have been enforced when Phyllis Harrison, RCAF (WD) travelled to her Manning Depot. She said:

Two entire (passenger) cars were reserved for WDs. We travelled east from Winnipeg station across all of Ontario to #7 Manning Depot” (Rockcliffe, Ontario). While travelling we picked up more recruits at every whistle stop through the wilderness of Northern Ontario, gathering them up like sheaves of wheat at harvest. No doubt the railway officials were bent on delivering all those females into RCAF hands at Ottawa, completed, cloistered in our two cars. Conductors and porters chaperoned the entrances to the WD cars as assiduously as a Victorian matron. There was not going to be any hanky-panky on this train.³⁰

The memorandum about escorts also shows that officials considered women, more so than men, needed moral regulation, thus creating a military double standard. This regulatory position adopted by the military reinforced cultural expectations of what these women should be doing and what would constitute unbecoming behaviour. There appears to be no recognition of the fact that young men would also be on board these trains destined for their manning stations and that perhaps

the unbecoming behaviour was indeed the responsibility of both sexes. To single out the need for women to be disciplined appears to be an overt act on the part of the military to manage this particular social and cultural crisis in a gendered manner.

Civilian Travel by Train

Protection for the increasing numbers of civilian women travelling was also a serious concern. This increase in travel for civilian women can largely be explained by the dramatic increase in marriage rates in the early years of the war.³¹ Many women were travelling in order to join their husbands at military postings and jobs throughout Canada. Jean Long was one of these women. About one trip, a journey by train from Port Hope, Ontario, to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Long related:

I went by train. I sat up in a car full of service men. When I got to Winnipeg I was put on the wrong train and I went south to Calgary instead of north to Edmonton and that made me miss the other train. I had to stay overnight in Calgary. I didn't know my way around. I only had \$125.00. The taxi man said, "I'll find you a good secure place to stay, but you are to lock yourself in and don't come out 'till I come for you in the morning." I think it must have been a red light district. It was cheap. I got to the train the next morning. From Edmonton I went to Prince Rupert. I think it took a day and a half. It was practically all men on the train.³²

The taxi driver in this instance, observing a young female travelling unescorted, assumed a responsibility to protect her respectability by locating a secure place for her to stay, and ensured that she returned the following day to the station to continue her journey. On her cross-country journey, far away from things familiar and with limited financial resources, finding herself in the wrong city with no idea of where to stay could have proved to be a frightening situation for an unescorted young woman. However, the taxi driver assumed control of his fare's plight, thereby upholding the gender-based cultural norms of the day: white middle class women's respectability needed protec-

tion. The sexual purity of young single women and the fidelity of married women was a fundamental part of this code of propriety.³³

Not all women who travelled by train remembered specific significant events, although several women remarked that travel by train was an adventure for them nonetheless. Edith Burger followed her husband from Calgary, Alberta, when his job took him to Nitro, Quebec. Since she had not previously experienced much travel, she saw the trip as an adventure. "I came by myself by train, landed in Toronto first and then went to Valleyfield, Quebec. And there were no bridges, only the railway bridges, so we had to take a ferry at Cornwall, Ontario. That was an adventure to go on the ferry."³⁴ Margaret Creighton and Helen Fulford had similar recollections regarding their train travel experience. Separately, for the first time in their lives, each travelled long distances by train from Port Hope, Ontario. Creighton followed her husband to Shelbourne, Nova Scotia, with her ten-month-old son. "The train that went from Halifax to Shelbourne they called the Blueberry Express: it was so slow you could get off and pick blueberries."³⁵ Fulford travelled by train from



Port Hope to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where her husband was posted. Until this trip, the farthest she had travelled was to her parent's cottage.³⁶ Civilian Red Cross volunteers were also frequent train travellers. Rosamund Miskolczi, in her role as an escort officer, remained in Canada and made over twenty train trips back and forth between Montreal, Quebec and Winnipeg, Manitoba in a twenty-two week period, escorting war brides and their children.³⁷

Helen Fulford in front of her home on the occasion of her trousseau tea in Port Hope, 1944.

Photo courtesy of the Fulford Family.

Travel by Automobile



Photo courtesy of the Creighton Family.

Wartime portrait of Margaret Creighton, right, with her infant son Michael.

Highway travel was also an adventure when undertaken for long distances. Prior to her train trip west, Jean Long went on her first long distance car trip to join her husband Frank at his posting in St. John, New Brunswick. Long is an example of civilian women who travelled considerable distances during this period, but not as tourists. “I drove down with Mrs. Bigelow, Margaret, and six-month-old Willa. We were fine until we got to the other side of Quebec City and something happened to the car. It stopped. The man at the garage did not speak any English so he took us to a teacher at the high school and he was able to tell the man what was wrong. We had to wait until the next day to get the car fixed and then we continued on to St. John.”³⁸

Kate Hall, like Long, was married early in the war. She travelled from Vancouver, British Columbia to Toronto, Ontario for her wedding, and then relocated to Montreal, Quebec where she travelled by car with her husband Ken, a teaching technician for General Electric X-Ray. Mr. Hall had become a teaching technician because so many x-ray technicians were required in war-related jobs. Her husband’s job provided Hall with the opportunity to “spend two years on the road driving a great little Ford coupe with Ken going around to all the little boon dock hospitals until the gas shortage, and we didn’t have enough to run a car.”³⁹ To a significant degree, Hall traveled exten-

sively and respectably largely because she was married. Although she experienced a degree of freedom, this freedom was mediated by Ken's presence.

By contrast, Melodie Massey, single, and a member of the military, had decidedly different car adventures. She came from a privileged background where it seems that certain behavioural transgressions, if not entirely accepted, were tolerated. The vast scale of movement during the war "gave women opportunities to push at gendered circumscription."⁴⁰ When she and her friend Liliias Ahearn were on leave they often made trips to Detroit, Michigan and Chicago, Illinois.

The Americans were not in the war then. Liliias had her car and due to the gas rationing we would scrounge gasoline from the air station. We could get gas in the United States, so it was never a problem getting back. When we went over, we lived it up, we drank pink ladies, and I would sing. Liliias and I would put wings on our uniforms and tell anyone who asked us that we were ferry pilots. We always got more pink ladies that way. If anyone asked us questions and we didn't know the answer, we would just say that it was a military secret. Another time we went to Chicago and we got stuck at Immigration. We weren't supposed to be going to Chicago.⁴¹

Massey related that on these cross border trips they usually went with 'a couple of guys'. On the one hand they could be seen as respectable women, protected by their escorts, while on the other they could be considered unprotected women travelling alone with two men. Massey's behaviour contradicts Joan Sangster's image of respectability during the war, an image, "that encompassed a belief in hard work, moral uprightness, and acceptance of proper gender roles and familial obligations."⁴² Due to the circumstances, and assuming that "femininity as a set of socially constructed discursive frameworks and the perimeters of these discourses change over time,"⁴³ Massey's behavioural rebellion possibly resulted from her upper class background and femininity mediated by relationships such as class, race and ethnicity. Massey was not restrained by the societal expectations of middle and lower class women of the time, and her personality was such that the war provided an arena for her gender resistance to the point of rebellion. Massey's frequent transgres-

sions outrightly challenged the wartime military regulations which attempted to govern and constrain women's social behaviour. Disobeying orders, stealing gasoline, crossing international borders, drinking in uniform and unchaperoned travelling in the company of young men, were all activities that contravened the prevailing ideologies of respectability and modesty for women.

Other women interviewed also pushed social and military boundaries and disobeyed rules of acceptable propriety. As British historian Phil Goodman states: "Away from the constraints of home, many women were to an extent challenging 'common sense' definitions of gendered space and activity."⁴⁴ Sage German, while she was stationed in St. Hyacinthe Quebec, recalled how she along with a group of women would travel to Montreal for their weekends off. They would ignore the military dress code and don civilian clothes so they could sneak into Rock Head's Paradise, a Black jazz club that was off limits to service women.⁴⁵ In a similar manner, Toad Gould says "My mother almost passed out when I told her my sister-in-law Margaret and I hitch-hiked from Toronto to Port Hope. They [women] did it all the time."⁴⁶ As Gould says, women saw traditional gender behaviour being challenged 'all the time' so why should they be any different from other young women at this time? Women were assuming many male roles during the war so Gould would have felt that hitch-hiking was simply another means of crossing gender barriers.

Overseas Automobile Travel

Gould's mother would probably have been even more distressed if her daughter had been one of the many Canadian women overseas driving vehicles as part of their military or civilian job. Melodie Massey, when stationed in England, did not know how she was able to drive at night. She recalls, "There were no lights on the car except for a very tiny slit and there were no maps so it was very difficult driving. It was especially awful when it rained or there was fog. I would drive and I don't know if you know, but there were no road signs."⁴⁷ In a similar manner, Jean Migotti, a Canadian Red Cross volunteer, drove an ambulance at a German Prisoner of War station in England. She said the prisoners were not supposed to get sick at night because they had no lights. "We were allowed a little strip of light on the ambulance so we had to use a flashlight and it wasn't easy

to drive. There were no signs anywhere and we had to take someone with us to show us the road.”⁴⁸ Transporting potentially dangerous prisoners of war under very difficult driving conditions put Migotti in precarious circumstances. The driving experiences of both Massey and Migotti resulted in potentially hazardous situations which countered the idea that women travelling alone needed protection. In their interviews, however, both women imply that the situations were adventurous and interesting. While they recollect breaking norms, they did not mention that they had any concern for their personal safety.



Photo courtesy of the Massey Family.

Melodie Massey, Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division served as a military transport driver overseas.



Photo courtesy of the Migotti Family.

Jean Migotti, Canadian Red Cross (Overseas Division), drove an ambulance on a German prisoner of war camp.

Protecting Women While Travelling

Wherever they went during World War II females were frequently subjected to conflicting perspectives associated with their travel. On the one hand, women travelling alone, or even in larger groups, must be protected from whatever might cause them physical or emotional trauma. This included such things as sexual harassment, or witnessing the general horrors of war. On the other hand, these same women were often placed in highly dangerous environments and were at times sent to the front line of a very real and horrifying war.⁴⁹ Social and political organizations sought to protect women from the dangers and atrocities of war by subjecting them to regulations and routines governing their personal behaviour, and at the same time attempted to lessen their exposure to the brutal realities of war.

Protection was a major issue with regard to women in the military travelling overseas. Historian Ruth Roach Pierson demonstrates that the Canadian Army had two distinct policies with regards to overseas travel: one for men and the other for women. The policy for women was designed to protect and regulate their sexuality. In order to provide some form of regulation, women were only supposed to stay overseas for a maximum, two-year period, since it was thought to be in their best interest not to be away from home for a longer period of time.⁵⁰ The societal “assumption that daughters needed more surveillance than sons was shared by Army authorities. The same supposition underlay Army policies affecting the dispatch of CWACs overseas: the age limit for CWACs was twenty-one, for men in the Canadian Army (active), eighteen.”⁵¹ This double standard was also observed by the Canadian Red Cross in their Overseas Division. Women had to be twenty-one years old and, if unmarried, had to have parental consent to go overseas, and if married, they had to have their husband’s permission.⁵² Thus, gender stereotyping meant that women were subjected to certain conditions of age, time, parental or spousal permission for overseas travel.

Several of the women interviewed and in other primary sources provide examples of how these and other forms of moral regulation were enforced. Audrey Lindop says that during her Atlantic crossing there were only three other women on her ship, two of whom were nuns and one a married woman returning home to England. “The captain was worried because I was so young. He

took me under his wing and I spent most of my time on the bridge.”⁵³ On board ship, Melodie Massey felt much the same spirit of protectionism. “There weren’t many women on the ship. I remember going out on the deck, and saying, “Jeez, it’s dark out here.” All I could see lying around the deck were black guys. They were Americans going overseas to serve. The women were all enlisted but we ate with the officers. There weren’t many of us, only about ten, and we were very protected.”⁵⁴ Taking their meals with the officers suggests that there was a fear these women might be vulnerable to sexual exploitation by the enlisted men or there would be the possibility of racial mixing of black men and white women aboard ship. By having them eat with the officers, the military was duly positioned to safeguard women’s honour.

Author Jean Bruce, in her book, *Back the Attack! Canadian Women During the Second World War at Home and Abroad*, corroborates the feelings about protection experienced by Massey and Lindop. Bruce, in one of her oral interviews, recounts the experiences of one woman who was travelling to England for a three month posting on officer’s training with the Auxiliary Territorial

A convoy in Bedford Basin, Halifax, Nova Scotia, April 1942. As the photo illustrates, convoys included warships, ammunition ships and tankers. Ships sailed in parallel lanes and were usually escorted by destroyers.

National Archives of Canada PA 112993.



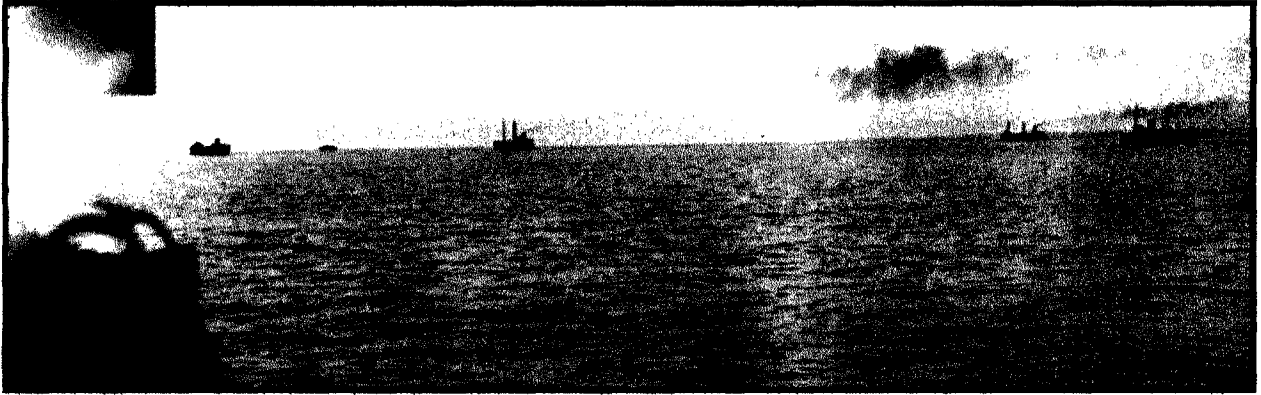


Photo courtesy of the Ian Tate Collection.

The Battle of the Atlantic included the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence River as well. The above convoy is travelling through U-boat infested waters in the Gulf of St. Lawrence westbound destined for Quebec City.

Service (A.T.S.): “We went over on the Queen Elizabeth, 20,000 men and 18 girls. We had an armed guard on our cabin door with a bayonet. I guess they were afraid we would be assaulted. There was a little area on the deck roped off where we were allowed to walk, at certain times.”⁵⁵ This situation reflects the double standard within the military: women were regulated, the men were not; women were secured at night; men were not. The implication is that women could not be trusted, and that they were vulnerable and weak. The regimentation also suggests that while on board ship there was an opportunity of their being seduced, or worse, as thousands of men and only a few women were on board. The fact that they had to be protected at all costs from their own soldiers on board troopships was considered extremely important, despite imminent danger from U-boat infested waters and foul weather.

Crossing the Atlantic

Considerable danger was encountered whenever young women were crossing the North Atlantic on ocean liners or on small ships in convoys. The Battle of the Atlantic, which involved the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the St. Lawrence River, was the longest and most destructive naval battle of World War II. The “ferocity of the fight in the Atlantic is revealed in the fact that 784 U-Boats were sunk and 2,603 allied merchant ships were sunk.”⁵⁶ As if the constant possibility of attack in German U-boat infested seas was not enough, the weather in the North Atlantic, including wind,

ice, snow, squalls, storms and swells provided intense and incessant potential danger.⁵⁷

The travel experiences related by these women not only describe great distance but also give insights into their psychological make-up. An ability to deal with the elements as well as the war when crossing the North Atlantic at that time was crucial, but their oral narratives reflect more a feeling of the spirit of adventure rather than a feeling of fear. Their youthful ages may have had a great deal to do with their attitudes. In 1941, Audrey Lindop journeyed to England to be married. From Toronto she travelled by train to Halifax, Nova Scotia, which was at the time the major mustering port for ships bound by convoy across the Atlantic. Lindop recalls her experience:

It was August, 1941. John had been at sea all through 1940, so when he got a shore job I went over. I got a phone call from Ottawa on a Friday saying that I was to be in Halifax on Monday. I got to Halifax and the ship I was to sail on was called the 'Harte Beaste.' It was a 6,000 ton freighter and was part of one of the largest convoys to cross the Atlantic. There were ninety-six ships in the convoy. We had people on board who were trying to get back to Britain from Jamaica, Bermuda all parts of the west, actually from all over. They were trying to get back to their families.

The ships weren't at all pleased because they had to take these civilians. They were freighters carrying oil, and we were carrying steel for arms, and cotton. Britain had nothing; they were desperate for supplies. The ships travelled in rows of ten across in the convoy. We were covered by Canadian corvettes at the beginning until we got near Iceland and then there was nothing until the British could send out ships to pick up the convoy. Anyway, there was a lot of trouble so we were taken up through the Straits of Belle Isle, which was pretty dangerous as it is a narrow passage with icebergs present. There were submarines in the area, that's why we had to go further north. By the way, no radio signalling was allowed, communication was done with flags. There was one ship in charge of the convoy, we could only travel at the slowest speed, which was about five knots.

There was nothing to do; you were dressed the whole time—you couldn't

take your clothes off, I mean never—if you were hit, it would have been good bye, good night—that’s all. We wore life jackets all the time. Everything was blacked out. There were no lights, and they didn’t stop to pick up anything, if a ship was hit, which did happen, two ships were hit, both of them oil tankers. They were blown up when we were going across. So we continued down close to the Canary Islands.

The captains were eventually able to get signals out. We were going around to Hull, that’s the other side of England. The Captains did not want to be responsible for all these civilians any longer that were on the convoy. So what they decided to do was to get rid of us somewhere off the coast of Scotland. Loch Ewe was one of the furthest points north in Scotland in a restricted area. That was an interesting experience, they let us off by tender at Loch Ewe, as the harbour was too small for the ship to dock. It took about three weeks, because remember they could only go as fast as the slowest ship in the convoy, which was five knots. (knot=nautical mile per hour) They took us ashore, then we had to take a bus to Inverness. Remember, I only had twenty-five dollars in the world.⁵⁸

Although they did not go at the same time, Stella Tate (WRCN) and Melodie Massey (RCAF) travelled by ship in a convoy between Halifax, and St. John’s, Newfoundland. They also experienced first hand the trauma and danger associated with wartime travel upon the water. Tate’s recollections centred primarily upon the weather associated with crossing the Gulf of St. Lawrence and the western Atlantic Ocean:

I was assigned to go to the R.C.N. hospital in St. John’s, Newfoundland. It was in the middle of winter. We went by sea in a small ship and it was a horrendous experience because I was very sea sick. It was a rough trip and bloody cold out, I’ll tell you - the ship was stuffy, smelly, and the meals in the dining room were greasy; certainly not suited to a queasy stomach. I remember lying in my bunk at sea level, and thinking, “Oh, it would be very nice if a torpedo came through right now.”⁵⁹

Massey had a different perspective regarding torpedoes when she was on route to St. John's. Her torpedo trauma was markedly distinct:

We didn't know when we would be leaving because we were going as part of a convoy. When we went on the ship, we were allowed to go on deck, and on route we saw a ship go up (torpedoed and sank) but it was a long way away. Then we had to leave the convoy as we were going to Newfie. The rest of the convoy was going to England. At that point we were not allowed out of our cabins, and we had to keep our life jackets on at all times. Lil (Lilias Ahearn) and I sneaked out on deck because we wanted to see coming into the entrance of St. John's harbour. We had been told it was very beautiful. Then we went by train to Gander.⁶⁰

Bruce's work with some of her interviewees reflects similar experiences. Included is one unidentified woman in the Women's Division, who describes her Atlantic Ocean travel experience: "We went over on the 'Aquitania.' There was no convoy. We were chased all over the Atlantic, down to the Azores, and practically to Iceland. I didn't really think of the danger. I was twenty-two at the time."⁶⁰ In a related situation, another unidentified woman, one of the first draft of thirty WDs to go overseas in August 1942, recalled, "It was all done so secretly that we suspected later it was because there were scads of U-Boats in the Atlantic at the time. Ottawa felt that there would be criticism about sending women over at the height of U-boat activity."⁶²

Placing women in such hazardous situations, with the potential for calamity and a loss of lives, was cause for considerable concern among the military. The socially acceptable norm was that women could support the war effort in a variety of ways, but they should not be placed in any situation that could result in personal injury or death. Perhaps due to the cultural conception of women being the weaker sex and in need of protection, the government and military hierarchy feared political and cultural repercussions if misfortune should result from ordering women to overseas postings. However women often disregarded such concerns.

The Canadian Red Cross Overseas Detachment

There were 484,000 women involved in Canadian Red Cross work. This number was almost ten times that of the combined Women's Military Service. Analyzing the interviews of women in the Red Cross Overseas Detachment allows one to see beyond the views presented by Pierson. Pierson provides scant information regarding Red Cross women and indicates only that they made jam and collected clothes.⁶³ She contributes to the notion that the Red Cross was merely a community volunteer group. While part of the Red Cross' mandate was indeed that, other primary sources suggest the Red Cross also contributed through its large membership to the war effort in many other ways. They served in activities which included The Nursing Auxiliary, Transportation Service, Office Administration, Food Administration and University Training Detachment.⁶⁴ Jean Migotti was one of six hundred and forty-one women who served overseas as a volunteer with the Canadian Red Cross Corps,⁶⁵ journeying by convoy from New York City to England on a small ship called the 'Rangatata'.

I went over on a little ship called the "Rangatata." We left from New York. I travelled with an American convoy. When I was on the ship I had to look after a child that was going back to England. There were several children returning home. It was a rough trip. It lasted fifteen days.

One day, Liliias (Ahearn), my friend who I met on the ship, and I went up on deck and we were standing at the railing and one of our ships in the convoy was torpedoed and we saw it go up and then down and that scared the living daylights out of us. Then in about two seconds there were people right behind us telling us to put on our life jackets and go inside and don't tell anybody what we saw. So we went inside. I had some rye left over from somewhere so we went down to the laundry room and there was a navy fellow struggling with so many children and doing the laundry so we helped him and shared our rye. Made him feel better and ourselves.⁶⁶

While waiting to board her ship in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Elizabeth Oland, a fellow Red Cross worker, stated, "They loaded on TNT while we waited to board the ship outside the harbour.

The captain thought it was too dangerous with the explosives to load the ship in the harbour.”⁶⁷ Similarly, Audrey Kitching, while sailing from Montreal to the Atlantic Ocean, remembers a long delay in the St. Lawrence River while taking on cargo. “We did not realize the cargo was TNT until our captain told us. At the same time he said, ‘Boat drill will not be necessary because if our ship is hit, we will all go straight up!’”⁶⁸ Another female Red Cross worker reported “We were under submarine attack for seventy-two hours. You could put your hand on the bulkhead and feel the vibrations of the depth bombs (charges) around our convoy.”⁶⁹ Barbara Oliver related that, while they were sailing for the war zone, when the Canadian Army landed in Italy, “Our ship was hit, and when we were going to the life boats, walls were missing. The life boats were lowered and we were taken on by an American destroyer. They literally pulled us on board by the seat of our pants.”⁷⁰

Many of the Red Cross volunteers frequently travelled back and forth across the U-boat infested Atlantic Ocean. Their job was to escort war brides to their new homes. Joan Lindly, an escort officer, made three trips back and forth across the Atlantic. She said, “We would have a forty-eight hour leave before returning to England.”⁷¹

Many of these military and civilian women found themselves in life-threatening situations. Their first-hand accounts illustrate their attitudes to the risks involved in their travels; most perceived these to be exciting and adventuresome, but not fearful experiences. The interviewees did not seem to reflect a sense of fear at the time of the incidents. Their voices reflected more of a sense of excitement at the idea of being part of an adventure that probably would not have been possible had it not been for the war. However, I think that many of them, in telling their narratives many years later, recognized that they were at times placed in extremely dangerous situations.

Stella Tate gave little consideration to government or military hierarchy when she participated in an unusual and potentially dangerous wartime naval mission. In mid 1943, the Germans had laid mines to the approaches of Halifax harbour. Later that same year Tate and a naval friend, against all prohibitions, wrangled themselves on board a Tea-time Sweeper (minesweeper) for a routine mine-sweeping patrol.⁷² It is impossible to know how they manipulated this absolute violation of naval regulations. Stella’s husband Ian (RCN officer, retired) suggests: “It may have had

something to do with the fact that sometimes a couple of lovely twenty-two year old female naval officers were hard to resist, even when going mine-sweeping!”⁷³ Perhaps Ian Tate was merely recalling the norm of the time: that a pretty woman was more likely than not to get her own way! Tate may not have had any idea that her good looks would garner her a trip on the mine-sweeper; she and her friend may well have simply been curious as to the operation of a minesweeper, and regarded the opportunity to be onboard during a routine operation as a unique adventure.

Women in the Air

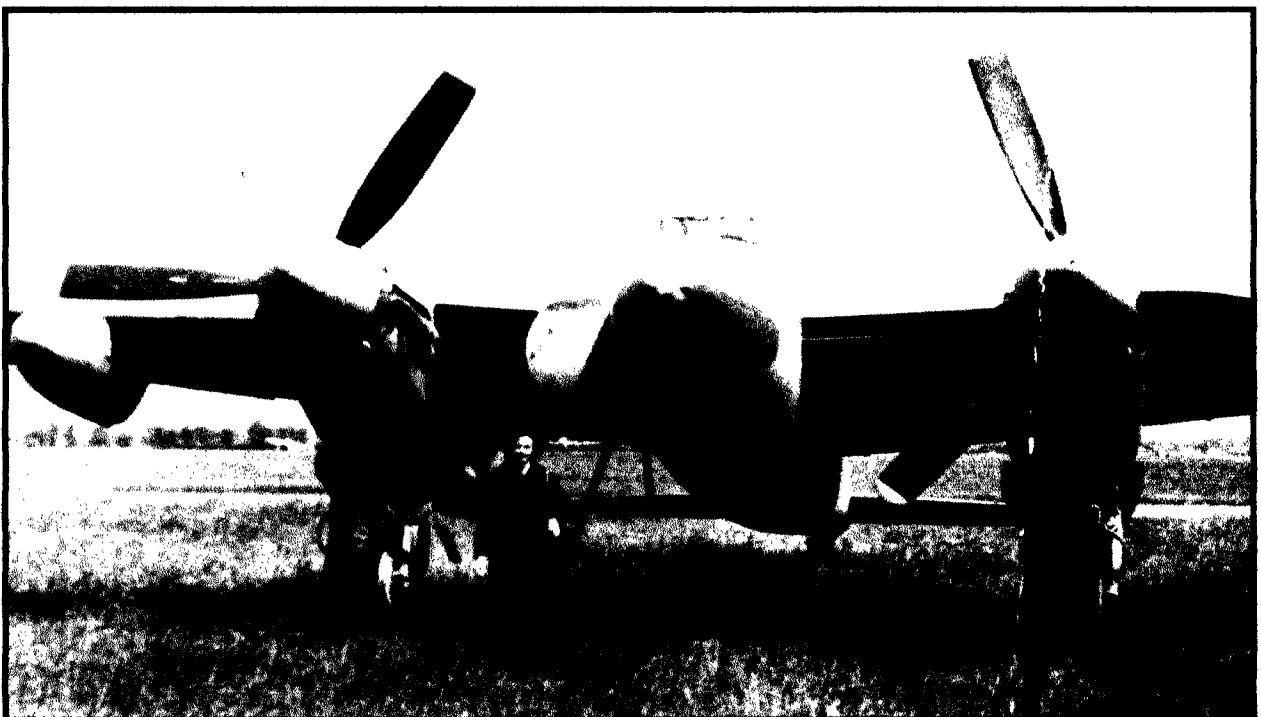
Another dangerous military assignment was flying military aircraft, and many Canadian female pilots would probably have found military flying to be an adventure. When the Canadian Government established elementary flying training schools at a variety of municipal airports across the country to train the more than forty-one thousand pilots who joined the Canadian, British and Commonwealth Air Forces, women were not allowed to attend.⁷⁴ Vi Warren did not accept the fact that she could not contribute to the war effort in her capacity as a pilot. As a civilian she had learned how to fly and held both instructor and commercial licences. Warren taught flying to some of the men who had enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force. She also flew airplanes for testing purposes at Barker Field, Ontario. But the RCAF refused to acknowledge her status because she wore a skirt. Although the RCAF held confidence in her ability to instruct the men who were going to fly for the RCAF, the same military service prohibited women from joining the RCAF.⁷⁵ Old attitudes remained intact. Even though during the 1930s women aviators such as Amelia Earhart had become world famous and were considered exceptional pilots, flying military aircraft during wartime remained a male-dominated occupation. The image of female military pilots did not fit most mid-twentieth century Canadian gender stereotypes. Amelia Earhart commented that her aviation activities provided her the opportunity to meet women pilots everywhere, women who shared her “conviction that there is so much women can do in the modern world and should be permitted to do irrespective of their sex.”⁷⁶ But even though C.G. Power, the Minister of National Defense for Air, was in favour of women acting as ferry pilots, the War Cabinet withheld its approval for women to

fly military planes until such time as there was a shortage of male pilots, and that situation did not occur.⁷⁷

Since military flying in Canada remained a male preserve forbidden to her, Warren journeyed by convoy from New York City to England where she joined the British Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA), a para-military organization of civilian pilots. She recalls the two weeks spent on the ship as a time when she was continually exposed to the possibility of disaster while having to maintain an entirely passive role. Her observations regarding this trip were “how different from a flying adventure where a pilot can make decisions and take action.”⁷⁸ The government and military authorities believed that women’s participation in the war effort should be in a support role. Warren however did not share that point of view. She expressed frustration at the constraints placed upon her ability to act. During her time with the ATA, Warren flew twenty-nine different types of single engine aircraft and seventeen different types of twin-engine aircraft. Her ferrying duties were not only confined to the British Isles but also took her to Europe several times.

Vi Milstead Warren in front of the Mosquito fighter-bomber she had just delivered to the airfield at Prestwick, Scotland.

Photo courtesy of Vi Warren.



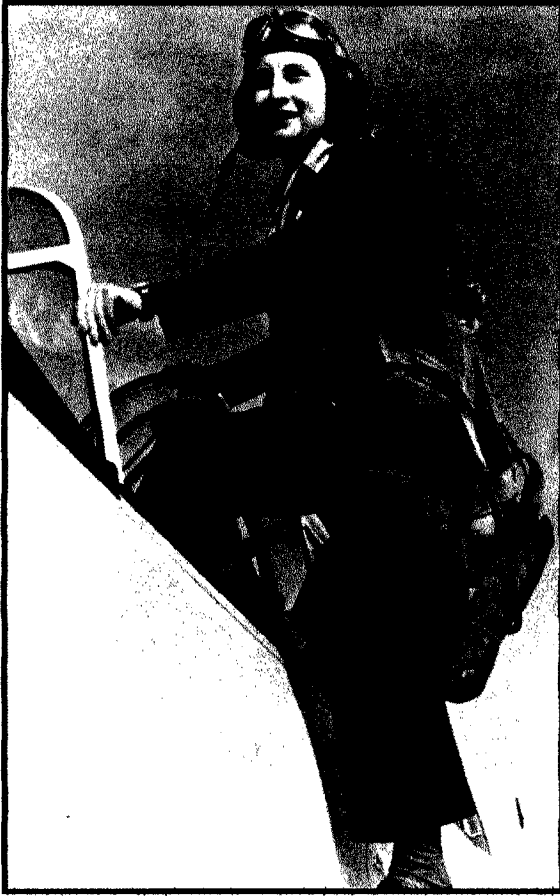


Photo courtesy of Vi Warren

Vi Milstead Warren clad in pants climbing into the cockpit of a Harvard Trainer at St. Hubert, P.Q., for an instrument check prior to her acceptance into the A.T.A.

During the war the ATA flew 415,000 hours, delivering more than 309,000 aircraft.⁷⁹ Both Warren and the American WASP flyers stated that they flew more types of aircraft than did most of the men in the service of the Canadian, U.S. and British Air Forces.⁸⁰ Aviation historian Shirley Render remarks, “It was really the war that gave women pilots their chance... The women ferry pilots were pioneers in every sense of the word. They disproved the time-honoured belief that military flying was for men only.”⁸¹ “It was amusing to watch the shock on the faces of the RAF pilots when one of us climbed out

of one plane and into another type,” said Warren. She recalls that it was even more of a shock when the men discovered that women were assigned to fly aircraft in which they had never even sat.⁸²

In European theatres of war, British, American and Soviet women were able to fly. In the United States women were allowed to join an experimental army-airforce program with the acronym WASPs (Women’s Air Force Service Pilots), which exceeded all expectations. Under the leadership of aviatrix Jacqueline Cochran, one thousand women faced danger and discrimination while ferry piloting, test piloting and instructing throughout the United States.⁸³ WASPs flew everything that the men flew. In the Soviet Union, female pilots exceeded the service of both Cochran and Warren. They served as pilots and navigators in active service and many were killed in combat. Their combat role has been well documented.⁸⁴

Travel Opportunities Despite Restrictions

Women travelling outside of Canada experienced another government restriction that caused

much apprehension for some of them and this was the amount of money an individual could take out of the country when travelling. Both Audrey Lindop and Pat Richan stated they were only allowed to take twenty-five dollars on their travels.⁸⁵ Richan travelled to Washington, D.C. and Lindop to England under this restriction. As Lindop noted, upon her arrival in Scotland she didn't know what she would have done had John, her fiancée, not met her. With the barest of resources she would have been in a strange country alone with no friends or family.⁸⁶ Government policy put these women at risk and their anxiety was significant, since they had no alternative resources upon which to rely. Men, on the other hand, could more easily travel in safety by hitchhiking and were also in a better position to pick up jobs as day labourers. Both of these situations were considered socially acceptable for men, and it would not have been as challenging for men to live under more rigorous conditions. However if Lindop or Richan found themselves in a similar position with limited resources, they were still expected to maintain propriety and respectability despite their plight.



Notwithstanding the strictures placed on both military and civilian female travellers, travel proved to be liberating. As Kay Mann says, joining the Army was the luckiest day of her life, providing "...the opportunity to travel extensively at the cost of the government." Mann, because of her overseas posting, also had an opportunity to visit her grandparents in Northern Scotland, a trip she would never have been able to consider had it not been for the war.⁸⁷ Several of the women in the services who were interviewed, whether stationed in Canada or overseas, took advantage of their leave to tour the surrounding countryside. Mann

Pat Richan, left, with a friend in Washington, D.C. Wartime fashions were sometimes casual as women wore skirts, dresses, bobby socks and laced-up shoes.

Photo courtesy of the Richan Family.

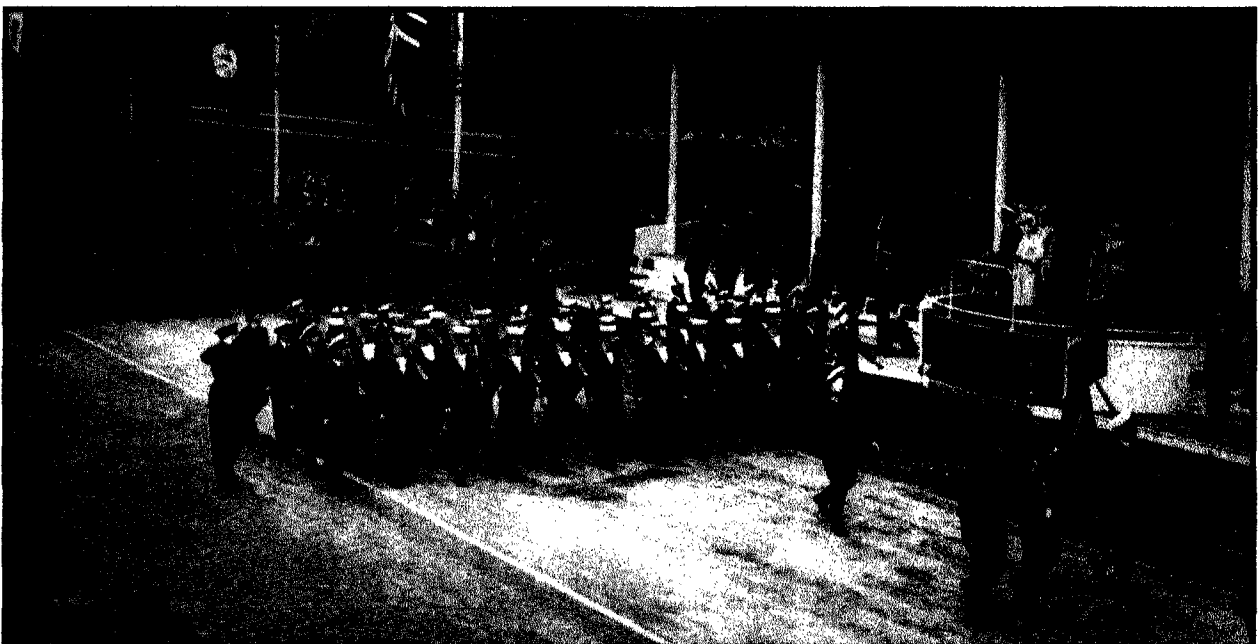
explained she was able to explore northern Scotland, the country of her heritage. Richan was able to assume the role of a social explorer when she went to a strange city in another country. This experience provided the freedom she would not have experienced at home.

Similarly, Kate Hall and Jean Long were able to explore many parts of their own country while travelling with, or following, their husbands. Women such as Margaret Creighton and Helen Fulford, who returned to Port Hope at the conclusion of the war and remained there throughout their lives, indicated that their war-related travels were a memorable facet of their life experience. These women, and others interviewed, saw their war-related travel experiences as an opportunity they might not have otherwise had.⁸⁸

Further travel opportunities occurred at the war's conclusion when the government subsidized the travel of military personnel. After they were demobilized, service women could wear their uniforms and travel on trains at minimal cost for thirty days.⁸⁹ Barb Jones (WCRN) thought it was great: at the time she was demobilized her father was stationed in London, England and, since the government was required to discharge her to her parents she went to England, where she had the

Barbara Jones WRCNS was part of the Canadian Troops marching in the Victory Parade seen passing the Royal reviewing stand in The Mall, England, May 1946. Jones is forth from the left in the Naval Contingent.

Photo courtesy of Barbara Jones.



opportunity to do some touring and march in the Victory parade in London in 1946.⁹⁰

Summary

All the interviewed women in wartime travelled more frequently and more extensively than did their parents. Most had rarely travelled beyond their own geographical environment such as from a rural to an urban setting, or to the family cottage or perhaps on a short sight-seeing drive. During the war, in either civilian or military capacity, many women travelled to disparate parts of Canada, the United States and overseas.

During their travels most women frequently challenged or pushed the boundaries of societal norms, especially gender stereotypes. They often disrupted spatial constraints to which they once had been subjected. For most travelling alone overseas on board a ship was a first time and unusual experience. Many challenged culturally established feminine social boundaries: some disobeyed direct military orders in order to participate in a greater variety of recreational activities. Hitherto social propriety expected that women travelling be escorted but during the war many women travelled long distances unaccompanied or unchaperoned.

Perhaps the greatest benefit these women experienced as a result of travel was a sense of personal introspection and self-confidence. Many found themselves in occupations which in peacetime would have been unattainable. Opportunities were presented to them and they accepted the challenge resulting in their flying aircraft and driving vehicles often in stressful circumstances. All the women reflected that they had expanded their own personal boundaries as a consequence of their travels. In different phrases and statements all expressed the belief that wartime travel held its own personal meaning for their self development. Melodie Massey recalls, "I became much more independent."⁹¹ Jean Migotti says, "It made me more adventuresome."⁹²

Despite the dangers and double standards encountered through travel, all the women experienced adventure, variously confronted and resolved gender stereotyping and learned much about themselves as a consequence of their wartime journeys by train, car, ship or plane.

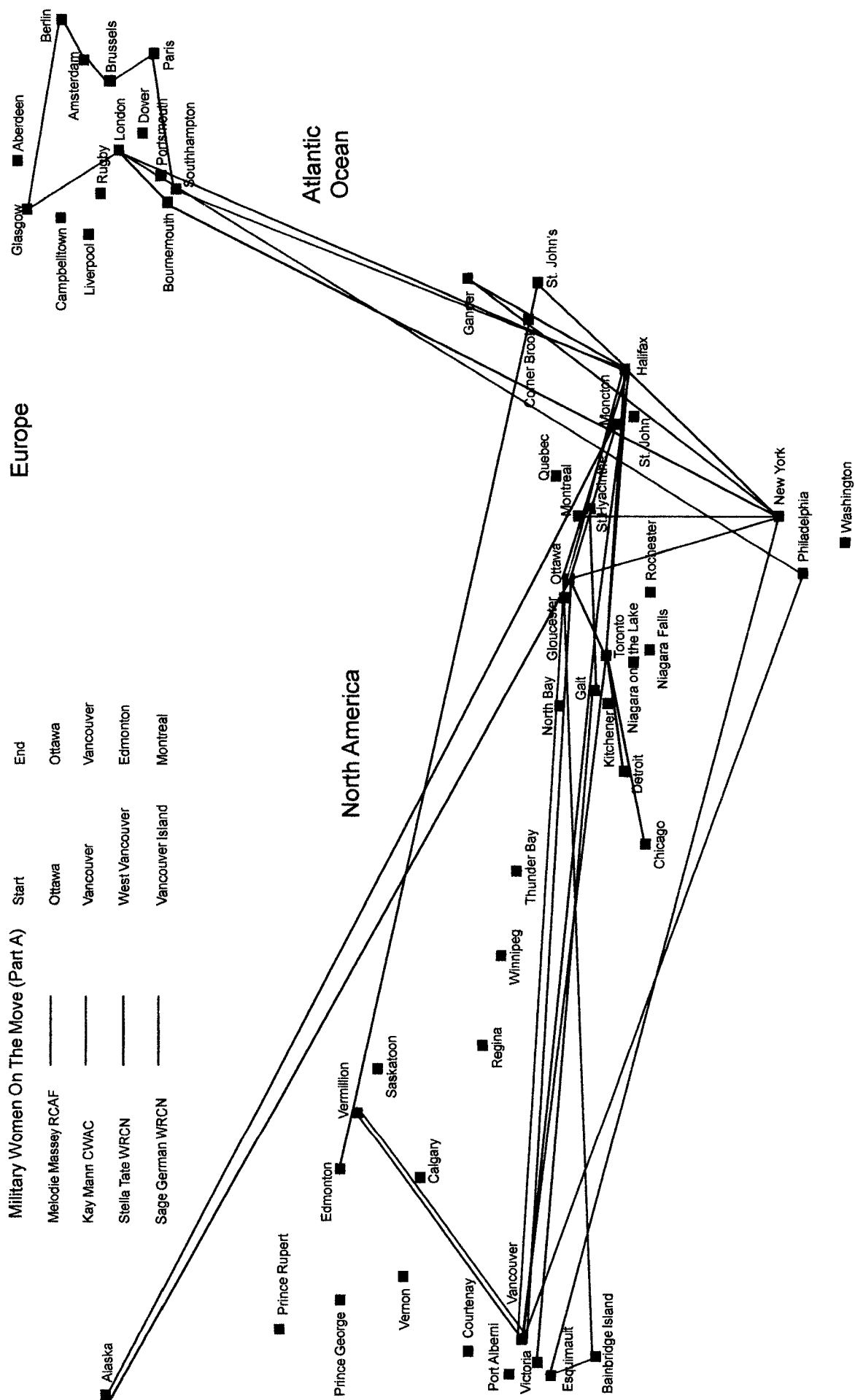


Figure 2.1

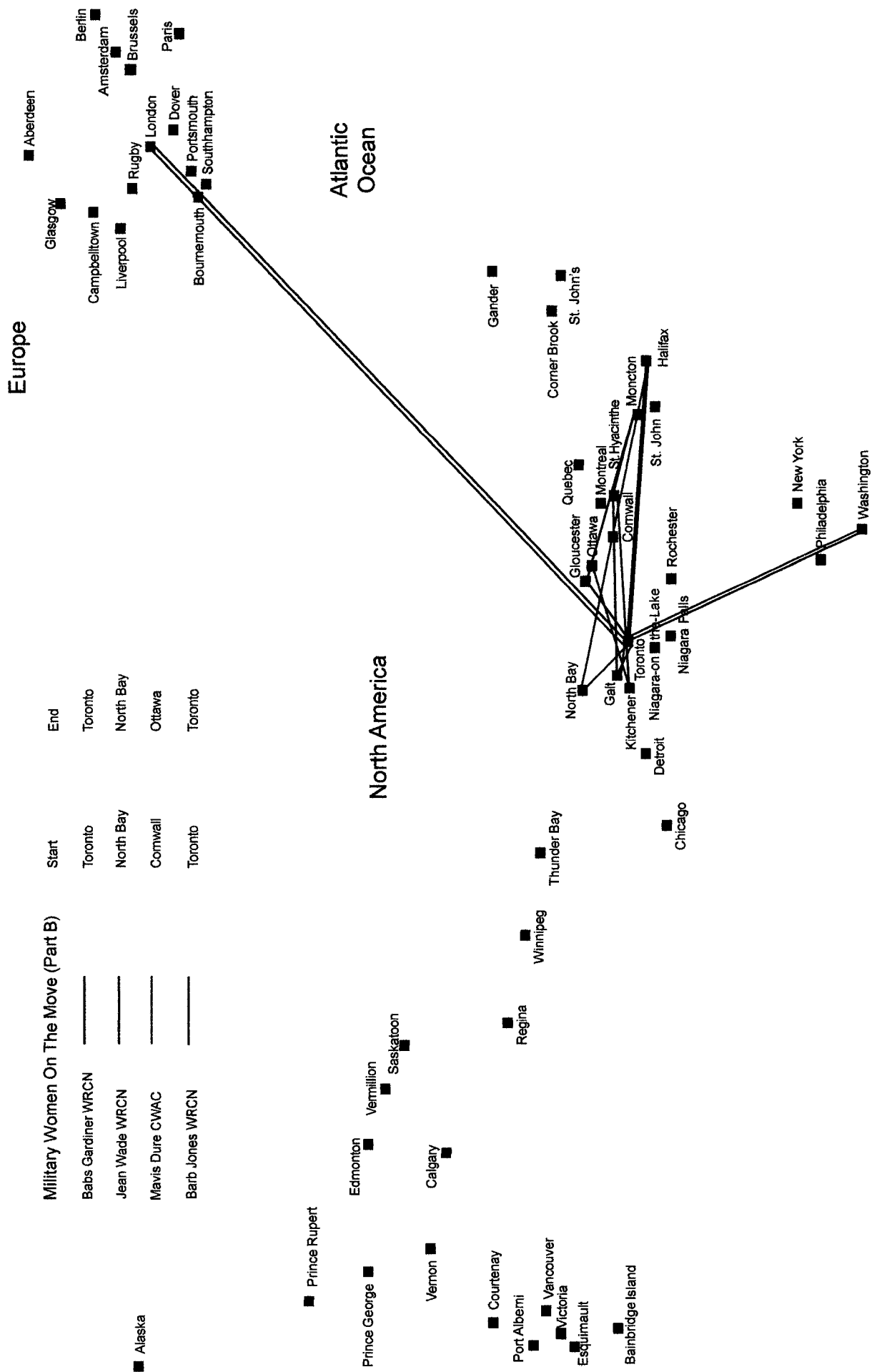


Figure 2.2

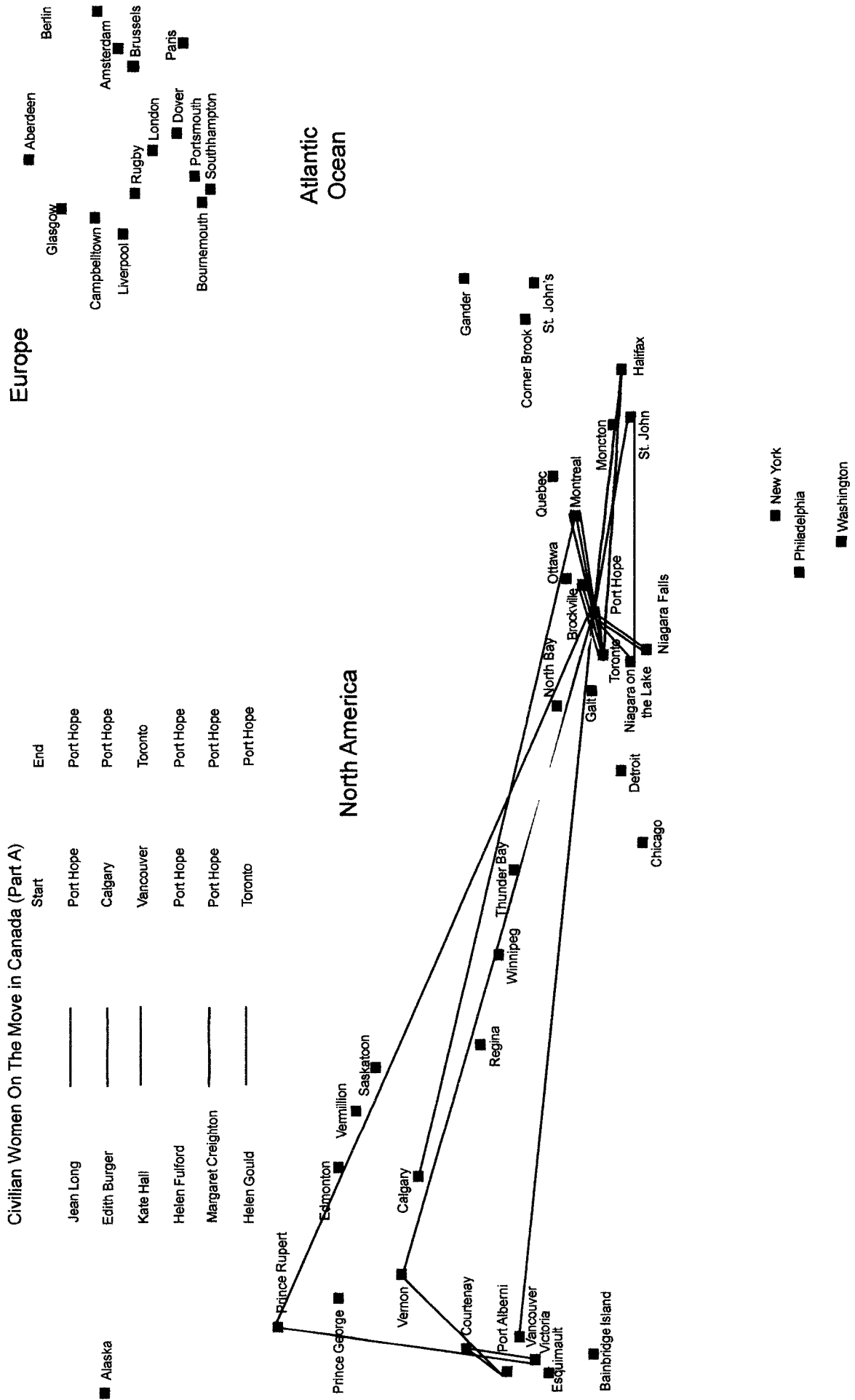


Figure 2.3

Civilian Women On The Move in Canada (Part B)

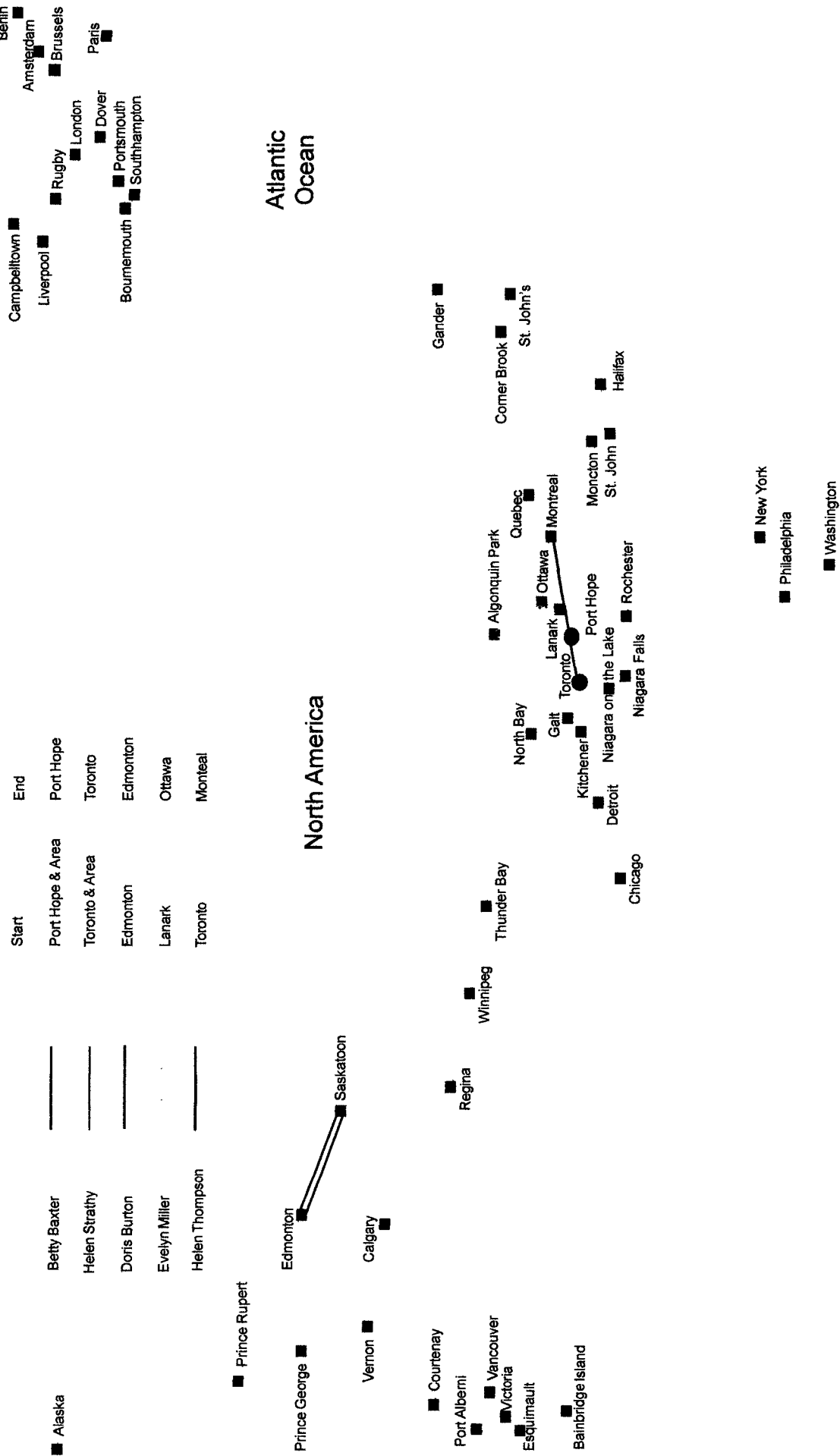


Figure 2.4

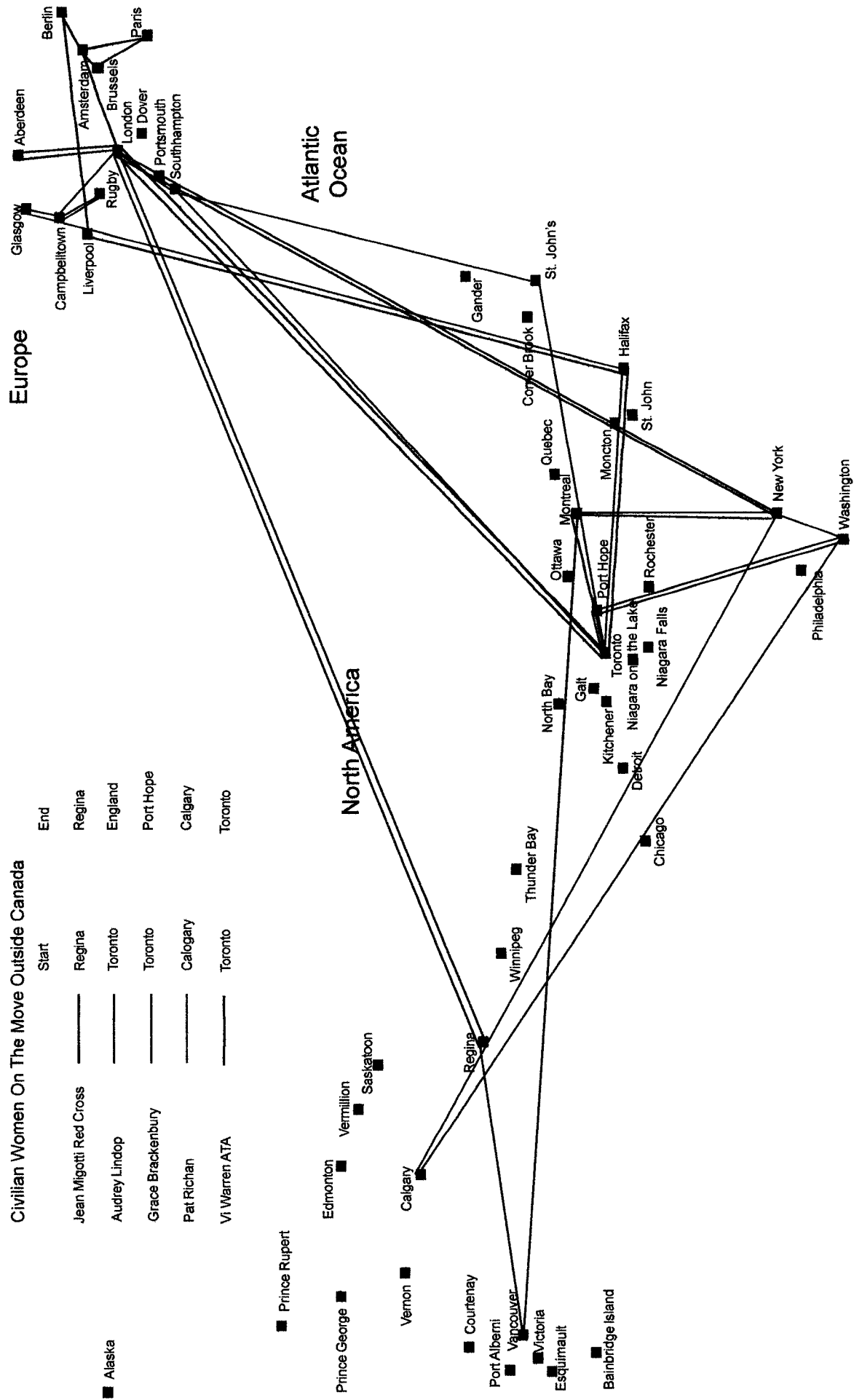


Figure 2.5

Women, War and Housing

We were incarcerated in the women's prison. It had been turned over for WRCNS basic training, it had bars on all the windows and you had big steel doors that came down to separate you at night.

Sage German, WRCN

For many Canadian women, being on the move during World War II resulted in significantly different living accommodations. Sometimes their wartime lodgings provided a dramatic change to their customary housing. Prior to the war the dominant domestic ideal for many young, unmarried women was to reside at home with their parents, or board with families close to their place of employment, which kept them under some degree of parental authority. When women joined the newly-formed women's services, the Red Cross, or were employed in war-related jobs, they were provided with a respectable reason to relocate and consequently, in some ways enjoyed more freedom. Although home may have been for many of them a constraining space, it also represented a haven of security. For many of the civilian and military women interviewed, lodging was no longer within the protective bosom of their family, and as a result they encountered not only unique living conditions, but also a whole range of new experiences.

In this chapter I examine several of these novel living arrangements in order to discuss the changes, insecurities and disruptions in life styles of wartime women in Canada. Through an examination of these changes I address the ways in which the gender order was disrupted. For example, living in some types of wartime housing provided women with more freedom and greater independence while still maintaining their respectability. Many women rethought what home was and re-established their lives within new spaces which, when compared to the societal norms of the time, were often unconventional. Examples include institutional housing such as barracks, dormitories, tent camps, Nissen huts and industrial staff housing. Other types of housing include lodgings constructed of salvaged and recycled materials. Although most housing was considered acceptable during wartime, some did not conform to the accustomed standards of many middle-class women.

Fiction writer Laurie Abraham, in her book *Reinventing Home*, outlines some of the problems women faced in regard to home. Through short stories she narrates how women were "forced

to re-invent our attitudes about everything that happens in our domestic lives.”¹ This re-invention was true for many women during World War II. Jill Wade in *Wartime Housing Limited, 1941-1947: An Overview and Evaluation of Canada's First National Housing Corporation*, outlines some of the reasons for wartime housing congestion which contributed to this re-invention.

First, the migration of war workers and their families to industrial centres and the movement of service men's families to urban centres near armed forces' bases substantially affected housing across the country by increasing doubling up and overcrowding, by encouraging tenancy, and by reducing vacancies.²

Historical Precedents in Women's Housing

Changes in life style and living accommodations are not without historical precedence. Historian Martha Vicinus's work on single, English, middle to upper-class women's struggles for respectability “chronicles the energetic lives and imaginative communal structures invented by women who pioneered new occupations, new living conditions and new public roles.”³ Vicinus discusses formal institutions for women developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which provided “alternatives to the nuclear family.”⁴ These communal structures include settlement houses, boarding schools, women's colleges, nursing schools and religious houses. Looking at the same period, Angela Woollacott finds “cumulative evidence that suggests there was a feminized world of boarding houses in London (as elsewhere) that enabled Australian and other women to move around the world and yet stay within the confines of respectability.”⁵

Similar feminized boarding houses were also established, for example, in Paris, Ontario where the work force for John Penman's Knitting Mills was primarily women. These boarding houses provided a means of protecting women's respectability. In her book *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Changes in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950*, Joy Parr comments that in order to protect women's respectability: “In most early twentieth-century communities...young unmarried women were closely scrutinized, female factory workers, with, perhaps, more public

flourish than any others.”⁶ Toronto’s expansion of light industries provided women with an opportunity to “leave their traditional niche in the urban economy of servants” and find wage work outside of the domestic sphere.⁷

Historians Parr and Joan Sangster examine the paternalistic approach to housing some industrial employers utilized, and they both discuss corporate welfare strategies related to women. These strategies include providing company owned housing for women workers and ensuring that this housing was deemed suitable and respectable enough for female employees. “Gender differences were also apparent in the moral protection and notions of respectability the company offered to women but not to men.”⁸ Women liked the paternalistic measures the workplace encouraged as they not only provided domestic accommodations but also a family style environment which included sports, social events and employee publications.⁹ These types of paternalistic strategies had been introduced as early as 1830. Thomas Dublin’s research investigates the women textile workers who came to Lowell, Massachusetts, and lived in company boarding houses. Communal living there provided a means of social control by regulating women through employing “keepers who were regarded as surrogate parents.”¹⁰ Company boarding houses also provided a means of keeping women’s wages lower than the wages of men.¹¹ This dormitory style of industrial housing was not inclusive to industry, it was also incorporated into the retail sphere. In 1917 Simpson’s department store magnate H.H. Fudger constructed dormitory living for Simpson’s female employees. Amenities such as housekeeping, dietary staff, and numerous recreational activities were part of the controlled environment Fudger supplied for his female employees.¹²

Women living in barracks during World War II experienced similar living arrangements to those provided by civilian employers. A wartime barracks life-style was not a new phenomena created by the military for their female recruits. Historian Adele Perry described the barracks life experienced by colonial white women coming from England to British Columbia as early as 1862.¹³ Young British women were sequestered in marine barracks which had been feminized to a degree for their comfort. The barracks were surrounded by a fence, and rooms for a sheriff and corporal were positioned at each end of the barracks. These measures suggest a need to protect the women’s

respectability by establishing a secure gendered space in which to house them.¹⁴

In order to give Canada's military women a sense of protection and respectability, barracks life was organized to resemble YWCA boarding houses of the early twentieth century. According to Carolyn Strange these boarding houses provided a means of protecting respectable young women by proposing "a gendered scheme of supervision."¹⁵ There were specific rules and regulations regarding issues such as the tidiness of rooms, the access of males to the residence, and curfews.¹⁶ Similar regulations were also found in nursing schools of the time. Historian Kathryn McPherson notes that young nurses in training were required to "adhere to the residence rules and thereby maintain a sterling reputation for the school and the hospital."¹⁷

Wartime Military Housing

Women who joined the military service often experienced changes in their living accommodations. Barracks life provided a communal experience for a large percentage of the women in the forces. Other women lived in prefabricated Nissen huts constructed of corrugated metal while some learned to endure more primitive conditions and resided in tent camps. A few women lived a nomadic existence sleeping in the back of their ambulances.

Barracks Life

Some military buildings which had originally been designed for other purposes were quickly converted to provide accommodation for the newly created women's services. For example, one of the earliest training depots of the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force (C.W.A.A.F.) was in the old Havergal College, a private girls' school in downtown Toronto, Ontario.¹⁸ Recruits of the Women's Royal Canadian Naval service (WRCN) underwent basic training at Galt (Cambridge) Ontario, where the Ontario Girls Training School "was given to the armed forces."¹⁹ Elinor Sinclair relates that these barracks used to be an old girls' reform school, where they practically froze to death in the winter and the whole situation was pretty grim.²⁰ Ruth Roach Pierson also wrote: "The armed forces had wrenched women out of that feminine realm and plunged them into an implacably

masculine one” where they would be living under similar conditions to their male counterparts.²¹

The first group of WRCNs sent to Galt were confronted with an awful mess. A former WRCN commented that before the girls left the reform school, they “trashed the place, broke everything in sight, wrote in lipstick and left filth all over the place” so the WRCNs were left with the unpleasant job of cleaning the building.²² Babs Gardner was also at Galt and said: “The doors opened out and some of the rooms were padded.”²³ The padded rooms were originally designed to prevent people from self-mutilation and the doors opened outwards as a safety design for those who might have to enter the room to restrain an individual. Sage German recalls spending a miserable six weeks at Galt where she said: “We were incarcerated in the women’s prison. It had bars on all the windows and there were great big barred steel doors that came down to separate you at night. I found it very oppressive. It was supposed to keep out a small weaselly stoker who looked after our furnaces. However he got in somehow and one poor WRCN got pregnant.”²⁴ It is not possible to know if this woman had a consensual affair or if she was raped. It is ironic that these women who had volunteered to serve in the fight for freedom in Canada’s military ranks found themselves lodged in a former penal institution for young women.

Middle-class expectations were another issue for some women living in wartime military housing. Prior to their enlistment, both German and Gardner had lived in residence at boarding schools. They had an experience of communal living which would have made their wartime adjustment readily palatable. Basic training conditions ensured that class received no privilege. However, the lack of such privilege was in most instances what working and lower middle-class women experienced normally in civilian life, where living conditions sometimes included a multitude of domestic duties and a lack of privacy.

The lack of privacy was another significant issue for service women in wartime housing. Audrey Lindop (WRENS), who was serving overseas, discusses being stationed at Leamington Spa, England: “It was a very interesting time. When we were there, there were about twenty girls in one room and there were only two baths which we had to share.”²⁵ Most women experienced two major shocks to their being when they enlisted. The first was the virtual lack of privacy, and the



Photo courtesy of the German Family

Second from left, WRCN Sage German with her Japanese Morse Code classmates and male instructors at St. Hyacinthe, P.Q., in 1944. This group was part of the radio telegraphy special branch which remained secret during the war and for many years thereafter. Their job was to eavesdrop on enemy radio transmissions.

second was the pervasive regimentation of military life. As Gardner says: “You had to recognize the fact that you weren’t free anymore.”²⁶ Each day of basic training for women recruits was regulated from the time they got up in the morning until they went to bed at night. The shock of having to relinquish every aspect of personal identity for a managed and dispassionate existence in the military was something totally unforeseen by most of the women interviewed.²⁷ For one airforce woman the supervision was very much “like a convent...where there was no room for personal gee-gaws or unmilitary clothing.”²⁸ Gardner actually lived in a convent for a while when she was posted to St. Hyacinthe, P.Q. She recalls, “They didn’t have our quarters ready so they put us up in the top floor of a convent.”²⁹ These women also had to conform to the kind of discipline which previously had been implemented for the women training at nursing schools.³⁰ As Jean Wade (WRCN) says, “there were guards at the gates of the barracks” and they even did bed checks at night.

Cleanliness in wartime housing was another problematic issue. Wade recounts that living conditions were certainly not what the women were used to, especially when there was an infestation of cockroaches in the barracks.³¹ German confirms the cockroach situation. When she was stationed in St. Hyacinthe, P.Q., she notes it was disgusting: "We had potatoes-a-la-cockroach."³² Cockroaches were not the only form of insect invasion. A former WRCN recalls to her horror: "I got head lice. Many of us did at basic training."³³ As noted earlier these primarily middle-class women were being subjected to similar problems that many working class and poor women probably experienced.

Nissen Huts

Nissen hut living appears to have been comparable to barracks life. However many of the

In an apparent publicity photograph WRCNS personnel appear in their dormitory surroundings in May 1943, in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

National Archives of Canada PA 128192



comforts of the barracks were lacking. One unidentified woman who went to Kitchener for her basic training said they almost froze to death. She relates her experience:

They had pot-bellied stoves to heat the huts, and the pipes would get red-hot, up to six inches from the ceiling. You had to watch them constantly. They had to take girls off clerical duty to go on fire duty. No fires broke out. I think the good Lord protected us.

We couldn't take a shower for days, it was so cold. And when we did, there were no shower curtains, and no doors in front of the johns. I had been brought up with a silver spoon in my mouth – I was never allowed in the kitchen at home. But at Kitchener, on my first Saturday, I washed 750 plates and scrubbed 3 floors.³⁴

This woman was not alone in experiencing disruptions to her class position due to military housing. For many military women, wartime conditions made the use of ill-equipped accommodations the rule rather than the exception.³⁵

Military living accommodations for Canadian women overseas during World War II were not only uncomfortable but dangerous as well. A *Chatelaine* magazine article, *Our Airwomen Overseas*, tells of the living conditions of the women at the Canadian Bomber Group in the north of England. "Like the men they live in corrugated iron Nissen huts, damp and chilly, set out in their own W.D. cluster among the oak trees: hot water for baths is something to be talked of rapturously, as of the distant past or future: leave doesn't come often."³⁶ Audrey Kitching, a member of the Red Cross Overseas Detachment, also recalled living in Nissen huts:

We lived with ninety-odd nursing sisters and other female staff members. We were a hospital unit training to live in the field. We had outdoor latrines, sensibly placed in circles, with canvas surrounding them. They were shoulder high and located at the bottom of a hill that was muddy and slippery when it rained (which was often).³⁷

One RCAMC (Royal Canadian Airforce Medical Corps) woman remembers her stay at Camp Sussex. "We lived in huts, and the conditions were fairly primitive. They were heated with

round-bellied coal stoves like in rural railway stations, and soldiers came in through the night to shovel coal. There were walls, but they didn't reach up to the ceiling."³⁸ One unidentified woman remembers that when she was stationed in Pontefract, England, "Our hut had a stove in it and a little pail of coal. That was to last for the whole week. We were allowed a bath once a week, and there was a thick, black line around the bath tub to limit the water we used. It was hard, but I wouldn't have missed it for the world."³⁹ Problems obtaining coal for heating were similar for Melodie Massey when she was living on an overseas military base with the Sixth Group: "We lived in these little houses. The only heating that we had in our room was a tiny coal fire place. I used to go and scrounge coal which meant that I went to the coal yard and stole it. Coal was rationed and each room was allowed only so much. It was very cold."⁴⁰ Massey was consistently creative in solving her problems with military regulations.

Tent Camps

The unfamiliar experience of primitive living conditions was also true for women who resided in tent camps. Two Red Cross overseas volunteers describe their experiences living in tents when their unit went to Europe. Catherine MacDonald Waters describes being awakened one night by a single thud. "A dud bomb had come through the roof of our tent landing between our stretchers." After this incident she says they were issued hospital beds to sleep on or under and "we kept our tin hats on our heads or tummies whichever we wanted to save."⁴¹ Fellow Red Cross worker Eleanor Wallace Culver lived in a tent camp in the small town of Neufchatel, France. She relates how miserable this experience was: "The weather was horrible; first we had to cope with the constant rain and mud and then snow that turned to slush. We ran out of water, saved our tea to wash our teeth."⁴² A former CWAC member stated in regards to her new living conditions: "The survival techniques were the first thing you learned."⁴³

Mobile Accommodations

Peggy Leigh McRae Fairey with the Canadian Red Cross Overseas Detachment experi-

enced a different type of housing when she went to join the Swindon Convoy: "This was a mobile convoy which meant that we kept all of our possessions in a barrack box in our ambulance. It was like being in a camper—your ambulance was your home."⁴⁴ Another Red Cross ambulance driver said, "The living conditions were extraordinary, we never slept in the same bed for two nights."⁴⁵ Both the Red Cross and military officials seemed to find an alternative and sometimes creative answer to any housing dilemma these women encountered.

Living on Subsistence Allowance

Some women escaped the confines and discomforts of wartime life and lived off base on a subsistence allowance. In Canada, due to overcrowding in some of the barracks, Mavis Dure and

In order to avoid the bombings, WRCNS personnel slept in the basement at the Canadian Naval Mission, London, England, July 25, 1944. Notice that their helmets and shoes are close at hand in case there was an emergency.

National Archives of Canada PA 128191



Sage German were allowed to live off the base with their parents. Both enjoyed the advantages of not having nearly as many rules and regulations while at the same time enjoying the respectability and security of their families. Dure and German related that they had the opportunity to wear civilian clothes rather than be in regulation uniform all the time as there was no one to report them. They thought this was an added bonus.⁴⁶

Living out on subsistence was not necessarily always attractive. This was especially true for the military women stationed overseas since physical danger was an ever-present reality as they were under the constant threat of German bombings. Many of the fifteen hundred RCAF WDs (Women's Division) serving in Britain lived out on subsistence allowance. One reason for this arrangement was the loss of many RAF controllers when their London barracks took a direct hit. After that, they wanted their staff located in different areas as a precautionary measure.⁴⁷ Jenny Pike, a WRCN dark room technician, comments that while serving in England she: "slept in the basement of the Canadian Naval Mission in London to avoid the bombing."⁴⁸ One unnamed WD said apartments on top floors were available anywhere in London. So when she was given her subsistence allowance she immediately found a top floor apartment. But in hindsight she suggested this had not been the smartest move of her military career. She recalls:

There were eighty-four steps up to our flat... One night Irene went to bed but I couldn't settle. I was washing up in the kitchen about 11:30 when I heard this drone
 There were eighty-four steps up to our flat... One night Irene went to bed but I couldn't settle. I was washing up in the kitchen about 11:30 when I heard this drone getting nearer and nearer, louder and louder. I opened the casement windows in the living room, just in time to see this V1, so close that I could have touched it. It dropped on an apartment block across the way and exploded. The blast sucked my windows shut. ...When I went back upstairs and into my bedroom, I found a big nut and bolt from the doodlebug lying on my pillow right where my head would have been.⁴⁹

Audrey Lindop while serving with the WRENS said that V-1s were the most frightening type of bombs. The V-1 was a “pilotless jet-propelled plane with a warhead containing one ton of high explosives”.⁵⁰ Lindop states:

Photo courtesy of the Lindop Family.



Audrey Lindop in uniform. After her marriage, she joined the British Women's Royal Naval Service (WRENS) working as a book corrector.

They were unmanned and very scary. I'll tell you that it's a funny thing that when you are bombed by someone who is alive, it has humanity attached to it. But when you have these beastly bombs, and there is nobody there, and the engine would just cut out, and down she came. They were very heavy. They came over very low and they had a flame at the back. They weren't headed for anything special, just so long as they could do damage. They were beastly. They were unmanned and very scary... I was frightened. And why not.⁵¹

Air woman Jean Inglis on her first night in London was staying in a RAF hostel for girls, right in the middle of the city. She remembers the fear: “I felt just a little squeamish when my girlfriends and I were billeted on the eighth floor because after all I had been reading in the newspapers and there were bombs! With resourcefulness that comes only from being scared to death we managed to find a room in a small private hotel.”⁵² They stayed there until they found themselves a safer place in which to live. Another WD's top floor flat not only had a leaky roof where the water poured in, but after experiencing her first air raid while in this flat, she said: “The vibration knocked

down a lintel from over the door of our room so we learned to duck.”⁵³ Melodie Massey related: “It was absolutely fabulous in London because you were billeted out rather than living in barracks.”⁵⁴ However Massey also recalls that it wasn’t always absolutely fabulous. During a mini blitz she remembers: “It was a bit scary—then the doodlebugs (V-1)...I don’t remember being terribly scared. There were blackouts all the time...if there was a raid, I remember that we slept below the stairs in the house where we lived. We slept there because it was the safest place. Ruby (Hughes) and I had gone to a bomb shelter and the smell was awful, so we decided that if we ‘bought it’ we would rather be where we were living.”⁵⁵

Civilian Boarding and Staff Housing

Despite the stress of bombing conditions, the military women who served overseas had a degree of freedom in locating accommodations which their Canadian civilian counterparts did not. General Electric and Genelco in Peterborough, Ontario, for example, were both classified “essential war industries and were thus key targets for government-labour recruiting strategies.”⁵⁶ Sangster says because of this shortage the government helped to relocate women from parts of Northern Ontario and Nova Scotia to supply labour for these plants.⁵⁷ Once these women were brought to Peterborough it was imperative to find respectable housing for them. Officials tried to procure chaperoned homes for the female workers and “appointed female welfare workers to look after the personal problems of the women.”⁵⁸ These welfare workers were regarded as “big sisters” who were theoretically to work for the employees and not for the plant hierarchy.⁵⁹ Through these measures companies attempted to protect the respectability and femininity of women through their moral management. This will be discussed further in chapter four.

In the later stages of World War II when labour shortages became more critical, Pierson notes that recruiting agents from ammunition plants in central Canada persuaded women from other provinces to relocate and take munitions jobs.⁶⁰ Gladys Greig was one of the many women imported from various parts of the country to work in a factory. During the war she worked at the Bata Shoe Factory, which had been converted into a munitions plant, in Batawa, Ontario. She

describes her living accommodations:

Living in a two-storey staff house built on the factory property I shared a second floor room with another young woman. There were two single beds, a small writing table and a chair and two clothes closets. ...for a small room and board charge, your room was cleaned and you were given clean bed linen and towels every week. You also received a meal ticket. A laundry room, to do personal laundry, was located at the end of the hall. The staff house was a five minute walk from the factory where the cafeteria was located on the second floor. We ate all our meals there. The meal ticket was punched each time it was used.⁶¹

Another wartime employer, C.H. Robinson, recruited young women from Saskatchewan and Alberta to work for an eastern munitions plant. The company paid transportation for the young women from their Saskatchewan homes. Upon arrival the young women were supplied with uniforms, which were laundered by the company. The young women were housed in dormitories each of which held one hundred occupants. Bedrooms were shared by two girls and each dormitory had laundry and washroom facilities. The dormitories were under the supervision of a qualified matron and each dormitory employed two house maids, who looked after the necessary cleaning. All of the buildings contained a spacious lounge as well as other attributes that provided the appearance of a homey women's club room. The meals were planned by trained dieticians and served in large cafeterias within the plant. The facility had regular entertainment during the week, including sports, dances and movies. The plant housed a medical staff with its own hospital, post office, beauty salon, bank and large recreational hall.⁶²

Photographs in the 1943 publication, *Women at War*, depict what many of these companies were trying to project as their public image. Working class women were photographed in their wartime housing dormitories, but to one unfamiliar with the setting, the image projected the appearance of a well appointed college sorority lounge filled with middle and upper-class students. According to the caption, the women in the photograph would be producing rifles the next day.⁶³

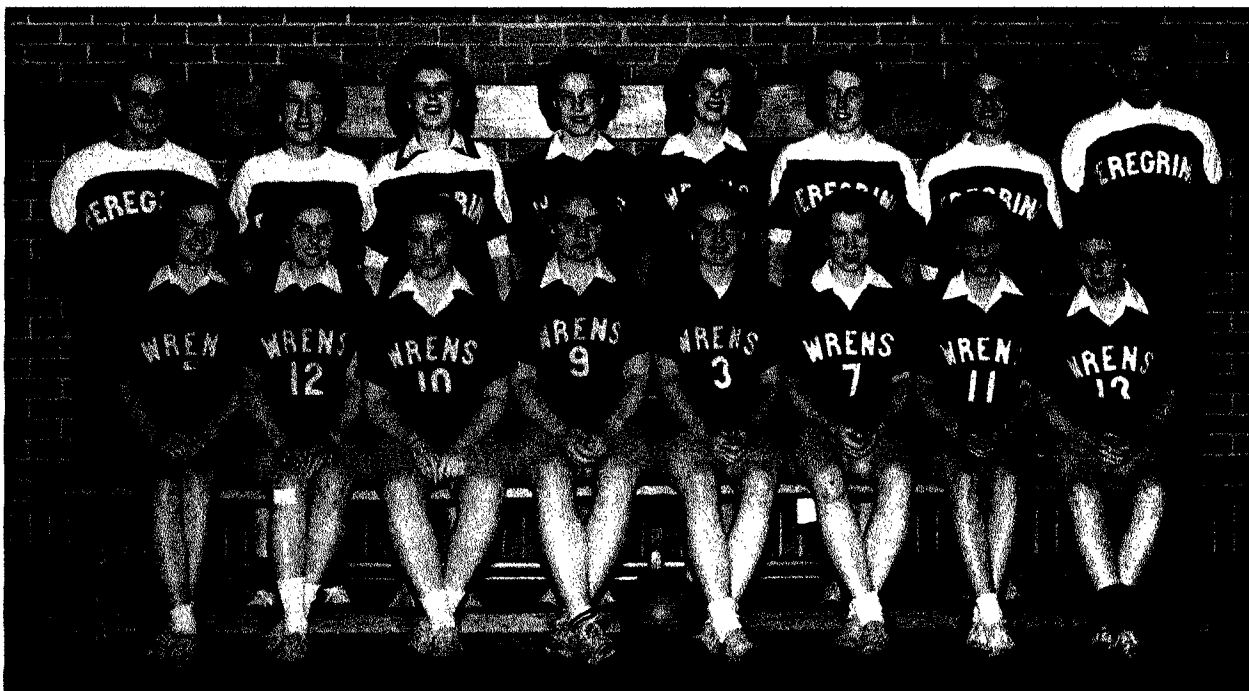


Photo courtesy of Jean Wade.

Jean Wade, top row, fifth from left, with HMCS Women's basketball team flanked by their male coaches at the Peregrine Naval Base.

Jean Wade at a dance in August, 1945, at HMCS Stadacona Naval Base. Naval personnel were required to wear their uniforms even while attending social functions.

Photo courtesy of Jean Wade.



The comfortable surroundings would appeal to many working-class women as it offered a lifestyle similar to that enjoyed by many middle-class women. The interviews and secondary literature show how the Women's Services similarly provided comparable amenities including uniforms and recreational activities such as competitive team sports, dances, swimming, movies and aerobic classes.⁶⁴

Unique Recycling and Salvaging

The Dominion government during World War II instituted recycling and salvaging measures. These measures were encouraged through articles, posters and photographs in magazines, newspapers and books. National salvage and recycling campaigns suggested hundreds of articles which could be profitably salvaged such as paper, glass, metals, old pots and pans, fat scraps and oils.⁶⁵ An article in *Chatelaine* magazine stated: "Canadians are becoming united in an effort to save marketable waste." The value of these salvaged articles was determined by the transportation charges, which made the distance from the collection point to the consumption point important.⁶⁶ Through recycling and salvaging some unique forms of housing developed.

The Dominion government's control over labour and materials prevented new houses or apartments from being constructed. With building supplies and skilled workmen allocated to war-time purposes civilian needs were secondary and much creativity was required to secure any form of accommodation.⁶⁷

One very unusual salvage project was undertaken in Edmonton, Alberta, where Doris Burton lived with her young son Ralph. Burton relates that housing was very difficult to find during the war years. When she found an apartment:

It was made out of airplane engine crates. When things were in short supply, it was a tremendous way of recycling. They repaired engines for the airforce in Edmonton and these were the big heavy crates the engines came in. They kept the boxes, and that's what the apartment was built from. It was a two storey building with eight apartments. I lived on the lower floor. It was a central hall plan, square in shape. It had a living room, a kitchen, a bathroom and two bedrooms. It looked like any other



Photo courtesy of Doris Burton.

Doris Burton with son Ralph in 1943 walking in downtown Edmonton, Alberta.

housing. You wouldn't know it was erected from airplane crates. The apartment building was still occupied many years later.⁶⁸

While her husband Gordon was overseas Burton lived for much of the time with her parents. It was not until near the end of the war that she moved into an apartment of recycled crates. After so many years of living under her parent's authority this new housing provided Burton with much more freedom in her own domestic space. Due to the housing shortages I don't believe Burton was the least concerned about the materials used in the construction of her apartment. I suspect it only became interesting to her in later

years, perhaps at the time of her interview. A follow-up telephone call confirmed this as Burton said, "I didn't really think about it until we discussed it."⁶⁹

Recycling was again a feature in wartime housing for Jean Long. Prior to the war she came from a comfortable middle-class background and lived at home. During the war Long found herself in unusual housing situations as she followed her husband Frank from one posting to another, but her housing was more primitive than Burton's apartment constructed from an engine crate. Long says that when they moved from Alberni to Vernon, British Columbia, she and some other wives lived in a converted chicken coop.

We had one pipe with cold water, and it went from the main house, through the chicken house. There were ten places with a partition between them and an army wife lived in every one. We used to have lots of fun because the one line (water) that

went from number one to number ten could be turned off in any of the spots. I used to turn off my tap so that meant nobody else down the line got any water. We were down the hill about a mile and one half from the regimental quarters. Outside there was a pile of wood and you had a stove. But you had to chop your own wood.⁷⁰



Photo courtesy of the Long Family.

Wartime photo of Jean Long in a glamour pose. Popular magazines and media promoted women's glamour.

After living in Vernon she relocated to Courtney on Vancouver Island and stayed on a chicken farm. Here she recalls: "The people moved their own family down to the front verandah hanging sheets all around it. And we girls stayed in the bedrooms upstairs while they slept on the verandah."⁷¹

A different mode of recycling provided housing for Eileen Topham, when she followed her husband Bill to the bombing and gunnery school at Dafoe, Saskatchewan:

It was a remote and lonely location...it was no picnic...the station had no accommodation whatsoever for families, with the result that a collection of old granaries, garages and shacks started to appear from out of nowhere directly across the road from the station gate. By the time I arrived there were about 150 shanties and a population of 400, wholly made up of young couples and children. The shanties

were rented to someone waiting on a long list. As always happens in situations of severe shortage, rents rose to exorbitant levels until finally the Wartime Prices and Trade Board stepped in and reduced them by an average of forty-five percent.

I couldn't quite believe it when I first saw that little shack that was to be our new abode. It was a converted grain barn measuring twelve by sixteen feet with a partition straight down the middle. One half was kitchen, dining room and living room and the other half housed a double bed and a chest of drawers. That was it.

In the living area, there was an old cook stove, a couch, and a drop leaf table with chairs. There was no electricity or water or inside plumbing of any kind. The biffy was outdoors, and all garbage had to be burned or buried. Water had to be purchased at five cents a pail from a local farmer whose truck came around twice a week. In between, we collected rain water or melted snow in the winter. All water, of course, had to be heated on the wood stove and the laundry had to be done by hand. I was a city girl learning about the other side of service life the hard way.

There was no refrigeration and dairy products had to be kept in a hole that was dug out under the floor. Sometimes the wives were allowed on the station to have a shower or to attend a social function.

Looking back, I realise now that we had more fun and comradeship there than at any other place. One had to be young and in love to make such an adjustment.⁷²

Topham's story of her experiences, and the other women's narratives all demonstrate that despite living under hardships, these women experienced a great sense of adventure.

Difficult living conditions held less sense of adventure for women such as Donna Chapman, who followed her air force husband to Fingal, Ontario. Chapman did not go alone, but was accompanied by her three young children. She describes the antiquated and austere living conditions that she and some other women had to endure:

The only accommodation we could find was a two-room apartment in an old farm

house, with no running water or hydro. I carried water in pails and washed diapers by hand. I had never experienced such primitive living before. There were four other families there all living under the same conditions.⁷³

The above examples of salvaging and recycling illustrate a unique approach to solving a housing shortage due to the fact that many materials required in building were being used for war-related purposes.

Summary

This chapter discusses the changes many wartime women made to their living arrangements in order to remain with their husbands and families, or to meet military and industrial labour demands. The interviews illustrate the unusual housing some women experienced. Often these facilities lacked what would, under normal conditions, be considered essential amenities. To compensate, recycling of materials was frequently arranged for in shelter construction. Institutional housing kept women in gendered spaces thereby helping to protect their respectability by placing certain controls and regimentation on their lives. Governments and labour organizations attempted to project and maintain a portrait of middle-class respectability with regard to the housing they provided for women. This was accomplished through the use of public relations, imagery and photo captions of life in these settings. The interviews attest to the fact that these images were not the reality. While many interviews reveal the lack of amenities and uncomfortable situations in which these women lived, they also reflect that despite those conditions the war years provided most women with a sense of adventure, more independence, greater freedom and the opportunity to push the boundaries of this new found freedom.

The Moral Management of Women

They didn't tell girls how to prevent pregnancy but they gave men condoms. I'll never forget as long as I live the vocab #4-122 mechanical prophylactics. I ordered enough of those ... to sink a ship.

Mavis Dure, CWAC

Many of the gender constructed ideologies and controls placed on women in regard to their respectability were discussed in previous chapters. In this chapter the general phrase I use to encompass the controlling practices of various organizations is the moral management of women. With regards to their sexuality and public environment, women's lives were regulated differently than that of men's. Double standards were established and reinforced by family practices and government and military regulations. These double standards were augmented in the popular media through advertising. I would argue that due to the double standards women's sexuality was the least liberating area of their wartime experiences. My interviews consider some of the numerous controls by which government and military authorities attempted to manage women's sexuality and morality during the war. However despite the double standards often encountered in their travel and living accommodations the interviews in these chapters demonstrated women were often able to find themselves in situations which were liberating.

In this chapter I discuss the impact that double standards held regarding women's sexuality and how these double standards maintained gender inequality through marking women as the party responsible for sexual impropriety. Women bore the blame and shame for heterosexual activities that resulted in disease, illegitimate pregnancies or abortions. Despite the stigma women were provided with limited information and protection from disease and illegitimate pregnancies. In addition this chapter analyzes some of the numerous regulations imposed upon women's sexuality which were supposedly designed to protect them. This chapter will also appraise female exploitation and the management of gendered spaces that occurred during the war.

Penny Summerfield notes that during times of war, "Women's departure from the female sphere was considered redolent with risk: they were themselves sexually threatening to men: they incurred sexual danger from them."¹ For example, women could be threatening to men by being

promiscuous and men could provide a threat to women through sexual harassment, rape and pregnancy. For these reasons military and state officials during the war feared that when women took on expanded freedom through new wage earning opportunities and different life styles, there would be an increased possibility of promiscuity.² During the war challenges occurred to the concepts of masculinity and femininity. While women retained their femininity, they were regarded as trespassing the boundary of femininity when performing within perceived masculine work domains. In such work roles women's sexuality was discerned as a threat to men but the reverse was not true.³

Throughout the war women's behaviour, appearance and morality often became the subject of private and public debate as these issues became matters of communal concern. The boundaries between public and private domains became blurred. These newly created spaces were neither public nor as private as they had once been. Since there were no 'rules' on how to behave in these new spaces both the government and military became alarmed with regards to the novel situation. This concern was expressed in a variety of regulations and policies issued by both of these organizations. While these authorities had concerns about propriety in these spaces women themselves also held concerns about how these environments might affect their prior notions regarding home and domesticity.⁴

Historical Precedents

The regulation of women's morality has various historical precedents. Summerfield states that both World War I suffragette campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst and World War II British feminist Dr. Edith Summerskill "understood and disparaged the way in which constructions of women's sexual morality were used to patrol the boundaries of women's changing roles at all times, but particularly in wartime." Summerfield argues that women who crossed, or attempted to cross, traditional gender boundaries were often suspect with regards to their intention. Whether they were fulfilling roles as wife, mother or girlfriend, if they crossed traditional sexual boundaries their action was still suspect. This suspicion extended even to the feminine task of comforting troops. While this task was generally recognized as necessary for morale, the task was fraught with suspi-

cion regarding possible ulterior motives.⁵ Similarly in her study on Canadian nursing Kathryn McPherson points out that student nurses were also regarded with suspicion and were expected to refrain from showing familiarity or initiating any form of sexual behaviour or social interaction with either male hospital personnel or male patients.⁶ Summerskill draws parallels between the public's alarm regarding uniformed women in World War II and historical attitudes held in the previous century relating to women's public persona. In this parallel, she states that there was a certain category of people, primarily older men, who were very vocal with the belief that a uniformed woman attracts characters of a disreputable nature.⁷ Historian Joan Sangster argues that prior to World War I the suffrage movements' ideologies focused on "the double standard that castigated women for their rejection of chastity and fidelity, for childbirth outside of marriage and for the sale of sex." She states that with a few exceptions, through the twentieth century in Canada "the law regulated the sexual activity of men and women in profoundly different ways, with heterosexual women subject to stricter policing and harsher stigmatization for sexual activity outside of marriage."⁸ Men and women were confined within an ideology that ordained roles for each sex that were often at odds with the facts of daily life.⁹ In her study of moral regulations, *Toronto's Girl Problems: The Perils and Pleasures of the City 1880-1930*, Carolyn Strange discusses several policies established for young working women which were put in place to disgrace and discourage women involving themselves in extra-marital sex. The Toronto YWCA established "a gendered scheme of supervision over the city's women adrift."¹⁰ As Strange indicates, the YWCA would cover "...the home front while morals police would supervise 'the world.'"¹¹ Strange discusses the many circumstances in which women's behaviour was regulated in a manner different from that of men.¹²

Nice Girls - Fallen Women

The war presented new opportunities for greater freedoms as many women were no longer under the watchful supervision of their families. These changing roles provided women with opportunities to assume jobs which previously had been considered predominantly a male preserve.

Many Canadians felt that women in these new job markets lead to a moral threat and consequently the only means of reducing moral impropriety was to reduce women's role in these newly created work areas.¹³ One reason many Canadians felt these new job markets were a threat to morality was that women now had more monetary resources. Middle-class commentators believed that such women were out at all hours frequenting dance halls and bars which, in turn, could lead to their promiscuity.¹⁴ Women's new employment opportunities also provided them with the financial independence to remain single and as such they would not need to be dependent upon a husband to support them.

Societal norms upheld respectable, heterosexual married sex and commitment to the family unit. Dorothy Chunn states "women in wartime have an important role in the guarding of the family standards... It is the first job of women ... to maintain the stability of her family, to keep it cozy and happy and see that her husband and children are properly fed."¹⁵ Sangster, however, says that during the war in some cases women were rejecting the sanctity of marriage and purity and this behaviour was seen as a challenge to the stability of the family and therefore the nation.¹⁶ Public expectations during the war suggest that: "For single women, motherhood was shameful no matter how they disposed of their children."¹⁷ There was a stigma attached to young single women becoming pregnant and women "who transgressed norms of public decency were ... fallen women."¹⁸

Perhaps the moral decline of some women was influenced by the popular media which encouraged women to be glamorous and sexy. Advertisements in magazines such as *Chatelaine* carried powerful messages concerning gender identity. Many of these advertisements promoted products that homemakers would use. However there were also many magazine advertisements promoting women's beauty products as a means of enhancing their sexuality. The objective of making themselves more visually attractive presumably enhanced their desirability to the opposite sex. Sangster writes that the war years brought with them an increase in dating as: "the wartime agenda made entertaining visiting soldiers a respectable if not patriotic past time."¹⁹ However along with this culture of dating came warnings issued by community leaders and parents relating to the boundaries of sexual and moral danger. Women were still expected to follow rules and curfews and

if they did not the consequences could be as dire as being in trouble with the law. Staying out all night could label young women as promiscuous resulting in possible incarceration in a provincial reformatory.²⁰

Double Standards: Venereal Disease, Birth Control, Illegitimate Pregnancies and Abortion

Within the military, the double standard for women with regard to venereal disease and pregnancy outside of marriage was firmly entrenched during the war. As Ruth Roach Pierson states, “like men, some service women had pre-marital or extra-marital sexual encounters, raising concerns over venereal infection and pregnancy.”²¹ However, military authorities provided women with neither birth control information nor contraceptives, unlike their male counterparts. Women engaged in premarital sex were considered to be violating the dominant gender ideology of this period. It is ironic that the government withheld birth control information but, intentionally or unintentionally, supported birth control by providing service men with condoms. The oral inter-



Photo courtesy of Kate Hall.

Kate Hall during the war in uniform as a volunteer of the National Executive, Girl Guides of Canada. Note the military influence of the uniform.

views also reflect the lack of information women were given in regards to their personal health during the war. When asked about lectures concerning birth control Mavis Dure stated, “They didn’t tell girls how to prevent pregnancy but they gave men condoms to prevent VD.”²² Early in the war, Kate Hall was the head nurse at a Venereal Disease clinic in Vancouver, BC. Even though Hall studied gynecology and maternity during her nurses’ training, she said, “We weren’t given information about birth control in our nurses’ training, I trained in a Catholic hospital. Enough said.”²³ This lack of information is not unusual in light of twentieth century Roman Catholic prohibition of any form of contraception except for the rhythm method.²⁴ As a nurse, Hall

knew condoms were used for the prevention of venereal disease, but she stated in her interview that she did not know they could be used as a form of birth control.

I believe there are additional reasons for this situation. First, birth control only gained a small degree of public respectability in the 1930s. Second, women did not have access to reliable and effective birth control measures.²⁵ Third, many women could not get birth control information from their doctors as “physicians saw most forms of birth control as unnatural and representing women’s rejection of motherhood. Doctor’s castigated women for limiting the size of their families.”²⁶ Fourth, until the mid-1930’s Canada had no strong birth control movement, unlike Britain and the United States.²⁷

Venereal Disease: Shame, Stigma, Imprisonment

The nineteenth century medical profession had already set a double standard for men and women regarding venereal disease. Historian Wendy Mitchinson in her book, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and their Doctors in Victorian Canada*, states that medical records reveal that doctors, when presented with a case of sexually transmitted disease, responded differently to women than to men. Doctors who treated men who contracted a sexually transmitted disease tended to blame the woman for the problem. By contrast doctors who treated women who contracted a sexually transmitted disease indicated little concern of linking the infection to sexual intercourse with a man.²⁸

During the war there was an abundance of information disseminated concerning the prevention of venereal disease. Two key themes emerge from the interviews. First, venereal disease was a problem due to increased sexual activity and second, men and women diagnosed with this disease were treated quite differently.

Pierson notes, “the aura of prejudice surrounding VD clung more tenaciously to female victims than to male.”²⁹ If a woman contracted a venereal disease or became pregnant she was stigmatized, with a loss of respectability. Moreover, a strong sense of shame was attached to her actions. Pierson further states that, unlike men, “a woman exposed to VD was left to become a casualty. Women were not issued any mechanical contraceptive devices and they were not provided

with any chemical or other means to cleanse themselves after possible exposure to infection.”³⁰ According to Pierson the consensus was that venereal disease spread through promiscuity and promiscuity was considered immoral and therefore the contraction of sexually transmitted diseases was shameful.³¹ Shame was further reinforced when military women who had been treated for venereal disease were, when possible, given a different posting in order to protect them from the humiliation of having contracted this infection. This plan had the opposite effect. Rather than providing them with confidentiality, moving them attached a stigma to their character. This policy measure was later rescinded.³²

Sangster considers that eradicating venereal disease provided a reason for moral regulation. A state and military campaign “reflected fears that as women left the home sphere for untraditional jobs and lives, they would become ‘proletarianized’ and thus promiscuous.” During both wars venereal disease was frequently coupled with promiscuity and prostitution.³³ Sangster cites statistics which present a marked increase in the number of women being sent to the Mercer Reformatory for Women for prostitution during the early 1940s.³⁴ Statistics indicate there were 10,000 more occurrences of venereal disease in 1943 than in 1942.³⁵ Statistics Canada provides nationwide data indicating that between 1939 and 1941 the reported cases of civilian venereal disease rose from 7,826 to 12,777. These numbers were greater in the case of the military, where between the beginning of January, 1940 and the end of June, 1943, over 35,000 soldiers contracted venereal disease.³⁶ Between 1943 and 1945 The Venereal Disease Act which regulated sexual offenses was used extensively for the moral management of some women. According to Sangster more women were sentenced to the Mercer Reformatory for breaches of the Venereal Disease Act than for both bawdy-house and street walking infractions.³⁷

Alison Prentice comments that a large number of service women were suffering from venereal disease, but a “much greater effort was expended on setting up preventative programs for men” than for women.³⁸ Literature in various forms, movies and posters provided a constant awareness of the war against venereal disease. Pierson points out that venereal disease control in the CWAC did not use education as its main preventative policy. Posters regarding the

concern for sexually transmitted diseases for the women's barracks were in short supply whereas similar posters for the men's barracks were plentiful.³⁹ CWAC Kay Mann's interview supports this statement. She states she witnessed many signs regarding venereal disease in the men's barracks. One example she related was a sign saying "She may be pure as the driven snow, but ?"⁴⁰ Pierson found that "despite the alarm over the incidence of VD in the female services, the actual numbers involved were small;" between January and June 1943, for example, the reported number of cases in 9,829 CWAC's living in Canada was one hundred and twenty-seven.⁴¹ Prentice and Pierson are in agreement when the latter comments that the venereal disease program for women fell short: "The dominant idea was that men needed protection from women, not vice-versa."⁴² The Government initiated a widespread effort to control sexually transmitted diseases by distributing condoms to male military personnel.⁴³

Supporting this observation Jean Long said that when she and her husband Frank were in Port Rupert you couldn't get condoms as "they were gone as fast as they came in."⁴⁴ Mavis Dure worked in a clerical capacity at the medical supply office in Ottawa. Her interview attests to the large volume of condoms being issued. She states:

Sgt. Mavis Dure, CWAC, back row right, head of the typing pool at Central Medical Supplies in Ottawa, 1945.



Photo courtesy of the Dure Family.

They didn't tell girls how to prevent pregnancy but they gave men condoms. I'll never forget as long as I live the VOCAB #4-122, mechanical prophylactics. I ordered enough of those, I am telling you, to sink a ship, and they were always on back order, always!⁴⁵

Officials even went so far as to establish twenty-four hour prophylactic stations for soldiers.⁴⁶ After the war Air Force authorities also confirmed the vast numbers of condoms that were issued.⁴⁷ This would indicate that men were encouraged to be virile and protected from disease. Conversely women were encouraged to be feminine but not sexually active. This raises the question: with which females were the men having sexual relations? Melodie Massey was the only woman interviewed who admitted to having pre-marital sex. In her early interviews Massey had alluded to sexual misconduct but did not discuss it specifically. In a follow-up interview she stated that when living overseas promiscuity was not uncommon particularly for service women who were living out on subsistence allowance. She stated these women had a great deal of "freedom and were footloose and fancy free." Massey acknowledged that she transgressed the dominant norms of femininity and had premarital sexual relationships while she was in the RCAF WDs. She also stated in regard to condoms that "I must have realized condoms stopped pregnancy because back then pregnancy was a terrible disgrace for any single woman and her family."⁴⁸

According to wartime media representations service men were threatened by the prostitute. Posters depicted easy and loose women as being the villains. Government booklets published in the fight against venereal disease showed the female prostitute to be a "reservoir of VD." However, Pierson cites statistics in her study indicating the casual pick-up was a more serious problem than were prostitutes. Women who were classified as casual pick-ups encompassed a broad spectrum which included housewives, office workers, factory workers and waitresses. In a 1944 study in Saskatchewan figures indicated that 90.4% of the women who contracted sexually transmitted diseases were casual pick-ups.⁴⁹ It appears that venereal disease was considered a service man's worst enemy, whereas getting a woman pregnant appears to have held little consequence for the men involved. Adele Saunders supports this conclusion by stating that there was a valuable loss of

manpower created by venereal disease. A top military priority was to eradicate this disease.⁵⁰ Critical manpower shortages provided a reason for the military to treat the infected men and to return them to active service.

Venereal disease was a health issue whereby women received different information and regulation from that of men. Within the military authority there was a double standard regarding sexual behaviour as service men were not held to the same level of social propriety as were women. If they contracted a venereal disease they were treated and retained in the military service. Contracting venereal disease and becoming pregnant outside of marriage created terrible fears for respectable women; both situations could cause long term consequences regarding marriage, home and child-bearing. Service women who contracted venereal disease were much more likely to be discharged.⁵¹ In December 1941 a joint meeting of the services concluded that for service women venereal disease would be handled by providing them notification that they required treatment and they were discharged from the service. This resolution was yet another way of delegating women to an inferior position. However the same military authorities changed the previous regulation in July 1942 when they determined that service women would be held to the same standard as service men and treated in the same way as their male counterparts. This change in status for service women was initiated when the CWAC officially became part of the Canadian Army thus making it difficult for the military hierarchy to have different policies for men and women.⁵²

The Big Secret: Birth Control

Historians Angus and Arlene McLaren discuss the Canadian birth control debates and campaigns from 1880 to 1980 by outlining the ways in which women tried to limit their fertility through various methods. They state: "Only in 1969 was the Canadian Criminal Code amended so that the provision of contraceptives ceased to be illegal."⁵³ Prior to and during the war "contraception was often ineffective and limited in availability."⁵⁴ For example, the most widespread methods employed were coitus interruptus, extended lactation when nursing, vaginal spermicidal jelly, condoms and the use of a diaphragm.⁵⁵ Birth control pills were not in use until 1963 and Canadian doctors were not allowed to prescribe them until 1970.⁵⁶ Conversely Mitchinson states there is evidence

Canadians were using various methods of birth control which caused a decline in fertility rates. By the mid 1800s there was a considerable drop in fertility rates and one of the reasons Mitchinson cites for this decline is the numerous birth control techniques available.⁵⁷ This would indicate many women managed to find ways of limiting their fertility, even if birth control technology was limited in availability.

However, the armed forces did little to provide women with information regarding birth control. In her interview Mavis Dure (CWAC) recalls: "There were many things that I learned in the army. They had a lot of lectures on health and what to look for, like crabs and VD."⁵⁸ WRCN Sage German's interview reinforces this observation. German says: "I remember the most horrendous movie on syphilis, certainly I don't remember anything on birth control."⁵⁹ In contrast to the public information regarding venereal disease, the lack of information regarding birth control may have caused many women to have unplanned pregnancies due to ignorance of their reproductive systems. It is more than possible that because women had little knowledge of their reproductive systems, they also would not have had knowledge regarding the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Issues of *Maclean's* magazine from February and March 1944 provide illustrated warnings alerting the public to the dangers of venereal disease. One particular illustration depicts a young attractive woman suggesting she may be the cause of the disease spreading. The text is concerned with manpower shortages and not the women who may have contracted the disease.⁶⁰ An analysis of *Chatelaine* from 1939 through 1945 reveals no articles or advertisements regarding birth control, whereas information regarding venereal disease was substantial. For example Saunders, *Chatelaine* magazine's medical reporter, suggests in one article that it was Canadian women's responsibility "to organize as a great fighting force against this national menace VD." In the article she lists various methods designed to prevent the spread of venereal disease and says that by educating people venereal disease would never be "contracted through ignorance."⁶¹

When asked if they had been given information on birth control Babs Gardner (WRCN) emphatically said, 'None!'⁶² Toad Gould only learned of birth control when her husband Norm was issued free condoms while in the service.⁶³ Ede Burger also said in those days she never



Wartime photo of Helen
'Toad' Gould. (Left)



Wartime photo of
Edith Burger. (Right)

Photo courtesy of the Gould Family.

Photo courtesy of Edith Burger.

Photograph of Evelyn Miller who worked as
a rural school teacher during World War II.

Photo courtesy of the Miller Family.



heard about birth control and she never knew about condoms. In her interview she said: "Certain things I used to ask my mother and my mother didn't know so she used to say go and ask your dad. We would go and ask dad and he would say go back and ask your mother and that was the end of the questions."⁶⁴ Evelyn Miller grew up on her family farm and said she and her sisters were never allowed to stay around when the animals were mating.⁶⁵ These interviews reinforce that for many middle class women sex and birth control issues were considered a taboo subject. Due to societal attitudes and practices these topics were not discussed openly or publicly. This resulted in many women being ignorant of knowledge that could be used to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Illegitimate Pregnancies

Referring to the early period of women's military service, Sage German (WRCN) states: "The fate for any single woman who became pregnant was a discharge from the military."⁶⁶ Melodie Massey's (RCAF WD) transcript describes one such incident. While she was stationed in Gander, Newfoundland, she and her friend Liliás bunked with forty or fifty other women.

There were two Newfie girls. They worked in the laundry. You couldn't understand a word they said, but they were absolutely fabulous. They both ended up being discharged because they took boys home and they both got pregnant... When we first joined the Air Force, if you became pregnant, you were dishonourably discharged. They changed this later on. You could have the baby, keep the baby, and get out honourably, or you could stay in the service, but you had to put the baby up for adoption. That was much fairer.⁶⁷

These statements clearly demonstrate the harsh realities for service women having an illegitimate child, a reality which service men did not have to face. Barb Jones (WRCN), in her capacity as a naval regulator, said that there were "lots of quick discharges" and part of her job was dealing with them. Her interview reflects the humiliation these women suffered. Jones describes how the regulators had to escort these women about the base and ensure that all the paper work which was required for the discharge was completed.⁶⁸ A former WRCN said of one young girl who was discharged due to pregnancy: "The poor thing was unmarried and she was terrified to go home to her parents."⁶⁹ Incidences such as these left many women in a vulnerable position, and they were twice maligned. They were stigmatized both by their peers who looked down upon them, and the military who dishonourably discharged them. One example is provided by Mavis Dure who recalled when the rules regarding a dishonourable discharge for CWAC women changed. "It was when one of our officers got pregnant. Things suddenly changed and she was not dishonourably discharged." Rank and class appear to have held privilege with regard to military discipline. As Dure said, "Why should it be OK for the officer and not for the poor little private."⁷⁰

Men on the other hand were not held accountable for their participation in a female's preg-

nancy. No discharge occurred as a result of men's amorous actions and "the reputations of the men were unaffected."⁷¹ Pierson said that "promiscuity was not uncommon among those serving the war effort, both at home and abroad."⁷² Prentice states that "Canadian service men accounted for 90 percent of the fathers named by CWACs discharged for pregnancy."⁷³ Even though military and government officials were aware of heightened promiscuity, they did not reinforce public awareness regarding birth control.

These narratives reflect the tensions and contradictions surrounding women's sexuality in regard to birth control, venereal disease, and pregnancy outside of marriage, especially among women in the military. They illustrate the double standards for women and men which existed in the Canadian services. While male military authorities attempted to ameliorate the problems with regards to pregnancy and venereal disease, they were unwilling to fashion policies of equal consequences, treatment, or morality for men and women under their jurisdiction.

Abortion

McLaren's vital statistical information from 1930 through 1950 reveals that during the war years abortion deaths for women increased and this increase he suggests was due to the fact that more women were looking at the option of terminating their pregnancies.⁷⁴ McLaren further notes that during the 1930's and 1940's "the absolute number of abortion deaths was frighteningly high."⁷⁵ He argues that the increase in abortion deaths occurred because women were seeking the aid of abortionists or they were attempting to induce their own abortions. McLaren states: "because women were forced to work within an illegal system, they were at a much higher risk of exposure to unsanitary conditions and to methods that were dangerous and undependable...despite the illegality of the procedure more and more women were seeking to terminate their pregnancies."⁷⁶ McLaren argues that both the medical profession and government officials were lax in providing safe abortion procedures and reliable birth control information for women.⁷⁷ Social disgrace and moralizing attitudes might well have contributed to the abrupt increase in abortions that occurred during the war. The increase in the abortion rate provides evidence of women's sexual activity and their possible attempts to exercise some degree of control of their bodies. The subject of abortion never arose

with any of my interviewees. Perhaps the reason for this is that I never explicitly questioned them regarding this topic: abortion was a taboo subject for middle class women, even more so than birth control.

Other Methods of Regulating Women's Sexuality

Melodie Massey related an incident of women regulating other women during her posting in Newfoundland: "You weren't supposed to neck with anyone. The military even had female Airforce Police that went out in cars with search lights just to see whether you were necking or not."⁷⁸ The police were not worried about what the men might be doing. The military's primary concern was to safeguard what they envisioned to be a woman's honour. This policing policy was another example of the military's double standard relative to women's sexual conduct. Using women to regulate other women was not an uncommon occurrence. Jeff Keshen states that in order to supervise and manage women acting as apparent prostitutes, municipalities hired additional female officers to act as moral patrols.⁷⁹

Another interesting moral management scheme designed to regulate sexuality undertaken by the military may have been the use of saltpetre (potassium nitrate). Saltpetre was thought to reduce sexual proclivities in both sexes. One former RCAF (WD) thought saltpetre was being used. She recalled:

No wonder we were all so tranquil. You could taste it (saltpetre) unmistakably in the juice, and it was supposed to keep your sexual impulses in rein. It wasn't really effective, I'm afraid. People's urges were stronger than the saltpetre!⁸⁰

Exploitation of Female Sexuality

In direct contrast to their attempts to control women's sexuality, military authorities at times used it to serve their own purposes. They exploited female sexuality to facilitate their agenda and attempted to enhance women's femininity through appearance codes, especially the uniform and the use of cosmetics. Historian Phil Goodman states: "In the construction of 'patriotic femininity' wearing a uniform, real or imagined, became part of the glamorous image of women during the

war.”⁸¹ Wartime enlistment campaigns reinforce Goodman’s statement. The focus in photographic recruitment advertisements and movies show glamorous women in uniform illustrating that women would not lose their femininity by wearing a uniform. These advertisements and movies also demonstrate the dominant masculine position of the time and the secondary support role in which women were portrayed. One RCAF enlistment campaign portrayed young attractive women in uniform and was captioned “Those keen young airmen are tomorrow’s fighting heroes. Wouldn’t you like to be there to help them on their way.”⁸² Media presented men in a position of dominance, while women were to remain acquiescent reinforcing that women were unequal partners in society.



Photo courtesy of the Tate Family.

Stella Tate aboard HMCS Owen Sound in October, 1944, selling Victory Loan Bonds to crew members. This was a publicity photograph to help boost victory bond sales.

An example of women’s sexual exploitation utilized by the military was demonstrated in one of Stella Tate’s experiences as a uniformed WRCN:

I was assigned to Lieut. Clyde Gilmour to go aboard the ships to sell war bonds. It is something that has always made me feel a little uncomfortable because I think how you looked, the cheesecake, and that sort of thing got played up a little. The boys really enjoyed having an attractive looking young nurse come aboard to encourage them to buy war bonds. What made me uncomfortable was that some of them signed

up for bonds which they could ill afford to do.⁸³

Massey reflected upon a parallel experience whereby service women's sexuality was exploited to facilitate another purpose.

We were sent to Gander (Nfld) to boost morale because there had been so many suicides. We were never told that this was the reason we were sent. It was a conclusion we drew later. It was a pretty obvious one as there were no American or Canadian Army girls on the station. After we arrived I think there was only one suicide.⁸⁴

These statements reflect the ambivalence in attitudes and tension surrounding women's sexuality present in the military during the war.

Gendered Spaces

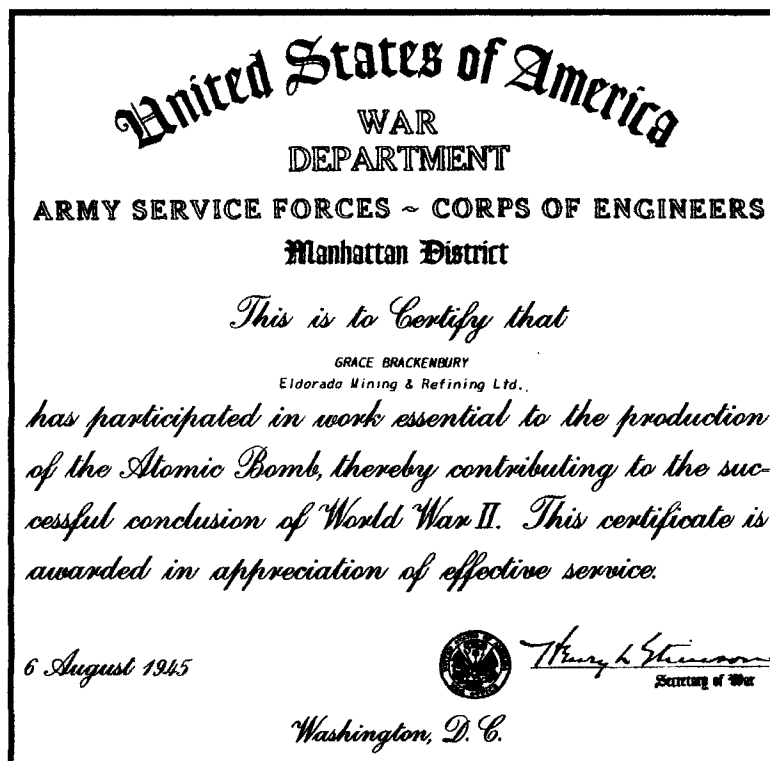
The moral management of women not only included regulating their sexuality but also included the management of gendered spaces. One incidence of this was revealed in an interview with Grace Brackenbury. In the early spring of 1942 a new market for uranium opened with developmental work on the atomic bomb. Canadian scientists and laboratories were employed in the American project code-named The Manhattan Project.⁸⁵ Brackenbury was the chief scientist of the laboratory at Eldorado Nuclear in Port Hope, Ontario where U_3O_8 (uranium oxide) was produced. This compound was a vital component in the manufacture of the atomic bomb. Brackenbury said "No one at our plant at that time knew because of the secrecy of the whole project."⁸⁶ During the latter years of the war Brackenbury made several trips to Washington, D.C. At the end of the war she was the only woman invited to Washington by the Corps of Engineers to attend a conference concerning the Manhattan Project. At the conference Brackenbury said General Groves, the head of the project,

got up at the beginning of the meeting and invited all the gentlemen present to go to the Army-Navy Club for lunch and then he looked at me, and he said, "I'm very sorry Miss Brackenbury that we cannot invite you to join us because it is men only. I have arranged for some of the ladies at the department to take you to lunch."⁸⁷



Photo courtesy of Grace Brackenbury.

Grace Brackenbury, Chief Chemist at Eldorado Mining and Refining Ltd., Port Hope, Ontario.



Document courtesy of Grace Brackenbury.

Certificate of Appreciation awarded to Grace Brackenbury by the U.S. War Department for her contributions to the development of the atomic bomb.

Even though Brackenbury held a senior position at Eldorado and was responsible for a key component in the construction of the atomic bomb, she was relegated to have lunch with the women. In response to my asking how she felt about this, she said "It didn't bother me. I was just glad to not have to go with all those big people."⁸⁸ Brackenbury's response did not indicate any feelings of gender inequality regarding the separate male-female sphere. However it did reflect her intimidation and discomfort in a situation where she was the only woman with a large number of powerful men. The inequity of male-female professional relationships was so ingrained at the time that some of these divisions were accepted as normal.

Summary

The information and interviews in this chapter illustrate the double standards employed during the war in an attempt to control Canadian women as sexual beings. Even though women

enjoyed expanded freedom they still remained under “a gendered scheme of supervision” imposed by socially constructed ideologies.⁸⁹ This regulation was effected in several ways, including the lack of dissemination of information about birth control, the portrayal of venereal disease as a woman’s responsibility, the women-blaming treatment of extramarital pregnancies, the military policing of women’s morals, the organization of gendered spaces, and the practice of reinforcing marriage and motherhood as the key role for both civilian and military women during the war. Even though women’s sexuality was regulated, statistics in this chapter regarding venereal disease, abortion and pre-marital pregnancy show that many women transgressed the prevailing norms of femininity.

The double standard imposed on women who veered from this role cast them in a position of being morally loose by branding them as promiscuous. Promiscuity would place them in virtually the same category as that of a prostitute. Men’s sexuality, however, was encouraged through the issuing of condoms at government expense in order to protect men from venereal disease, a strategy that pre-supposed the existence of promiscuous women. It was argued that “public morality could excuse male sexual philandering while at the same time simultaneously castigating female impropriety for its potential to pollute.”⁹⁰ This ill-disguised double standard made women a handy scapegoat to blame for the spread of venereal disease.⁹¹ Women, not men, also were held responsible for illegitimate pregnancies and were being punished for transgressing the boundaries of respectability. During World War II attempts by both military and civilian institutions to constrain women’s sexuality and behaviour created double standards with regard to men’s and women’s moral regulation. Through various forms of regulation, surveillance and policing on the part of government, military officials, and the family, women’s sexuality was supposedly protected. Simultaneously, however, these same institutions endangered women’s sexuality by withholding information and treatment which could have provided them with safe protection of their bodies. The government’s main priority was to protect the interests and morale of both military and civilian men and in so doing maintained the unequal status of women.

Conclusion

Canadian Women did a great job in Canada and overseas. To my dying day, I will never forget entering St. John's harbour, coming from the suffocating feeling of darkness into the lights.

Audrey Lindop, British WREN

The war was exciting, exhilarating, very maturing, and we felt we were essential to the war effort. It was wonderful to feel we were needed and that feeling is still with me today. I think we felt great pride. We loved the senior service and we were proud to be in uniform.

Sage German, WRCNS

My concluding comments will consider two topics. First, I will describe briefly the post-war lives of my interviewees, and second, I will return to the debate regarding the significance of World War II for the lives of Canadian women.

Post-war Lives of the Interviewees

After the war several of the women interviewed returned to the domestic sphere assuming the role of wife and mother. Others, though, showed active resistance to the idea that this was the only option for women. The post-war interviews reflected for many women the war did indeed change their lives. The war opened new and challenging roles for some of these women and established new public and private spaces. The very idea that women's place and only place was in the home was challenged. Both civilian and service women interviewed experienced change and new opportunities which possibly would not have happened had it not been for the war. Through the unconventional experiences women were exposed to during the war they understood the possibilities of accepting roles beyond that of wife and mother. Although several of the women married and raised families, it was not the ultimate fate for all. After Babs Gardner was demobilized from the women's service, she enrolled at the University of Toronto, studying towards her Master's degree in English on her Department of Veterans' Affairs credits. However when her boyfriend returned from overseas she dropped out of the program. Gardner stated, "I hated the term class but in regard to marriage she said "That's what women in my class did...you didn't work unless you had to."¹ Similarly when Mavis Dure was demobbed she said, "I didn't do anything after I was in the army, but I waited for Johnny (her husband) to come marching home, and we were married."² Audrey

Lindop, Jean Wade, Jean Long, Toad Gould, Doris Burton, Margaret Creighton, Helen Thompson, Helen Fulford and Ede Burger were all married to active servicemen. At the war's conclusion when their husbands returned home they settled into the role of wife, mother and homemaker. Betty Baxter and Kay Mann were also married and became homemakers but did not have children. The women who remained at home continued to volunteer their time and energies and took on leadership roles in numerous community and charitable causes, including organizations like the Canadian Red Cross, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Hospital Auxiliaries, Church groups, ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), Girl Guides of Canada, Hospice, Meals-on-Wheels, ACO (Architectural Conservancy of Ontario) and the Salvation Army.

However, not all the women interviewed for this thesis conformed to these ideals and patterns. Some showed active resistance to the cultural constructs generated by patriarchal biases. Some women showed a resistance to conformity and what was considered the norm or the conventional. Many of the women took steps to alleviate the post-war let down that many Canadian women were experiencing. Stella Tate's husband Ian had proposed to her during the war. At that time she did not accept his marriage proposal. Tate had graduated as an Occupational Therapist and wanted to stay in the labour force in her chosen field. After being demobilized she returned to Edmonton, Alberta, and worked at the Veteran's Hospital. Six years later she married Ian but continued to work until the birth of her first child. After her youngest child's fourth birthday Tate re-entered the work force. She felt that she played an important role in establishing the occupational department at the Toronto Crippled Children's Centre (Hugh Macmillan Centre). Prior to her retirement she was a special projects manager for the Ontario Ministry of Health. Tate did not find it necessary to measure her worth solely through her domestic status.³

Similarly Kate Hall and Ev Miller, who were both married and raised families, chose to expand their world beyond their domestic status. In 1953, when her daughters were in school, Hall returned to her nursing career and at the age of forty she enrolled in, and completed, her nursing degree in Administration at the University of Ottawa. Miller followed a parallel course also attending the University of Ottawa where she received her Bachelor of Nursing Science (Public Health

Nursing). Hall and Miller pursued careers in their chosen nursing fields. Now in their eighties both these women remain vital and active. Miller operates a respite bed and breakfast in Ottawa for families with patients in Ottawa hospital and Hall resides in Nanaimo, B.C., and has recently been presented with the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award.⁴

Vi Warren married after the war and with her husband Arnold worked as a bush pilot and conducted aviation work in Asia. June Callwood, a contributor to *Chatelaine* magazine, dubbed Warren 'the bush angel,' the only female bush pilot in the world. Through her career Warren logged over seventy thousand hours on sixty different types of aircraft. Currently she lives in a log cabin in the countryside near Grafton, Ontario.⁵

Grace Brackenbury and Barb Jones remained single. After the war Brackenbury accepted a position at the Bureau of Mines in Ottawa. Seeking a change in career she returned to school and graduated with a Dietetic Internship Diploma from the Vancouver General Hospital. She remained in her new career as an administrator and senior consultant until her retirement in 1978. Jones taught physical education at a Toronto private girl's school until she retired to Port Hope, Ontario.⁶

Jean Migotti, Helen Strathy and Pat Richan all married later in life. Each of these women's husbands had been previously married and each had children by their previous marriage. Migotti, Strathy and Richan assumed a mother's role for all of these children. Migotti's career spanned a variety of jobs in numerous locations throughout Canada. At one time she was secretary to Canada's first Canadian Governor General Vincent Massey. After the war Strathy returned to the University of Toronto to complete her degree. She then created a career for herself at Bell Telephone of Canada. Richan pursued an administrative career which took her to England, Montreal and Toronto.⁷

Sage German and Melodie Massey were more adventuresome than many of their peers. Following her demobilization, German travelled to England and experienced the aftermath of war-time London. She remained overseas for a year working as a stock broker. She married her husband Tony who had a permanent career in the Canadian navy. As a naval couple they travelled extensively.⁸ Massey's first husband was an American serviceman she had only known for a short period of time. Following the birth of a daughter, her marriage ended in divorce. In 1948 she married Hart

Massey, son of Governor General Vincent Massey. Massey had been born into the upper class as the daughter of the Senior Aide-de-Camp at Government House in Ottawa and her divorce at the time went against gender and class ideals of respectability. She resided in London, England for two years. Upon her return to Canada she learned that she was dyslexic, but in spite of this handicap she worked at the University of Ottawa's Child Study Centre as a remedial teacher. She has travelled extensively and has become a well-known stitchery artist.⁹

These women, along with those interviewed in other primary and secondary resources, have provided invaluable information for analyzing the primary themes of this dissertation: women's wartime mobility, women's living spaces and the regulation of women's sexuality. Their oral narratives provide a valuable vehicle through which we may capture the past. Through these women's individual and cumulative voices a collective history regarding their daily lives, feelings, emotions, environment, culture and other aspects of their individuality emerges. Their narrative insights demonstrate how the war disrupted many social conventions which defined the gender order. They also reinforce the notion that had it not been for the war, women might not have experienced such economic and sexual changes, spatial disruption, increased mobility and potential liberation. The interviews reflect that for these women the war provided a variety of experiences including adventure, fun, expanded latitude, respect, maturity, self-esteem, confidence, personal autonomy and greater self-sufficiency. War created a new confidence in many Canadian women so that they could cross gendered boundaries and be successful. One former RCAF WD and Strathy in their interviews suggest how the war may have changed some women's views in regard to their roles in society.

During the war we did everything a man could do except fight, and after it was all over there was a lot of unrest as well as happiness and sadness, all mixed in together. Some women were saying to themselves, "I don't really want to have children. I don't have to be a housewife. I want my own freedom, now, because I proved that I am as smart as any other person"...so if people did marry they had a different outlook, because they were different women than they had been before the war. And

they raised a different generation of children because of it.¹⁰

Strathy states:

I think the war years for someone in my place was a good thing because the expectation of what might life might have been changed. Before the war you stayed at home until you got married because if your family could support you you didn't take a job away from someone who needed it so the expectation was you would stay at home and do genteel volunteer work. Some women never moved out of that role including some of my friends. I think the war was a turning point. It made me face a future of working and doing something with my life instead of sitting at home. I'm grateful women started working. I finished school and went into the business world.

I had a career.¹¹

The interviews also support the contention that during the war women lived under double standards and discrimination. Nevertheless, they made strides towards liberation and advanced the position of Canadian women. As the interviews suggest, government and military policies and rules were not always adhered to. Women pushed boundaries which disrupted the social conventions which defined the gender order. They left their homes and entered public spaces. Many travelled extensively across the country and overseas. They accepted jobs in the industrial sector, worked on farms, volunteered their labour and joined the newly formed women's military services. Canada was the first nation in the Commonwealth to admit women as an integral part of the naval service with gender equality in non-combatant roles, not just as an auxiliary force. Canadian women in the CWAC were also part of the first all-female pipe band in the world. The very presence of women in the military, even though they were non-combatants, was an unprecedented break with tradition and demonstrates the great strides women made if these were only for a short duration. During the war the military provided its female personnel with new opportunities and worked towards a greater equality of wages. Through these opportunities women found a form of liberation. Barbara Winters argues, "Women who served in the military during the war proved what feminists had been arguing over all along—women are capable of doing most of the work men do."¹²

Revisiting the Debates

The narratives of the interviewees and the debates in the literature by Winters, Jeff Keshen and Heather Moran, which expand on Ruth Roach Pierson's work, clearly indicate a pattern of historic change took place in many areas of women's lives. Through a critique of Pierson's work Winters challenges Pierson's "claims that female service participation was so limited that it precluded any fundamental change in gender relations."¹³ Winters argues that Pierson's evaluations of the military are based entirely on the CWAC and she had not taken into consideration the other women's services.

First, unlike the CWAC and RCAF WDs women who joined the WRCNS did not enter an auxiliary force, but instead with one exception, a lower rate of pay, they were considered equal members with their male counterparts.¹⁴ Second, female naval officers received the King's Commission which entitled them to "all marks of respect that are afforded their rank from members of all three services whether male or female." This was not true of the CWAC where the officers were junior to their male counterparts. Third, naval women were "trained, employed and promoted in the same fashion, that is, according to skill, not gender."¹⁵ In regard to job opportunities Winters asserts that more categories were opened up for female naval personnel such as dieticians, plotters, photographers, dental assistants and confidential book correctors.¹⁶ The interviewees support Winters' arguments. Lindop was a confidential book corrector. Tate was the first occupational therapist male or female in the navy and German and Gardner became skilled Morse Code operators. These were not merely support positions. Fourth, all three female service members initially were paid two-thirds the salary of their male counterparts. However the rate for female naval personnel was later increased to four-fifths of their male counterparts providing a smaller gap in pay equality than was found in the other services or in industry.¹⁷ Winters' work clearly demonstrates that members of the CWAC were limited in comparison to their counterparts in the navy who were provided with equal access to non-combatant roles.

At the end of the war the military services did provide women equal opportunity with their male counterparts in regard to discharge benefits. Through the Veteran's Land Act, women re-

ceived financial benefits which would assist them in purchasing a home.¹⁸ Service women were allowed thirty days free travel and were provided similar educational benefits as were men. Educational benefits provided two thousand ex-service women the opportunity to attend university and another eight thousand to enrol in vocational training schools. More women entered unconventional and highly specialized fields of study including chemistry and metallurgy.¹⁹ Although the three women's services were disbanded at the end of World War II, they were reinstated as a part of the military in the early 1950s reinforcing the fact that women are a valuable asset to the military.

Keshen and Moran both argue that women's volunteer work was crucial to their personal development by providing them with greater authority and allowing them to share some power with men. According to Moran many of the new volunteer agencies created during the war in Waterloo County continued their work after the war even though these agencies had been created only to meet wartime needs. The continuation of these volunteer organizations provided new opportunities for women. The focus of information changed from family planning and traditional female roles to a focus upon informing women of new employment and educational opportunities.²⁰ Much of the progress women made for equality in Waterloo County was due to the changes that women experienced in the work force. As Moran states through accessing higher paying jobs women participated in the economy to a far greater extent than had been the case in pre-war years.²¹ The war provided a foundation upon which women could build better opportunities for post-war employment.²² Keshen states that after the war as more and more married women entered the work force many outdated rules disappeared.²³

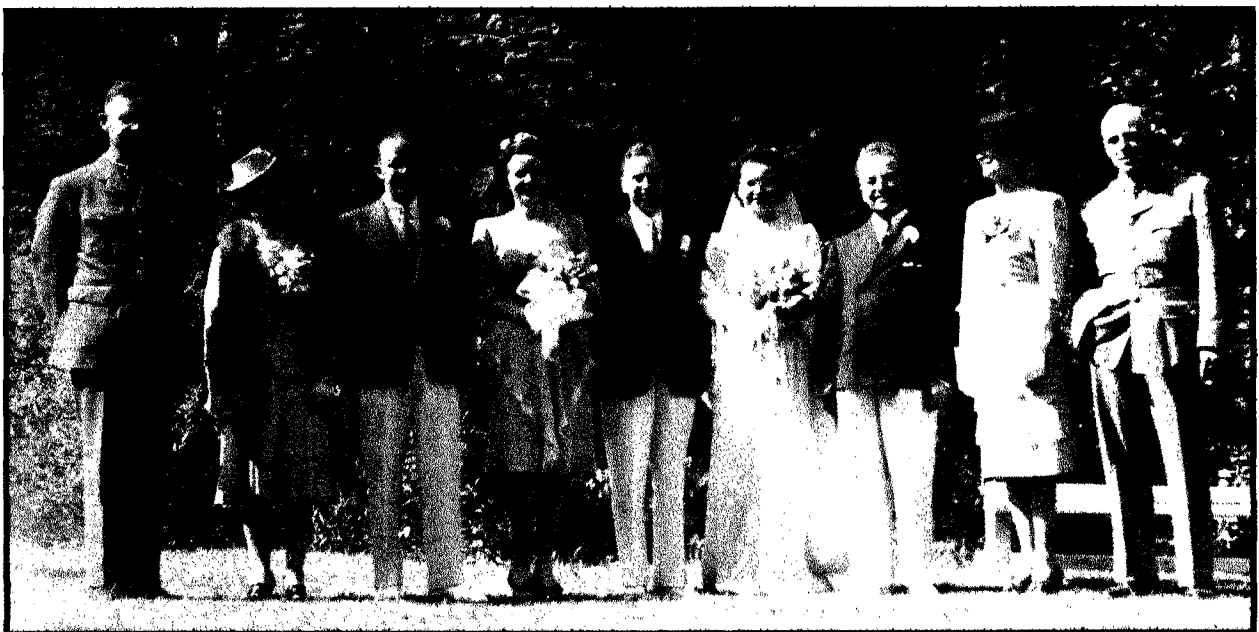
I agree with Pierson that the war by no means changed dominant and public social constructions of gender and most women returned to their familial role. I would argue, however, that the war did disrupt the gender order creating shifts which allowed some women to push boundaries and make important advancements towards equality. The post-war era witnessed a continued growth in the number of working wives and mothers and from 1941 to 1951 an increase of thirty per cent was observed in the female workforce. This steady increase in numbers of working wives was perceived at the time as a major shift.²⁴ These advancements provided a foundation upon which the daughters

of these women, including myself, could build a platform for gender equality.

There are many aspects regarding women's involvement in the war which have yet to be studied. First, this thesis only concentrated on women from primarily middle-class, Anglophone and white backgrounds. Future historical research might explore other groups of women such as Native women, Francophone women, Black women and Japanese-Canadian women whose lives and experiences may differ from those of the women interviewed in this study. Second, the long term effects of participation in World War II on women's lives provides an underexplored subject for pursuit by Canadian historians. The use of oral history as a contributing methodology could assist historians in researching and assessing the long term changes the war may have precipitated. The activities of the post-war lives of the women interviewed for this thesis have opened possible topics for further scholarly research. Such post-war subjects of women's lives could include a study of how women raised their children, whether they became socially and politically active, whether their employment patterns altered, and whether their educational levels changed. It is possible that research in these areas might indicate that the war provided a foundation for the development of women's rights and helped to further their disruption of the gender order.

My parents wartime wedding, June 3, 1944. From left, Charlie Carter, Grandmother Hale, Hunter McBain, Aunt Allaneen Murray, Clifford and Elisabeth Hale, Grandfather and Grandmother Shay, Hugh Murray.

Photo courtesy of Susan Rafuse.



Notes

Chapter 1: Introduction

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Chapter 5: Conclusion

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