

Civilian Support

During the two World Wars, many deaf women spent their spare hours volunteering with the Canadian Red Cross. In 1915, for example, the Dorcas Society (the former name for today's Women's Auxiliary) of the Toronto Mission to the Deaf met weekly at the Toronto Bible College on College Street to knit mittens, wraps, and stockings for Canadian soldiers at the war front in Europe.[35] Issues of *The Gospel Light* (the Mission's monthly publication from 1908 to 1917) reported that there was also a Red Cross sock knitting class for deaf women held each Thursday in the home of Annie (nee Fraser) Byrne, a popular Toronto interpreter and wife of a deaf man, John Rutherford Byrne. As the members of this group became more proficient in their knitting skills, their output increased, and the ladies were

now able to contribute to the health and comfort of our men at the front.... Before separating for the Christmas holidays, thirty-six pairs of socks were sent to a friendly connected Red Cross Association. Twelve pair were sent to relatives of the deaf at the front and ten pair were sent to the Fred Victor Mission for Soldiers there.... The funds for material amounts to thirty-five dollars, being contributed by collections at our Sunday meetings.[36]

For those individuals who could not spend time actually sewing clothing, George William Reeves, a deaf man active in the Toronto Mission, "started a subscription, which enabled us to secure 56 pair of first-class hand knitted socks," which were presented to the officers of the Red Cross League.[37] Each pair of socks came with a card bearing the donor's name and the following message: "With the compliments of the deaf of Toronto, Canada. May the wearers of these socks be made comfortable, and may the comfort thus obtained be the means of spurring them on to greater efforts to bring the war to a speedy and successful termination. God bless and save the loyal and brave men from Canada now at the front." [38]

With the outbreak of the Second World War, deaf Canadians once again were actively concerned about their country's soldiers. In a 1939 article in *The Star Weekly* (a Toronto newspaper), David Peikoff (noted Canadian Deaf leader) described the Deaf community's willingness to participate in war efforts:

War, and the national social and industrial emergency which goes with it, is providing the totally deaf with a splendid opportunity to prove that their services, when rightly placed, are as valuable as those of hearing people.

Already in Toronto, as in other Canadian cities, we have merged our various clubs together for the more efficient prosecution of war work, and daily increasing quantities of socks, sweaters and similar support are piling up.

All across Canada we have shown a united determination to "do our bit," and every society and club has its list of volunteers ready, for action whenever called ... an increasing number of totally deaf workers are taking their places at the machines of munition and armament factories.[39]

As Peikoff mentioned, deaf men and women worked at factories and plants while hearing men were off fighting the war. Many of these factories were engaged in producing goods for the war efforts. Ottawa, Ont. had its share of deaf civilians working in jobs vacated because of the war, as evidenced by the following news brief:

There are quite a number of deaf Civil Servants in Ottawa. The typists are Miss Hazel Blair, in R.C.A.F. branch; Miss Jean McLaren, Medical Army branch; Miss Mary Yureck, Dept. of Munitions and Supply. Miss Molly Brigham is a clerk at Income Tax branch; Miss Jean Goowin [sic], United Kingdom Payment Office branch. Other clerks are: Lloyd Greene in Dept. of Transport; Mr. Alonzo Charron in Dept. of Public Works; Romeo Dallaire is a mimeograph operator at the Administration of Ordnance Services office. Archie Wright and H. Johnson are chemists at John & Sussex Laboratories. Bill Baillie clerks at Dept. of Munitions & Supply. Those in the Post Office are G. Huband, Murray Brigham, John Dunn and Tom Brigham, who are clerks. June Arnold of London is with the Ottawa Aircraft Co.[40]

Windsor, Ont. also had deaf civilians filling in for hearing employees who were off fighting in the war:

Since last spring all the local industrial firms have willingly hired deaf people to work on war jobs. They have found that most deaf workers have proved highly satisfactory--17 deaf men are working at the Canadian Ford plants; 7 at the Chrysler plant. About 12 are at the Auto Specialities Co. now.[41]

In Winnipeg, Man., 26 deaf people worked at Leader's Ltd., six worked at McDonald Aircraft, and about a dozen were employed at the No. 3 Wireless Training School (which had taken over the

property of the Manitoba School for the Deaf a year after the outbreak of war). During the 1940s in Winnipeg, Man., deaf women gathered once a week at the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf on Balmoral Street, where they sewed brightly coloured or navy flannel dressing gowns for the soldiers.[42]

Deaf children, too, contributed to the war efforts. For example, three students at the Ontario School for the Deaf in Belleville - George Margo, Jessie E. Auld, and Jack L. Hooey - collected \$25 from 72 girls and 55 boys at the school and donated it to the Canadian Red Cross Society "to be used in the war efforts of the organization." [43] The Belleville branch of the Red Cross was so pleased with the students' efforts that they

formed a new organization known as the "Pupils of the O.S.D. Red Cross Unit." [44]

The next year, a group of female students at the school made marmalade, which they sold to raise funds for the Red Cross.

The girls in this class were Phyllis Thompson, Olga Witruk, Eileen Barrett, Lucille Bourdeau, Geraldine Taylor, Florence Rivando, Isabel Watson, Loretta Hoy, and Audrey Baker. The boys got into the act as well by collecting waste paper, which they sold so they could donate the money to the societies serving the soldiers.[45] Through these and similar activities, deaf civilians of all ages contributed to Canada's well-being during times of war.



Deaf war workers in Winnipeg (circa 1943) [click to enlarge]

The Tribune (Winnipeg, Man.) / Courtesy of Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf (Winnipeg, Man.) with permission of Clifton F. Carbin, author of Deaf Heritage in Canada: A Distinctive, Diverse, and Enduring Culture (1996)

Back row (left to right): James Hayward, Lawrence Ranger, William Gluchy, L. Vant Hull, Blanche Alfray, Jack Borsa, Alice Laigneault, Evelyn Nazar, J. Hanson, W. Pugh, Sophie Ladyszewski, Gertie Malyk, Steve Boyko, foreman.

Front row (left to right): Andy Malyk, John Ladyszewski, Scott Drake, R. Patkau, Fred Laran, Joe Chaikowski.

Seated: Paul LaPorte.

35 "The Deaf Working for Our Soldiers," *The Gospel Light* 8 (no. 86) (Feb. 1915): 8.

36 "Mission Notes (Our Red Cross Knitting Class)," *The Gospel Light* 10 (no. 109) (Jan. 1917): 5.

37 "Our Interest in the War (What the Deaf Are Doing)," *The Gospel Light* 8 (no. 91) (July 1915): 5.

38 Ibid.

39 David Peikoff, "Signs in Our Times," *The Star Weekly* (Toronto, Ont.) (Oct. 28, 1939): n.p.

40 Anne Ayres, "News of Ottawa & Vicinity," *The OAD News* 2 (no. 3) (Dec. 1942-Jan. 1943): 7.

41 "Windsor Notes," *The OAD News* 2 (no. 3) (Dec. 1942-Jan. 1943): 18.

42 Lillian Gibbons, "Deaf People of Winnipeg Sew for the Red Cross at Their Community Center," *The Tribune* (Winnipeg, Man.) (Mar. 6, 1940): 9.

43 "Three O.S.D. Students Present \$25 Raised by Pupils for Red Cross," *The Canadian* 48 (no. 1) (Oct. 1940): 6.

44 Ibid.

45 "Pictures of Deaf Children in Daily Papers," *The Canadian* 48 (no. 6) (Apr. 1941): 4.