



Historic Sites and Monuments Board War Bride Plaque Inscription

Between 1942 and 1948 some 48,000 women, accompanied by 22,000 children, mostly from Great Britain, landed here at Pier 21 as wives of Canadian servicemen stationed abroad during the Second World War. The high numbers of these wartime romances prompted the federal government to provide the new spouses with transportation to Canada and information about their adopted country. Across Canada, war bride clubs helped the women adapt to new customs and surroundings. In the succeeding generation, the war brides collectively strengthened many Canadians' emotional links with Britain.

Les Épouses De Guerre

De 1942 à 1948, quelque 48,000 épouses de militaires canadiens postés outre-mer au cours de la Seconde Guerre mondiale débarquèrent ici au quai 21. Venant pour la plupart de Grande-Bretagne, elles étaient accompagnées de 22,000 enfants. Le nombre de ces amours de guerre incita le gouvernement à offrir à ces femmes la traversée ainsi que de l'information sur leur pays d'adoption. Elles reçurent en outre l'aide de cercles d'épouses de guerre pour s'adapter aux coutumes locales. À long terme, leur présence renforça les liens d'affection et d'amitié avec la Grande-Bretagne.

Sample War Bride Stories from the Pier 21 Collection

During and after the war 50,000 war brides and their 22,000 children arrived at Pier 21. These brave and adventurous ladies left everything familiar behind and came to cities and rural areas across Canada. Though some later returned to their homelands, most adapted

and grew to love Canada, displaying a pioneering spirit and resilience that had developed during the long war years.

Their personal stories range from the hilarious adventures of London girls in the prairies to heartbreaking tales of abandonment and betrayal.

Please consider adding your memories and images to our collection by writing to library@pier21.ca.

When Love was Young

By Susan Bear

One summer evening in 1941, Mildred and her friend Joan were in Croydon when they met two Canadian soldiers looking at photographs in a shop window. Harold and Eddie were stationed nearby at Caterham and in town for a night out. The four struck up a conversation and made dates for later, and it wasn't long before Mildred took Harold home to meet her parents. Harold recalls that they were somewhat reserved, but friendly. Mildred's mum Florence thought Harold looked like Bing Crosby and Eddie resembled Bob Hope. She would jokingly announce, 'Here comes Bing Crosby and Bob Hope.'

Everything was going smoothly for Mildred and Harold, until they missed the bus home after a date one evening. There wasn't another from Croydon back to Thornton Heath for over an hour, so they walked several miles home. Coming up Norbury Avenue, they saw Mildred's dad waiting by the front gate, obviously upset. Mildred was sent inside. Harold was told, 'If anything had happened to my Mildred, there is nothing I wouldn't do to you!' Harold felt unwelcome after such a stern warning, and went inside to collect his things and leave, but Florence convinced him to stay the night. The next morning Dad apologized. Harold never knew what Florence said to her husband, but the incident was never mentioned again.

As their relationship progressed, Harold stayed at Mildred's home on leaves, donating his ration tickets to her family, which Mildred's mum put to good use by cooking supper for everyone. Mildred often traveled on trains and buses to see Harold where he was stationed at Caterham, and later Seaford. Their friend Doreen from Seaford recalls that Mildred's mum was very strict and never allowed her to stay overnight, so as a result she always commuted back and forth.

Mildred spent evenings at home in her room writing to Harold. When the nightly air raid warning came, everyone ran for the shelter, realizing once inside that Mildred was inevitably missing. Her worried mum would say, 'where is my Mildred? She must get in here.' Without fail, Mildred would come sliding in at the last second with pen and paper still in hand, announcing 'here I am!'

The couple became engaged in 1943. Harold returned to England on leave from the Mediterranean after the war was over and the happy pair chose a wedding date of July 24, 1945. Harold's regiment, the Carleton York, was going home, and in order to remain

overseas until his wedding, he had to join another regiment. He was posted to Germany with the 3rd Battalion, North Shore Regiment.

When the time came for Harold to travel to Thornton Heath for his wedding, the British Railway was on strike. Only British soldiers were allowed to cross the English Channel from Calais, France to Dover. Harold was desperate not to miss his wedding! He tried for days to get through, and even tore the Canadian badges off his tunic. An attempt at a British accent didn't succeed in fooling the guards either. They knew he was Canadian.

In Thornton Heath, everyone was busy making the arrangements for the wedding. Rationing was strict after the war, so it was very good fortune to have a reception planned at a nearby restaurant complete with a wedding cake!

Mildred waited anxiously with guests at the church for Harold on her wedding day. She looked resplendent in her wedding dress, accented with a bouquet of red carnations and a horseshoe for good luck. Word came that he was stranded with other troops in Calais, France, and would be an hour late. One hour later, word arrived that he would not make it at all. Bearing the unfortunate news with a grace particular to Mildred, and determined to show her guests a good time, she hid her disappointment well, and insisted they proceed with the party in Harold's absence. It turned out to be an unusual reception without the groom, but everyone enjoyed Mildred's one and only wedding cake.

Harold arrived in Thornton Heath the following day, and discovered that he had not only missed his wedding, but his honeymoon as well. Mildred's parents had gone on holiday in their place, so the wedding was postponed until their return.

With family and friends reassembled at the church on August 4th, 1945, the groom waited anxiously for his bride, but she didn't arrive this time. The taxi carrying the bride and her father had a flat tire en route to the church, leaving Mildred stranded and in tears. Their broken down car was finally located, and Mildred and her dad were rushed to the church. The couple were finally married after an hour's delay, with a small reception after at Mildred's home. An account of the unusual circumstances of their wedding appeared in a local newspaper.

After a weeklong honeymoon in Seaford, Mildred returned home to Thornton Heath, and Harold went back to Germany. He returned to England on long service leave four months later. After only a month together, Harold was repatriated to Canada, and it was six months before Mildred and he were reunited.

As she waited for her travel documents, Mildred visited friends and family saying her good-byes. There were many tearful farewells. Her mum and brother Lawrie took her to report at the designated place when she left England. Mildred sailed on the Lady Rodney from Southampton, arriving at Pier 21 in Halifax on June 21, 1946. A war bride train took her on to Moncton, where Harold and another couple were waiting. The next day they drove to Sheffield, and along the way Mildred was treated to fresh strawberries from a roadside stand, her first taste of New Brunswick. It must have been an exciting day for

her, coming to a new country and finally being reunited with her husband after such a long separation.

Living at the family homestead the first few years, Mildred grew close to Harold's sister Dean, her brother-in-law Tommy and their children who lived on a farm nearby. They visited frequently, and Dean's children thought the world of their favorite aunt Mildred. Dean taught Mildred the survival skills needed for living in the country, canning preserves and meat, picking fiddleheads, and what Dean was best at, keeping a fire roaring in the wood stove.

Quite an attraction in Sheffield with her accent and funny expressions, Mildred's cheerful smile and comical sense of humor made her a favorite with visitors. Dean's daughter Judy recalls Mildred's excitement the first time she saw a moose, describing it as a gentleman moose, a phrase that sent everyone into a fit of laughter. Judy fondly remembers that when Mildred came to their house to visit, she always brought laughter with her.

Mildred's best friend was her neighbor Celia, who also happened to be a war bride. Common backgrounds provided a comforting bond to build their friendship on. Mildred was also fortunate to find a second family away from home with her friend Jean's parents, who were also from England. Being near people from her homeland helped ease the initial culture shock she experienced, and must have made her adjustment to Canadian life somewhat easier. Mildred enjoyed her first Christmas in Canada at their home, especially the wonderful array of food. Homesick for her family though, Jean's mum kindly provided a shoulder for Mildred to cry on that Christmas Day.

Mildred's first child, Malcolm, was born in March 1947, and Linda in July 1948. Harold was working in construction, and like many other women whose husbands worked away from home, Mildred was left to raise the children mostly on her own. It probably wasn't what she expected out of marriage, but she made the best of the situation by being the best mother she could be. Her children recall that she was 'a good mother to us. She was our main thing in life, always there for us.'

It wasn't long before the young family outgrew the homestead. Mildred was happy and relieved when they decided to rent half of the Swenson farmhouse a few miles up the road in Sheffield. The old house faced the St. John River, making it extremely cold in the winter, but it was a place of their own. A wood stove heated the house, with a woodshed and outhouse in the back, a stark contrast to the central heating and indoor plumbing common to urban life in England that Mildred had been used to.

Mildred adjusted to her new life very well under not the easiest circumstances. She stretched and saved pennies, earning extra money trapping muskrats and selling pelts. Dean and Tommy had livestock and vegetables, and shared their abundance with Mildred and her family. Deer and moose meat were plentiful in season. With times rough for everyone, people looked out for each other, and Mildred managed to cope. It was never a question of success or failure for her. She chose this life, and was resolute in making a go of it.

Known as a great cook, Mildred became famous for making the best cookies for miles around. Her friend Marg also recalls, 'Mildred made the best soup, simmering soup bones and fat into a broth on the back of the wood stove for days before adding vegetables. A favorite during hunting season.'

Settling down to country life must have been quite a transition for a sophisticated city girl. Mildred had been accustomed to the convenience of buses, trains and the subway in London. She had enjoyed a busy social life, going to movies, dances and visiting with her friends, always ready for some fun and laughter. Once in Sheffield, she found that a trip into Fredericton on the bus a few times a year was cause for excitement. It came up the road in the morning picking up passengers, and returned in the evening. A day in the city was a big deal for everyone. Annual spring flooding was another event that always created a stir, living so near the river.

Mildred always looked forward to her Uncle George's summer visits from Toronto, who always brought candy and gifts for everyone. His visit to Sheffield in June 1956 coincided with a long awaited visit from Mildred's parents. Mildred was overjoyed at the family reunion, and pleased that Malcolm and Linda met their grandparents.

Moving to Fredericton in 1960 dramatically changed life for everyone. The new house had modern luxuries of indoor plumbing and television, though Mildred still cooked on a wood stove. Small in stature, the high kitchen cupboards posed a problem for her, which she solved by standing on a block of wood.

Malcolm and Linda attended a much larger school in the city, and they both became involved in sports. It wasn't long before they made new friends, and soon had lives of their own. Still employed with the same company, but working in the office now, Harold had time to socialize as well. Mildred found herself on her own a lot, but being the outgoing, friendly person she was, it didn't take long for her to start new friendships, and she enjoyed having friends and family from Sheffield come to stay with her. She often took people in when spring flooding forced them from their homes. Celia had also moved to the same neighborhood, and Mildred often walked to her house to visit.

Mildred's hopes for another baby had resulted in miscarriages along the way, but in early 1961, she became pregnant again. For her own reasons, perhaps to be certain, she didn't tell anyone for several months. Linda and Malcolm discovered their mother was expecting a baby when Linda noticed a bag on the table while their mum was out one afternoon. Curious, she looked inside and found maternity clothes. She said, 'Malcolm, you better come and look at this!' With her discovery, the secret was out of the bag.

Susan was born in September 1961. Malcolm and Linda remember their father coming home late that night, waking them with the news that they had a sister. Having a baby in the house after so many years was a big adjustment for everyone. Mildred was thrilled however, and focused much attention on her new baby. Generous friends had two showers for her, and Edna remembers how Mildred made the adjustment to late

motherhood. 'At first, Mildred was worried about providing for another child, but she had faith that what she needed would come to her. She had a lot of fun with Susan.' Before long, Mildred was out walking with Susan in the stroller, frequently going to Celia's to visit. She often wrote to her mum, Lawrie and wife Vera of delight in her little daughter, hopeful they might come to Canada to see her.

Mildred's father died in April 1962, but she was unable to attend his funeral. Uncle George died a few years later, leaving her a small inheritance, and as a result, she was then able to return to England to visit in May 1966, her first trip home in twenty years. Mildred was ecstatic, and friends delighted her with a going away party, showering her with gifts for the trip.

Mildred spent two nostalgic weeks with family and old friends in familiar places; however, she found England had remained too reminiscent of wartime. It was a wonderful visit, but she was glad to return to her family. She commented afterwards that she could not live in England again. Canada had become her home.

Shortly after Mildred's arrival home, Linda got married. It was difficult for Mildred to accept her eldest daughter leaving home, soon followed by the news that she and Harold would be grandparents, but true to her character, Mildred coped very well under not the easiest circumstances.

Circumstances had clearly begun to affect Mildred as the year drew to a close. On December 16, 1966, she wrote a letter to her brother Lawrie, in which she told him, 'Time is short, so a brief letter will have to do. I'm not looking forward to Xmas too much. If you were here you would understand.' It was obvious to her brother from the melancholy tone of her words that Mildred was not her usual cheerful self, and that it was not a good time for her. Mildred ended her letter by saying she was going to town later that afternoon. She had no way of knowing how short time really was, or the tragedy that waited for her before that day was ended.

Later that evening, Mildred and Harold were returning home from a Christmas party when Harold lost control of their car on an icy bridge and crashed. Suffering from serious injuries, Mildred remained in a coma for several hours, and passed away the following day, December 17, 1966, at the age of 42.

Blessed with a presence that could light up a room, Mildred's wonderful qualities of laughter and optimism for life still touch those who loved her. She possessed a unique ability to make the most of what fate dealt her. Lovingly remembered for her devotion to family and loyalty to friends, she will always remain an inspiration to the ones she left behind.



My War Bride Story

By Eileen Black

In September 1940, our home was demolished by a parachute bomb and my mother died in January 1942 as a result of her injuries. I was buried and then rescued by my father but luckily, I was not injured.

I married a Canadian soldier in November of 1941 and looked forward to the time when I would be coming to Canada. The time finally came in July 1946 and by then I had two children ages four and two. My husband had been home a full year so we were very anxious to follow him. When I was due to leave, my father came to London to say goodbye. It was with mixed feelings that I left but nevertheless, I was excited to be on my way at last.

The voyage over was a little difficult, looking after the two children and trying not to be seasick. When we arrived in Halifax, I remember that it was very hot and as we only had to go as far as Montreal, we were some of the last ones to go ashore. Finally we boarded the train and settled in for a night's sleep. The train was late and didn't arrive until late at night. By that time everyone was very tired.

My husband and his family were at the station to meet us; we were finally together again.

We lived in Montreal for the next two years and I was lucky that several other War Brides from my hometown had also married men from Montreal.

In 1957, we decided to venture out west. By then we had two more children. We sold everything and bought a station wagon and camped our way across the country taking twenty-six days. Finally we arrived in Vancouver with no job, no furniture and very little money. The first years in Vancouver were very difficult but we managed and never

regretted moving. We are now retired and have seven grand children. Thank goodness we are both healthy and enjoy life.

In 1989, I became a member of the Vancouver War Brides Association. I have never been sorry that I came to Canada.



Our Journey to Canada

By Hilda Bradshaw

Our journey to Canada started in Southampton on the Aquitania, July 22, 1946. I remember the good food on board ship, and although I was so seasick, I especially remember the 'white dinner rolls'. Although I couldn't eat, I took a white dinner roll back to the cabin with me to show the girls who couldn't make it to the dining room, so we could all gaze at it in wonder. We hadn't seen bread so white for a very long time. On reaching Nova Scotia and Halifax's Pier 21 we got all our things sorted out alphabetically, on the train we went. Being shown to our seats, we were thrilled to find we had a whole seat each, but found we needed the extra space, as the journey to Saskatchewan was a long one. It was interesting to see the various provinces roll by. A lot of us had not traveled too far from home during the war, what with the London Blitz etc.

I was lucky, having been brought up in a military school in the Nilgiri Hills in S.W. India, because my father had been in the British Army in India before she got her independence in 1947. This would also have been the first time a number of the 'War Brides' as we were named, had been parted from their families which was hard for them. We looked forward to seeing our husbands again with a mixture of excitement and apprehension, but we were determined to make the best of things, so we put on a smile and took our first steps into a land which we knew nothing about. Things were of course, very different, and we slowly got used to Canadian ways.

I went on to Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and was tickled to see a city so clean after grimy London. I was disappointed to find out that we were not going to live in Saskatoon but that I had another train journey to Carrot River, of all places. This was news to me, we arrived in Carrot River in darkness, and my husband and I were met by my father-in-law and an older English couple who had a car. We drove out to the farm we were going to live on (another surprise) along a dirt road, which was very narrow and there was thick brush on either side. Imagine my thoughts, surrounded by complete strangers, except my husband. I hoped that another car was not coming from the other direction. London has narrow streets, but this was quite nerve racking. My father-in-law was a very sweet person, but he had said 'lets get her home tonight before day break because if she sees Carrot River in the daylight she will go back right away.' We laughed about that years later. However, I did stay and learned to do everything a farm wife was supposed to do: canning, bread making, making pies, cakes, butter and all the best of it. I learned a lot and people were so helpful.

We were always treated so well on our journey, and my thanks goes out to all, from on board ship to Pier 21, and on the train. We were well received on the whole, but unfortunately there were some girls who were not well received by some Canadian families, sad to say.

War Bride Poems Collected by Research Department Staff

Mid Atlantic
author unknown

Canada's big and Canada's new, and Canada's far away,
Has Canada anything half as fun as Epsom on Derby Day?

Canada's days are warm and dry and Canada's skies are clear,
Does Canada know what it's like to fish from Southern Pier?

Canada works and Canada plays but always Canada grows,
Can Canada show me anything dear as an English rose?

Canada's hearts are young and strong and I am one of them now,
Does Canada know how the sparrows sing as they follow an English plough?

Canada's plains are broad and long and Canada's lakes are deep,
Does Canada know of the Sussex downs and the bleat of English sheep?

Canada's coming closer now and we'll soon see the Maple trees,
But part of my heart has been left behind in the wash of the English seas.

War Brides

They've chosen their partners, they're proud and glad

Of their Aussie, their Yank, or Canadian lad.
From parents and friends, from their land they'll depart.
What a great step for a very young heart.

Off to a country unknown and untried
To learn other methods and customs besides.
Even their husbands at first must be shared
With his people and friends, who have
waited and cared.

These brides must take courage and kindness along
For they can't rush back home when small things go
wrong.

They will speak for this land by behaviour and deed,
Must earn their acceptance and honour their breed.
Good luck and God bless them, these pioneer brides
And give them fine children, the best of both sides.

This poem was published in a British newspaper in 1946.

Thoughts on Leaving England
by an unknown author

We've left our "weald" and "downs" and "fens,"
The moors and northern lakes.
We've left behind the local pub,
"No beers" ... "sold out" ... the daily rub
Of queens, and suchlike mundane things.
Shed a tear perhaps for the home of Kings,
London, the ballet, Wigmore hall.
The costermonger, bomb scarred St. Paul.
To the land of coke, the nickel and dime,
We wend our way ... may fate be kind.
We follow the lead Columbus gave.
Bride, babe and child, o'er the rolling wave
To Canada.

Ballad of the Brides
by Gwyneth M. Shirley

There were six hundred war brides who sailed away
On an old troopship one winter day.
For Canada bound, after World War II,
From England they sailed, to start life anew.

At first, all went well. They feasted each night,
Exclaiming the wonder, unused to the sight
Of white bread and oranges, sugar piled high,
Rich gold butter and ice cream with pie.

But alas! Two days later a boisterous sea
Swept up the ship with sadistic glee;
Way below deck, it was hell - plain hell -
Tossed like toys on the turbulent swell.

Six hundred war brides, prostrate and pale,
Bewailing the day that they ever set sail -
Bonny Scots lasses, Irish colleens,
French girls and Dutch brides, still in their teens.

Six hundred war brides with mal de mer racked -
Bunks close together like cheap coffins stacked -
Lost between two worlds; a limbo where love
Seemed more remote than the stars up above.

Homesick and seasick, each girl in her bed
Found time to think and found time to dread
The uncertain future and life in a land
She never might love or understand.

Ten days, ten nights on that hateful sea
And then ... a strange tranquillity!
A silence, unearthly, around them lay;
By noon, thick fog obscured the day!

While fate stepped in, played a cruel trick,
The children were suddenly taken sick.
So near and yet so far from land,
Still as a statue the ship seemed to stand.

Too weak to cry, the babies lay,
More feverish every passing day,
While Red Cross nurses, four in all,
Tried to cope with every call.

The ship ached in every bone.
Oh! You could hear her timbers groan.
But through the fog she groped her way,
Detached, suspended, steeped in gray.

At last, a vast expanse of sky

And raucous gulls a-wheeling high,
While on the waves, a welcoming sign:
Dark strands of seaweed intertwine.

The cry went up, "Land, land in sight!"
Look where the distant sea breaks white
Against a bleak and barren shore -
Surely untouched by man before.

And then the sun's reflected light
Sparkled on window panes so bright.
"A house, a house" ... with wood piled high
And frozen washing 'gainst the sky.

The Aquitania docked with ease
And standing in the chilly breeze
Six hundred brides one thought did share,
"It's Halifax, we're really there."

The quayside, bright with colours gay,
Bedecked with flags to mark the day,
Bustled with life. The cheerful sound
Of drums reverberated round.

Army officers, shouting commands,
Mingled with citizens shaking hands.
Sally Ann ladies, served cups of tea,
Coffee and sandwiches, all quite free.

Mounties in scarlet stood stiff as starch
To rousin strains of the Wedding March
While one brass band broke into play
"O Canada" on such a day.

And war brides awaiting sang along
Not sure of the words but liking the song.
Their voices floated across the sea;
Their story passed into history.

This was the last war bride crossing of the Aquitania in January of 1947. Poem reprinted from Legion Magazine.

War Brides Song
Composed by war brides aboard the Lady Rodney

Oh! The drums bang and the symbols clang,
And the war brides lead the way.
It's forward into Canada, you can hear them say,
We all hail from a mighty country,
To a lovely one we go,
To our dear Canadian husbands,
The smashers we used to know.

We left the town of Southampton,
On the 15th, day of May.
Then upon the Rodney, we were all feeling gay,
We left the shores of Blightly in the afternoon that day,
And some of the girls were crying,
Hurrah, we're on our way.

We're feeling fine, That's a very good sign,
Our spirits rule the day,
To us it's simply home from home
The old Canadian way.
Where ere we go from east to west,
We want you all to know,
We'll make the best Canadians,
No matter where we go.

Ode to a Canadian

Copied from the diary of Kay Ruddick, a Red Cross worker, who escorted war brides to Canada

Author Unknown

He'll ruin your life, run off with your wife
And think he is doing no wrong.
He'll take you around if you lend him a pound
And take all you have for a song.

He's a thousand-mile ranch that was left by chance
At the death of his old uncle Josh.
He's a marvellous shot, and believe it or not
Is a wonder at breaking a hoss.

He's forgotten his wife, he'll be single for life,
With the boys he's a regular guy.
And he's got a life story that is covered with glory,
But he's much to wicked to die.

He'll gaze with a frown on old London town,
Saying "Gee, what a helluva dump"
Why back home on my farm it would go in my barn
And your ego goes down with a bump.

He has personal charm that is meant to disarm
To anyone that gets in his way,
And, don't listen to him, for he's only a whim
And he'll surely lead you astray.

Though you know he's a liar your blood is on fire
As he whispers "I love you so much."
You go weak at the knees as he whispers "Oh please"
And you feel his experienced touch.

Though you may regret it you'll never forget it,
Although it is breaking your heart
To think of the kisses that other young misses
May give him while you are apart.

Though he makes you so mad, and often quite sad,
Still you cannot send him away.
He's really quite bad and a regular cad,
So why do you whisper "Please stay"

He'll wed you of course when he gets his divorce,
But while waiting – "Oh honey, why not?"
So just think of this, when he begs for a kiss,
That a pram costs a helluva lot!

TO A WAR BRIDE

We left our homeland just after the war
Everything so strange and new,
We welcomed, laughed at, and looked down upon,
But some stood their ground...quite a few

Some found it hard, to change their ways,
And returned before they gave it a chance,
But most of us stayed... a challenge.. a dare,
They called the tune...and we danced.

Homesickness was a trial to bear,
Our folks were so far away,
We had no shoulder to cry on; no one to care...

How heavy our hearts were; our loved ones away

But we grinned and we bore it, and boldly stood firm
It's paid off in hundreds of ways,
We've had our families, were proud of them all
And so glad we married a bunch of great guys

As the years roll on by, we are still proud to be,
A bunch of young gals from over the sea.
We are proud to be part of, to love and to share,
All the boundies and gifts, this great country bears.

The good things have out numbered the hard,
As the rainbow of life rolls by,
God help us to carry on as he would like,
So share with Him before you fly.

Now all you war brides take time to shake,
The hand of a friend in need,
We've had our day and in many ways,
Are richly blessed, don't you agree?

Help those who come now to these bounteous shores,
Even tho' they speak not out tongue,
We were the strange ones a few years ago
Remember? so help them along.

To keep this old world going round and round, To
help keep peace and tranquility,
Let this be our pledge for as long as we live,
With God's help... Let it be.

Mosaic of Memories

A song written by members of the War Brides Association of Fredericton for for a concert that they performed. Donated to Pier 21 by Mrs. Thonita (spelling of name to be confirmed)

Dearie – Do you remember when –
we queued up for cigarettes
married Canadians who now are vets
carried gas-masks over our shoulders
wherever we went.
Test your memory!

Dearie – Do you remember when –

Jerry dropped his bloody bombs
we ran to the shelters and sang war songs
blackouts, sirens were part of our life style
it sure was a trail.
Rotton memory!

Dearie – Do you remember when –
we danced to the palais glide,
valeta, quick-step, tango and jive
dipping, swooning and crooning
we took life in our stride
lovely memory!

Dear – Do remember when –
we had no elastic for our knicks
buttons popped – oh what a fix
thanks to a good old safety pin
we were saved from dishonour and sin.
What a memory!

Dearie – Do you remember when –
we shopped with our ration books
didn't get enough to cook
couldn't get any silk stockings
so drew seams up legs.
Painful memories!

Dearie – Do you remember when –
we did our best for the servicemen
praying they'd come back again
saying goodbye at the station
crying all the way home.
What a memory!

Dearie – Do you remember when –
we left dear old Britain's shore
Canada bound to men we adored
kiddies and luggage in tow
looking for a face we would know.
Happy memory!

Dearie – We hope your life's been good to you –
with memories old and new
there have been good days and sad days
but ain't it been fun.
Lots of memories!

Tune change –

Dearies we say goodbye now and good luck to all
having a ball here – see you all next year?
From the war brides of Fredericton.

Together and Apart

A poem held close to the heart of Reagh Delong during his war years to remind him of his true love, Lucy Matthews.

“I thought to live without you was a thing I could not do.
Till I suddenly remembered that I was part of you.
So if you’re feeling lonely whenever you may be.
Will you please dear, remember that you are part of me.
So we’ll always be together although we are not near.
For I am with you, darling – and you’re with me my dear.”

A War Bride

Dedicated to Johanna Hageman (husbands mother)

She is apprehensive, a little pensive.
"How will it be?" she thinks.
I will miss my people so.

Should I stay,
should I go,
Oh, I don't know!

The ship hoots it's last Farewell,
She wanders up and down the deck.
Too sad to eat or sleep,
she starts to "count sheep".

Awakened by excited voices,
she realizes they are docked,
In a strange, vast land.

Then someone emerges from the crowd,
he takes her hand, her man.
Together they will start a life.
Husband and wife.

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Poem by War Bride Patricia Miller

I left old England far behind,
The country of my birth,
I took a trip across the sea;
Now what was all that worth?

It was not because of wanderlust,
I left old Blight's Shore
At a chance to live luxuriously
Free from rationing evermore.

Now what could be the answer,
That Canada's my home?
And London town is just a dream
Across the stormy foam.

The answer, very plain to me,
My love for you so true
Was my passport to happiness
And across that sea of Blue

A War Bride's Story by Hope Bridgewater

In Britain when nazis were bombing our land
We asked other countries to give us a hand;
By crossing the ocean the Canadians came
Helping our country was their total aim.

Lonely Canadians would come to a dance
Hoping the girls would give them a chance
A chance to be close to someone again
A chance to act as courtly young men.

I then saw a soldier who danced with great flair
He was handsome and had curly red hair;
He then caught my eye and asked me to dance
And we danced and he said, "Now, do I have a chance?"

Life was for living and death was so near
We married soon after in less than a year;
From many a battle, he came out alive
I prayed every day that he would survive.

Leaving my home at the end of the war

I cross the wide ocean to the man I adore;
We come to his farm with hundreds of cows
Chickens and horses, and even some sows.

My mother had told me I shouldn't have left
I now felt so lonely and very bereft;
I asked for the loo and what did I get?
A very old outhouse I'd rather forget.

He built a new outhouse and painted it blue
I used it quite often, what else could I do?
Then, I kept reaching to turn on a light
Nothing was there but the darkening night.

Nothing electric! Now, how could I cope?
With a washtub and wood stove, I had reason to mope;
From sunrise to sunset, I worked on that farm
Why did I do it? My husband had charm!

I was kicked by a horse and gored by a cow
I was scratched by a rooster and charged by a sow;
More dangerous than war was this life on a farm
How did I face this? My husband had charm!

Why did I do it? It was love for that man
For love I adjusted as all of us can;
A war bride I was and always will be
While helping to build this land of the free.

A Wentworth Valley War Bride by Hope Bridgewater

Sirens and bombings were part of the night
As the Nazis hit Britain with all of their might;
Fire, death and destruction first met our sight
Looking outside in the dawn's early light.

Canadian heroes came to our shore
To aid in the fight of this desperate war;
Their Lancaster bombers helped turn the tide
As Canadians bravely came to our side.

A Canadian airman lay wounded in bed
This time when I saw him I thought he was dead;
As he opened his eyes, he caught hold of my hand
"Here I lie helpless; I can't even stand!"

In case I don't make it, I've something to say
I love you, my princess, with each passing day
I thought I was dying and then heard your prayer
With you sitting beside me in that little chair."

Turn, again and again I had prayed as a nurse
In hoping his pain would never get worse
His bravery and joking were his coping skill
And all his belief in God's will.

"O God, help this man in his painful ordeal
As nurse I implore you to hear this appeal
He's brave and he's noble in fighting this war
Dear God, let him live many years more."

And Stephen grew well as time ticked away
Handsome and stronger on each passing day;
Then, came the day with our wedding bells ringing
His Lancaster crew were cheering and singing.

Days passed into autumn as Stephen grew strong
Saying, "I'll go into battle where I belong
Death may await me in that Lancaster plane
God willing, I'll make it without being slain."

When the Nazis were crushed and the war declared ended
The role of this Lancaster crew was commended;
The crew flying homeward bade England farewell
My husband now gone, my loneliness hell.

On the ship Aquitania, I came cross the ocean
Saw pier twenty-one with tears of emotion;
United again, we drove to this valley
To a welcoming crowd and a blissful finale.

Memories of the Old Valley Schoolhouse by Hope Bridgewater

Let's call up the memories of the Old Valley Schoolhouse
And with its marvelous history espouse;
Yes, let's call up the memories, the call of the past
The names of past students, a magnificent cast.

Barclay and Purdy and Beebe and Hunt
The nicest of people you'll ever confront;

Letcher, McLellan, Macdonald and Swan
In music and history, they've always shone.

Weatherbee, Teed, and McNutt and MacPhee
They're very well known for their pedigree;
Hunter and Smith and Langille and Brown
For brains and inventions they have renown.

One name we will honour on this special day
Ernest Cumming who died in his chosen way
Fighting the Nazis and their war of hate.
Ernest Cumming, we are calling you great.

Ernest Cumming, only son of Howard and Frances
He served in the Air Force, taking his chances;
A lone Spitfire pilot, he carried out missions
Of photo-reconnaissance in dangerous conditions.

He married in England and once said to his bride:
"A personal wish I'd like to confide
If I should die on a reconnaissance flight
Tell my parents I was out there doing what's right."

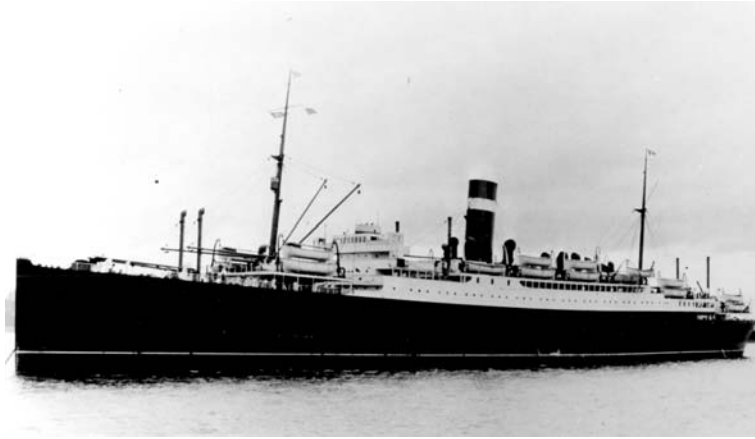
He went missing in action; no Mayday was heard
And he vanished alone, without saying a word;
And after the war, his wife, Anne, came to this Valley
To see Howard and Frances and help them to rally.

You can see on a hill near a century old church
A cenotaph standing, with names you can search;
And a name written there on the black granite stone
Ernest Cumming, brave Spitfire pilot, is shown.

Names of descendants are here in this room
Barclay, Hunt, Letcher continue to bloom;
Waugh, Hyslop, Ramussen, Halliday, Wood
All work together to keep things looking good.

The old Valley Schoolhouse is still standing proud
Witness today this wonderful crowd;
And memories of those who attended this hall
Live on in spring, summer, winter and fall.

The Cattle Curse of the War Brides
By Carrie-Ann Smith



Empire Brent - Letitia

During and after the war 50,000 war brides and their 22,000 children arrived at Pier 21. These brave and adventurous ladies left everything familiar behind and came to cities and rural areas across Canada. Though some later returned to their homelands, most adapted and grew to love Canada, displaying a pioneering spirit and resilience that had developed during the long war years.

Their personal stories range from the hilarious adventures of London girls in the prairies to heartbreaking tales of abandonment and betrayal. Among my favourite war bride stories are the ones written by the women who boarded the Empire Brent in November of 1946. After tear-filled goodbyes to their families and a trip to the hostel in London the girls gathered their courage and boarded the ship. A new chapter of their lives was beginning and all believed that the next time they stepped on solid ground it would be in Canada.

When Sylvia Wilkes married a Canadian soldier during the Second World War she was repeating history because her mother-in-law, Lily Wilkes (nee Lawrence) had married a Canadian soldier during the First World War. Lily arrived at Pier 2 in Halifax with her one year old son in 1919. Sylvia set off twenty-seven years later. Here is her description of what happened.

"Our ship was to be the last one until spring, so it was go then or wait until spring. About an hour out, we hit a cattle ship. It was about five in the morning and I was up feeding my baby when I felt this jolt. I went up on deck and saw all the cattle in the water. It was pathetic. Our ship was damaged too much to continue so it was back to port and back home for a couple of weeks."

An account donated to us by Mrs. Olive Minnings helped fill in some of details and set the record straight as far as the brides' reactions to the crash was concerned.

"Our first boarding at Liverpool was Nov. 24, 1946; although, in the early morning our ship after leaving the dock ran into a Cattle boat in the River Mersey and capsized it. Imagine the confusion when it was announced we would be sent back home or to a hostel in London to wait repairs and would be advised when to return. Newspapers reported War Brides hanging over the sides of the boat crying out in horror, that was not entirely true because at five a.m. when it happened, most of us were still in bed."

Eileen Aedy's account is the punch line of this little tale and the incident that inspired the title.

"It was quite an eventful journey with several delays. Sailing from Liverpool, we no sooner left the dock than we collided with a cattle boat. The boat sank with the loss of some of the cattle. A large hole was torn in the bow of our ship, and we were towed back to dock and sent home for two weeks while the bow was repaired. It took ten days to sail from Liverpool to Halifax and another day to disembark and board the train. The second day in the train we were held up for eight hours outside of Rimouski owing to a derailment of a cattle train ahead of us!"

The war brides followed their hearts to Canada. Whether it was smooth sailing or rough, cattle-strewn waters they made the best of their circumstances. The visit of a war bride is always a special event at Pier 21; though not all of their stories are as dramatic as those detailed above, each of the brides has a unique courtship tale and immigration story to tell.