

Women and the War

Document A:

Before 1914, middle-class women had few options for working outside the home. Some became nurses or teachers. Others were employed as domestic servants or worked at low-skill, low-paying jobs in food and clothing industries. During the war, increased industrial production created a demand for labour. Women were hired for all types of work, from operating fishing boats to working on farms. One Toronto woman who worked filling artillery shells described her motivation on the job as follows:

There was everybody, every single class.... [W]e began to realize that we were all sisters under the skin.... [T]here's nothing that draws people together more than mutual trouble.... [W]e felt, "The boys are doing that for us, what are we doing for them?" You just rolled up your sleeves and you didn't care how tired you were or anything else. —Tapestry of War, 1992

Initially, there was a reluctance to allow women into new fields of employment. As the war proceeded, however, it became evident that if the country was to make the most of its resources, women's contributions would be vital. Many new factories were established to manufacture guns, ammunition, aircraft, ships and more, and women soon could be seen in almost every factory working alongside their male counterparts. This shift in gender roles took some getting used to, but by the end of the war, women had proved to themselves and to the country that they could do any job a man could—and do it well!

Suffrage Is Granted to Women

Without women's efforts on the homefront, Canada's wartime economy would have collapsed. But when the war ended, most employers assumed that women would return to work in their homes. Many women believed that their contribution to the war effort should allow them to make decisions about how their country was run. During the 1915 provincial election in Manitoba, one of the Liberal Party's campaign promises was to give women the right to vote. They kept their promise, and Manitoban women received this right in January 1916. Thanks to the efforts of suffragists across the country, women in other provinces soon won the right to vote as well. Alberta and Saskatchewan followed Manitoba's example later in 1916, with Ontario and British Columbia following in 1917. In 1918, women were granted the right to vote in federal elections, with the exception of Aboriginal and immigrant women.

Suffrage: the right to vote in political elections

Suffragette: a woman seeking the right to vote through organized protest



Nellie McClung, a Canadian suffragette, who worked hard to gain women the right to vote, said “Women should have the same freedom as men.” WWI helped accomplish this, and prove she was right.

Suffragette: a woman seeking the right to vote through organized protest

Suffrage: the right to vote in political elections



Elsie MacGill,
**THE FIRST FEMALE
 AERONAUTICAL
 ENGINEER IN
 THE WORLD**

Engineer
 Elsie MacGill
 oversaw
 the production
 of aircraft in
 Fort William, Ont.



Canada's Own “Rosie the Riveter”



Popular WWII “Rosie the Riveter” poster

America may have made the fictional “Rosie the Riveter” famous during the Second World War, but Canada found its own female role model in a real person. Elsie MacGill was the first woman to receive an electrical engineering degree in Canada and the first female aircraft designer in the world. The 35-year-old aeronautical engineer supervised the production of Hawker Hurricane fighter planes at the Canadian Car and Foundry Company, which employed 200 women and produced more than 1,450 aircraft during the war. MacGill became a symbol of Canada's miraculous economic wartime transformation. She was even the subject of a comic book called “Queen of the Hurricanes” that was devoted to her achievements.

We're in the army now



YOUR AID IS VITAL!

Save

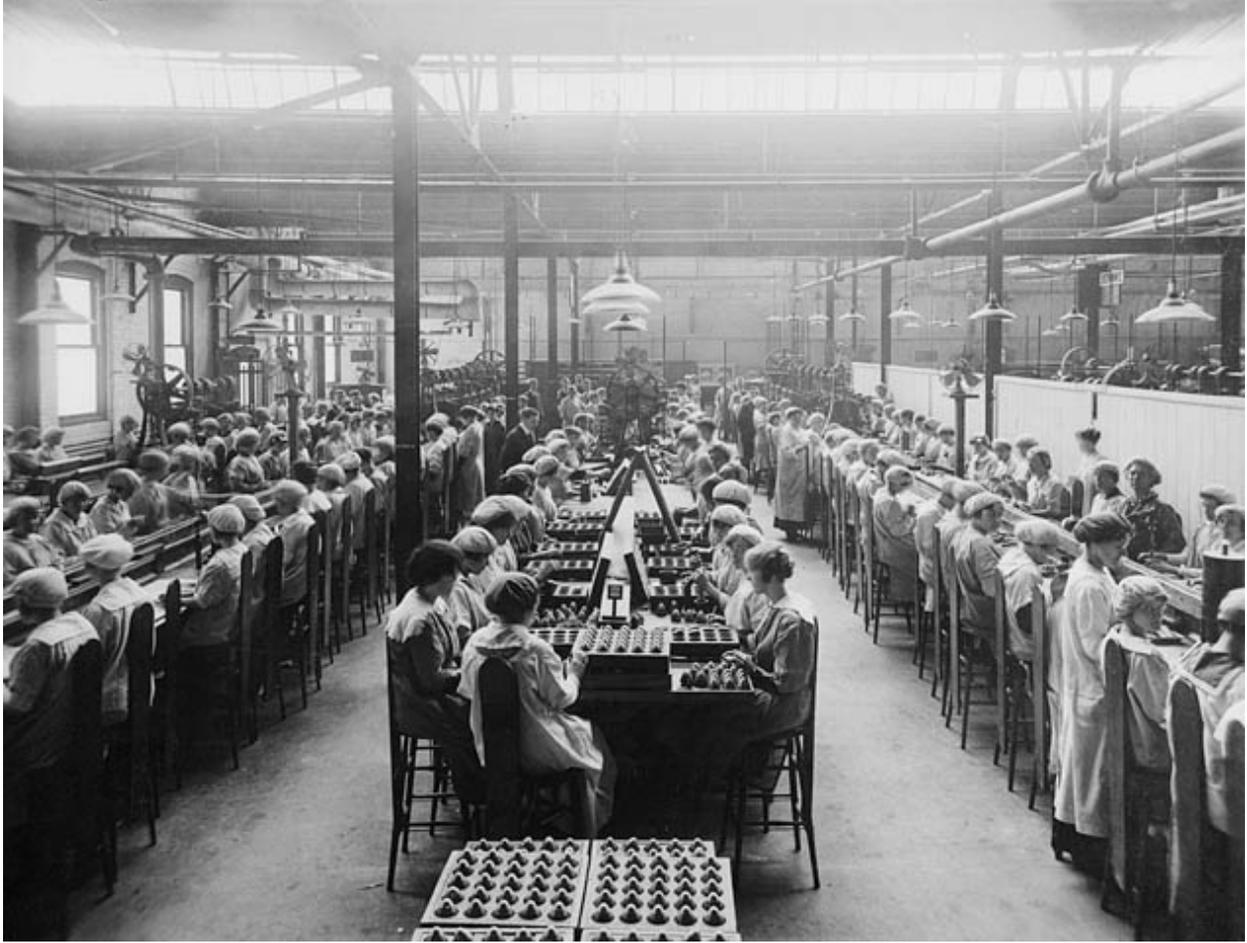
**METALS RAGS PAPER
BONES RUBBER GLASS**

THEY ARE USED IN WAR SUPPLIES



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Munitions assembly, Verdun, Québec. About 35 000 Canadian women worked in munitions factories where shells were manufactured, and thousands more drove delivery trucks.

