

Women on the Home Front, First World War Video Transcription

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As the First World War raged in Europe, women and families were busy at home doing their part to help the war effort. My name is Cadet Corporal Mba from the Royal Canadian Air Cadets, 340 Griffin Squadron.

When the men left for war, women filled a lot of job positions for the men like business, industry, and agriculture. Over 30,000 Canadian Women worked in factories making ammunition, planes and items needed for the war. 5,000 were employed in civil service. Thousands more were employed to work in banks, offices, factories, and on farms. Many of the men and boys who worked the farms in Bruce County went to war, leaving extra work for the women of their families.

Women, for most of the war, also had to give permission to their sons and husbands to enlist in the army. Most of the time it was against the law in Canada for a married man to enlist without the written permission of his wife.

The government made posters to encourage married women to let their husbands and sons go to war. At that time, it was an honour to have family that went to war.

Women also raised money to support soldiers and their families through the Canadian Patriotic Fund. In Bruce County, many newspapers ran advertisements encouraging people to give money to patriotic funds. For example, the Jan. 10, 1917 *Port Elgin Times* contained a large advertisement asking residents to “Give to the Mothers of our soldiers in the name of your mother – as your testimonial to Canadian Motherhood. Give to the Canadian Patriotic Fund. \$6,000,000 must be raised in Ontario for this Fund in 1917.” Bruce County Women organized social events to raise funds as well, like picnics and this Box Social held in Pinkerton in 1919 to help returned soldiers.

Many Bruce County groups regularly raised funds through innovative activities and events. Bruce County women of the Red Cross raised over \$34,000 in 1918. Signature quilts

were often made as home front war effort fundraisers. Members of the community would pay a fee to have a name embroidered on the quilt. The finished quilt would be raffled off, and the money made would go to the war effort.

Members of women's groups, like the Women's Institute, also made things like sheets, socks, shirts, and bandages for men overseas. These groups sent books, newspapers and special treats to military hospitals as well. It was common for organizations to publish information in the local newspaper about the items they made and sent overseas.

Women were also called on to help with food shortages. By 1917, the Ontario Department of Agriculture was asking everyone to grow a vegetable garden and keep hens. This continued until the end of the war. Many Bruce County newspapers contained "Food Controller" articles in 1918. For example, the Southampton Beacon newspaper on February 21, 1918 contained an article saying that "Every woman who saves bread, beef and pork products is in fact and deed yielding an unseen weapon on the war as truly as her sisters behind the trenches are in caring for the broken and the marred."

Throughout the "Food Controller" newspaper columns, they appealed to the traditional gender roles of the time, with article saying "The responsibility for saving food so that the national total of eating shall be less lies largely with the housewife. In fact, the immediate work of helping the Allies by food service falls to her."

The women and families of Bruce County and across Canada were undoubtedly a huge part in the success of World War I We thank you, and we salute you.