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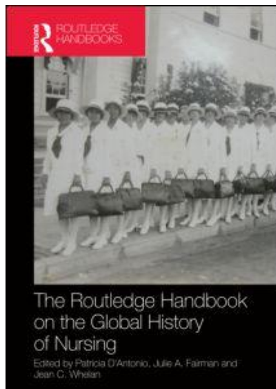

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Commemorating Canadian Nurse Casualties During and after the First World War

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4

COMMEMORATING CANADIAN NURSE CASUALTIES DURING AND AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Nurses' perspective[1]

Dianne Dodd

The First World War looms large in Canadian national consciousness, not least because of the staggering death toll of over 66,000 in a country of less than 8 million people. Canada became a nation in 1867, through an act of the British Parliament that brought together several British North American colonies that had long resisted the pull of the American republic to their south, including what would become the predominantly French-Catholic province of Quebec. Joining the defense of the motherland in August 1914, Canadian troops played a decisive role in the Great War, earning Canada a prominent place in the British Empire and forging a new identity as a truly autonomous nation – a colony no more.[2] During this five-year trial by fire which ended in November 1918, over 3,000 Canadian nurses, whose official title was Nursing Sister and who entered the military with the relative rank of second lieutenant, served in the Canadian Army Medical Corp (CAMC), caring for the sick and wounded.[3] More than 60 of them died, 21 as a result of enemy action. This chapter examines the ways in which this first generation of Canada's military nurses were remembered, and forgotten, in the great outpouring of memorializing in postwar Canada.

Analysts of gender and war have pointed out the profound unease toward women's presence in or near war zones in the interwar period, and this is clearly evident in nurse memorials.[4] Kathryn McPherson and Natalie Riegler provide early studies on the Canadian Nurses Association's prominent marble relief erected in the Parliament Buildings in 1926, showing how Canadian nursing leaders successfully used nurses' wartime service to win rare recognition for women/nurses in the commemorative terrain.[5] Indeed, secular, religious and military nurses appear relatively early and frequently in prestigious public places devoted to historic memory.[6] However, this Parliamentary war memorial is generic in nature and avoids a direct acknowledgement

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of nurses' sacrifice of life, placing them in the traditional feminine role of mourner and/or nurturer.[7] This has led Canadian historian Susan Mann to declare a postwar amnesia regarding nurses' wartime service and sacrifice.[8]

This chapter revisits these and other studies within a larger context, examining all major national commemorations[9] – including statues, plaques, books, posters, and the naming of streets, institutions and geographic features – of nurse casualties in Canada, beginning in wartime and continuing to the present day. Similar to Katie Pickles' study of the martyred First World War British nurse, Edith Cavell,[10] the study finds that changes in the commemorative message over time reveal nuances not always evident in a static snapshot of any one memorial. During the war, nurses were applauded for their bravery, albeit often in the service of wartime propaganda, while the interwar period shows ambivalence and reluctance to acknowledge nurses' military role. Recent memorials show a more soldierly role for the nurse, particularly in those sponsored by nurses themselves, reflecting the perception, recently confirmed by analyses of their wartime writings, that military nurses saw themselves as soldiers.[11] As well, military organizations belatedly recognized nurses as pioneers in opening the doors of the military to women,[12] an acknowledgement that also served the military's recruitment needs.

The chapter also places commemorative initiatives within the context of recent literature on historic memory. Successful public memorials, particularly those at the national level, are sufficiently ambiguous to allow meanings to vary according to the viewer's perspective.[13] The dominant or mainstream message is meant to unify all citizens in common celebration or remembrance, and to foster national loyalty across gender, class or ethnic divides. First World War commemorations erected all across Canada in the 1920s and 1930s, as Jonathon Vance has convincingly argued, met a very real need to give meaning to immense human suffering and loss.[14] Beyond this dominant message, however, there is a minority discourse that speaks to nurses' experience. Like other non-elites, women have been largely invisible in the commemorative terrain. Their bodies traditionally appear as allegories of abstract principles such as liberty or peace,[15] and they are seldom accorded an active role. Even more rarely do they achieve the status of real, named heroines. A middle ground is evident in many modern nurse memorials where the military nurse fulfills a symbolic role as "representative woman," standing at the apex of women's wartime contributions. A common strategy in historic recognition of women is to recognize them as part of a generic group, such as pioneer mothers.[16] In the case of military nurses, this serves to neutralize the threat to gender roles that nurses' military rank and professional stature posed, and to downplay their actual work. Still, when examined within the sphere of commemorating women's role in history, it is clear that nurses assume a large and symbolic role vis-à-vis their gender. Further, despite the dominant message directed at all Canadians, especially women, nursing leaders' realized their goal of speaking to nurses through depictions of their own work, largely by highlighting the all-important symbol of the uniform,[17] as well as other markers previously overlooked.

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Llandovery Castle, Edith Cavell and the propaganda value of dead nurses

In 1904, Canadian Nursing Sisters were integrated into the Canadian Army Medical Corp (CAMC) as officers with the relative rank of second lieutenant.[18] This made them the first nurses in the British Empire and allied countries to gain military rank. Also, it made the Great War the first major conflict in which women played an official role, with access to military funerals and having their names recorded on official casualty lists. Thus their deaths could not be ignored. As many scholars have noted, this challenged longstanding gendered conceptions of warfare in which women played the role of "other."[19] The resulting ideological turmoil found early expression in the outrage over the execution of British nurse Edith Cavell in October 1915, for her role in helping Allied soldiers escape German-occupied Belgium, followed by a wave of commemorative initiatives, including several in Canada. Later that year, Canadian Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden and the Premier of British Columbia, Sir Richard McBride, named a majestic mountain in Jasper National Park, Mount Edith Cavell.[20] This made the British-born Cavell the first named, wartime nurse to be commemorated in Canada – an unusual honor. With the Dominion Parks Branch just established in 1911 to administer Canada's emerging national parks system, the naming of Mount Cavell also boosted tourism.[21] Reflecting Cavell's enduring symbolic value, a church in Jasper holds a service in her honor each year on the Sunday nearest Remembrance Day.

British authorities used the outrage over Cavell's execution to bolster sagging recruitment for a war bogged down in static trench warfare. Similarly, the Canadian government exploited the deaths of 14 nursing sisters to motivate battle-weary troops in 1918. The Canadian hospital ship, *Llandovery Castle*, was torpedoed by the German U-86, 114 miles off the coast of Ireland on 27 June 1918. Its crew, medical officers, nursing sisters and orderlies had been returning to England after bringing 644 convalescing patients to Halifax. The ship took a hit to its engine room, lost power, could not call for help, and quickly sank. Although most passengers were evacuated onto lifeboats, the Germans rammed, shelled and fired on them. Only one boat, with 24 passengers aboard, escaped. The death toll of 234 included all 14 nursing sisters aboard. Typical of the tone of wartime propaganda, Sergeant A. Knight, who was in the lifeboat with the nurses, portrayed an uneasy mix of bravery and helplessness:

> Unflinchingly and calmly, as steady and collected as if on parade, without a complaint or a single sign of emotion, our fourteen devoted nursing sisters faced the terrible ordeal of certain death – only a matter of minutes – as our lifeboat neared that mad whirlpool of waters where all human power was helpless.[22]

Knight tells us it was doubtful "any of them came to the surface again, although I myself sank and came up three times, finally clinging to a piece of wreckage and being eventually picked up by the captain's boat."[23] In this masculine narrative, the reader is left to presume that the nurses were overwhelmed by the water's powers.

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The Government of Canada/CAMC's commemorative booklet on the sinking also praised the nurses:

> Through it all nothing stands out more brilliantly than the coolness and courage of the 14 Canadian nursing sisters, every one of whom was lost, and whose sacrifice under the conditions about to be described will serve to inspire throughout the whole Empire a yet fuller sense of appreciation of the deep debt of gratitude this nation owes to the nursing service.[24]

Knight crafted nurse sacrifice in terms of selfless nurture, noting that one of the 14 nurses, Matron Margaret Marjorie ("Pearl") Fraser, had served in a casualty clearing station, where she had provided care to all, including German prisoners of war. He reported "Many times had she been the first to give a drink of water to these parched enemy casualties. Many a time had she written down the dying statements of enemy officers and men, transmitting them to their relatives through the Red Cross."[25]

Canadian military officials used *Llandovery Castle* as a battle cry for the critical Battle of Amiens on 8 August 1918, which began the German army's retreat and ultimately ensured Allied victory. Led by its shock troops, who over five years of war had developed a reputation that inspired fear in the enemy, the Canadian Corps of the British First Army advanced an unprecedented eight miles in one day,[26] eventually pushing through to Mons in a series of battles on the Western Front called the Last Hundred Days.[27] Exploiting soldiers' identification of nurses with feminine nurture, rest and recovery – the antithesis of mud, violence and death[28] – Brigadier General George Tuxford gave instructions to his brigade that the cry of *Llandovery Castle* "should be the last to ring in the ears of the Hun as the bayonet was driven home."[29] Tragically, nurses were used to motivate rank and file soldiers in a campaign that they and Canadian historians later criticized as unnecessarily costly in human lives.[30] The *Llandovery Castle* also inspired war posters such as one for Canadian Victory Bonds (Figure 4.1), which shows a drowned nurse in the arms of a Canadian soldier who shakes an angry fist at the villainous Hun who would kill "innocent" women.[31] Although the buoy clearly identifies the ship as the *Llandovery Castle*, the nurse, who wears the Red Cross on her uniform, is inaccurately identified. The use of this international symbol of wartime humanitarian aid was meant to highlight the heinous crime of attacking a clearly marked hospital ship.

Edith Cavell, the first high-profile nurse casualty of the war (1915), was memorialized in numerous ways not only in Canada but all across the British Empire. Her death symbolized for many the dangers of having women/nurses near the front. However, by war's end, the shock value of nurse casualties had dissipated somewhat and the 14 nurses of *Llandovery Castle* were largely forgotten.[32] No major memorial was erected to them, although in 1924 their names were included among 415 soldiers, sailors and merchant seamen on a Halifax memorial, known locally as the "sailors' memorial."[33] The Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC), which was formed early in the war to bury and later to commemorate soldiers, developed policies guided by the principle of absolute equality among the war dead. Repatriation of bodies was prohibited, as were

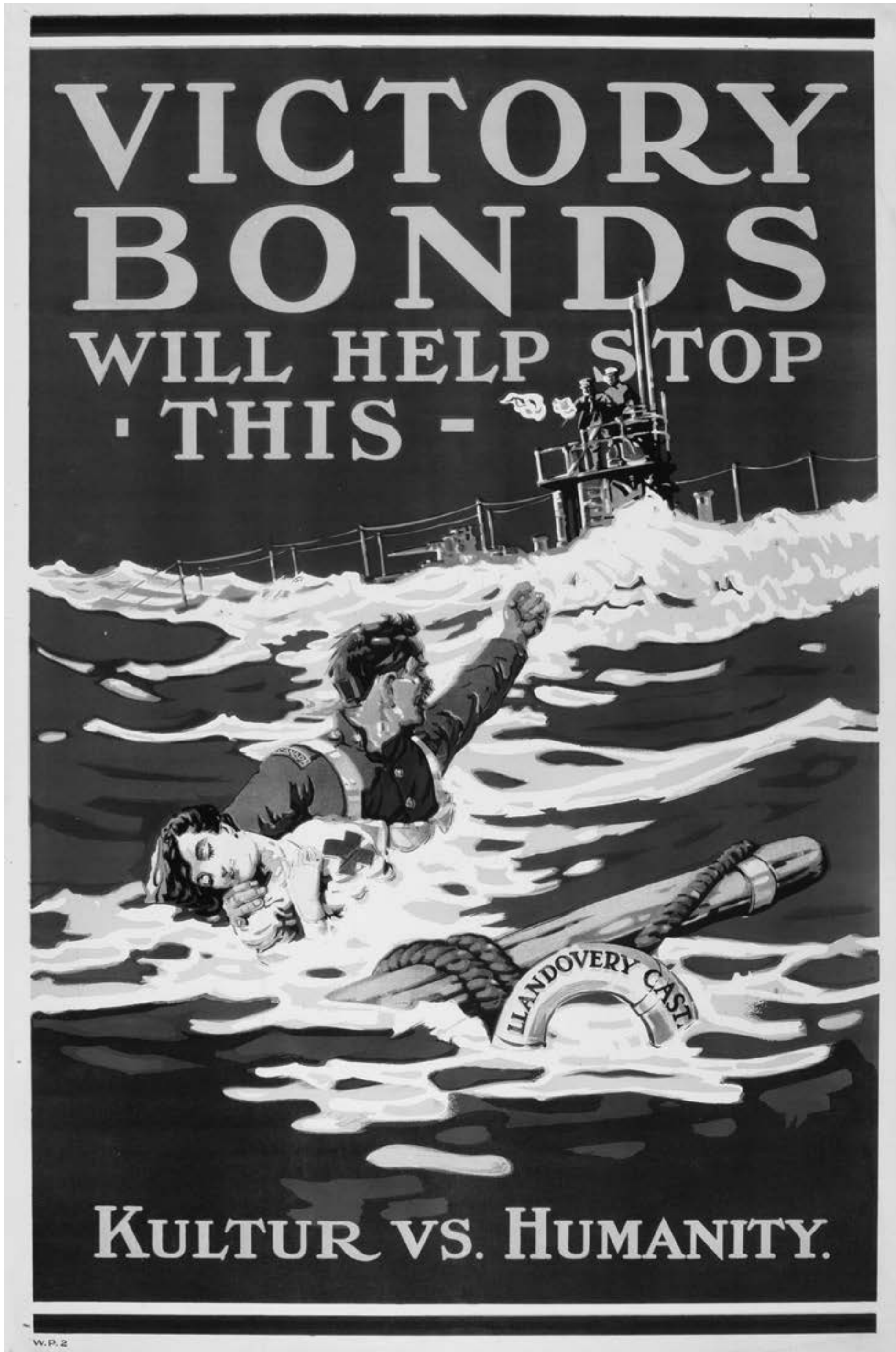

Figure 4.1 First World War Victory Bond poster.

Source: Canadian War Museum.

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private markers. Headstone and military gravesites were uniform, and once a person was named, either on a grave or, if no body was found, on a memorial, they could not be named again, at least not at the national level.[34] Once named in Halifax, the nurses could not be named again and they were not included on the impressive Vimy Memorial in France, unveiled in 1936. It listed 11,285 Canadian soldiers for whom no graves existed.

Despite military nurses' obvious elite role in women's wartime work, art historian Kristine Huneault points out a similar absence in the "home front" collection of the Canadian War Memorial Fund (CWMF).[35] This collection was created by Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook), an expatriate Canadian businessman in London, who obtained an official mandate to document the participation of Canadians in the Great War.[36] Beaverbrook began by taking charge of the war records department and expanded this work to include the commission of art works. While the latter focused on the troops, the attention given to women's patriotic work at home pushed him to record the "home front" as well. For this, he hired primarily female artists, to produce works that valorized women's war work and encouraged more women to take on critical labor in munitions and agriculture.

One of these artists was the American-born Florence Wyle, who had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, where she met fellow sculptor Frances Loring. The two became lifelong companions and collaborators, moved to Toronto in 1913 and did home front war art. They and other artists portrayed female war workers engaged in active labor, often displaying an unusual sense of purpose and muscular strength.[37] As Huneault notes, this potentially radical gender equality was rendered acceptable through the ideology of patriotism. Interestingly, like nurses' wartime sacrifice, these images of strong, active working women were largely forgotten after the war.[38]

They were not immediately forgotten, however, as we see in Wyle's depiction of Edith Cavell in a privately funded memorial erected at the Toronto General Hospital (TGH) (Figure 4.2) in 1918–19. As often occurs with community initiatives, there was no unveiling and there is little surviving documentation, leaving the monument's origins obscure. We do know that by December 1918, the Edith Cavell Memorial Fund had raised $4,000, much of it coming from schoolchildren who apparently found Cavell's feminine bravery and patriotism appealing.[39] It may have been linked to nurses at TGH, a leading centre of nurse education and home to several nursing leaders, including Mary Agnes Snively, president of the Canadian National Association of Trained Nurses (CNATN) from 1908 to 1912. In the spring of 1919, Sir Edmund Walker, a prominent banker, philanthropist and art lover, served as assessor and chose Florence Wyle to carve this relief. Jules F. Wegman of the prominent architectural firm Darling and Pearson designed the frame in which it sits.[40]

Wyle's work also reflects the postwar evolution of Cavell's wartime propaganda image of youthful innocence (despite her actual age of 49) to a more mature, heroic ideal of British womanhood more closely associated with nursing.[41] Wyle portrayed Cavell as an individual, rather than a generic type, her portrait-like appearance suggesting that the artist used one of the earlier sculptures or portraits of Cavell as a model.[42] She is placed in three-quarter view, between two soldiers in profile, "against a neutral,

Figure 4.2 Relief of Edith Cavell, Toronto General Hospital.

Source: M. Moher.

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undefined and timeless space."[43] The soldiers move slowly, bent with fatigue, whereas Cavell stands tall and holds the injured soldier's hand. Symbolizing the ideals of humanity and conveying the compassion of the nursing profession, it also depicts Cavell's strength and courage.[44] It is a fitting tribute to the only named, heroic military nurse memorialized in the period.

The inscription, which links British-born Cavell with Canadian nurses, is dedicated to: "Edith Cavell and the Canadian nurses who gave their lives for humanity in the Great War. In the midst of darkness they saw light." Curiously, another layer of meaning was added in 1922 when an Italian-Canadian organization, for reasons completely unknown, added a small round plaque at the bottom, with the more conventional inscription "Lest we forget." In this case there was an unveiling at which flowers were placed at the cenotaph at Toronto City Hall.

Cenotaphs, or empty tombs, were erected to honour those whose remains lie elsewhere, serving as sites of public and private mourning in most Canadian communities. Dr Harley Smith, former Italian consul, also linked the "sacrifice of Miss Cavell" to the Italian community. In his remarks, he gave a resume of the Italian military campaign, while another speaker made a generic tribute to women, praising the "wonderful work of womanhood, at home and as nurses on the field."[45]

The memorial in Parliament, 1926

Although the connections are not always clear, this Toronto memorial (and a proposal for another one in Ottawa) appears as a prelude to the truly Canadian memorial, the impressive high relief made of Italian Carrara marble unveiled in the Canadian Parliament (Figure 4.3) in 1926. At their 1919 annual meeting, the CNATN, later the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), discussed a proposal to erect a memorial dedicated to Cavell in Ottawa on which the names of nurse casualties were to be inscribed. This one does not appear to have made it past the discussion stage. Nonetheless, it pushed Canadian nurses to make a decision to erect a war memorial "distinct from any association with Cavell" (CNATN, 1919), reflecting the nascent Canadian nationalism typical of commemorative initiatives in this period.[46] Many of the same people were connected with the two initiatives. Jean Gunn, Superintendent of Nursing at TGH, assumed the chair of the nursing association's memorial committee.[47] Architects from Darling and Pearson, who designed both frames in which the two reliefs were placed, had done architectural work for both the TGH and the Parliament Buildings, rebuilt following a 1916 fire. The latter incorporated a memorial Peace Tower which contains Books of Remembrance, on which the names of casualties were listed, alphabetically, by year of death, including the names of nursing sisters.

Gunn chaired the memorial committee responsible for raising funds and liaising with those who negotiated the site. In 1922, on the advice of Frank Darling,[48] the nurses appointed a business committee to collect designs and transact business. It was composed of three men: C. Barry Cleveland from Darling and Pearson, Gerald R. Larkin, son of a hospital trustee, and Lawren Harris, a prominent Canadian artist. The nurses had initially asked the government for space in the Centre Block of the Parliament Buildings

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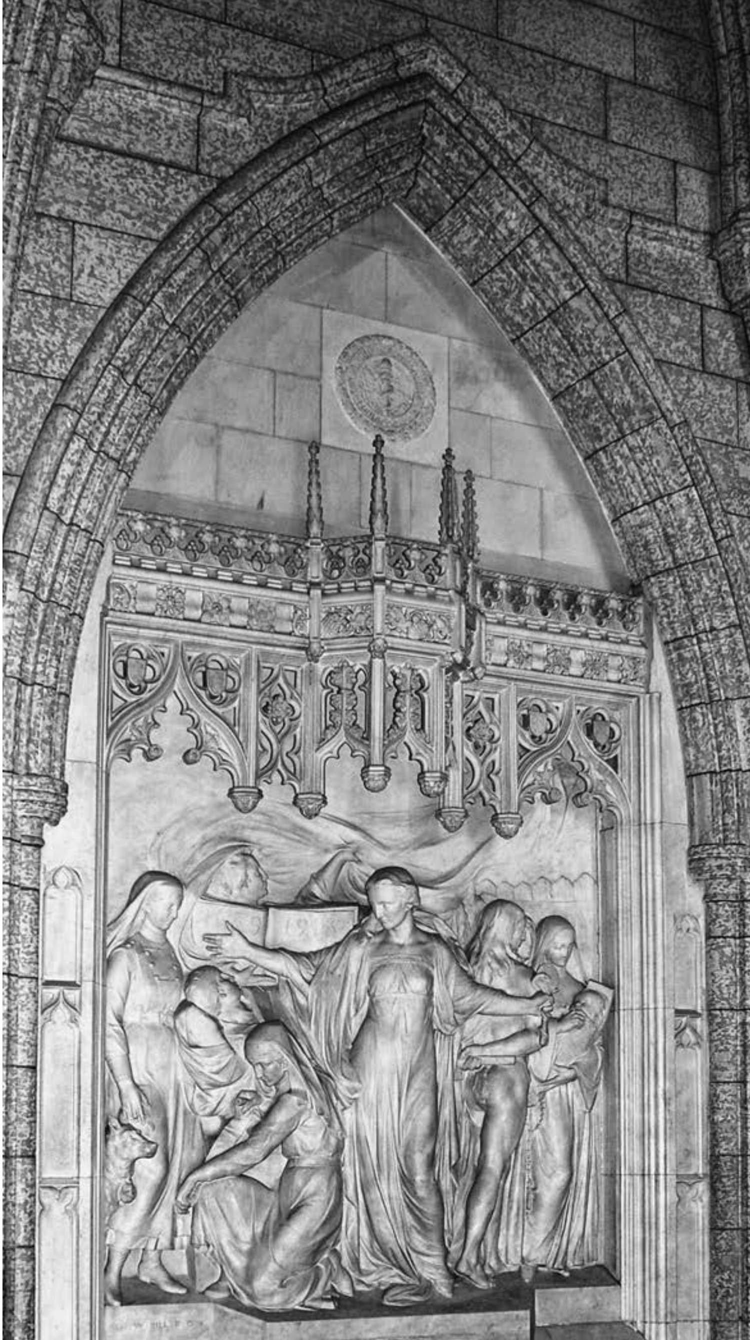

Figure 4.3 Nurses' Memorial, House Of Commons, Ottawa.

Source: © Parks Canada, M. Trépanier.

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but were offered a site in nearby Major's Hill Park instead. They would likely have accepted this, except that the business committee pressed for a site in Parliament.[49] As criteria and precedent reserved this space for statuary of Canadian statesmen and historic figures, Cleveland and Larkin met with Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, asking him to place the memorial in the "Hall of Fame" outside the Parliamentary Library, where it could be accommodated within an historic theme. King agreed, despite strong objections from the speakers of the Senate and House of Commons, and several ministers, including Charles Murphy who had been acting Minister of Public Works when the initial request was refused.[50] King was aware that the government's 1917 imposition of military conscription had badly divided English and French Canadians.[51] A large majority of English-speaking Canadians supported the war; indeed, many of the numerous military recruits, including nursing sisters, and/or their families were relatively recent arrivals from Great Britain. By contrast, many French-speaking Canadians, angry over recent incidents hostile to their language and culture, took a more isolationist stance.[52] While for the nurses the relief was a war memorial, for King it was an opportunity to link the impeccable wartime service of military nurses, most of them English-speaking, with the heroic past of Catholic, French-speaking nuns from hospital orders, who helped found New France in the 17th century.[53] Indeed, Pearson and Darling's preliminary sketches of the memorial gave prominence to the nuns.[54]

Having acquired the space, the nurses' memorial committee appears to have given its advisors a lot of latitude, particularly in the choice of artist. Initially, Gunn negotiated a method for choosing the design with the national nursing association's provincial affiliates. Reflecting Canada's federal government, the Canadian Nurses Association was composed of provincial branches that were responsible for registration of individual nurses.[55] However, the business committee persuaded the nurses that "sculptors of recognized talent" would not enter designs unless guaranteed that they would be judged by their peers. As a result, the provincial affiliates voluntarily waived their selection rights, leaving the business committee to appoint a board of assessors, another all-male committee, composed of prominent artists David N. Brown, James Edward Hervey MacDonald and Ernest Ross Rolph, to make the final choice.[56] The latter were unanimous in choosing a model submitted by George W. Hill, a Paris-trained sculptor from Montreal who had built his reputation on war memorials and statues of politicians. Assuming the nurses wanted a high-quality, conventional work of art, the business committee's choice was a good one. However, it also served the interests of artists and architects who preferred peer review. It also left little room for the nurses to pursue, had they wanted to, excellent female sculptors such as Wyle or Loring.[57] Perhaps the nurses did not want to jeopardize their precarious foothold in the military (or prestigious space in Parliament) by embracing images of gender equality or aligning themselves too closely to the women's movement.

This raises the question as to what the nurses did want. We know that they wanted to ensure that nurses' sacrifices were remembered in the larger enterprise of historic/war remembrance, and that they deliberately raised the money entirely from nurses. The national committee also expressed the hope that the memorial would "present some visible expression of the nursing sister and her work."[58] But the inscription, written by

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King, reflects a generic tribute that fails even to mention nurses: "Led by the spirit of humanity across the seas woman by her tender ministrations to those in need has given to the world the example of an heroic service embracing three centuries of Canadian history." Still, the nurses were accorded sponsorship: "Erected by the nurses of Canada in remembrance of their sisters who gave their lives in the Great War, nineteen fourteen–eighteen, and to perpetuate a noble tradition in the relations of the old world and the new." The historic reference was made necessary by the memorial's placement in the "Hall of Fame" or history hall. While King's generic tribute hardly reflected longstanding efforts of nursing leadership to dissociate generic feminine caregiving with skilled, professional nursing, it did accord nurses a leadership role *vis-à-vis* women.

In her insightful analysis of the memorial's images, Kathryn McPherson shows how the artist used gender and race to highlight an historic, nation-building discourse in which a few elite, white, uniformed women were allowed to play a minor role.[59] But Hill's highly symbolic memorial reveals other layers of meanings when looked at through the nurse's eyes. In the centre of the relief a female allegorical model representing humanity links the religious nurses on the right with First World War military nurses on the left. History, a male allegorical figure in the background, holds the Book of Records from 1639 to 1918 which reveal, as Hill recounts in his explanatory text, "the great deeds of heroism and martyrdom of the early nurses." On the left, one military nurse kneels beside a wounded soldier. McPherson does not use the word *pietá* to describe her mournful pose, yet the image clearly brings to mind the powerful Christian image of Mary cradling the crucified Christ. Here, the artist uses familiar Christian imagery to express the nation's grief, common to memorials of the period in which a soldier's sacrifice often paralleled that of Christ.[60] Indeed the mourning pose is so dominant that, McPherson declares, "neither nurse is actually doing anything."[61] However, Hill tells us that the military nurses are caring for a wounded soldier, and on closer examination we see that the kneeling nurse is unravelling a bandage. In depicting her changing a dressing, the artist highlights a typical, representative military nursing task. In light of King's generic tribute, this draws an unspoken, symbolic link between nurses' work and that of millions of women throughout the empire who made bandages and other supplies to send to the troops through patriotic organizations such as the Red Cross. While it remains striking that a memorial to remember dead nurses assigns them the role of mourning the soldier[62] and the image is far removed from earlier depictions of strong, working women, the nurse does reflect the important Christian figure of Mary.

The nurse standing behind the kneeling nurse conforms to traditional depictions of the *pietá* in which other mourning figures often surround Mary and Jesus. However, she also fulfils a more practical function in providing a full-length view of the nurses' uniform. Clearly marking nurses as officers in the previously all-male military hierarchy is the uniform, a highly valued symbol of professional (and military) status.[63] While it is not clear whether the Canadian Nurses' Association or the artist chose to have the nurses wear their service or work uniform rather than their formal, or "walking out" uniform, it is certainly in keeping with the nurses' association's expressed preference for a work theme. This uniform, with its distinctive blue dress, white veil, brass buttons and

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two stars to denote lieutenant rank, had earned Nursing Sisters the soldiers' affectionate nickname "bluebirds," which the nurses valued highly. The nurse also holds back a dog, the meaning of which McPherson suggests may relate to death,[64] allowing it to provide balance to the opposing image of the nun holding a baby, as nurses are present during birth and death. The dog could also suggest loyalty. However, given the preference for Red Cross imagery in military nurse memorials, and the pouch that the dog carries around his neck, it was likely meant to refer to the Red Cross's use of dogs on the battlefield to help bring back the wounded for care and treatment.[65] Although CAMC nurses did not get close enough to the front to use dogs themselves, nor is there any evidence the CAMC used them, they are a symbol of care of the wounded during wartime and search and rescue.

Vancouver Memorial Window: A soldier among soldiers

One commemorative initiative sponsored by the Canadian Nursing Sisters Association, a group of former military nurses formed after the war, shows the nurse in a somewhat more egalitarian, soldier-like posture. The Canadian Memorial Church was built in Vancouver in 1928 as a war memorial. In its vestibule are four stained glass windows honouring the soldier, sailor, airman and nursing sister, the last of these funded by the Nursing Sisters Association (Figure 4.4).[66] It shows the nurse posed in a similar manner to that of the other military representatives, implying a measure of equality. However, in contrast to the airman who holds a propeller; the sailor a rope; and the soldier who leans on his rifle; the nurse does not hold any tools or symbols of her work except that she wears her service uniform. Rather, she folds her hand over her heart, likely to signify compassion. Nurses held this memorial in high regard. A commemorative booklet notes, "For years the surviving members of the Nursing Sisters have attended Remembrance Day services in a body."[67]

Figure 4.4 The Nurse Memorial Window, Canadian Memorial Church, The United Church of Canada, Vancouver.

Source: BC History of Nursing Society.

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Nurses and the National Cenotaph

Historian Susan Hart suggests that there is a reluctance to show nurses at work in Canada's National Cenotaph (Figure 4.5, overleaf).[68] Located in the nation's capital, this symbolic tomb represents the graves of soldiers buried overseas and serves as the site for National Remembrance Day services each 11 November. Unveiled in 1939, "The Great Response" by British sculptor Vernon March depicts 22 figures marching purposefully through a triumphal arc, with female allegorical figures representing Peace and Freedom above it. Dressed in historically correct uniform and equipment, with the infantrymen in front, each represents its branch of the military.[69] At the rear, with the support services are two uniformed nursing sisters, of whom Hart has this to say:

> Whereas the male figures are all heavily burdened with the instruments typical to their branch of service, such as rifles and machine guns, one nurse carries a small handbag and the other one appears to be holding her gloves. As well, the glove-carrying figure has one hand pressed into the side of her abdomen as if she might be experiencing a stitch in her side as a result of the brisk pace set by the male figures ahead. While the two nurses have no attributes of their service, the near-by stretcher bearer, in addition to the stretcher he carries, has a medical kit bag over his shoulder clearly marked with a Red Cross emblem.[70]

Here, the marching nurses are dressed in their official military or walking uniform. Wearing short skirts and short-brimmed hats, one of the Nursing Sisters sports a greatcoat while the other wears a cape which flies up into the wind in a shape suggestive of an angel's wings, invoking popular images of nurses as ministering angels. Still, nurses' presence with the troops in a national monument gave high profile to Nursing Sisters' role in the military's medical system.

One can only speculate as to what input nurses had into these two memorials, but the uniform appears to have served as a symbol of professional work. How do we read the hand over the heart, however? Military nurses, as their wartime writings reflect, hoped that their war service would demonstrate the worth of professional nurses.[71] And, although they identified themselves as soldiers, they also drew upon the "safe" gender roles favoured by society, acting as sisters or mothers, and often extolled the bravery of their "boys" ahead of their own.[72] Many spent their own funds buying comforts for their patients, grieved those who died, attended their funerals and even decorated their graves.[73] Canadian nurse Warner relates, for example, "I put some roses on the grave of one of our Saint John boys. I wish his mother could see how well cared for it is."[74]

A belated acknowledgement: Recent depictions of military nurses

With the recent resurgence in interest in First World War nurses and the acceptance of women in the military, we are seeing new commemorative initiatives that recognize Nursing Sisters (later Nursing Officers) as soldiers, and as pioneers for women in the

Figure 4.5 (above) National Cenotaph, Ottawa.

Source: © Parks Canada, A. Guindon.

Small photos *(below)* show nurses at the rear of the memorial's arch.

Source: © Parks Canada, D. Dodd.

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military. In 1998, more than 80 years after the naming of Mount Edith Cavell, a mountain was named for Canadian Nursing Sister Gladys Wake: Mount Wake near Pemberton, British Columbia.[75] Nursing Sister Wake died in Étaples, France during the Germans' 1918 spring offensive when one of two hospitals there was bombed by German air gunners, taking the lives of six Canadian nurses along with many more medical personnel and patients. As with the *Llandovery Castle*, news reports extolled the nurses' bravery as they attended to the wounded, while German planes flew low attacking with machine guns. Wake's last words served well as propaganda: "Tell them not to be sorry, but glad, and tell them to carry on."[76]

A provincial war memorial on the grounds of the Province of Saskatchewan's legislative buildings in Regina was unveiled in 2007 (Figure 4.6), joining an earlier statue depicting an infantryman. Together they mark the entranceway to panels listing the names of 5,348 First World War casualties from the province.[77] Canadian nurses, including Loretta Miller, head nurse at Winnipeg General Hospital, and the Anglican sister Hannah Grier Coomes from Toronto, were the first to serve with the military in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan during the 1885 North West Rebellion.[78] Thus, the province staked a claim as the birthplace of Canada's military nurses. The Saskatchewan War Memorial Committee decided in 2006 that "recognition of the women's role in armed conflict had been long overdue and that the most recognizable role played by women in the early years had been that of the Nursing Sister."[79] The committee raised the funds, obtaining a major contribution from the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association, whose maquette (small model of the statue) was unveiled by Princess Anne in July 2007. Alberta artists Don and Shirley Begg modelled the sculpture on a photograph of Saskatchewan Nursing Sister Elizabeth Matheson. Born in Onion Lake, Saskatchewan in 1892, Matheson was the daughter of Doctor Elizabeth Beckert Matheson and Rev. John Matheson. Before interrupting her nurse training to help her parents with their health care and missionary work, Matheson enlisted in 1917 and served in France and England. Her story is told on the Saskatchewan Nurses' Association website.[80] In the unveiling, Second World War Nursing Sister, Lt Col. (retired) Hallie Sloan proudly exclaimed that it was perfect in every detail, right down to the boots that nurses wore.[81] Symbolizing the acceptance of women in the military, the Nursing Sister wears her official uniform and stands with her arms at her side, beside the soldier.

A less lasting tribute, Veterans Affairs Canada and the National Capital Commission produced an ice sculpture in 2011 for Ottawa/Gatineau's winter festival, *Winterlude*. Although we are reminded that, as Canada was then active in Afghanistan, acknowledgement of nurses as pioneers for women in the military also served recruitment goals, this project did acknowledge their pioneering role. The ice sculpture replicated the 1926 nurse memorial, and text on accompanying panels extolled women's long wartime role beginning with the 1885 North West Rebellion, when "women bravely stood in harm's way to nurse wounded soldiers." It continues, "since then women have taken part in a variety of aspects of military life, now joining their male counterparts on the frontiers, operating submarines, providing necessary intelligence support and patrolling battlefields."[82]

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Figure 4.6 First World War Memorial, Regina, Saskatchewan.

Source: John G. Connors, RCAMC/CFMS (Retired), unidentified photographer.

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Conclusion

Changing values are revealed in this progression from wartime exploitation of nurses for their propaganda value to postwar forgetting and generic tributes, to acceptance of nurses as pioneering military women. Nurses actively remembered their heroism by erecting memorials, and these reveal minority discourses in which nurses depicted their work through symbols such as the uniform. As the success of any public monument should be measured in its ability to elicit a response, more research is needed into how the Canadian nursing body used these memorials to create their own traditions and rituals of remembrance.[83]

Do these memorials also shed light on the question asked by numerous scholars: "Did nurses/women make gains through their wartime service?"? The military was an exclusive organization, accepting only males, and at the time of the First World War predominantly white males. Women were excluded, based on the gender ideology that suggests they were in need of protection. In return for their war service, veterans were ensured full political rights, public honors – indeed the families of war dead often made further demands of the state.[84] Although less successful, some ethnic minorities tried to gain military admission and to subsequently use their war service to gain enfranchisement and other political rights previously denied them.[85]

How did women fare in this exchange? Some scholars assert that war left conventional gender ideology unchanged.[86] One can certainly point to the forgetting of nurses' sacrifices through generic memorials in the immediate postwar years to support such a claim. However, other scholars point to nurses' postwar professional gains.[87] In Canada, for example, most provincial nurses' associations gained registration legislation and saw the launching of university-based educational programmes. Women in Canada, as did women in many Western democracies, also obtained the right to vote at or immediately following the war. Indeed, many historians have observed that women's wartime services, from knitting socks to nursing, gave politicians a face-saving "reason" to finally accede to women's longstanding suffrage demands. As nurse casualties played an important symbolic role in "representing" all women in postwar memorials, one might conclude that military nurses' presence among the nation's war heroes helped undermine the longstanding objection to women's full political equality: that they could not fight and die in the defense of their homeland(s).

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