

Mary Shannon Fisher
nee McInnes
Scottish War Bride
Scythia



Editor's Note: The following memoir is based on an interview that was conducted by Elinor Maher and Beverly MacLellan for the Colchester Historical Society Museum &



Archives as part of the museums Year of the War Bride research and exhibit of 2006. The Pier 21 Society would like to thank Ms. Maher, Ms. MacLellan and the war brides that contributed to this collection by sharing their experiences and impressions of the war years and their early days in Canada.

Permission to use the Fisher family photos and this material, excerpted from the Brookfield Elder Transcripts Project, was obtained from Mrs. Fisher before her death in January 2006. Thanks to Kerry Geddes who shared additional information.

Name:

Mary Shannon (nee McInnes) Fisher

Parents:

Alexander and Sarah (nee Keary) McInnes

Home:

Ayrshire, Scotland

Birthdate:

October 16, 1923

What was the attitude to Canadian service men in your community?

Very positive

Husband:

First: Byard Fisher

Byard Fisher was a tail gunner and a wireless operator. "And a warrant officer. They thought they were invincible, they had such belief in each other." He went missing on November 10, 1942.

Second:

Harold D. Fisher

Harold was born in 1920 and enlisted in the RCAF in 1941. He served with 407 Squadron and then No. 2 127 Wing of Tactical Force at Tangmere on the south coast of England. On June 11, 1944, they sailed for France and landed at Beny-sur-Mer, Juno Beach. Heavy losses were incurred by their unit over the coming weeks. Harold volunteered to drive supplies into Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp after it was liberated. No words can describe the horrors encountered there. After VE Day the men in Harold's unit volunteered to go to the Pacific theatre of war but it was over before that was necessary.

Wedding dates:

June 7, 1942 (first), February 4, 1946 (second)

How did you meet your [first] husband?

"I met him [Byard] at work. At Ayr. I worked at the sports complex. He came in with two of the handsomest pilots you ever laid eyes on. He was pretty handsome himself, red-headed and nice. And he was standing looking at this big notice that was on the wall and it said the Canadian Army would meet the local hockey team on Friday and there would be this hockey game. Here were these three foreign boys, just looked great, and they said to each other, "Oh, there's no problem there. The Canadians are going to wipe them out. Why not?" So as they walked past me, I said to them, "Don't put too much money on that because you're going to lose it." So then they turned back and said, "How do you know?" And I said, "I just know. Just don't put too much money on it." He said, "Do you want to make a bet?" So I bet a package of cigarettes. And the next week he arrived with a package of cigarettes and I couldn't take them from him because I knew that the Ayr team was all Canadian; they had been imported before the War. And they had played as a team, you know. The Canadians didn't have a chance because that was a pickup

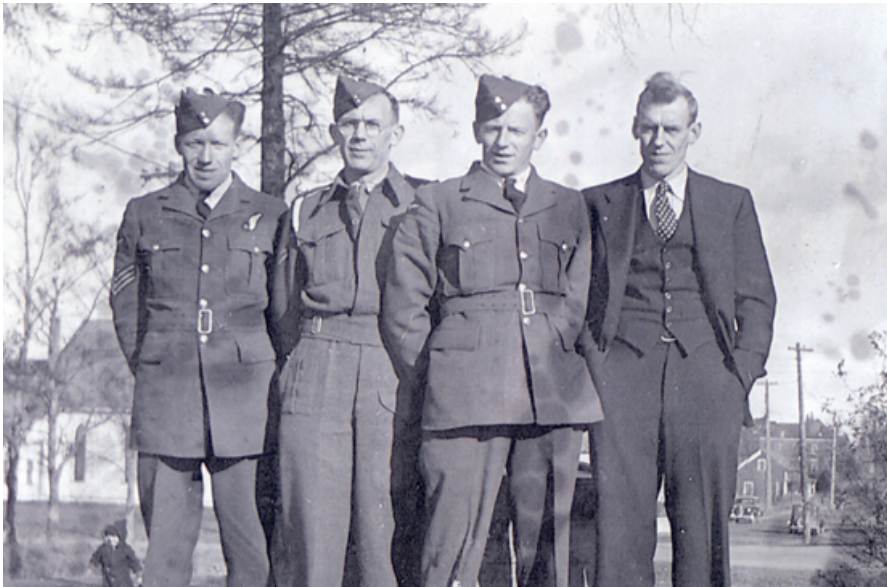
team. So I didn't think I was entitled to the cigarettes. That's how we became acquainted."

Byard was still missing when you came to Canada?

"Yes. I thought he might come out of a prison camp after the War. There's a lot of information that the government doesn't give you. You just wait and see things. But then you have this faith."

So you had met Harold Fisher, [Byard's brother, Mary's second husband] in Scotland?

"Harold had spent all his leaves with us. When Byard joined up he had what to him was a new car. It was a '38 Chevy. And he was coming home from work one day and decided enough was enough and he was going into the Air Force. And he said to Harold, "If you'll stay home and work with our father and keep the company going, I'll go into the Air Force and



you can have the car for a bonus." And he had just got landed out in the West in a training camp when a letter arrived and Harold said, "The car keys are in the cupboard and I'm in the Air Force." They chased each other all

through the War. They were always one step behind the other. They were on Coastal Command and every time Byard got moved Harold got moved into his place. But they spent all their leaves with my mother and father."

"We had a long time together. The three of us had a long time together."

At what point did you and Harold decide to marry?

"It was just a natural follow of events. When he came, they got their leave together, he came on leave to my mother's house. And we traveled around a lot together, the three of us would go out together. And when

Byard was lost he took the responsibility. He was there for Shannon and he was there for me."

"He [Harold] really wanted to go back to Britain. He liked everything about my family's life and the attitude of the people; he just wanted to go back there. And I thought, this man [Harold's father] who already lost one son was $\frac{1}{4}$ we should stay and, you know, have company and people around him for a few years anyway. But the few years went on and it was too late for us to make a change, it was too late to take the kids away from this district. Harold wanted to go north, and Byard before him wanted to go north. You realize I married my first husband's brother."

When did you marry Harold?

"The fourth of February, 1946. I came here in May 1945 and Harold came back in August. The first day he was home from overseas, he was back to work for his father."

What was your family's reaction to the news you were marrying a Canadian?

"Very positive. Byard had been spending time with my family whenever possible."

Can you tell us about your wedding?

Byard and I were married on June 8, 1942, in Dalmellington. My sister, Jane, was my bridesmaid. My brother, Bill, stood with Byard as Best Man. After the wedding our guests went back to my parents' home. There was no meat because of the war but our butcher donated an ox tongue. My mother was able to make a wedding cake when a family friend produced some of the scarce ingredients - through unexplained means.

Byard had to go to Stranrer the next morning to catch the ferry to Limavada, Ireland. A friend had enough gas to drive us there. He left and I returned to my parents' house.

What are your memories of the trip to Canada?

[Mary and her daughter Shannon travelled on the Scythia.]

"Well, I mean I never was afraid of the future all the time I was coming across. We traveled in convoy. All day the ships spread out and then at night they would close up for more protection. The children were undressed and washed and clean clothes on and their snowsuits, their

siren suits as they called them. And you spent your entire day except for mealtime on deck because you didn't know whether the ship would be attacked or whether there were submarines out or anything. It wasn't a thrilling experience, looking for a new life or anything. I was only coming to visit."

What was the date and memories of your arrival?

Mary arrived at Pier 21 in May 1945 on the ship Scythia, "The biggest shock I got was from when we came into Halifax and saw Pier 21. It was a shambles and all we could see were the backs of the buildings further up town and along the street and they were all needing paint and in such disrepair. And even coming from a country that was at war, we were in better shape than they were in Halifax. And that was surprising. That was a big surprise. And I wasn't the only one that felt like that. We felt we were coming over into the new world. It wasn't a new world."

Was Halifax economically depressed at that point?

"No, I think Halifax was booming. There were so many servicemen billeted down there, and going, and the navy wives would come and live in Halifax and if their husband's ship was lost they'd go back home to their parents. The ones whose husbands survived would stay in a single room in Halifax just for when they were coming back and forth. It was a very active place. But not a popular place because they were keen to have the Navy money but they weren't keen to have the Navy servicemen. That's what caused the riots. The day that war was finished, they locked up all the taverns and the licensed restaurants and when the sailors came into town to celebrate, there was nothing open. And that caused a riot, and they tore Halifax apart. I don't think anyone 1/4 the servicemen had no sympathy for the city. They really did ask for it."

They closed up because they didn't want the sailors 1/4 ? "They didn't want the sailors perhaps drinking or causing a problem. And they caused a problem all right. But they had a great deal of help from the civilians. Once the riot started. Everybody was involved in it and it ended up with civilians stealing and fur coats lying in the street.

Oh it was wild. We had a brother-in-law and his wife that lived down there and they could see it from their window. Smashed windows and 1/4 just vengeance, that's what it was. I don't think that Halifax is too proud of it. Instead of throwing the place open and saying, "You've earned it, for to lock everything up it was just stupidity."

So there was a little bit of tension there, I guess?

"Well, we were foreigners. This is now I consider a good, friendly community. But my children have been Canadians since they were born, and I've only acquired that. I don't think I've ever acquired that. I'm still from outside. But then anyone coming in here is from outside, isn't it? It wasn't us particularly."

Many of the women who came came from towns and cities, and they came to mud roads and no buses.

"Yes. Nobody told us that. Why didn't they tell us? Were they so used to the situation themselves? I was one of the lucky ones. We had electricity here. We had a bathroom. And I thought everybody lived like that. Surprised that they didn't. They thought we were sort of spendthrift or something."

Children?

Shannon - 1943 "was born in Scotland. She was born a few yards from Robbie Burn's cottage."

Kerry - 1947

Dawn - 1950

Kelvin - 1954

What were your first impressions of Canada? How did you get from Halifax to Middle Stewiacke?

"We off loaded and there was some servicemen there who took our baggage ashore, and anyone who was leaving Nova Scotia was leaving to go out West, they would travel the whole distance in that train. They wouldn't have to change or anything. The train didn't move that night, the first night. We slept on it. Five, six o'clock in the morning the train came up to Stewiacke and stopped there, and Gran and Grampy Fisher were there and some of Harold's sisters, and that was us landed in Canada. And the way that $\frac{1}{4}$ the train was very long and a lot of people and it blocked off the view of the other side of the railway tracks. And I thought Stewiacke was just maybe half a dozen houses and one street or something. I didn't realize there would be more of the town and I wondered what we were going to do in a little place like this. Really country little place. And it rained, and it rained for 23 days. Grampa Fisher come in one day and he said, "I want you to see something." So when I went out and looked, he said, "We have a sun." But he was an exceptionally fine man and always made us welcome. There were quite a few of us at one time. We really didn't have anyone, or anyone to talk to. So I thought it would be a good idea if we formed some kind of a group among ourselves - —nothing official, just to get together. And we did that."

What were your other impressions of Middle Stewiacke?

"Well to be truthful with you, the majority of us felt as if we had gone back in history. When we'd come from a place that was developed, ancient, has history, a lot of history, and we come here and everything seemed to be new and raw. And I thought one time about getting my brother to come out. He was interested in travelling and history and I'd like him to come and visit me. And he said, "But what is there to see?" And the only place I could think of was Louisburg. You're just, you're not quite in touch with history. There was a lot of things that were, I don't think they were intended to be hurtful but they were. Like, inviting our group to come and meet another English girl who was arriving and we're all sitting around the living room and the men are in the kitchen, which is the usual mode at that time, and one local girl pipes up and says, "Can your wife cook or is she like the rest of the British girls?" And then the other one about what's going to happen to all our girls, with all these foreign girls coming? And one of the men was quick enough to reply and say,
"Well, you know they were all here before we left."

Where did you live when you first arrived in Canada?

"With my in-laws, Suther and Annie Maude Fisher, Middle Stewiacke."

Did you have trips home?

"Yes. On several occasions. All of my children had the opportunity to visit Scotland."

Did your family come to Canada to visit?

"No."

Did you or your children have difficulties with Canadian. Citizenship?

"No. Shannon was a 'naturalized Canadian' and I had no difficulty."