

HOMELAND STORIES

Wedding Dresses, War Brides and War Housing

Character Education

- Recognize changing patterns, trends and customs and how they affect individuals
- Consider the roles of heritage and tradition in character development
- Look at how the larger pictures of demographics, immigration and housing affect individuals

Facts

- The IODE collected and sent 87 Canadian wedding dresses overseas for military women to marry in white
- With the War Bride transportation scheme, the Canadian government brought 44,000 war brides and their 21,000 children to Canada between 1942-1948
- Canada built one million homes during and immediately after WWII to accommodate war workers and returning veterans

Before the Reading

- How does each wave of immigration change Canadian life? Provide examples
- Discuss in pairs what the best ways are to find a future marriage partner. Are your opinions based on family, cultural or media values?
- What is the best way to welcome immigrants and familiarize them with Canada?
- Is the concept of being married in white important? Why or why not?

HOMELAND MINUTES



"Building Canada – Small Homes – 1946"
Victory Home
www.internationalmetropolis.com/



Going Green "Victory" Home
www.nowhouseproject.com

WWII Houses Have Something to Say: NOW!

The cries of the Baby Boomers born to War Brides and returning Canadian veterans have long ceased to echo in the halls of approximately one million WWII homes still standing. Thanks to Lorraine Gauthier and Alex Quito of a design company called

Work Worth Doing, there are new cries coming out of these houses and they are all about retrofitting for energy conservation. Their trademarked "Now House" design was one of 12 winning designs for CMHC's Equilibrium Sustainable Housing Demonstration Initiative and their first model retrofit went on view September 10, 2008, at 12 Topham Road in Toronto. Since then there have been an

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Reading 1: IODE Wedding Gowns



Lt. Col. Alice Sorry and Lt. Col. Isobel Cronyn, unpacking wedding dress sent by an anonymous donor for the use of Canadian Women's Army
London, England 23 Feb. 1945

Karen M. Hermiston/DND Collection PS-139938

The three following newspaper clippings are from the IODE Fonds at the National Archive in Ottawa.

The Evening Telegram, Toronto, August 20, 1945

“WEDDING GOWNS FROM CANADA DID DUTY FOR MANY WAR BRIDES”

Eighty-seven long, white wedding dresses went overseas last spring as a gift from Canada to British service women doing duty both in Britain and in foreign countries. The gowns, assembled at Toronto headquarters, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, were sent by members of the various chapters across Canada. Together with wedding veils, gloves, shoes, stockings, lingerie, pearl necklaces, prayer books and fine handkerchiefs, the dresses helped to overcome the severe clothing shortage and to fulfil many a bride's ambition to be married in white. Some of the articles were new, but most of them had been worn at weddings in the Dominion.

The dresses were sent from Toronto for the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, Women's Royal Navy Service and the Duchess of Northumberland's Comfort Fund for the Auxiliary Territorial Services, England. Upon arrival in Britain, three costumes were immediately flown to Italy, where they were enthusiastically welcomed. The cost of clothing in Italy was so high that mosquito netting had been a feature at most wedding ceremonies of British service women there. Six others were posted for India, where shortage of materials was most acute. One dress, veil and pair of gloves of the outfits sent to Northern Ireland was worn by a member of the WAAF at her wedding to a service man in Belfast, June 15. The frocks had a busy but very happy life, travelling from town to town, country to country, being loaned over and over again to many a glowingly beautiful bride so that she might cast off her uniform on her wedding day and wear the traditional “white”.

Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, Saskatoon, May 28, 1946

Women's Page:

“IODE CONVENTION NOTES”

by Emily Gould

WINNIPEG—One of the most fascinating displays at the IODE convention in Winnipeg is the bulletin board covered with letters of thanks from all over the world. Some have been sent in amusing cartoon style while others from heads of military and government departments are strictly formal fashion but there are many from seamen, soldiers and airmen expressing their appreciation of IODE gifts that make delightful reading. There is even a letter and a picture from one of the brides who wore an IODE wedding gown. There she is, the third to don the satin robe, stepping from a car resplendent in her borrowed finery and looking radiant as though she had designed it herself.

Delegates were thrilled to pop into the coffee shop the other morning for breakfast and to find it thronged with newly arrived British wives and their babes. The whole shop became a reception room immediately and women were hunting up those who were going to Alberta and British Columbia. The Saskatchewan members found some going to Kindersley, North Battleford and places near Prince Albert.

The Herald, Montreal June 1, 1946

“2ND WAR MEMORIAL CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS IODE MEETING”

Mrs. Horkins told a little story of meeting British war brides at the headquarters of the Order in Toronto, at which time she had told them of this second War Memorial Campaign. One of those present informed Mrs. Horkins she had come to Canada with her child some little time earlier at the insistence of her husband who wanted to be sure that she and their little son were in his native land—Canada—if anything happened to him. He was later killed and she said that she felt she would be very happy if her son could at some time obtain a bursary and thus be sure of an education. In relating the above incident Mrs. Horkins said: “Let us look after the children of the men who made our existence possible.”

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additional five houses in Windsor. As Ms. Gauthier stated in a 2009 presentation to the 4th Canadian Solar Buildings Conference on a slide with wartime housing dotted across a map of Canada, “Now House will start with one house, then a community of wartime houses, then a million houses across the country.” The award-winning models demonstrate near zero energy use and reduced green house gas emissions. The retrofit of 5,000 WWII houses in Toronto alone would reduce green house emissions by 27,000 tonnes annually. These WWII homes, like the WWII veterans themselves, have much to tell Canadians about values.

Reading 2: War Brides



Personnel of the Canadian Red Cross Ambulance Convoy, Charlton Park, England January 1945 (L-R): Peggy Leigh, Patti Spence, Mrs. Kathryn Copeman, Coralie Field, Mary Price and Mrs. K. Hamilton Jackson, CO Sgt. Karen M. Hermiston / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-133602

The first wedding between a Canadian serviceman and a British woman took place 43 days after the first of 494,000 Canadian military men and women arrived in the United Kingdom. Since the well-fed, uniformed, traditionally polite Canadian personnel remained in the UK for

up to three years before being posted further, there was lots of time for romance. There were also many contact points. Young British men were generally serving overseas and young British women were engaged in war industries, in support of military bases and in coastal defence facilities. They had ready access to Canadians in canteens, dance halls, pubs, movie theatres, skating rinks and even churches. By November 1940, the Canadian Army had issued rules for members who wanted to marry. Initially the only requirements were for the groom to request permission from the commanding officer, prove he was debt free and that his intended was “of good moral character”.

With the large number of marriages however, and some cases of bigamy, by December 1941, the groom had to declare his marital status, swear he was able to support a family and start saving \$200 towards his bride’s passage to Canada. The intended bride had to find a responsible citizen who would vouch for her character. There was a two month waiting period before a wedding could be

scheduled during the groom’s leave from active service.



Pencil sketch of Pier 21 by Margaret Van Gorp www.pier21.ca

These rules and regulations did not stand in the way of wartime love. The stories of the 44,000 war brides with their journeys across the ocean in 58 different ships, their reception at Pier 21 in Halifax, their rail trips across

Canada in “Diaper Specials” and their reception by service organizations and families, are well documented in first-person accounts, historical studies and on websites.

The Homeland part of the war bride story starts with the Canadian government, service organizations and individual volunteers who welcomed and supported the war brides. In 1944 Canada’s Department of National Defence, assisted by Canadian immigration officials, the military and the Canadian Red Cross, set up the Canadian Wives’ Bureau. In a comfortable lounge on the third floor of the exclusive Galleries Lafayette on Regent Street in London, the young brides who were mostly in the 18 to 23 year-old age range, heard talks, saw films and read books, magazines and brochures about life in Canada.

Escorted transportation was arranged from the war bride’s home in the UK to her husband’s home in Canada. The young woman had only to wait for shipping to free up—sometimes a very long wait. Once the war brides landed in Halifax, the Canadian volunteer organizations took over.

The IODE provided brochures and literature such as the *Canadian History for New Canadians* (in five languages) and *From Kith to Kin*, a booklet specifically for war brides. They arranged for personal property bags containing stuffed toys, soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes for women and children to be delivered by port workers.

The IODE assistance with transition to Canadian life did not, however, end at the Halifax docks. IODE members arranged community welcomes, usually teas, sent Christmas cards and held Christmas parties for the new Canadians. Other service organizations followed-up as well.



Pat and Gerald LaVac

War Bride Pat LaVac: Journey's End in Lovers' Meetingⁱ

Then my call up came, as it did to every healthy young woman sometime after reaching her 18th birthday. I was quite excited to receive a notice to report on May 5, 1942 to an air field somewhere in Kent

Why Me Lord?: a grateful memoir, Pat LaVac

From a diary that she kept religiously, Pat Taylor from Arundel, a village near Brighton in the south of England, pieced together her WWII years and the fateful meeting with a tall, dark and handsome Air Gunner who would take her to a new life in Canada. As a 15 year-old in 1939 Pat had helped settle London's child war guests into their new country surroundings. In 1942 after a dire bout with Scarlet Fever Pat trained for six months to be an electrician at a technical college in blacked-out north London to qualify for British Air Ministry work. Finally in early 1943 Pat boarded a train that passed through Robin Hood country in Nottinghamshire en route to the small village of Norwell where she stayed during her stint as an electrician at the aerodrome, nearby RAF Ossington. In June 1943, the base was transferred to the RCAF as #82 Operational Training Unit and the Canadians arrived.

The fateful lovers' meeting took place early one morning when Pat was ordered to find out why the Tannoyⁱⁱ communication system at No. 1 site was down. Cycling

through blooming hedge roses near a row of Nissenⁱⁱⁱ huts she surprised an airman sleepily headed to the urinals. The embarrassing incident led to a first date at the Chicken Coop, a dance hall rigged up on the second floor of a barn where a gramophone played the Dorsey Brothers and Glenn Miller. On a second date Pat noted in her memoirs that they skipped the dancing and went for a walk by the Trent River in Newark. "A beautiful summer night in August with just a slip of a new moon overhead and a sky full of glittering stars, well that is how I remember it, with the ripple of the water in the background; I was lost."

The lovers' journey had just begun. Although her beloved Gerry had been legally separated from his Canadian wife for almost three years, he had to start the paperwork for a divorce (which his wife eagerly awaited). One set of papers had to be redone when the ship it was on was torpedoed. Finally the divorce N.I.S.I. documents arrived but the Decree Absolute was not in time for Pat and Gerry to marry in England before he went back to Canada on the very last withdrawal of Canadian Aircrew from England. When the papers came through they completed the application for Pat to go to Canada as a War Bride. Passage was on the third sailing of the *Queen Elizabeth* which had been refurbished from a troop ship to transport War Brides and their children. After tearful goodbyes in Arundel with her mother who was in hospital with a broken hip and her father who saw her off to the bus, Pat said good-bye to her sister in Southhampton, the port from which the *Queen Elizabeth* sailed. "... she was the last one to see me off to Canada starting a new life, a journey into the unknown but at the end of which I knew Gerry would be waiting and at last everything would be right."

Pat never saw her parents again, but, she was happily married to former Warrant Officer Gerald LaVac (1916–2000) for 56 years.

ⁱ From the poem "Carpe Diem" by William Shakespeare

ⁱⁱ An electronic amplification system, usually a 5.1 channel PA. used to hook together all parts of a base

ⁱⁱⁱ A prefabricated half-cylindrical corrugated steel structure

Reading 3: War Housing and the Baby Boom



Miss Dilys Owen and Mrs. Roley Harris of the Canadian Red Cross / Dec. 1944
Lieut. Charles H. Richer / Canada. Dept. of National Defence / Library and Archives Canada / PA-136664

In 1946 the war brides and their dependents represented 54% of the immigration to Canada. With a heavy demand for housing for their burgeoning families and for those of returning service people, most of whom were contributing to what was called the

Baby Boom, the federal government's Central Housing and Mortgage Corporation (CMHC) took over the assets of Wartime Housing Ltd (WHL) and assisted in the financing and management of housing projects across Canada. During WWII 30,000 Monopoly-shaped houses had been built for munitions workers and to provide housing for military bases and BCTP sites. These hastily constructed 245 metre square, partially pre-fabricated "Victory Homes" became the model for what would end up being one million affordable, single family housing units for returning veterans that grew up in planned neighbourhoods even before the end of the war.

Modest bungalows sprang up on large lots on winding streets or in grid patterns. Examples of the affordable WWII and immediate post-war single family housing remain in Toronto at Avon Park, near the Queensway and Royal York, in Winston Park near Downsview Airport, in a development near Trethewey and Jane built on the site of the former de Havilland Aircraft Co. and in another at St. Clair near O'Connor called Topham Park. Collingwood, Hamilton, Ottawa, Windsor and Ajax are other Ontario communities that sport the characteristic housing of this era.

Usually after a transition period living with families, war brides and returning veterans raised their families in WHL or CMHC homes such as these. Although these starter homes were modest, they changed the social fabric of Canada. Young families across Canada began to take single family residence as a norm and consequently sprawled out into larger homes in larger suburbs that began to ring cities and towns.

War brides from the U.K., Holland, Belgium, France and Italy diversified Canada's cultural base in these new suburban communities, they helped grow the Canadian population and they contributed to changing housing patterns. The large influx of war brides also opened the eyes of the world to how wonderful Canada was and inspired immigration for decades.

After the Reading

- List at least 10 ways Canadians assisted war brides to help their transition to Canada
- How do these readings show changing trends and patterns?
- Why is housing part of a lesson on war brides?

Extensions

- Research war bride histories using the Pier 21 website and analyze three factors that seem to be common to in their stories www.pier21.ca
- With one million WWII war homes mostly still in use, it is likely there are some in communities near to yours. Create a photographic record of the war houses near you
- Compare the immigration patterns from the WWII era to those today. What do they tell you?

Sources

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- "In love with a soldier", "To Canada in style" and "Welcome to the Canadian Wives' Bureau" CBC Digital Archives, www.archives.cbc.ca
- Kozar, Judy. *Canada's War Grooms and the Girls Who Stole their Hearts*. Renfrew: General Store Publishing, 2007
- *Now House: One small house. One million opportunities*. www.nowhouseproject.com
- "Statistics", Canadian War Brides: The Authoritative Source of Information on the Canadian War Brides of WWII", www.canadianwarbrides.com/stats.asp
- "Victory Housing Plans" www.internationalmetropolis.com/vichousing.pdf

Audio Visual Clips

- Love and War: Canadian War Brides – 20 clips
"http://archives.cbc.ca/war_conflict/second_world_war/topics/1542/"