

**Discuss How Important Women Were (Economically, Socially, and Politically) to the War Effort Between 1939-45**

12/15/2020

Mr. Read

Week D - Quadmester 2

Women in the early 1900s were mostly seen as housewives and family caretakers but during the World War II (WW2) women provided for the economy of the country, stepped in politically and represented themselves socially which made them an important aspect of the war. Over one million Canadian soldiers got called out to war in 1939, which left many women and children at home to continue providing for Canada at home. They did this by doing much volunteer work and getting jobs to keep the economy stable. Women also went to war by doing jobs such as nursing, driving, and making food for men in combat. Although men were taken away from jobs at home in Canada, somehow Canada had to keep their weak economy as stable as possible. One way to do this was for many women to do some 'masculine' or hard labour jobs; unforeseen for a woman to ever do at this time. Instead of being just housewives and taking care of kids and the home, these women started to create a movement for themselves by protesting for rights as they were doing more jobs contributing to the economy of Canada. Women at home gave up time and supplies with jobs such as knitting, cooking and rationing their food so the soldiers at war were able to have food and clothing to be strong and warm. These contributions helped soldiers to feel as though a part of Canada was off at war with them. Knowing that the more they contributed, the higher the likelihood of their husbands and male counterparts coming home safer and sooner so this helped motivate many of the women at home. Specifically, keeping the economy strong, doing volunteer work, and women going to war all graphically illustrate why women were important to the war effort between 1939-1945.

The first facet to examine when looking at why women were important to war economically in WW2, are the occupations many women took on which allowed the

economy to stay stable while husbands, sons, friends, and family were off at war. During this time women took part in jobs like factory work, drivers of cars and buses and built ammunition and military vehicles. As men were out at war, they were not helping with the economy back at home in Canada, so the women took over. Without their contribution the economy would have been at risk of collapse. Female empowerment rose at the time of World War 2 since women were getting jobs that were seen as masculine. By participating in the economy, by getting an education and post-secondary degrees allowed women to contribute to Canada in ways outside the home and family life. Female empowerment was also part of the movement of women getting jobs and being more important in society during 1939-1945. At this time education in engineering became acknowledged and people like Elsie MacGill, who was the first person to get a degree in electrical engineering and an advanced degree in aeronautics, was the first female to ever become an aircraft designer. By the end of the war women had to step up and become voices. They now had to take part in keeping Canada stable. In the Memory Project it was stated that, "In 1917 there were about 35 000 women in munitions factories in Ontario and Québec. By 1943, about 261 000 women were involved in the production of war goods, accounting for more than 30% of the aircraft industry, close to 50% of the employees in many gun plants, and a distinct majority in munitions inspection." (*Women in the Second World War*) This quote helps be able to see that even just from WW1 to WW2 more women took part and were acknowledged in providing for the country of Canada socially, politically and economically. The more women who took part in the jobs needing to be replaced, the more important they became since people started to realize and become reliant on these women. As soon as someone is relied on, it is harder to replace and find a new person to switch out instead

of them; that was the case for the women taking the jobs at the time. By WW2, women were starting to be seen as an equal to men and were given opportunities not normally given to them making them important. On the website Veterans it was stated that, "Women worked shoulder-to-shoulder with men in factories, on airfields, and on farms. They built parts for ships and aircraft and manufactured ammunition. They drove buses, taxis, and streetcars, [and], Women who worked with lumberjacks and loggers during the war were called 'lumberjills.'" (Veterans) This proves that women were able to be seen as equal or the same and were able to work in industries that only men were seen in. Factory work, lumbering, engineering, and teachers were some of the many jobs opening up during this time while men were at the war. Hence, it is clearly visible how women taking jobs at home in Canada make women an important aspect in Canada during World War Two.

Along with women working in Canada, the next area that will be discussed when proving why women are an important aspect to Canada's war effort is their volunteer work. The second point why women were an important aspect of the war between 1939-45 was the unpaid volunteer work females took part in Canada. A group like the Canadian Red Cross, the Women's Reserve Volunteer Corps, and the Canadian Auxiliary Territorial Service took part in much of the volunteer work, donations, and rationing in World War Two. Over fifteen thousand women were part of the Red Cross Foundation and much more outside the foundation participated in philanthropy. A couple of the ways the females did this were knitting, baking, rationing the food they were eating, and much more to support the men at war. Volunteering and war contributions not only helped keep Canada's economy stable, it supported the soldiers with needed rations. The volunteer work women took part in and the jobs involved were extremely important

to the war effort. On the Canadian Red Cross website it said, "Those who stayed behind mobilized to make bandages, sew surgical gowns, and assemble food parcels for shipment overseas."(*"History of Women in the Red Cross"*) This demonstrates that women and the Red Cross were contributing to the war effort without pay and recognition. If women at home did not start growing, sewing, building items then shipping it overseas, the Allies could have suffered greater losses, including war itself. Another important aspect for women at home in Canada was to save all the necessary items that were at home that could be extremely helpful or beneficial at all to Canadians at war. Women saved up metal, glass, bandages, canned food and more. This saving was helpful to men and people in combat during the war. In the Veterans website it says,

"To deal with wartime shortages, women became experts at doing more with less. They made their own clothes (sometimes even using an old parachute to make a wedding dress) and planted Victory Gardens to supply much-needed fruits and vegetables to their families and communities, [and], Weekly rations of food included 1 1/3 ounces of tea, 5 1/3 ounces of coffee, 1/2 pound of sugar and 1/2 pound of butter, [and], Packaged canvas 'ditty bags' with items such as chocolate, sewing kits, and razor blades."(Veterans)

It is clearly evident that they allowed people to reuse items and to allow war to be the way it was for Allies along with Canadian soldiers to succeed. Saving supplies to be a priority to be then shipped off or allowing money to be saved by Canada was shown by women in Canada. Therefore, it is clear that the volunteer work and philanthropy taken under by Canadian women makes them an important part of the WW2 effort.

With volunteer work at war, the next part that will be talked about when explaining why the women were an important aspect of war is their role in Europe at

war. The last mark on why women were helpful and were needed in the war effort was women actually enlisting to war and taking parts in jobs that include nursing, driving, and cooking meals for the many soldiers. Although women could not fight their contributions at the war were just as important to the war effort. There were three main groups included in the women going to war consisting of the Royal Canadian Air Force - Women's Division, Canadian Women's Army Corps, and Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service. With the women taking certain jobs there were more men to work in combat. All these contributions to the war, women going to war is one of the most beneficial ways women showed their courage and strength at this time. Over fifty thousand female Canadian soldiers enlisted and went to war. This bravery is an important aspect of how women were important to the war effort between 1939-1945. In an article inside the Canadian Encyclopedia it says, "Some 50,000 Canadian women eventually enlisted in the air force, army and navy. While the Royal Canadian Air Force Women's Division members were initially trained for clerical, administrative and support roles, they eventually came to work as parachute riggers, laboratory assistants, and within the electrical and mechanical trades." (*Canadian Women and War*) This shows that fighting was not a part that females took part in, but they did so much instead. Women transported men around, helped soldiers seek medical attention and have meals made while not at the front lines. This support was important to the war effort and how roughly all fifty thousand Canadian women participated making the soldiers feel more at home and recover while away from the trenches. Canadian women at war were helpful in making medical arrangements to the soldiers. They took part in this by being nurses as well as driving ambulances at one point during the war. Around three thousand female Canadian nurses served in World War Two and participated in

helping soldiers and their health. Another quote that was found on Veterans website was, "This time, approximately 4,500 nurses were attached to all three branches of Canada's military, with more than two-thirds of them serving overseas." (Veterans) This means that many women who were allowed to go to war played the important role of nursing and bandaging wounded soldiers as they came off the front lines. Without their contribution many people could have been hurt and not saved. Thus, it is clearly shown how the Canadians at war made an important contribution to the war effort in 1939-1945.

In conclusion, women's role at the war, their volunteer work, and their jobs in Canada to keep the economy in Canada stable allowed Canadian females to be an important aspect. Respectively keeping the economy steady, doing volunteer work, and women enlisting in war all distinctly illustrate why women were important to the war effort between 1939-1945. Women taking part in volunteer work and giving leftovers to the men, starting growing and rationing food to provide for the Canadians at the war was an important part. As well as going to war and becoming nurses to help front line soldiers and driving vehicles was also crucial. The last facet that was very important was the ability for the economy to be taken over here in Canada by the women taking over the jobs the men left as they went off to war. Women were a very important part to be included in the war and their contributions socially, politically, and economically benefiting Canadians and the Allies World War Two.

### **Work Cited**

Canada, Veterans Affairs. "Women at War." *Historical Sheet - Second World War - History - Veterans Affairs Canada*, 14 Feb. 2019,  
[www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/historical-sheets/women](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/historical-sheets/women).

"Canadian Women and War." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*,  
[www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/women-and-war](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/women-and-war).

"History of Women in the Red Cross - Canadian Red Cross." *Red Cross Canada*,  
[www.redcross.ca/donate/other-ways-to-donate/join-the-tiffany-circle/history-of-women-in-the-red-cross](http://www.redcross.ca/donate/other-ways-to-donate/join-the-tiffany-circle/history-of-women-in-the-red-cross).

"Women in the Second World War - The Memory Project." *Home - The Memory Project*, [www.thememoryproject.com/educator-resources/collections-and-highlights/11:women-in-the-second-world-war](http://www.thememoryproject.com/educator-resources/collections-and-highlights/11:women-in-the-second-world-war).