



Preserving, promoting, and developing Wellington North's unique cultural resources to build a vibrant community and a prosperous economy.

CULTURAL MOMENT

Wellington North Women in Military Service in World Wars I and II

When Canadian women served in both World Wars, it was mostly on the home front, raising money and replacing men whose military service took them away from all types of work. In World War I, they also served as nurses in the Canadian Army Nursing Service. Nursing Sister Alice Cook of Mount Forest gave her life to the service of injured and ill soldiers in a wartime Toronto hospital, dying of influenza at age 25. Her story was shared as our November 2020 Cultural Moment.

By World War II, although women were not allowed to serve in combat, they took on many crucial roles in the various services both in Canada and in Europe. Women of Wellington North were well represented in nearly every branch.

Two Raftis sisters from West Luther, Genevieve Marie, and Mary Marcella, enlisted in the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (*WRCNS also known familiarly as Wrens*), trained on HMCS Conestoga and were posted in 1945 to HMCS Stadacona Base, Halifax. There they served as nurses aids as well as taking on other necessary work. Marjorie Driscoll, from Arthur, also served in the WRCNS, the fourth member of her family to sign up. She had already earned her Bachelor's degree at the University of Toronto.

Erie Mae Jackson of Conn, a prolific writer throughout her life, especially of biographical and autobiographical books, joined the Canadian Women's Army Corps in 1944. She rose to the rank of Sergeant and qualified as a Non-commissioned Officer. The Wellington County Museum holds her writings.

Several women followed their brothers or cousins into service. Pearl Ida Day joined the CWAC, in Toronto, while her four brothers served overseas. Mildred Colwill, who also enlisted in the Women's Army Corps, in 1942, was the sixth member of her family to serve in the Army.

Isabel Jean Mullin joined the Army in the spring of 1942, at 18, and served in the Women's Army Corps. She was transferred to England where she worked as a driver for Canadian Army Officers.

In some cases, little information is easily available on these resolute women. Claire Connell, for instance, is only briefly noted in the Arthur Enterprise-News in 1944: "Miss Claire Connell joined the RCAF". Many may now be known only to their families or to the keepers of military records.

No matter how they have been remembered, these Wellington North women must always be honoured for their loyalty and courage in answering their country's call to service. They set the bar for those local women who are currently doing the same.