

**'THEY BROUGHT US EATON'S CATALOGUES': ISSUES OF GENDER,
CONSUMERISM, AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE STORIES OF SECOND WORLD
WAR BRITISH WAR BRIDES**

by

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**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of**

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Abstract

Close to 48,000 women and 22,000 children travelled to Canada from Britain during, and in the years immediately following, the Second World War. Throughout their journey to Canada, and even after their arrival, war brides came into contact with government bodies like the Canadian Wives' Bureau, as well as voluntary organizations. These groups were instruments of education and acculturation and focused their 'Canadianization' lessons on war brides' roles as wives, mothers, and consumers. War brides continually negotiated and selected messages in order to make use of tools that would suit their own needs. They did this, for example, through the War Brides' Clubs they organized in Canada. This thesis uses records of the Department of Mines and Resources, Immigration Branch, Department of National Defence, records of various voluntary organizations, as well as the oral histories of British war brides to investigate aspects of gender, consumerism, citizenship, and "Britishness" in the stories of war brides.

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I am completely indebted to the women who allowed me to interview them. They welcomed me into their homes with grace, warmth - and often the British tradition of tea and biscuits. Their honesty and willingness to participate in this study reminded me at every turn how special this group of women have continued to be over the years. These women include Mrs. Mary Sancton, Mrs. Pat Loop, Mrs. Marjorie Berry, Mrs. Phyllis Lockyear, Mrs. Audrey Renton and those that wished to have their names withheld.

Special thanks goes to Mrs. Lockyear, who welcomed me into her home more than once, and introduced me to several members of the ESWIC Club in Ottawa, including Mrs. Jean Spear, who kindly shared documents from her personal collection. I am honoured to have been able to participate in their afternoon tea at the end of May. Thanks also go to Mrs. Vermette, and the members of the Montreal War Brides' Association, who allowed me to go to one of their meetings.

I would also like to thank my colleagues in the M.A. program, for their continual friendship over the past two years. I could not have done it if we were not in it together. Thank you to friends who have been perpetual cheerleaders whenever it was needed. Love and appreciation go to my family for their constant encouragement, support, and faith in my abilities throughout this process.

Finally, this work is dedicated to my grandmother, Lily Sutton, who always shared her stories with me – even when she was not sure why I was asking. Her optimism and courage during the good times, as well as her perseverance during the difficult years of her journey, continually renewed my own determination. Learning about the story of her wartime romance with my grandfather, Frank Sutton, which developed into a long and happy marriage, has been my inspiration for seeking out the stories of other British war brides. And, if Frank Sutton had not asked Lily Bell Smith to dance at the YMCA in Croydon, this thesis might never have happened.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The story that has been told of Second World War British war brides has all the makings of an award-winning movie. The drama of the war, the romance of a whirlwind courtship, the heartache of leaving everything familiar behind, and, of course, the happy ending (complete with the image of the nuclear family) all form elements of its scenes. They form the basis for the way in which historians, both popular and academic, and their audiences, have conceptualized this slice of Canadian history. Left at that, however, the brides' story becomes somewhat mythologized. It comes to signify something other than what it means to war brides themselves.

When I interviewed my grandmother, Lily Sutton from Dumfries, Scotland, about her experience as a war bride several years ago, she mentioned elements of her journey that I had never anticipated, and thus, to which I attached little initial significance. When describing her preparations to leave for Canada in 1946, she explained:

They had started a Canadian Wives Club in Croydon, and we used to go every two weeks. I met a lot of women there who were in the same position as me. Some of them had children, some didn't, and some had more than one. And we used to meet, and they'd have people come in – Canadian army women. They used to come and talk to us about Canada and what to expect. They'd give us Eaton's catalogues. We were allowed to take them home, and we were just fascinated with Eaton's catalogues! We hadn't seen clothes and stuff like that for years because you couldn't buy clothes unless you had enough ration coupons. We'd see the clothes and all the furniture – they were so different from ours... iceboxes! We didn't have iceboxes – we didn't know what such things were. There were no fridges – they hadn't come out with them yet. These kinds of things... we found them fascinating to look at!¹

¹¹ This quote was taken from a larger interview with Lily Bell Sutton, Montreal, Quebec, 1998. Though she asserts that refrigerators were not invented when she reviewed the Eaton's catalogues, studies like Joy Parr's *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) have shown that refrigerators were in use by the war years. Parr states that "in 1941, when there were electric or gas stoves in three-quarters of Canadian homes, only one in five households contained a refrigerator rather than an icebox." (p. 247) Though the appliance made its appearance in the 1930s, it is possible that the appliances were not prominent in the Eaton's catalogues that were examined by war brides, explaining why it does not figure in Lily Sutton's memory.

Upon later reflection, it became obvious that these memories carried some abiding importance to her. They became the images through which she accessed her memories of the time. As I researched the literature on war brides it became obvious that these images appeared time and time again in the stories that war brides told. The question then became, how do these seemingly central images fit into the story when they are so clearly far from central to the romantic one-dimensional tale reflected in the literature?²

The term “war brides” was popularized to refer to European and British women who married soldiers stationed overseas during the Second World War. The First World War had its share of war brides, but their numbers were vastly overshadowed by the phenomenon that war brides became in the 1940’s. Though my focus will remain on British war brides immigrating to Canada, the United States and Australia also have their own version of this phenomenon, coming under various labels: war bride, G.I Bride, etc. Close to 48,000 women came to Canada during the Second World War and in the first few years following the war. Having met their husbands while they were serving overseas, and marrying often after very short courtships, these women, for the most part, only knew about Canada what they had learned from their husbands, or had been told at Canadian Wives clubs before their departure. Unlike most immigrants, these women were offered a free ride across the Atlantic by virtue of their marriage to Canadian boys, travelled alone or with their children, and did not necessarily settle into cultural enclaves with which they identified. The national and local press coverage of the arrival of these

² The romantic version of the war bride story is not the only one that has been told in the literature, but, these stories seem to form the bulk of the literature. Even when authors have told stories about war brides that had difficult adjustments or traumatic experiences in their immigration, they do not delve into the stories in any depth in order to establish patterns or sources for these experiences.

women, showing photos of rosy-cheeked faces waving from the deck, indicated the healthy 'Britishness' that the women came to embody.

An exploration of how these images and meanings become intertwined will take this historical analysis from an initial linear and whiggish progression, to a theoretically informed and more intricately questioned framework of the connections between gender and immigration. An assessment of war brides' role in postwar society as wives, mothers, and consumers, as well as an examination of the issues of the supervision and protection of female immigrants will help historians to understand the discourse that takes place between immigration and ethnicity, consumerism and citizenship, and the immigrant and his/her 'host' society. These issues show that there are many dimensions of the war bride odyssey, which have, as yet, not been sufficiently explored. Following recent trends in immigration history, the story of war brides begs a new interpretation – one that moves past the romantic visions of lonely soldiers and adventurous local girls.

Any examination of the war bride phenomenon, and indeed, war brides themselves, necessitates an understanding of where they fit into the larger context of immigration in Canada. Canadian immigration policy prior to the Second World War saw the tightening of restrictions, decreasing the numbers of immigrants being let into the country. Because of the adverse economic impact of the Depression of the 1930s, the Canadian government shut the doors to most immigrants until the country's recovery. Though the war brought new life into the Canadian economy, immigration barriers remained high, continuing to limit access to "American and British subjects with adequate capital, European agriculturalists with sufficient means to farm in Canada, wives and minor children of Canadian residents capable of caring for their dependents,

and those who had received permission to enter through specific orders-in-council."³

Bypassing restrictive immigration laws, British war brides gained entry to Canada since they qualified under the last two exceptions to the rule. Under Order in Council PC-23/5095 war brides were not only given permission to immigrate to Canada, but also provided free transportation for their journey.⁴ They were also granted entry because they were British citizens.

The citizenship status of war brides has attracted very little attention among the popular historians that have written about war brides. Their status is also left unclear in government correspondence. Investigation has shown that upon their arrival in Canada, British citizens gained entry as British subjects. Canadian citizenship only came into existence with the Citizenship Act of 1947. Though the term 'Canadian citizen' had been used for immigration purposes prior to the passing of the act, referring to people who were Canadian-born, it was not defined until the act came into effect on January 1, 1947.

Section 9(1) of the act stipulated that

A person, other than a natural-born Canadian citizen, is a Canadian citizen if that person
 (a) was granted, or the name of that person was included in a certificate of naturalization, and was not an alien on the 1st day of January, 1947, and
 (b) was, immediately before the 1st day of January, 1947, a British subject who had Canadian domicile.⁵

These sections applied to British war brides who arrived in Canada before the act came into effect. Therefore, with the passing of the act, war brides went from being classified

³ Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), p. 251.

⁴ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. Order-in-Council 23/5095, June 15, 1942.

⁵ Excerpt from the Canadian Citizenship Act, 1947, Section 9(1)(a) and (b) provided by Catherine Howlett, Nationality Law Advisor, Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Other sections of the 1947 Citizenship Act applied to war brides from countries outside the commonwealth. These women gained 'Canadian Citizen' status because of their marriage to Canadian citizens. This status is important to note, since the 1947 Act provided women a citizenship status separate from their husbands, which had been not been the case prior to 1947.

solely as British subjects, to gaining the official, and newly defined, status of 'Canadian Citizens'. Nonetheless, before 1947 Canadian officials, in their correspondence, often referred to the Canadianization of war brides as the acquisition of Canadian citizenship.

Early studies of immigration focused on the policy aspect of the immigrant experience. Historians explored the conditions that influenced policy makers' stance on whether or not to admit immigrants, or from which countries to admit immigrants, at different times. Certainly, examining the policy regulating immigration can highlight the ideological views of governments, and citizens, and the historical contexts that affected decisions about immigration policy.⁶

This top-down perspective is essential for understanding the experiences of war brides. In the years immediately following Second World War, at a time when Canada slowly and selectively began to open its doors to people from other countries, the Canadian government sponsored the immigration of close to 50,000 women and their many dependents. Even more importantly, they welcomed the women to Canada, and attempted at every turn to ensure that their journey was suitably arranged for migrants of their gender, class, and status as British citizens. An analysis of government files will attempt to identify the underlying assumptions that were embedded in the Canadian cultural context of the immediate post war era. By examining the pervasive class, gender, and ethnic concepts, coupled with the evolving sense of Canada's place in the

⁶ For studies dealing with the policy side of immigration history, see works like Irving Abella and Harold Troper's *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto 1982), Peter Ward's *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia* (Montreal-Kingston 1978), and Barbara Roberts, *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada 1900-1935*, (Ottawa 1988), and see Valerie Knowles, *Strangers at Our Gates: Canadian Immigration and Immigration Policy, 1540-1990*. (Toronto: Dundurn, 1992). For further examples of early immigration histories, and works that focus on the policy aspect of the immigrant experience, see Franca Iacovetta's immigration historiography, "The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History", Canada's Ethnic Group Series. (Canadian Historical Association, Booklet No. 22, 1977), and Doug Owram's *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide, 2: Confederation to Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

world and in the empire, we can begin to understand the concerns of government and immigration policy makers for this mass immigration of women. This policy analysis will also assess where the story of war brides diverges from the history of postwar immigration of other ethnic groups.

The writing of immigration history in Canada was dramatically enhanced by the advent of the new social history. Historians of immigration share methodology with historians of gender, labour, and ethnicity, aptly locating immigration within the social history milieu. One example of the interconnectedness of these fields is “its emphasis on ‘agency’ and doing history ‘from the bottom up.’”⁷ In terms of immigration history, this approach sought to understand the experience of immigration through the eyes of the immigrant. Instead of simply examining the policies that faced new immigrants and how they ‘acted upon’ new citizens, this newer approach investigates the immigrant’s active role in the process.

In the case of war brides, this bottom-up approach is one that has been favoured by historians researching their journey. The literature, as will be seen later, focuses on the war brides’ own story, without placing it in any larger context. In order to truly understand the stories of war brides, however, it is necessary to incorporate political and social history approaches. Integrating the analysis of government documents and laws, with the interpretation of women’s reactions, concerns, and decisions on a personal level, can provide a more complete picture of the war bride experience. More importantly, the writing of policy and experience provides better insight into the importance of the war bride migration for Canadian society.

⁷ Franca Iacovetta, “The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History.” *Canada’s Ethnic Group Series*. (Canadian Historical Association, Booklet No, 22, 1977), p. 5.

One important area where immigration history intersects with other social histories is in the work of historians who have adopted gender as a lens of analysis. This multi-faceted analytical tool is a newer phenomenon in immigration history. Earlier works evaluated the immigrant experience based on the experiences of men or women, without incorporating into the works an examination of what meanings masculinity and femininity held for immigrants in their new homes. This approach was adequate for dealing with issues of Canadian immigration that favoured male migrants to meet specific labour needs. However, it did not seek to understand the role that gender plays in creating experience. In investigating the experiences of families immigrating to Canada, the male perspective was also used to reflect the family as a cohesive unit. In part, this approach was a result of the idea that women held a protected position in the family unit. The female head of the family often remained isolated from the 'host' society in the context of the labour force. Early histories of immigration did not use gender as a means of differentiating between the experiences of male and female family members, signifying that women's experiences did not warrant an examination of their own.⁸

That omission soon changed with the growing body of work by historians of women and gender who recognized that women's place within the family, and indeed in the work force, created unique pressures that demanded exploration. Bringing gender into the picture necessitates a shift in focus. As historians, the result has been a call to

⁸ See Donald Avery, *'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932* (Toronto, 1979), Craig Heron *Working in Steel* (Toronto 1988), and Patricia Roy, *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver, 1989). For further examples of early immigration histories, and works that focus on the policy aspect of the immigrant experience, see Franca Iacovetta's immigration historiography, "The Writing of English Canadian Immigrant History", Canada's Ethnic Group Series. (Canadian Historical Association, Booklet No. 22, 1977), and Doug Owram's *Canadian History: A Reader's Guide, 2: Confederation to Present* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

retool and then re-evaluate our perceptions. Women's experiences must be understood as being influenced by the meanings Canadian society places on their roles as women, as well as the meanings they attach to their own experiences.

This gendered approach is essential in the study of war brides. Their story forms one small slice of female immigration history, involving a particular group of women, facing an unusual set of circumstances that was directly correlated to the war. Had Canadian men not traveled overseas and interacted with the young female population of Britain, their stories simply would not exist. Married to Canadians, war brides came to Canada in a group movement that constituted a unique female experience but also drew upon more general features of women's immigration. It cannot be understood without establishing what being a woman meant in the war and post-war era both in Canada and Britain.

Full-length studies viewing immigration through a gendered framework have often highlighted the experiences of women within a specific ethnic group. This is true of Franca Iacovetta's study of Italian immigrants, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto*. Her book takes a gendered approach to exploring the lives of Italian immigrants. In a review of her book, Dino Cinel comments that the focus on one ethnic group is an accepted ritual in academia. This ritual, he says, is "complex, but its main component is a dissertation analyzing the experience of [the author's] ethnic group. And the ritual is not complete until a university press publishes the dissertation."⁹

⁹ Dino Cinel, Book Review of Franca Iacovetta's book, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Post War Toronto* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992), in *American Historical Review* 99 (1994), p. 1784. For further examples of works that specifically explore the experiences of female immigrants from one ethnic group, see Frances Swyripa's *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), Varpu Lindstrom's *Defiant Sisters: A Social History of Finnish Immigrant Women in Canada* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1992), and Sheelagh Conway, *The Faraway Hills are Green: Voices of Irish Women in Canada*

Though chidingly put, this “ritual” seems to be one that many historians of immigration, and female immigration in particular, have passed through. However, that does not devalue the kinds of studies that have been done. On the contrary, this emphasis on exploring the diversity of Canadians prevents historians from falling into the dangerous trap of generalizations. Further, these works recognize the importance of understanding the context of a woman’s life in her native country along gender and class lines, in order to subsequently contrast, define, and understand her experiences in Canadian society.

Literature that focuses specifically on one ethnic group holds importance for telling the war bride story. The war brides immigrated to diverse locations and did not settle in cultural enclaves like many European and Asian ethnic groups. Yet, their ethnicity still plays a predominant role in their experience. Though the majority of the women that formed part of this group were British, they were from various regions of England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. They held different traditions, identities, and histories that coloured the ways in which they would view their immigration. Still, their ‘Britishness’ was especially important given Canada’s postwar propensity to prefer immigrants who fit nicely into our ideal of ‘the Canadian’ citizen, tied as that was to the imperial relationship. Seemingly, their values of femininity, family, and loyalty to the same crown, made them more desirable as wives for ‘our boys’ than women from other European nations. Their politics and their traditions complemented our own.

This study will focus on British war brides, namely those women that immigrated to Canada from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Their predominance in this immigration story is the result of the length of time that Canadian soldiers spent stationed

(Toronto: Women’s Press, 1992). The last example is more pertinent to a later discussion of works that center on oral history with women immigrants, but is included here since the author focuses particularly on Irish women.

in various places around those countries, prior to any European landings. Their British wives consequently formed nearly ninety percent of the women that came to Canada during and immediately following the war. The wives' 'Britishness', then, becomes a vital part of the story. The military relationship between Britain and Canada set these romances in motion, as it did with war brides that immigrated to the United States. However, the larger imperial connections between Canada and the United Kingdom shaped the way in which officials conceptualized the British war brides' immigration and citizenship. Further, the imperial relationship also coloured, and continues to influence, the way war brides thought about their new home, and the one they left behind.

Understanding the nature of Canada's relationship with Britain when more than 48,000 war brides crossed the Atlantic will help to clarify another aspect of the war bride experience. Anthony D. Smith, in his book *National Identity*, discusses the concept of community development. He states that, "A second element [of nationality] is the idea of a *patria*, a community of laws and institutions with a single political will. This entails at least [sic] some common regulating institutions that will give expression to common political sentiments and purposes."¹⁰ In relation to war brides, it is important to note that these laws and institutions often stemmed from the British tradition. This connection of institutions, laws, and 'communities' is an important aspect of the war brides' immigration, since, as Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock state in their work *The Making of the Mosaic*, the organization and character of political institutions play a critical role in determining [immigration] policy outcomes in Canada."¹¹ The similarity of "organization and character" of Canada and Britain's central institutions, meant that

¹⁰ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), p. 10.

¹¹ Kelley and Trebilcock, p. 11.

war brides were viewed as complementary to the continued development of Canada's 'community' or national identity. The concept of strangers and allies, colony and mother country, and dependence and independence, all enter the debate about the meaning of this mass immigration of British women, and the way they were welcomed and received by the Canadian 'host' society. Their immigration plays into the debates of Canada's understanding of itself as a "community" in this historical context. The 'Britishness' of these women and the relation of that 'Britishness' to Canadian identity requires examination as much as the ethnicity of groups that may seem more distant from the Canadian host society.

Canada's perception of itself in the years of the Second World War involved a continual push for independence and distinction from its mother country. At the same time, however, Canada's national identity still maintained a strong political and cultural connection with Britain. As Lisa Gaudet has asserted in her work on female imperialism in Canadian women's organizations, "we can better understand nationhood as an ongoing process whose meanings are historically specific and politically charged."¹² Though Canada had established its status as a nation long before, complete with its own institutions, traditions, and history, its connection to Britain still remained strong. Unlike the First World War, Canada made its own decision to enter the conflict instead of being immediately involved by virtue of the colonial connection. As J.L. Granatstein has explained in his discussion of Canada's decision to declare war in 1939, "The fundamental reason for this Canadian decision was sentiment. The ties of blood and

¹² Lisa Gaudet, "The Empire is Woman's Sphere: Organized Female Imperialism in Canada, 1880s-1920s." PhD Thesis Carleton University (2001), p. 3.

culture that bound Canada to Britain proved strong enough to compel the government willingly to follow the course it did.”¹³

Still, as Granatstein points out in his work, even though Mackenzie King knew that Britain’s entry into war would mean Canada’s participation, “domestic politics demanded that at least the appearance of free choice be preserved.”¹⁴ The domestic politics that Granatstein refers to reflect the changes Canada was dealing with in the interwar and Second World War years, between establishing its own place on the world stage, while still maintaining its commonwealth connections to Britain.

The decision to join the war ‘independently’ follows Canada’s continual attempts in the twentieth century to establish its own place on the international scene, and equally important, to establish its identity as different from both Britain and the United States. Barbara Roberts has asserted that, “between 1880 and 1920, Canada built a nation. For most, that nation was to be British in outlook as well as in character. The highest level of citizenship was based on love and loyalty to Canada and to the British Empire; the two were inseparable.”¹⁵ As is evident from Granatstein’s earlier assertions, these connections between the two countries were still prominent leading into the Second World War. This citizenship held meaning for Canadians and, therefore, affected their understanding and reaction to the mass immigration of women from Britain.

The uniqueness and importance of Canada and its role in the world was a lesson that immigration officials and voluntary organizations, which sought to educate British

¹³ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 19.

¹⁴ Granatstein, 5.

¹⁵ Barbara Roberts, “A Work of Empire: Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration,” *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1979), p. 185.

brides before their arrival, strongly pushed. As historian Anthony D. Smith has asserted in his work on nationalism, “nationalism, the ideology and movement must be closely related to *national identity*, a multidimensional concept, and extended to include a specific language, sentiments, and symbolism.”¹⁶ Examining all of these elements in relation to war brides - the policy that allowed their immigration, their dealings with Canadian officials, their education and acculturation as immigrants - will be important to establishing how Canada’s sense of national identity and nationalism affected the mass immigration of war brides.

Books such as *We Came From Over the Sea: British War Brides in Newfoundland*, published by the British War Brides’ Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, clearly demonstrate that the commonwealth connection is an element of the war brides’ experience.¹⁷ This connection is highlighted through a letter from the Queen’s representative, congratulating them on their endeavour. The book also contains letters from various Canadian government representatives. The national identity that is created by British war brides more than fifty years after their emigration is one that is based on the symbolism and identity of both Canada and Britain, and the places where that ‘nationalism’ or ‘national identity’ intersect.

The immigration of war brides also needs to be examined in relation to Canada’s long history of immigration officials and reformers’ perceived need for the protection and supervision of female immigrants. Canadian and British historians have written a substantial body of work exploring the roles of late nineteenth and early twentieth century women in building the nation and the empire. This reform work was a patriotic

¹⁶ Smith, p. vii.

¹⁷ Barbara Barrett, et al., *We Came From Over the Sea: British Brides in Newfoundland*. (Portugal Cove: British War Brides Association of Newfoundland and Labrador in co-operation with ESPress, 1996).

endeavour for those women who joined its ranks, in terms of their desire to build a strong empire, as much as it was an undertaking that suited and reflected their gender. These female immigration reformers were “aware of the part played by British women in the development of a country and thought that the best way to express their patriotism was to assist and encourage the ‘best classes’ of British women to come to Canada.”¹⁸ Though the lives of middle class women at the time is said to have been governed by a separate spheres ideology, maintaining women’s presence and focus within the home, these reformers suggested that, for many women, their duties were more far-reaching.

Their efforts were imperialistic, in the sense that their work facilitated the migration of British women, an act that was construed as an empire-building duty. As Lisa Gaudet has pointed out, the work of these women was important since it involved “shaping, extending, and supplementing parliament’s educational and regulatory policies, [and] participating in the acts of governance – they helped to harness the will of the citizenry to the needs of the nation-state.”¹⁹ This role was acceptable, in part, because the recipients of their energies were women.

The maternal quality of female reformers’ endeavours, in so far as they attempted to supervise and protect British girls coming to an unfamiliar ‘new world,’ helped to place their work within women’s traditional sphere of activity. As well, since most women being assisted were of a lower social standing than the women who were in charge of their welfare, the very public undertakings of the women promoting and supervising female migrants were non-threatening to dominant class and gender ideologies.

¹⁸ Roberts, p. 187.

¹⁹ Gaudet, p. 31.

In the case of British war brides, the female supervision, and assistance of immigrants through volunteer organizations, are also very prevalent. Organizations like the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, the Women's Institutes, and church affiliated organizations, to name a few, had female volunteers that worked closely with war brides to ensure their protection and supervision throughout their journey. Like some of their nineteenth century precursors, these organizations ran hostels for travelling women, met them at train stations and brought them to their new homes, and ran education and acculturation programs to make them into good 'Canadians.' In short, they took responsibility for various sections of the war bride journey, doubtless encouraged by the long-held understanding that dealing with women immigrating to Canada was women's work.

This female interaction is equally evident in the work undertaken by organizations like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army, whose membership consisted of both men and women. Like the government departments that took care of the war bride immigration, records show that male officials handled the policy level work, whereas hardworking women handled the personal interaction with, and daily responsibility for, the war brides.

As women taking care of women, immigration reformers often focused on responding to the seemingly unrelenting need for domestic servants in Canada. Like war brides that came decades later, the domestic servants that answered the call put out by female immigration societies were able to make the voyage to Canada as participants in assisted passage schemes. Marilyn Barber's work on immigrant domestic servants

highlights many of the same issues that arise from the study of war brides.²⁰ Studying working class immigrant women, her studies incorporate lenses of class, gender and ethnicity to examine their experiences. Barber illustrates the early twentieth century demand for acceptable immigrants, namely those that emigrated from the British Isles, and demonstrates the ways in which their “Britishness” or ethnicity coloured the experiences of female immigrants. Canadian agencies actively targeted the British Isles for domestic servants, since its daughters were deemed safe enough to bring into Canadian homes. They were preferred to women from European countries, who may have had morals or values that were too foreign for their Canadian middle class employers.

Another similarity between the earlier recruitment of female migrants and the war brides’ migration is the seemingly constant worry about the ‘kind’ of woman that was emigrating to Canada. The attempts to evaluate the calibre of women immigrating to Canada reflect long-held notions relating to gender and morality. Women were seen to be more prone to go astray if not lead down the proper moral paths. Therefore, women travelling to Canada had to be supervised and protected during their immigration. Unlike their male counterparts, female immigrants were expected to uphold the proper values of the nation – values that would be ingrained in their children. They were expected to be

²⁰ For studies of immigrant domestic service and assisted passage schemes in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries see Marilyn Barber, “The Women Ontario Women Welcomed: Immigrant Domestic Servants for Ontario Homes, 1870-1930,” *Ontario History* Vol. 72, No.3 (1980), p. 148-172, *Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada*. Canada’s Ethnic Group Series. (Canadian Historical Association Booklet 16, 1991), Magda Fahmi “‘Ruffled Mistresses’ and ‘Discontented’ Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1880-1914,” *Labour/Le Travail*, p. 68-97, Julia Bush, “‘The Right Sort of Woman’: female emigrants and emigration to the British Empire, 1890-1910,” *Women’s History Review* Vol. 3, No. 3 (1994), p. 385-409, Barbara Roberts ‘A Work of Empire’: Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration,” in *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1979), p. 185-201, and Roberts in “Ladies, Women and the State: Managing Female Immigration, 1880-1920,” in *Community Organization and the Canadian State* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), p. 108-130.

the 'civilizers' of the nation, a role that made female immigration reformers anxious that they find women of the right character to send to the less civilized colonies. Female immigration societies focused on the emigration of "only such women and girls as are of good character and capacity."²¹ Essentially, they targeted unmarried middle-class women who sought better employment opportunities, but were more often able to recruit working class girls. This demographic created tension with regard to the calibre of girls coming to Canada.

Similarly, jitters over the morals and characters of British war brides appear throughout magazines and newspaper articles of the time. Writers continually attempted to reassure Canadian readers that the wives their sons and brothers had chosen were good women. A Legion newspaper article from the war years readily exclaimed that "Canadian servicemen [were] the 'best immigration agents this country has ever sent abroad.'"²² These worries stem back to the long-held suspicions originating with other assisted passage schemes, such as those assisting domestic servants, that, although Britain was sending its women to the colonies, they were not sending "the right sort of woman."²³

What sets the supervisors of the war bride movement apart from their predecessors facilitating the immigration of domestic servants is that they were overseeing women who were already married rather than single women who might be presumed to be more vulnerable. The war brides' status as young married women travelling without their husbands, however, seems only to have made the call for their

²¹ Julia Bush, "'The Right Sort of Woman': female emigrants and emigration to the British Empire, 1890-1910." *Women's History Review* 3:3 (1994) p.396.

²² Melynda Jarrat, "The War Brides of New Brunswick," *M.A. Thesis*, University of New Brunswick, 1995, p. 3.

²³ Bush, p. 385.

supervision along their journey, ensuring their safe delivery to their homes in Canada, all the more urgent.

One of the main functions of the organizations and government departments that became involved with the immigration of war brides to Canada was to prepare them for their journey. The education of these women, with the ultimate goal of their 'Canadianization' began, for many, long before their departure from English soil. The Canadian Wives' Bureau was born with this task in mind, and its efforts were countless to prepare British wives for what they could expect in their new lives.

The Bureau undertook the task of acculturation, in part, by producing and distributing prescriptive literature. As will be explored later, several organizations and government departments created booklets and cookbooks that provided guides for becoming a 'Canadian' cook, wife, and mother. These lessons were further reinforced by movies, lectures, and activities at war bride Clubs in England. These clubs came under various names: Canadian Wives' Club, Maple Leaf Club and Princess Alice Club, to name only a few. Their purpose, however, was uniform. The clubs, and the organizations behind them, sought to precondition British wives to their new lives overseas. The clubs existed solely to prepare these women for their roles as citizens of Canada, and perhaps more importantly, as Canadian wives and mothers.

Pamphlets, National Film Board movies, and even Eaton's catalogues, as noted earlier, all become instruments of acculturation for war brides long before they boarded the ships to cross the Atlantic. Since much of this prescriptive material survived the journey through time and across the Atlantic, examining the literature provides us with an idea of how the 'host' society conceptualized the arrival of the young brides. The

literature further allows us to assess the role various governmental and non-governmental bodies played in the education and acculturation processes. It provides clues regarding the images of Canada and Canadian citizenship that they attempted to inculcate.

The study of the instruction of war brides is particularly interesting because the government had a lengthy period in which to conduct this education. Since the government and military were unable to proceed with a mass immigration until after the end of the war, British wives were a captive audience – and they were clamouring for information on their new homes.

Efforts to educate immigrants, particularly immigrant women, have a long history in Canada. These attempts are especially active in the post-war era. As Franca Iacovetta has pointed out in several works, “new immigrants gave Canadian experts plenty of opportunities for regulating and reshaping the ‘delinquencies’ of men, women, and families according to dominant political, social, and gender norms – or, as contemporary parlance had it, “Canadian ways.”²⁴ Reaching female immigrants, in particular, represented the education of a future generation of Canadians. Women were the gatekeepers to ‘Canadianizing’ immigrant families.

In the case of war brides and their families, the women were the only ones who needed the education. Their children were young enough on their arrival to grow up ‘Canadian’. The education of the mothers, therefore, was designed to demonstrate that Canada had its own unique culture and customs, which they would have to adopt in order to be a successful wife and mother by Canadian standards.

²⁴ Franca Iacovetta, “Making Model Citizens: Gender, Corrupted Democracy, and Immigrant and Refugee Reception Work in Cold War Canada,” *Whose National Security?: Canadian State Surveillance and the Creation of Enemies* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2000), p. 155.

What sets post-war education of immigrants, including the education of war brides, apart from earlier acculturation programs is the cold war focus on consumerism, and its relationship to notions of citizenship. In her work on the subject, Iacovetta explores how the meanings of citizenship and consumerism, as they become invested in food and appliances, become intertwined and further complicated by attempts to 'Canadianize' post-war immigrants. She relates the example of a young Czech girl who told reporters that she associated Canadian lifestyles with "modernity and affluence", and specifically "noted the 'smart clothes and immaculate appearance' of Canadian women and abundance of food."²⁵ This connection between Canada and abundance would not have been one lost on British war brides.

Emerging from several years of intense rationing, and dating servicemen who often brought them chocolate, cigarettes, and even nylon stockings as gifts, from Canadian canteens, or from relatives from Canada, British war brides recognized that they would be facing a daily reality when they arrived in Canada that did not include many of the wartime hardships they faced in Britain. The images of abundance were only reinforced by attempts by Canadian officials to ensure that the war brides' journey was both comfortable and plentiful, by providing lavish five course meals, and canteens stocked with goods unseen in Britain. Historians must explore the images of Canada as the 'land of plenty' to understand whether, and to what extent, the meanings become internalized for materially deprived British women.

There is also a need to explore the connections that were made on the British wartime home front that emphasized these elements of consumerism and citizenship early

²⁵ Franca Iacovetta, "Recipes for Democracy? Gender, Family, and Making Female Citizens in Cold War Canada," *Canadian Women Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2000), p.14.

on. If British women's role in the war, as good British citizens, was to consume goods effectively, sparingly, and patriotically, the connections between consumerism and citizenship can be seen as running deep indeed. That connection between consumerism and citizenship was only reinforced by the war brides' visit to the Canadian Wives Bureau, aptly located on the "third floor of a fashionable and expensive store known as Galleries Lafayette."²⁶ In the case of Canada, however, citizenship was tied to the seeming abundance of consumer goods. Attempts to educate British wives intricately wove the notions of consumerism and citizenship together with gender in preparation for their new roles as wives and mothers in Canada.

The literature on gender and consumerism in an international context – what women buy and consume for themselves and on behalf of their families – has grown over the past few years. The debate within this particular field is somewhat similar to that seen in immigration history, in so far as it has seen a shift in focus in recent years. Do historians examine how and what women consume, or do we attempt to deconstruct the various meanings that are attached to food, clothes and other material goods? Furthermore, do we explore the images as projected by the producers and advertisers of the goods, or as understood by the women who consumed them? Where do the two approaches intersect? In essence, the debate can be seen as one of empiricist versus post-modern or 'top-down' vs. 'bottom-up'. The post-modern approach has received the most scholarly attention in recent cultural studies.²⁷

²⁶ Joyce Hibbert, ed. *The War Brides* (Scarborough: Signet Books, 1978), p. 33.

²⁷ For studies relating to consumerism and gender see Victoria de Gracia, ed., *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), Maggie Andrews and Mary Talbot, *All the World and Her Husband: Women in Twentieth-Century Consumer Culture* (London: Cassell, 2000). For gendered images in particular consumer spaces, see Valerie Korinek *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), and Cynthia Wright, "'Feminine Trifles of Vast Importance: Writing Gender into the

The tools used by organizations that sought to educate and acculturate British brides in the postwar era become interesting ways of accessing this question of consumerism and its connections to citizenship. This is because the attempted socialization assumed that the new female immigrant could be introduced to Canadian life through consumer goods. Her ability to effectively use those goods, essentially to become a Canadian consumer, would be a gateway to her becoming a Canadian citizen. Essentially, to shop Canadian is equated with becoming Canadian.

Yet, none of these attempts to educate and acculturate new citizens, and in particular British war brides, can be fully understood without examining the immigration experience from the 'bottom-up.' As discussed earlier, this approach has often been used when dealing with the history of female immigration in Canada. It is not enough to understand the policies that guided lowering and raising immigration barriers. As Franca Iacovetta has pointed out that

The new immigration history of the past two decades has rescued the immigrant from being understood merely as the object of the host society observers or as a victim of economic forces. Immigrants have come to be seen as actors in the process of transformation in which they have been involved.²⁸

As active participants in the education and acculturation process, Iacovetta's group of immigrants re-appropriate their agency, and, as such, become involved in a dialectic process of deciphering and negotiating meaning.

There have been several works that have examined the relationship between immigrant women and 'host' society organizations. These works attempt to understand

History of Consumption," in *Gender Conflicts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) 229-260, and Joy Parr *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

²⁸ Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), p. xxiv.

projected meanings from the perspective of the new citizen. Further, they attempt to read between the lines of written records to understand, of the resources available to immigrant women, what elements they absorbed, dismissed, or reappropriated to meet their own needs. Any analysis must be constantly aware of, and allow for, women's active participation in this process, negotiating and redefining the images that are directed at them. In other words, the assessment must reflect, as the shifts in the literature have, that the process of acculturation, of becoming 'Canadianized', is not simply a force acting on immigrants, but rather a dialectic relationship between the immigrant and the 'host' society.

These renegotiations can be explicitly seen in Franca Iacovetta's article "Making 'New Canadians': Social Workers, Women, and the Reshaping of Immigrant Families."²⁹ Iacovetta identifies the "selective ways in which many of these women made use of available services" of social workers.³⁰ Evident in this case is the movement in the historiography of female immigration to present women as active participants in their own stories. Linda Gordon demonstrates the same element of agency in her work on family violence, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960*, wherein she examines the active role female clients played in their relationship with social workers in the United States.³¹

This theme is no less prevalent in the story of war brides, as they encountered and negotiated the efforts of groups like the Red Cross and the Canadian Wives' Bureau to

²⁹ Franca Iacovetta, "Making 'New Canadians': Social Workers, Women, and the Reshaping of Immigrant Families." *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), p. 261-303.

³⁰ Iacovetta, "Making New Canadians", 270.

³¹ See Franca Iacovetta, "Making 'New Canadians': Social Workers, Women, and the Reshaping of Immigrant Families," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) and Linda Gordon, *Heroes of their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960* (New York: Viking, 1988).

mould them into desirable 'new Canadians.' The records of these organizations will be examined to understand their efforts to create a smoother transition to Canadian life, and for a change or continuity in messages that they directed at war brides during the acculturation process. As important, however, will be the attempts to examine the messages, and their intended effect, in comparison with the thoughts and reactions of war brides themselves, in order to determine where their active participation and definition of meanings and roles reinforced or thwarted those intentions. The analysis will query how war brides might use these unprecedented resources and tools to shape for themselves their transition to Canadian life and culture.

In order to access the actions and reactions of war brides throughout their journey, this study of war brides will be including oral history as one of the main methodological tools. If prescriptive literature and archival government documents provide the 'top-down' view of policy and intended messages, only allowing women the opportunity to tell their own stories will maintain some balance in the research. Using this approach will help to understand the experiences of women on ships and in their new homes, and how they were influenced by this education and preparation.

Oral history has long been intimately connected with women's history. Joan Sangster's article, "Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History" provides an explanation for that connection. She asserts that

The feminist embrace of oral history emerged from a recognition that traditional sources have often neglected the lives of women, and that oral history offered a means of integrating women into historical scholarship, even contesting the reigning definitions of social, economic and political importance that obscured women's lives.³²

³² Joan Sangster, "Telling Our Stories: feminist debates and the use of oral history," *Women's History Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1994), p. 5.

Interviews with women allow the participant to “tell her story in her own terms.”³³

Interviews are a challenging tool to use, however, since there is a degree to which interviewers must interpret the participant’s silences as well as their words. In other words, part of the difficulty in interviewing women is learning to “hear what women implied, suggested, and started to say but didn’t.”³⁴ Interviewers must also beware of their cultural context, their biases, and their ideological leanings, as well as those of the interviewee, in order to understand where the experiences of both parties affect the dynamic of the interview, and, in turn, the historical evidence and interpretation.

The literature dealing with war brides has followed the oral history approach. Most of the works documenting their journey can be seen as either a collection of oral interviews, or what can most aptly be characterized as ‘popular histories,’ based on interviews with women. This ‘bottom-up’ approach has allowed women the opportunity to tell their own stories. However, since these works lack any attempts to analyze the war brides’ stories, they do not succeed in accessing the silences as well as the words that women present in their interviews.

Some of these books were created to celebrate war brides’ involvement with regional war brides associations, or are small works that were locally published. This is true of the work mentioned earlier, *We Came From Over the Sea: British War Brides in Newfoundland*. The book was created in 1996 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of war brides’ arrival in Canada. The work allows women’s stories to stand on their own,

³³ Kathryn Anderson and Dana C. Jack, “Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses.” *Women’s Words* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 11. For other literature on oral interviews see Katherine Borland, “‘That’s Not What I Said’: Interpretive Conflict in Oral Narrative Research,” in *Women’s Words*, p. 63-75, and Ann Oakley “Interviewing Women: a contradiction in terms,” in *Doing Feminist Research*, edited by Helen Roberts (London: Routledge, 1981).

³⁴ Anderson and Jack, p. 17.

without the mediation of the editors for historical context or even an introduction.³⁵

Though useful in conveying war brides' stories, many of these works appear folksy and anecdotal, and only tantalize the professional historian and arouse a sense of the number of questions that still need to be asked in the study of war brides.

Other works on the topic of war brides that involve oral histories provide more mediation and slightly more context for the stories women have to tell. Ben Wick's popular history *Promise You'll Take Care of My Daughter: The Remarkable War Brides of World War II*, as is evident from the title, is a celebratory look at the lives of women that were involved in the mass immigration.³⁶ It provides more context for the meeting and marriage of the brides to their husbands. However, this context often appears sweeping and general. Joyce Hibbert, the first to publish a collection of war bride stories, provides more context than Wick for the wartime and postwar historical setting that fuelled notions and decisions about the immigration of war brides to Canada.³⁷ These works provide an important first step in the history of war brides. The romantic nature of the story, and the idea that the women eager to share their experiences with writers usually have experienced a 'happy ending', creates a dynamic that easily lends itself to popular histories. As a result, unlike other aspects of history that have seen a progression from a 'top-down' approach, to one that seeks to analyze from the 'bottom-up', the story of war brides seems to have experienced an opposite progression.

³⁵ For other works on the topic of war brides that only provide oral histories, see Barbara Ladouceur and Phyllis Spence, ed's, *Blackouts to Bright Lights: Canadian War Bride Stories*. (Vancouver: Ronsdale Press, 1995), and Olga Rains, *We Became Canadians* (Peterborough: Overnight Copy Service, 1984).

³⁶ Ben Wicks, *Promise You'll Take Care of My Daughter: The Remarkable War Brides of World War II* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992).

³⁷ Joyce Hibbert, ed., *The War Brides* (Scarborough: Signet Books, 1978).

For the most part, the popular history of war brides drawing on their stories follows an easily recognizable formula: the meeting of the Canadian servicemen, the journey across the Atlantic, and the adjustment to the 'host' society. This progression usually seeks to follow the war brides through their wartime experience until their final settlement in Canada. The narratives that are examined here are organized very much chronologically, which in turn seems to create a whiggish progression to their experiences. It seems that, no matter how bumpy the ride, the women praise their new homes and eagerly identify themselves as Canadians at heart. Partly, this is probably the result of the sample of women that were interviewed. Women who have been disappointed with their experiences may have been less likely to have joined war brides' associations or, possibly, did not remain in Canada at all, making their stories very difficult to access. The women that were interviewed, then, are more likely to be ones that would provide a happy ending, and envision themselves as success stories. Moreover, this phenomenon of the 'happy ending' may result as much from the creation of memory over time, as from the nature of the sources. For whatever reason, this formula has seldom been broken, and the work on war brides remains a topic that been poorly contextualized, severely fragmented, with a surface that has barely been scratched.

Obviously, this pattern of 'the happy ending' serves chronological purposes, but it also helps to bring the reader along an emotional journey. Along the way, the reader has witnessed and participated in the war bride's joys of her romance and marriage and the sorrows of leaving everything familiar behind. By the end, however, the reader is safe in the knowledge that the war bride is happy with her decision, and has made a successful transition to Canada. This pattern is especially noticeable in the narrative that ends

Hibbert's book. A war bride recalls her return to England, and the book ends with her telling final remarks:

During my visits back to England, and I've been a few times since my family grew up, I have split loyalties. I love the country of my birth and youth but feel that I couldn't live there very comfortably now. My thirty years in Canada have changed me and the England I remember from childhood has vanished. I feel that the pace of life is a little slower there and the children tend to be better mannered. But for me, something seems to be missing and I want to get back to Alberta where I really feel at home.³⁸

Those words reoccur in various forms throughout war brides' narratives. I will not attempt to argue, nor could I, that the narratives these women produce are inaccurate. I simply wish to point out that this re-occurring sequence seems to stunt the level of analysis historians have applied to the story. The narratives build simply to get to that point, and their construction is deliberately self-serving.

By reformulating the questions asked by the historian, the narrative could be re-examined to understand not only where women started out, and where they ended up, but also what meanings they attributed to their experiences along the way. Also, instead of only following one woman's journey from beginning to end, placing the war brides' immigration into the framework of a larger movement, taking place within a particular era, will help to establish the context and patterns within which these experiences fit. In other words, more work needs to be done on the topic of war brides in order to change the story from an uncontested linear progression to a close examination of projected versus negotiated meaning.³⁹

³⁸ Hibbert, p. 131-132.

³⁹ Joy Parr discusses this issue of projected or intended meaning versus its reception by the targeted group, in her most recent book, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999)

The earlier works on war brides have been effective in so far as they have sparked a public interest in the story of war brides and their often-overlooked importance in the history of Canadian immigration. The strength of many of the books, like Ben Wicks's work, lies in its ability to capture the reader's emotions, as they quickly become involved in the narrative. Perhaps more importantly, the works have allowed these women to leave a written record, albeit imperfect, of their experiences as they remembered them. As a result, they have become evidence for other historians to examine and interpret within a broader historical framework.

There have been only a few academic books produced on the history of war brides – works that have attempted to take a step beyond the romantic recounting of the meeting, the journey and the adjustment narrative. The best example of an academic work on the topic is produced within the American context. This American framework of analysis is Jenel Virden's *Goodbye Piccadilly: British War Brides in America*.⁴⁰ Though Virden's work follows the same chronological progression, her deeper level of analysis allows her to escape the 'whiggish' predilection that is inherent in other works on war brides. By not simply dismissing negative experiences in favour of a happy ending, Virden's interpretation of women's stories allows the reader to understand how war brides negotiated their understanding of their surroundings. This is partly because Virden sets war brides against a broader conceptual backdrop of American immigrants in the twentieth century. She outlines how war brides are similar to, and how they are different from, other immigrants. What particularly gives her study value is that she incorporates an explicit analysis of gender and ethnicity to explore the meaning of being

⁴⁰ Jenel Virden, *Goodbye Piccadilly: British War Brides in America*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

a British woman in postwar America.⁴¹ For, she says, “although it is possible to discuss immigration without reference to gender, any definitive statements on migration movements, immigration experiences, and assimilation must take into account some recognition of gender differences.”⁴² In other words, being female and being British come together to create the circumstances for a distinct immigrant experience for women, and more specifically, for war brides.

This level of analysis has been absent in the Canadian historical literature on war brides. Melynda Jarrat’s Master’s thesis (1995) from the University of New Brunswick attempts to redress this balance.⁴³ Using an array of primary sources, such as Red Cross records and oral histories, Jarrat brings the analysis a step further than any of the books in Canadian history on the topic. What is interesting about Jarrat’s work is that she touches upon various aspects of the war bride story that have been underdeveloped in the past, like the involvement of the Red Cross. These new elements provide intriguing gateways for understanding the relationship that Iacovetta explored earlier, namely the boundaries and meanings that are constantly being renegotiated between the immigrant and the ‘host’ society. Jarrat’s repeated mention of the Red Cross⁴⁴ and the Canadian Wives Bureau⁴⁵ hold promise for taking the story of war brides in a completely different direction. Jarrat does not delve deeper than providing a description of the logistical role those organizations played in war brides’ journey. She does not examine the educational process started by the Canadian Wives’ Bureau and continued by the Red Cross, nor does

⁴¹ Virden, p. 4.

⁴² Virden, p. 6.

⁴³ Melynda Jarrat, “The War Brides of New Brunswick,” M.A Thesis, University of New Brunswick, (1995).

⁴⁴ Jarratt, 11.

⁴⁵ Jarratt, 12.

she attempt to access the messages that those groups projected at war brides.

Furthermore, though she includes some oral interviews in her work, Jarrat does not highlight the responses war brides had to the organizations, and their active negotiation of the organizations in their immigration.

Similarly, Cheryl Butler's Master's thesis from the University of Toronto (1995) in the Department of Education places war brides within the context of wartime England and women's wartime experiences.⁴⁶ She recognizes the effects of rationing and restrictions of wartime life on British women. However, she places a great deal of importance on that element in leading women to their decision to marry Canadians and leave Britain. Though it is true that the British wartime context must factor into the analysis, claiming that context as the sole reason women married Canadian servicemen, would be to ignore the ways in which women understood their experiences. That approach imposes an explanation on the stories of war brides that was not true at the time, nor has it been true in the creation of their memory over the years.

Therefore, in order to bring the story of war brides further than the doorstep of immigration historiography, and into informed academic discussions of Canadian history, we need to begin to examine it from a new perspective. A fruitful next step in advancing the study of war brides is to explore the connections between gender, consumerism, and citizenship. Through a close examination of primary material and the integration of several interviews, the study will attempt to use gender, ethnicity, consumerism, and citizenship as lens of analysis. Without these elements, the experiences of Second World War British war brides cannot be fully understood.

⁴⁶ Cheryl Butler, "Janey Canuk: Experiences of World War II British War Brides Who Emigrated to Canada," M.A Thesis, University of Toronto (1995).

Chapter Two will examine who the women were who became involved with Canadian soldiers, married them, and subsequently prepared themselves to leave everything familiar behind. This chapter will also include portions of oral interviews in order to interpret war brides' wartime lives. The women interviewed for this study were predominantly women who married RCAF servicemen, and many had also been involved with the WAAF's, and were of a middle class background. It will also look at the government policies that facilitated their immigration to Canada, and determined the course it would take. Finally, it will highlight early government and public reactions to the ever-increasing number of marriages taking place overseas. This response will serve to illustrate how war brides' immigration was affected by societal preoccupations with their moral character and respectability. The moral concerns are especially important because they helped to shape the government's goals and fears in transporting this large number of married women and children, unaccompanied by their husbands, across the Atlantic.

The third chapter will examine the organization that was set up specifically to prepare women for their immigration to Canada and settlement into Canadian life. Forced to wait until the end of the war as a result of wartime shipping restrictions, and worried about rocky settlements and unhappy brides settling with in-laws before the demobilization of their husbands, the government took the opportunity to create an elaborate body to deal with the questions and concerns of war brides. The Canadian Wives' Bureau acted as the first point of contact between war brides and Canadian society – after their husbands. Its main goal was to educate British brides about Canada. In an era of on-going Canadian self-consciousness, the Bureau set out to show Brides,

through publications, clubs, lectures, and cooking lessons, exactly what made Canada great, and, more importantly, what made it different from Britain. Here again, those lessons were couched in postwar ideals of women as wives and mothers, and shaped the way women were to view their place in their new homes. The chapter will attempt to equally access the ways in which the war brides negotiated the messages directed at them, selecting the tools and information that would facilitate a 'Canadianization' defined on their own terms.

Chapter Four will examine the actual journey taken by war brides, through various parts of England, over the Atlantic, and across Canada to their respective homes. Here, too, an organization played a major role in the experiences of war brides. The Canadian Red Cross, though involved in the education phase as well, played its most central role as helper, supervisor, and director of this mass immigration. Its representatives faced the journey with women virtually from their doorsteps in England to their doorsteps in Canada. They necessarily, then, play a major role in the memories war brides have about that experience. A look at the Red Cross archives provides interesting insight into how they conceptualized their role in this journey, and how the brides, in turn, came to view their presence, significance, and purpose. It also provides a glimpse at the importance Canadian officials placed on the protection and supervision of war brides during their journey.

Finally, Chapter Five will attempt to interpret the experiences of women as a group even after they have stopped being identified as a cohesive movement. Though they ended up in various parts of the country, and lived their lives on their own terms, this chapter will attempt to identify the instances in which that once identifiable group

continued to have similar experiences. To do this, I have examined the records of various social organizations that sought to acculturate women upon their arrival, as well as organizations that war brides formed or joined. War brides used these clubs and relationships for their own purposes – namely, to meet other women new to Canada, to commiserate on the loneliness and distress they felt in their new lives, and to maintain their British identity while they continually adopted a Canadian way of life. The chapter will demonstrate that Canadian organizations and representatives, both in Britain and in Canada, could offer up tools of ‘Canadianization’ for war brides, but how these ‘old country girls’ used the tools could only be determined by their own needs, will, and determination.

The clubs provide yet another clue pointing to the idea that the government could not fully shape the experiences of war brides. As narrators of their own stories, war brides were active participants in their own immigration and acculturation to Canadian life. This section will also include an inquiry into the role the organizations and literature have played in the creation of memory, and the establishment of a collective war bride experience or war bride romantic mythology.

Though one of my biggest complaints about the historiography of war brides is that it maintains a meeting, journey, adjustment timeline that seems to stifle the unpredictability of memory and oral history, it seems the only logical way to create a framework for understanding their experiences. It is, indeed, the only way to understand and explore the phenomenon of tens of thousands of women of mosaic backgrounds and experiences undergoing what was supposed to be virtually the same education at the same time. That dichotomy is part of what makes their story so interesting.

In the end, the goal of these exercises is to provide historians with a more comprehensive understanding of immigration and gender as it plays out in this time and geographical space, landing in this instance on mid-twentieth century war brides. If it can, however, simultaneously rescue the war bride from the realm of naïve and awestruck newcomer, to the critical, active, and discriminating interpreter of meaning, the historian's work will be more admirably done.

Chapter 2

“A Case of Meeting Someone, Falling in Love, and Getting Married”

Approximately 48,000 war brides came to Canada at the end of the Second World War. They brought with them close to 22,000 children. In the end, the total number of British war brides and their children moving across the ocean reached close to 70,000, forming the largest mass immigration across the Atlantic at one time in the twentieth century. Though wartime marriages between servicemen and ‘local girls’ happened in various countries, including Germany, France, and Holland, British war brides formed over ninety percent of the group.

The immigration story of these British Brides begins long before their settlement into Canadian life – before their journey on a series of transport or luxury ships, before their ‘Canadianization’, and before their marriage to Canadian soldiers. Rather, it begins, on average, in their teenage years as the country around them erupted into war and their immediate surroundings were altered in fundamental ways. As a result of this change, British women were no longer carefree teenagers. They quickly became war workers and servicewomen, as well as adults.

In order to fully understand the ‘war bride story’, it is necessary to examine the circumstances under which British women met, courted, and married Canadian soldiers. Their experiences were shaped by the ways in which wartime conditions facilitated and frustrated this process. Subsequently, their experiences informed the ways the government conceptualized the meaning of the growing number of marriages taking place in wartime Britain; it also coloured the means through which officials sought to deal with the resulting questions of transportation, immigration, and citizenship. These

preliminary issues helped to pave the way for the education and acculturation of war brides to Canadian life. They will be dealt with in detail in this chapter.

The Canadian soldiers that arrived at Britain's ports for war service did not go unnoticed by British women. The fact that they stayed in England awaiting advances in Europe, in many cases for several years, made them only more conspicuous. Many women soon found Canadian servicemen stationed close to their villages, and sometimes invited over by parents wanting to make the foreigners feel at home. As well, young single women, who were away from home and working in the military forces, soon met many of these Canadians. Moreover, since many of these women were living away from parental supervision, young couples had more opportunity to interact, and establish relationships.

Young British women met Canadian men's strange accents and laid-back demeanours with interest. As Ben Wicks has related in his work on war brides, British citizens on the home front, "battered and scattered by constant bad news suddenly became aware of these young men with happy smiles and realized that they were just the tonic that was needed."¹ These men were new to the steady bombing of cities and villages that young British women faced, and were met with interest partly because of their status as foreigners. Though the men were culturally connected to their wartime 'home' as a result of Canada's commonwealth relationship with Britain, they were still seen as different by the British public. Similarly, as historian C.P Stacey has pointed out in his history of the Canadian military involvement in the Second World War, young and rowdy Canadians must have been viewed with some wariness on their arrival by the

¹ Ben Wicks, Promise You'll Take Care of My Daughter: The Remarkable War Brides of World War II (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992), p. 14.

parents of young British girls, since Canadian servicemen were known to have been causing difficulties in areas surrounding Canadian military stations in the early war years. He asserts that, “to the unsophisticated young Canadian soldier, a place where men, and even women, could meet (within certain permitted hours) to drink freely what they chose and enjoy themselves, a place known as the ‘poor man’s club’, was a novel experience.”² As well, many parents must have been suspicious of the young single men that were catching the eye of their daughters, since questions of promiscuous sexuality had often been tied to the activities of young servicemen. It would take time for the British public to become comfortable with the number of young Canadian men who permeated the everyday landscape of British life during the war years.

When asked what they knew of Canada before they met their future husbands, several war brides recalled learning about some of the geography in early school years, but did not have any points of reference for understanding the sudden appearance of so many young Canadian men. In part, they were attractive because they were new - different. Audrey Renton recalls seeing young Canadian aircrew relaxing outdoors at the RAF station at Millom, and remembers that she “couldn’t figure out why they kept throwing that ball back and forth, and of course they were playing catch.”³ Other war brides had had family members or school time acquaintances that had been to Canada, and reported details about the landscape and culture.⁴ For example, one war bride, Mary

² C.P. Stacey and Barbara M. Wilson, *The Half Million: The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 34.

³ Interview with Audrey Renton, North Gower, April 23, 2002.

⁴ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002. She reported that when she was approximately 13 years of age, a cousin had been to Canada to work for a year as a hired hand on a farm on the Prairies. Though she does not remember what province the city was in, she can recall that he mentioned the religious differences of the family her cousin visited, as well as him relating stories of taking in the harvest, etc. Phyllis Lockyear, war bride, interview April 15, 2002, Ottawa, related that she remembered a Canadian family moving to the next village. Since they went to the same school, the children would tell stories about

Sancton, had such exposure to Canadian culture. Her parents had lived in Montreal for several years after they first got married. Like many British immigrants who returned from Canada during these years, her father felt he should return to England at the beginning of the First World War to offer his help in the war effort. Canada had a fairly high level of this kind of return migration in the years prior to the Second World War, involving British citizens leaving in order to get involved in the First World War, or attempting to escape the difficult conditions of the Depression in the 1930's. As a result of her parents' experiences, Mrs. Sancton was more familiar than most war brides with customs and lifestyle in Canada. In turn, her parents could relate to the difficulties of starting a new life in another country since they had experienced many of those hardships for themselves.⁵

The uncertainty that young British women faced, and their desire for an escape and sense of normalcy in the dark days of the Blitz, led them to welcoming parties for allied troops or dances held by various military or volunteer organizations. These efforts can also be seen as war work, in so far as they were meant to unify and help troops persevere in a doubtful time. Though many British women met their future husbands in the course of their war work, or in the course of everyday life, many relationships began as a result of meeting at one of these dances or 'hops'. As Lily Sutton related, "I met [my

their lives. She distinctly remembers them telling the English children about funeral parlours, and the way people dressed.

⁵ Interview Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002. Mrs. Sancton's parents lived in Canada before she was born until the outbreak of the First World War. One of her parents had a father that had been involved in an engineering project with another English man, whose child immigrated to Canada. When Mrs. Sancton's parents came to Montreal they contacted the couple they knew through family connections. The two couples were in contact until the Mrs. Sancton's family moved back to England. The Canadian couple's son eventually joined the Air Force during the Second World War. Before he left Canada, his mother gave him the contact information for the family they had once known and that had moved back to England. After a few months, with his first pang of homesickness, he contacted the family. When visiting, he discovered that they had a daughter, Mary. The connections between the two families that spanned three generations lead eventually to the marriage between Mary Sancton and her husband. The couple settled in Montreal.

husband] at a YMCA in Croydon [England] where they used to have dances a couple of nights a week and it was like an open place. You could go and have hot tea... and people used to go and meet and then a couple of nights a week they had a dance... I used to go with a friend that I worked with.”⁶ These functions were arranged to create a welcoming atmosphere for Canadian servicemen. They also provided entertainment opportunities for British women. As historian Jenel Virden has pointed out, “the combination of outside paid work, increased wages, and wartime changes afforded women more independence and resources to enjoy more leisure-time activities.”⁷

Especially at these social gatherings and leisure activities, as historians examining the British home front during the Second World have related, “uniforms represented forgotten colour, glamour and status, much resented by the civilian male population, struggling with far lower wages and increasingly dowdy clothes.”⁸ The differences between the seemingly glamorous Canadian men that surrounded them, and the more familiar loved ones that had left them behind, sparked interest in British women, and created a unique environment that facilitated wartime romance. As Ben Wicks has remarked, in his retelling of the war bride story,

The Canadian troops had arrived in a land that was largely deprived of British sons and husbands. Many of the single young women were therefore eager to fill the void of male companionship as soon as possible. They found the Canadians more than perfect substitutes for the absent British soldiers. Being better paid than their British counterparts, the Canadian servicemen proved to be generous, and... they displayed a warmth and personality that soon endeared them to the British population.⁹

⁶ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

⁷ Jenel Virden, *Goodbye Piccadilly: British War Brides in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 16.

⁸ Raynes Minns, *Bombers and Mash: The Domestic Home Front, 1939-1945* (London: Virago, 1980), p.164.

⁹ Wicks, p. 1-2.

The men that arrived were often young and unsure of what the future would hold. Since, for the most part, it was not until 1943 that Canadians experienced the full brunt of the war, they had only to wait both in small villages and large urban centres training and spending their pay.

In a country that faced increasingly strict rationing, the Canadians' generosity to young British women only made the young foreigners more attractive. Canadian servicemen could obtain goods that British women had not seen in years. More, importantly, war brides remember, they were willing to share. As it did with the arrival of American servicemen later in the war, "word spread quickly that the visiting servicemen with North American accents not only enjoyed a good time but were able to pay for it."¹⁰ British women often found that the higher pay received by Canadian servicemen in comparison to their British counterparts meant that they spent this extra pay on their British girlfriends.

Many women reported that their Canadian boyfriends showered them and their families with goods that were in short supply throughout the war, including cigarettes, fruit, and chocolate. Audrey Renton mentioned that when "parcels came from home, they shared with the girls. They gave canned fruit, sardines, Lipton Soup packages, chocolate bars, gum, and cigarettes... Sweet Caporel cigarettes."¹¹ Lily Sutton can remember that Frank, her husband, used to bring cigarettes from the Canadian military canteens for her and her father when he would visit.¹² The ability of Canadian servicemen to provide consumer goods that were scarce in Britain could only have heightened the view that their British girlfriends had of Canada as a 'land of plenty' that

¹⁰ Wicks, p. 2.

¹¹ Interview with Mrs. Audrey Renton, North Gower, April 23, 2002.

¹² Interview with Mrs. Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

was not enduring the rationing that was a stark reality for British citizens during the war years.

Despite the British public's initial wariness of foreign soldiers who appeared to be 'overpaid, oversexed, and over here,' Canadian servicemen were well received. Canadian soldiers were often invited to British homes to share a meal by young civilian women or their families. Though these invitations often stretched family rations, it was not uncommon for British families to offer up a pint of beer, a meal, or friendly conversation with Canadian servicemen in the towns in which they were stationed. These invitations and kind gestures directed at Canadian soldiers were an effort to welcome them to England, and make them feel more comfortable far from home. These efforts were widespread and were "a natural response, since some had sons, daughters, and husbands also serving their country far from home, and they hoped that their loved ones were being given similar treatment wherever they were stationed."¹³ Canadian servicemen often reciprocated by offering gifts of scarce goods like chocolate or cigarettes to their welcoming hosts.

When asked about their impressions of Canadian servicemen, most war brides seemed to have a favourable image of the young men. Audrey Renton recalls that the Canadians seemed "undisciplined, wonderful."¹⁴ Though they were known for their dedication and hard work as servicemen, Canadians seem to have been viewed as being less conservative, and more 'easy-going' than their British counterparts.

¹³ Wicks, p. 4.

¹⁴ Interview with Mrs. Audrey Renton, North Gower, April 23, 2002. Mrs. Renton was in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force, and many of her memories of young Canadians were formed on the various bases at which she was stationed. She noted in a later conversation, that RAF officers always agreed that the Canadians were second to none in the air.

One war bride commented that British women “liked the Canadians, they were fun. We weren’t fond of the Americans.”¹⁵ The two groups of servicemen were often compared in interviews done with war brides. Though the memories British brides have of the two groups of foreigners are tied, Canadians seem to be remembered more positively than American servicemen at the time. The Americans, in particular, were the servicemen remembered by the British public, especially its young women, as ‘over-paid, over-sexed, and over here.’ Historian Jenel Virden, in her work on British war brides in America, *Good-bye Piccadilly*, has noted that the some British people viewed American servicemen as “aggressive, pushy, immoral and scandalous.”¹⁶ Still, other members of the British public met the Americans with the same welcoming natures with which they had greeted the Canadians. The tendency of Canadian war brides that were interviewed to remember Canadians more positively than Americans may be the product of memory, and the affiliation these women have had with Canada for so many years. Perhaps that memory is created in part through a post-immigration internalization of Canada’s perpetual self-consciousness in the face of American culture.

Yet, specific memories and stories related by war brides during the course of their interviews suggest that the dislike of American servicemen, or rather preference for Canadian servicemen, was less a product of memory than a result of unpleasant encounters during the war. One war bride related that she and other servicewomen were not permitted to walk down a certain street near where they were stationed, “because the Americans would stand at the gates with nylons.” She recalled that she “can remember

¹⁵ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 3, 2002.

¹⁶ Jenel Virden, *Goodbye Piccadilly: British War Brides in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 19.

this fellow standing there with the nylons dangling from his hands, you know, “you want nylons?” and we were all in our uniforms, “no, thank you very much.”

This war bride’s comments also highlighted a point of contention with regard to young American servicemen, when she said, “well, I think that with the Americans, it was a case of them waiting so long to come into the war, and they claim they won it. It really goes over like a lump of lead with the British.”¹⁷ The early stage at which Canadian servicemen joined the fight, as opposed to the later entry of the Americans, may have played a part in endearing them to the British public.

American servicemen’s higher pay often created the sense that they were showing off, and thought that British women would be attracted to the material goods they could provide. Canadian servicemen were paid less than Americans, but more than British soldiers.¹⁸ Though they were able to provide scarce goods for their girlfriends and wives, they do not seem to be remembered as bragging about that privilege. Lily Sutton’s first impression of her husband seems, then, fairly representative of the difference between Canadians and Americans from the perspective of British women. She recalls, “He was a nice person, that’s all... he didn’t brag about things, you know, like a lot... [of] the American servicemen. [Americans] came in and they told us this and told us that. He was always very quiet – sort of genuine, I guess you would call him.”¹⁹

British women soon found that these encounters led to romantic relationships with Canadian servicemen. In turn, a large number of these relationships soon developed into plans for marriage. Most historians point to the urgency of wartime to explain the short courtships that preceded many marriages of British brides and Canadian servicemen.

¹⁷ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 3, 2002.

¹⁸ Virden, p. 21.

¹⁹ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

Since people's outlook during the war entailed an "attitude of living for the day [wartime circumstances] led what might have been casual romances in peacetime into quickly made commitments to marriage."²⁰ The possibility of death and the constant threat of separation contributed to an intensity of relationships that was unique to wartime years.

Another factor that led to intense and short courtships before marriage is the increased mobility of women working in war services. The more time women spent away from home, the less time they spent under their parents' roofs. The increased social independence of women during wartime was a theme that has been taken up by historian John Costello. In his book, *Virtue Under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes*, Costello asserts that the war brought with it a loosening of social and sexual mores.²¹ An increasingly charged sexual atmosphere created by wartime helped to cement relationships between war brides and Canadian soldiers. This atmosphere was further charged by the idea that war brides were "becoming young adults at an uncertain time."²² They were making decisions about their lives and futures, about marriage and children.

Yet, other historians like Jenel Virden maintain that a study of war brides and their husbands suggests that, "these couples came together and married despite the war, not because of it."²³ Her work with war brides and their husbands highlights the notion that their marriages were based on love and not a rash decision based on the fear of the uncertainty of the future. These urgent conditions, then, simply shortened the courtships

²⁰ Wicks, p. 6.

²¹ John Costello, *Virtue Under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), p. 274.

²² Jenel Virden, *Goodbye Piccadilly: British War Brides in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 11.

²³ Virden, p. 10.

of couples that might otherwise have taken a longer road to the certain end of marriage. The interviews undertaken for this study of Canadian war brides suggests that war brides and their husbands did marry because they were in love. To state that they married because they were uncertain of their futures would be to simplify a complex and interesting time in history. The war did, however, seem to magnify the urgency of daily life, and thus encourage young couples to not put off marriages that might have involved a more drawn-out courtship.

Though they may have known little about Canada before they met Canadian servicemen, their boyfriends or husbands often provided a plentiful, but not always accurate, source of information for women curious about the land these young men had temporarily left behind. While dating, British war brides recall that the Canadians often shared stories about their upbringing, cities, and life at home in Canada. One war bride adamantly asserts that her husband “told me it never rained in the summer. So I didn’t even bring a raincoat when I came. And he vows he didn’t – but he did – he told me it never rained.”²⁴ She went on to recall that her husband continually tried to impress on her Canada’s immense size. She remembers that, “he said that everything was big. He thought that our rivers were just streams. And I think they got bigger and bigger as the days went by.”²⁵ She also recalls that her husband, who was from Alberta, would tell her “things about what they did at school, his friends, and going up to Banff, skiing and skating... sort of everyday things.”²⁶ The short length of many relationships during the war meant that Canadian husbands and their British wives got to know each other in a condensed period of time, and the prolonged intervals many couples were separated from

²⁴ Interview with war bride (name held upon request), Brockville, May 3, 2002.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

each other as a result of military duties may have allowed less time for asking questions about the servicemen's life at home – this may have left some questions unanswered about what life was like in Canada.

Worried about the consequences of the intense relationships between British women and their Canadian husbands, especially in the early years of the war, allied governments attempted to stall these unions by creating bureaucratic hoops that would slow down their progress. Therefore, the Canadian government required servicemen to seek permission to marry from the military. The most practical result of this new regulation was that obtaining permission took time. One Immigration Branch official noted that, “the idea was that during this period of delay, the soldier and his intended wife would have time to further consider the step they were going to take and would also give the Army Authorities time to enquire into the fitness of the couple to marry.”²⁷ In this way, marriages were prevented from being the result of rash decisions made by young couples that did not take the time to recognize the magnitude of the commitment they were making. Instead, military officials were placed in the role of guardians. The question of exactly what they were guarding - whether it be the future focus of young soldiers, the welfare of Britain's daughters, or the prize of Canadian citizenship – is less clear. The role of guardian was one that military officials maintained throughout the immigration of British brides, with the help of organizations like the Red Cross. The military enlarged the concept of military discipline to include seeking permission to marry, thereby keeping control of the men under its command in aspects of their personal

²⁷ National Archives of Canada (hereafter NAC), RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter to Acting Director of Immigration Branch of DMR, from the Commissioner, Immigration Branch, DMR, London, Jan. 20, 1944.

life. The military was thus able to control both men and women who became involved and sought to marry through their control of the male serviceman.

The process of seeking permission to marry involved a series of steps. Though marriage already involved the participation and regulation by both church and state, in making it necessary for the soldier to obtain permission to marry it was further complicated by military officials, becoming a matter to be cleared through military regulation. Army chaplains and commanding officers could then ensure that the soldier was serious in his commitment to his future bride. Perhaps more importantly, they could also ensure through army personnel records that the soldier was not already married to someone in Canada.

The process of gaining permission from the military to marry also involved letters of reference from people who could attest to the character of the War Bride. There is little evidence outlining what the government hoped to learn from these letters, and how they defined the hope that the women were 'good' girls. Nonetheless, the idea that many of these letters were provided by church officials might signify that the Brides' recognized that the issue in question was that their morality as women. By asking predominantly church officials, the war brides were acting within accepted gender frameworks of the time that sought to ensure more than just that the women were unmarried and without illegitimate children. The gender notions of the time were predicated on the idea that women who were going to marry Canadian servicemen had to be of the right moral calibre. Historians C.P Stacey and Barbara Wilson have noted in their work, *The Half Million: The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946*, that when brides could not provide references of their own, the responsibility to assess their character and

moral worth often fell on the servicemen's unit chaplain. Stacey asserts that, "this was not always easy; indeed, there were times when he was asked to certify, that a woman, already pregnant by the respective groom, was of good character."²⁸ In dealing with some of the same issues, Cheryl Butler asks a poignant question:

What was the c/o [commanding officer] or chaplain going to do if the woman was pregnant? Would he refuse permission for the marriage and leave the woman to cope with a 'bastard' child on her own? Naturally many officials were reluctant to do that.²⁹

These issues most have placed many officials in an awkward position. As Butler's assertion suggests, giving permission to the union must have seemed like a more attractive option than the alternative. It is important to note that in these cases it is the women who were deemed to have lapsed morally, as opposed to the servicemen that had fathered the child. These notions about women demonstrate the double standard at work in notions of women and men's sexuality during the war years.³⁰

Women in various branches of the Armed Forces were made to acquire the permission of their commanding officer, much like their husbands, to ensure they were not of 'poor' character, not married to a serviceman posted elsewhere during the war, and not pregnant. Servicemen's character was not so much in question in relation to their seeking permission to marry while stationed overseas. Rather, military officials focused on the issue of whether the serviceman was already married in Canada, and whether he had any venereal diseases.

²⁸ Stacey and Wilson, p. 138.

²⁹ Butler, 50.

³⁰ For further discussion of the double standard that guided gendered notions of women's sexuality in the war years, see Ruth Roach Pierson, *'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

Since it is from women who procured these letters to military officials that the existence of the letters is known, and since they are not contained in the files of military officials, it is difficult to know how military officials interpreted or treated the documents. The letters seem to serve as a formality – a small hurdle – but one that would nonetheless succeed in slowing down the marriages of British women and Canadian servicemen. That the government correspondence does not set out in any detail or formal way what kind of requirements they were looking for in these letters only seems to reinforce the idea that the letters of reference represented a tactic by Canadian officials to stall the marriages, rather than to disallow marriages altogether based on the outcome of the letters.

The necessary medical examination, a general physical and Wassermann test to check for venereal diseases, would ensure that the wife was in good health, not a future drain on medical and welfare agencies in Canada. These tests were less extensive for women already in the forces, who had regular medical exams, as well as a physical at the time of their demobilization. Similarly, servicemen had to undergo periodic medical testing to ensure that they were not infected with venereal diseases.

Doubtless, these elements all helped to slow the rate of marriages taking place during the war years. It is not known to what extent these letters and exams provided the Canadian government with a glimpse of the women who would soon come to Canada, and soon become mothers to a future generation of Canadians. One might assume that most letters of reference would be favourable, or given the number of marriages that passed through the procedure and received permission to marry, either the government was not being very stringent in their selection, or the group of women was seen by those

in their community to be of fine character. Since letters of reference are usually flattering by nature, it seems that the government's request for these letters was simply another hurdle put into place to slow the numbers of marriages between Canadian servicemen and British women.

Both the British and Canadian governments were doubtful about the relations taking place between their citizens. The Canadian government worried that British women might become involved with servicemen in order to access their Dependent's Allowance. For Canadian military officials, this meant paying out more money than had been anticipated, and they did not want to see their recruits being taken advantage of only to have these women become a drain on Canadian social services. More long-term worries recognized that if marriages were entered into too hastily, divorces might ensue after the women's immigration to Canada. Here again, the fear was that these women would become a drain on Canada's social welfare systems.

Britain shared the same kinds of worries, however, since encounters between British women and Canadian husbands that did not result in a marriage, could leave women abandoned and with children to support at the end of the war. British officials feared if Canadian servicemen, and indeed, servicemen from other countries, were not held accountable for their wartime unions, these women would become a drain on Britain's social welfare system. Since it was assumed by both Canadian and British officials that women who married Canadian men would automatically follow them to Canada and be supported by their husbands, it was the relations that did not end in marriage that were particularly worrisome for the British government. Neither scenario,

of destitute English women, nor broken and used Canadian soldiers, seemed like useful situations for postwar international relations.

One Canadian military official remarked, "Marriage is at best a lottery and it is not unusual even where normal precautions are taken to have some cases of incompatibility or hidden vices brought to light after marriage... it is felt that ... in times such as these, young people are possibly a little more hasty than in normal times."³¹ Remarking on the short length of the courtships of the couples, as discussed earlier, both military and immigration officials thought that they would be better served to create a two-month waiting period before that permission could be granted.³² By making the marriage process as drawn out as possible, officials sought to weed out any 'hasty' marriages that could be deterred by the length of the process.

After all, even though for the couples, "it was simply a case of meeting someone, falling in love, and getting married,"³³ it represented a mountain of paperwork and logistical problems for the government to solve. Since soldiers had to be repatriated to Canada at the end of the war, the Canadian government had to decide how they would go about getting their brides to Canada as well. Though they had the First World War as a reference, policy makers must have recognized that the sheer numbers of war brides in the Second World War would create a completely different situation than had been experienced two decades earlier. In January of 1942, the Cabinet War Committee made the following sweeping decision:

³¹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to Mrs. MHT (Mary) Alexander from F.W. Clarke, Director of Repatriation, Jan 16, 1945.

³² NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter to Acting Director of Immigration Branch of DMR, from the Commissioner, Immigration Branch, DMR, London, Jan. 20, 1944.

³³ Virden, p. 47.

Canada should provide free minimum cost ocean and rail transportation for dependents (wives, widows, and children under 18) of members of the Canadian Forces overseas. Repatriation in every case is based on the connection of the family head with some Branch of the Canadian Forces, Army, Navy or Air, and does not depend in any way on where the dependents were born or where the marriage took place.³⁴

This decision was put into effect by Order in Council P.C. 23/5095, and made retroactive to benefit the few cases where dependents had already made their way to Canada by paying their own passage. Early on, then, the government decided to bear the burden of transporting dependents to Canada, providing free transportation and food. Through this order, the Department of Mines and Resources took over the responsibility for the transportation, until the growing responsibility was transferred to the Department of National Defence in August 1944 under Order in Council P.C./6422.³⁵

The question of citizenship also needed to be addressed. Some war brides, coming from countries other than Britain, faced the prospect of losing their citizenship from their home country and not necessarily gaining citizenship from their husband's country simply by virtue of their marriages. This problem meant that in some situations, war brides were not citizens of any countries. In the case of British war brides marrying American servicemen, the union did not mean the loss of their British status, but it did not necessarily entail the granting of American citizenship.³⁶

Citizenship issues were not a major problem for British war brides coming to Canada. Generally, the citizenship issues surrounding their immigration did not cause much debate because of the commonwealth relationship between Britain and Canada. As

³⁴ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 1, C-10400. Memorandum to Hon. Mr. Crerar from Director Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, May 20, 1945.

³⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, Reel C-5220. History of S.A.A.G. Office and Directorate of Repatriation, 1942-1947. By Col. George H. Ellis, Director of Repatriation, n.d. p. 27.

³⁶ Virden notes that it took a three-year period of residency in the United States for British war brides to gain American citizenship (p. 40).

Jenel Virden has pointed out, in contrast to unions with American men, "the British government was less concerned over the legal status of the considerable number of British women who married soldiers from commonwealth nations such as Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand."³⁷ Rather, the British government was more concerned about British marriage to soldiers of some eastern European countries where marriage meant the loss of British citizenship, and the automatic gain of their husband's citizenship. The status of the bride's citizenship, then, rested on the policies of their husband's countries.

The commonwealth relationship between Britain and Canada is an important part of the immigration story for British war brides. War brides were British subjects, and continued to be classified as such upon entry into Canada. The Canadian Citizenship Act of 1947 created and defined the term "Canadian citizen," and included war brides in that definition by virtue of their status as British subjects with Canadian domicile. The question of providing passage was the topic that created the most discussion, whereas the notion of citizenship was a given to Canadian immigration policy makers.

The government attempted to ensure that the dependents would, in every way, "be treated as Canadian citizens."³⁸ Still, the view of war brides as Canadian citizens did little to quell the fears of government officials that the brides might not be the best kind of immigrant. As had been the case with large-scale female immigration of past decades early correspondence suggests that immigration officials worried about the moral character and calibre of these women as immigrants and future Canadians. Even as the government was passing the free passage scheme for dependents of Canadian

³⁷ Virden, p. 39.

³⁸ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, C-5218. Letter to the Mrs. J. Robert Page, Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, Toronto from J.H. Neeland for Col. F.W. Clarke Director of Repatriation, DND, March 28, 1945.

servicemen, seemingly helping the women immigrate, they were wary of making it easier for servicemen to marry. One telegram from February 1942 related that, "Canadian Military Headquarters are concerned at number of marriages taking place and type of girls some of soldiers are marrying, and hence they are reluctant to remove any of the existing deterrents to marriages."³⁹

Anxieties about the calibre of British brides continued through 1943 as the numbers of British Brides grew exponentially, as is evident from the reports from both military and immigration officials who reported that some of the brides could be considered "undesirable" immigrants.⁴⁰ In reference to one London War Bride, the government official remarked, "there was no question of this woman going to Canada in advance of her husband, but I have drawn attention to her because of her type. She did not seem "fast" but dirty and untidy, her hands being grimy and tobacco stained."⁴¹ This description of the war bride as 'dirty' and 'grimy' does not suggest an immoral character, since the official mentions she is not 'fast'. Rather, the description seems to be a reference to the woman's social class standing. Officials' anxieties reflect the longstanding feeling of Canadians that though British immigrants were desirable by virtue of their common heritage with many Canadians, the female stock that was selected for immigration was not always of the highest quality, bringing the unwanted of British society to establish new roots in Canada.

³⁹ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt.1, C-10400. Telegram to The Secretary of State for External Affairs, Canada, from The High Commissioner for Canada in Great Britain, February 21, 1942.

⁴⁰ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 2, C-10400. Letter to unknown recipient, from F.C.B., Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, May 29, 1943.

⁴¹ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt.1 C-10400. Memorandum to unknown recipient, from official [signature illegible] at the Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, Jan. 14, 1941.

A recent thesis by Cheryl Butler at the University of Toronto suggests that class concerns formed the basis for some of the official fears about the 'quality' of war brides.

Cheryl Butler asserts that

While it should come as no surprise, the statistics clearly show the majority of war brides were married to Canadian Army personnel. Since the army recruited the largest numbers and in many cases men with working-class backgrounds, a parallel might be drawn that most married their own class of women - that is working-class. Statistical and anecdotal data to prove this has not been found.⁴²

Jenel Virden also draws attention to the importance of class in her study of American brides, stating that, "although there were regional variations and a few class differences among the war brides, the majority were from working or lower-middle class families."⁴³

If Butler's speculation about the background of most war brides is correct, longstanding Canadian concerns regarding British working-class immigrants might very well have influenced the response of Canadian officials to the war brides.⁴⁴

Regardless of their inter-office anxieties, the government maintained a public stance that Canadian servicemen had selected the highest quality British women to marry and make Canadian citizens. The government's public statements announced the high qualities of the brides. One military official argued:

Canada is very fortunate in having such a splendid hand picked class for migration to Canada and anyone who sees one of these movements to Canada and sees the healthy robust children will appreciate it. The boys have married into good healthy British stock of which we should be proud.⁴⁵

⁴² Cheryl Butler, "Janey Canuk: Experiences of World War II British War Brides Who Emigrated to Canada." *M.A. Thesis* University of Toronto (1995), p. 57.

⁴³ Virden, p. 70.

⁴⁴ My own interviews were mostly with the wives of Air Force men, who might not have same class demographic as the Canadian army. Only one woman I interviewed went to university, while a few others attended technical college or secretarial schools. Still, most seem to be of the middle class, or upper working class.

⁴⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 13, C-5218. Letter from Col. F.W. Clarke, Department of Repatriation, to Col. F. X. Jennings, Department of Public Relations, April 28, 1945.

There may have been several reasons for this positive spin by Canadian immigration and military officials. Faced with letters of reference from the women's commanding officers or church officials, touting their devotion to religion and strong moral outlook, there may have been a true belief among officials that the wives Canadians were taking in Britain were strong and desirable immigrants. Yet, certainly, letters of reference are positive and flattering to their subjects by their very nature. More likely, the idea that these marriages were causing rumblings among families and friends at home may have prompted officials to maintain a united stance for the sake of damage control. Their decision to provide free transportation for the many brides that awaited immigration might not have been supported by the Canadian public if long-held fears about the poor quality of English citizens coming to Canada were perceived to be becoming a reality.

The positive assertions by the Canadian government attempted to convince the public at home that Canadian servicemen were recruiting quality immigrants to Canada. They argued that the women Canadian servicemen had chosen as brides were well worth the government expenditure in bringing them to Canada, all expenses paid, in a time of shortages. They took the opportunity to respond to newspaper articles and letters from the public that expressed concern about the type of women involved.⁴⁶ The 'type' they seemed to be referring to was less a matter of character than a matter of class – though

⁴⁶ One such letter between the Department of National Defence's Director of Repatriation and the Department of Public Relations cites an article from an April 23, 1945 article in *Time* that officials stated "[stirred] up prejudice and casts a slur on the wives and children of our servicemen who married in the U.K." The official goes on to say that "Canada is very fortunate in having such a splendid hand picked class for migration to Canada and anyone who sees one of these movements to Canada and sees the healthy robust children will appreciate it. The boys have married into good healthy British stock of which we should be proud." The article seemed to focus on the maladjustments of some of the war brides that had already arrived in Canada, and seemingly, blamed these maladjustments on the poor calibre of the women Canadian servicemen had married. NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 13, C-5218. Letter from F.W. Clarke, Director of Repatriation, Department of National Defence, to Col. F.X. Jennings, Department of Public Relations, April 28, 1945.

the two issues often seem to intertwine in the minds of Canadian government officials and even the female immigration reformers that came before them. The Canadian government announced the "fine quality of girl who is throwing in her lot with us,"⁴⁷ and touted that "each one of these wives had profited by a better educational system than we are able to give to women here of a corresponding class."⁴⁸

By highlighting elements such as the good education, intelligence and moral character of the British brides, the government sought to counteract the sometimes-unfavourable view of war brides expressed by the Canadian public. Public opinion in newspapers often suggested that British women were taking advantage of the generosity of Canadian servicemen who were far from home. One anonymous female Red Cross worker reflected on her experiences in England, writing a response to a favourable article on British Brides. Though they might make good wives, she asserted, "it is fairly obvious that there are many other factors involved in these marriages between Canadians and English girls, one of the chief being that the soldiers have been away from their homes... and are, therefore, prey to loneliness and longing for a home." Not only were these women conveniently present to receive the attentions of servicemen, but she went on to assert that "it is clear that most English girls, in spite of the hardships war has brought, are having more good times than those enjoyed by Canadian girls, whose friends, brothers and husbands have all gone overseas to Britain, and then to other theatres of war."⁴⁹ With views like the one above expressed in Canadian newspapers, British brides

⁴⁷ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 12, C-5218. Letter from J.H. Neeland for Col. F.W. Clarke, Director of Repatriation, Department of National Defence, to the Ladies Auxiliary Royal Canadian Engineers, April 2, 1945.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Newspaper Article, unknown source. Scrapbook of Mirium Currie Mitchell, Canadian Red Cross Corps, London, located at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

came to be painted as emotional profiteers of the conditions in wartime Britain. They seemed to be enjoying themselves on the arms and paycheques of lonely Canadian servicemen. At a time when women were supposed to be unselfish and morally upright, the idea that they might be exchanging romance for the sake of consumer goods must have brought up images of prostitution and excess that did not mesh with the traditional interpretations of women's role in society.

Another article from *Chatelaine* in April 1944 provided a more mixed view of British war brides. Since she had been in England performing war duties, the author's first hand account was advertised as a "a frank and conscientious report from one Canadian woman to other Canadian women, on a subject that concerns us all."⁵⁰ It was unavoidable, she asserted, that Canadian soldiers "like and admire British women." In the article she distinguished two different types of these women, represented by examples she provided of "Winnie" and "Laura." Winnie, she described, is "a dance hall pick-up – a wide-eyed irresponsible girl... she had been brought up poor but not respectable."⁵¹ However, the author subsequently tempers her criticisms of brides, by providing the following qualification:

Perhaps it isn't fair to mention Winnie. She is by no means typical of our soldiers' British wives; it is because she stood out as shockingly below the average that I remember her... But if we must accept some Winnies (as we accept our own Canadian-made slum families) let us remember that the great majority of these thousands of new Canadians are clean, decent, nice women, and their babies are fine examples of careful conscientious motherhood.⁵²

Although public debate recognized the worth of most British brides as wives, mothers, and immigrants, there remained a subtext of fear regarding 'loose' women taking

⁵⁰ "Our Men... and Those British Women" by Mary-Etta Macpherson. *Chatelaine* (April 1944), p. 53, 57.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵² *Ibid.*

advantage of lonely Canadian soldiers. It is important to note here as well the connections the author makes between class and morality issues. She ties the image of the slums to a lack of respectability. Here again, the moral character of women involved was scrutinized by a Canadian public that feared it was getting the least desirable immigrants that Britain had to offer.

Contrastingly, an amusing addition to the discussion of the worth of British Brides appeared in an October 1946 edition of *Maclean's* magazine. In it a British soldier responds to rumours he'd heard about the glowing beauty of Canadian girls in comparison to war ragged British girls. After disagreeing wholeheartedly with that assessment, he ironically asserts,

Well, it seems a long day away since all those Canadian soldiers told us we hadn't seen anything until we'd seen the Canadian girl. But I just thought of something – they didn't practice what they preached! Even with all the boasting about Canadian womanhood, 30,000 Canadian soldiers married those drab, unwashed, ill-fed and ragged English girls. I'm just brash enough to suggest that they don't hurt the Canadian scenery a bit."⁵³

This British soldier's comments contain a clear bias - he is British male, defending the characteristics and worth of the girls from his own country. As for the Canadian Red Cross worker, she is certainly still critical of the women in question, no doubt causing sleepless nights for Canadian mothers who worried that their son married a "Winnie" overseas. Nonetheless, both authors attempt to fight the negative views of war brides held by the Canadian public, attempting to convince readers that unfavourable stereotypes were not representative of the type of British women that would soon be making their way to Canada.

⁵³ "Now, About You Girls," by Roland Wild. *MacLean's* (October 1, 1946), p. 69.

Another image of British women emerges from articles in magazines and newspapers preceding their immigration to Canada. Many writers had pointed to the strength of British women since the early years of the war. Not only did they face daily trials that Canadians on the home front could only read about, but also they took an active and very public role in the defence of their country. An ongoing series of articles from Maclean's related the opinions of Beverley Baxter in a feature called "Beverley Baxter's London Letter." In September 1940, Baxter discussed the firm sense of patriotism and duty with which women in Britain faced wartime life:

Not long ago a gently nurtured wife was in the fields near her home when she saw a German airman land with a parachute. Endless pronouncements had told her to lie down and remain unobserved. Instead, she walked up to the airman, ordered him to put his hands over his head and marched him along the road until she found a policeman.⁵⁴

The image of the strong-willed British woman defending her country was one that writers touted often, especially in the early years of the war. Baxter goes on to assert that these women surpass Joan of Arc and Elizabeth in their courage and perseverance. It is important to note that the author describes the wife as "gently nurtured," doubtlessly reassuring the audience that the heroine could be brave and womanly at the same time. British women were an impressive bunch – until they started to marry Canadian men. These public notions of British women must have fuelled the fire of some discussions on the home front about how to feel about the marriages. Certainly, these British women were noble enough to defend their country and deserving of Canadian women's respect as a result. Perhaps, however, the question of whether they were worthy of marrying Canadian women's sons, brothers, and 'old flames' was an entirely different question.

⁵⁴ "Beverley Baxter's 'London Letter': The Women of Britain." *MacLean's* (Sept 1, 1940), p. 41.

An article from the *Globe and Mail* in April 8, 1944 suggested that the negative criticisms that were directed at British war brides were the result of the rants of jealous Canadian women. The writer argued that, “the present criticism of overseas marriages – sometimes it approaches bitterness – is based upon the non-marriage of Canadian girls whom the boys left behind.”⁵⁵ The author goes on to highlight to the common heritage of British war brides with many Canadians, and their status as very desirable immigrants by saying:

If Canada wants British immigration after the war, one of the best ways to secure it is to give the advance guard of British brides a high opinion of the Canadian people. That, of course, is not the basic reason for treating these strangers well. The basic reason is that they are the wives of our fighting men, the daughters of our ancestral land, and the mothers-to-be of our fighting men’s children; some of them mothers already, bringing these future Canadian young folk with them.”⁵⁶

Evident in this selection is the role war brides were supposed to play as the links between the past and the future – and between Britain and Canada. These women had been a link between the Canadian military and British public during the war years, and their role as a human connection between the two societies became even more entrenched with their marriage to Canadian servicemen. These connections that the public often made between images of war brides and their future roles as wives and mothers of young Canadians informed the discussions of their worth as immigrants, and their calibre or moral tone as female citizens. The fact that the articles on the topic of war brides appearing in Canada before and during the time of the brides’ arrival, seem to try to convince the public of the

⁵⁵ Newspaper Article, *Globe and Mail*, date unknown. Located in a scrapbook at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa. This scrapbook seems to have been personally collected by a Red Cross official, probably a VAD, and contains random clippings that, seemingly, caught her interest and related some meaning to the experience she was having at the time. The clippings are included without commentary. The scrapbook was found in the records of the Overseas League section of the Red Cross records. Quite possibly, the women who created the scrapbook had had some contact with war brides.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

British women's worth, seems to signify that it was felt that the Canadian public needed to be convinced.

Now that the logistics for the mass immigration were well underway, and the married lives of many of the couples was already underway, the couples awaited the end of the war and the war brides' eventual immigration to Canada. Wartime conditions and the danger of a wartime crossing meant restrictions on the number of ships that could be travelling back and forth across the Atlantic. Furthermore, those that did make the trip were needed to carry materials and men to sustain the war effort. As a result of this need, the transportation of war brides became secondary to meeting the needs of the military and Allied nations. A small number of war brides did make the trip before their husbands were repatriated to Canada. The majority, however, would have to wait until after the end of the war to travel to their new homes.

The decision to postpone the immigration of war brides was reached after lengthy discussions between government officials from the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources and the Department of National Defence that took over responsibility for the immigration in 1944. The postponement of the immigration had been in the works since the early years of the war. An early telegram reflected this policy in 1941, when the correspondence instructed officials reviewing the files of war brides, to, "as [a] general principle, refuse movement [of] wives married overseas until husband [is] accompanying or already in Canada."⁵⁷ Though justified in public by presenting the problem of wartime shipping restrictions, the government had other reasons for wanting war brides to remain in England until the end of the war.

⁵⁷ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 1, C-10400. Night Letter from Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Torosus, London, Immigration General, July 17, 1941.

One reason was that the experiences of the small number of women who had already made the journey, preceding their husbands to their Canadian homes, illustrated some of the problems that early journeys entailed. Firstly, there was the issue of the general adjustment to new surroundings, which was made even more difficult for war brides without their husbands' presence and support. Government officials marvelled at why any bride would want to put herself through that ordeal since it meant that she was, "to go to a strange country, where she is inevitably bound to feel lonely and homesick in a very short time... It is hard to understand why either of the couple should desire such a move."⁵⁸ As far as government was concerned, though living in Canada would have been physically safer than remaining in Britain, an early immigration seemed a traumatic alternative to staying in Britain's familiar surroundings until the end of the war.

Another reason that the government resisted war brides' desire to journey to Canada during the war years was the fear that conditions were not suitable for their reception. Before the first war brides started arriving in Canada, the federal government investigated the settlement arrangements that the husband's relatives would be providing. In some instances, they found that the house was in poor condition, the in-laws did not speak English, or were simply unwilling to receive the War Bride into their homes.

If officials felt that the Canadian serviceman had not been entirely honest to his wife about his life at home they had to decide whether they would allow these immigrants to advance to unacceptable conditions. Officials soon decided that the following procedure should be followed:

⁵⁸ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 3, C-10400. Letter from Commissioner, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Acting Director, Immigration Branch, DMR, Ottawa, Sept. 21, 1943.

In the instance where the wife is preceding to relatives living under conditions that might not be visualized or understood by the new member of the family, we take special care to see that she is carefully informed – first, of the location of her new home, and secondly, the actual conditions there... Should we be satisfied that the arrangement will not work out successfully, our London office informs the applicant that she had better await the return to Canada of her husband.⁵⁹

Other stories of unhappy women not getting along with their in-laws only encouraged the government to postpone the immigration of war brides until after their husbands' return to Canada. This decision became standard by the later years of the war, and most war brides had no choice but to wait until 1945 and 1946 to join their husbands in Canada.

Though everyone seemed to be preparing for the war brides' departure from England early in the war, especially at a policy level, war brides assert that they were not thinking about moving to Canada during the war. Mrs. Pat Loop remembers that she "hadn't intended to come here, [she] just got caught up in the swing of things."⁶⁰ Lily Sutton explained that

We never thought about it. I never thought about coming to Canada. Maybe in the back of my mind I thought he would stay here. I don't know. Really, I never thought about it. I mean, we got married, and that was it, you didn't – you couldn't – think that far ahead, because you didn't know what was going to happen [during the war.]⁶¹

Caught up in the momentum of wartime life, and weary of thinking too far ahead, war brides' immigration seem to sneak up on them.

Even if war brides, themselves, were not spending time worrying about their upcoming immigration, it is clear from their memories of the time that their parents were busy worrying for them. One war bride reported that her family appointed her brother to

⁵⁹ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter from Joliffe, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Miss Nora Lea, Assistant Executive Director, Canadian Welfare Council, Jan 31, 1944.

⁶⁰ Phone interview with Patricia Loop, Ottawa, May 21, 2002.

⁶¹ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

speak to her about the consequences of marrying a Canadian serviceman. He asked if she was sure about her decision to marry, and reminded her that Canada was going to be a long distance from home, and she couldn't "pop back and forth."⁶² Another war bride, Lily Sutton, can remember, "My mother... said 'oh, we are going to lose her.'" Her father and husband, on the other hand, "used to go down to the pub the two of them when [her husband] came home and they talked a lot. I think he knew a lot more of what was going to happen than I did. That is why he wasn't really [worried]... he used to tell my mother "never mind Bess, she'll be ok."⁶³ Here again, it is evident that the marriage of a British woman to a Canadian serviceman was presumed to result in the eventual migration of women to follow their husbands to Canada.

The wartime environment of living for the day meant that with the momentum of surviving the day and regular duties, and romance and weddings, many war brides did not consciously recognize the implications of their looming immigration until their husbands were demobilized to Canada. These separations often happened unexpectedly. The end of the war brought with it a desire to return servicemen home as soon as possible. For war brides, this may have meant their husbands were shipped home without much notice, leaving them wondering when they would reunite again. With the end of the war, however, the future must have begun to seem more certain, bringing with it the imminent departure from England, and everything familiar, to begin a life in Canada.

Many husbands waited for their wives' arrival impatiently, often writing to government officials and newspapers to express their frustration with a government policy that had promised to bring their wives to Canada and had yet to fulfill that promise

⁶² Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Ottawa, April 29, 2002.

⁶³ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

by the end of the war. One immigration inspector from the Department of Mines and Resources angrily reported his encounter with a group of unhappy husbands in June 1945. Claiming that Army officials had promised them "their dependents would travel on the next boat following them to Canada," the men turned up to "voice their grievance." The official related that, "today they ganged up on us in as much as five called at one time. At least two of them had been drinking... when they gang up like that in fives, anything can happen."⁶⁴ In this case, the government official denied providing an official promise as to when the brides would arrive. Instead, he concluded that it must have been a lower level official's attempt to placate anxious husbands who did not want to leave their wives behind in Britain.

Wives often had to take on the responsibility of reassuring their husbands it was government delay and not their own doubts that was stopping them from making the trip. One husband sent a letter from his wife to the Department of National Defence in 1946 that insinuated that only women who bribed immigration officials received priority to travel once the journeys had got underway in 1945. Further, she attempted to reassure him by adding, "There are 32,000 girls waiting to go to Canada, so I'm not the only one waiting, pet, but surely they'll try to ship us out quicker as transport gets easier, so darling, please understand, it's beyond my control, just as soon as they send me word."⁶⁵ From 1945 through to 1947 war brides faced delays as a result of priority problems and pregnancy restrictions.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the women interviewed for this study suggested

⁶⁴ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 461, File 705870, pt. 7, C-10401. Letter from Assistant Immigration Inspector-In-Charge, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Mr. J.D. McFarlane, A/Eastern District Superintendent, June 6, 1945.

⁶⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 24, C-5219. Copy of a letter to Mr. S. Palef from Mrs. S. Palef in London, May 16, 1946.

⁶⁶ Women who were 6 months pregnant or more were not eligible to travel.

that through these years, most British wives remained just as anxious as their husbands to start their new lives in Canada.

At the same time, some sections of the Canadian public advocated delaying the journey of war brides until such time as all members of the Canadian military had been repatriated. The implication that wives might take priority over soldiers who had fought for their country, and who waited to be reunited with loved ones, was met with resistance and anger in the pages of the Canadian press. A letter to the editor of *The Maple Leaf* asserted, "If those restless Canadian soldier brides "want a boat" by all means give them one – the Lusitania. [Signed] A Happy Bachelor." The same edition subsequently included an opinion of the wife of a Canadian serviceman. In it she stated, "The idea that we should have priority over men who have been away from their families for years, as many of these boys have been, is unthinkable." The Editor then notes, "You two should get together and better international relations."⁶⁷ These letters illustrate that news of war brides, discussions of their immigration, and their priority for travel, were topics that were discussed by an emotionally charged Canadian public.

The question then became, what was the government to do now that they were responsible for such a large group of women who faced waiting one or even two years in Britain before being allowed to travel to Canada? The sheer numbers of women awaiting passage, and the immense logistics involved in their upcoming journey, created a captive audience for government to develop a structure solely to cater to and benefit anxious brides. The delay in transportation allowed an opening for the brides to be provided with essential information for their journey, and to learn about Canadian culture and customs.

⁶⁷ Letters to the Editor, *The Maple Leaf*, date unknown, located in the records of the Overseas Club, housed at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

It also gave the brides an opportunity to form relationships with other brides. The government speculated that these relationships and avenues for distributing information could only help to facilitate the war brides' journey, prepare them for their roles as Canadian citizens, and ease their overall transition to Canadian life.

Chapter 3 2 Sackville Street

On the fifth floor of an old stone building on Sackville Street, just off Piccadilly Circus in London, is a government office which deals exclusively in postwar happiness. The waiting room is cheerful and attractive. Even though windows look out on a blitzed area of the city, they're decorated with gay chintz curtains; there are plenty of comfortable chairs and couches, and the tables are stacked with magazines to entertain waiting wives.¹

John Doupluce's very visual depiction of the atmosphere at the Canadian Wives' Bureau Headquarters in London near the end of the Second World War gave his readers an inside glimpse into the welcoming resource centre created specifically to prepare the British war bride for her journey to Canada. Indeed, his sharp contrast between what gloom lay outside the walls of 2 Sackville Street, and what its interior contained and represented, must not have been one that escaped the wives who visited its waiting room.

With the numbers of servicemen returning to Canada rising daily, leaving their British wives to await passage to Canada, the Canadian government had a captive audience of British women to educate and assimilate to Canadian life. Though immigration officials and volunteer organizations had attempted to educate immigrants for years prior to the Second World War, their efforts were often undertaken after the immigrant's arrival in Canada. The education of war brides was unique in so far as attempts to 'Canadianize' them began before their immigration to Canada. Their education was also unique in terms of the structure of the machinery set up to complete the task.

¹ John Doupluce, "They're Bound for Canada." NAC, RG 76, Vol. 461, File 705870, pt. 5, C-10401. This quote comes from a newspaper or magazine article that was contained in the files of the Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources. The original source is unknown, though the file indicates that it originally appeared circa February 1945. A photograph of the Canadian Wives' Bureau waiting room, complete with British war brides reviewing Canadian magazines can be found in C.P. Stacey and Barbara M. Wilson's book, *The Half Million: The Canadians in Britain, 1939-1946* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 143.

Canadian officials' attempts to educate British war brides were driven by Canada's sense of its place on the international stage. Canada had asserted its independence from Britain in political and military affairs. Yet, the country continued to struggle with defining its own identity. Canadians continued to explore the parameters of that identity in the context of their commonwealth connection to Britain, and their fear of cultural assimilation with the United States.

These issues of identity and the definition of Canadian nationalism fuelled the lessons officials used to educate and assimilate British brides. The issue of national identity was complicated for war brides in the sense that 'educators' had to distinguish where commonwealth identity ended and Canadian identity began. With immigrants from other countries, as Franca Iacovetta has pointed out,

The Cold War baggage of prejudices, suspicions, and "corrupted democracy" created a highly charged context in which the process of making "New Canadians" or moulding "Model Citizens" out of Holocaust survivors, former Fascists, anti-Soviet refugees, and other immigrants became urgent moral campaigns for democratic decency and test cases for proving the greater good of Western liberal democracies. Gatekeeper intrusions into immigrant lives were cast as moral imperatives in the fight against godless communism.²

Typically, the host society thus regarded immigrant education as introducing completely new concepts of political ideology and social frameworks. For British women, these ideologies and frameworks were not so foreign.

Government officials and voluntary organizations that sought to 'Canadianize' British women had to work hard to establish Canada's identity as being distinct from that of Britain. Though Canada had a long history of preferring immigrants from Britain over other countries, its representatives sought to impress upon young brides that the country had its own physical characteristics, geography, and history that had to be taught to

² Iacovetta "Making Model Citizens", p. 154.

incoming British immigrants so they would understand that there was a difference between a Canadian citizen and a British subject. Nonetheless, in their attempts to become involved with British brides, organizations often touted their connections to British society or culture as proof that they should be involved in the process of caring for the large group of British women. They felt that this familiarity would ensure their success in efforts to educate British immigrants. Even though Canada was by no means homogeneously British in demographic terms at the end of the war, Canadian culture still reflected the long-held connections to Britain, even if its population did not.

War Brides' 'Canadianization' was gendered – their education as immigrants couched in postwar notions of women's place in society. Historians examining women's wartime roles, whether in North America or Britain, have taken various stances on the war's consequences for women's place within society. In Canada, historians such as Ruth Roach Pierson have asserted that women's increased presence in wartime factories and auxiliary military corps did little to reshape gender roles for postwar society. Pierson was one of the first to argue that, rather than a shift in the ideological understanding of women's role in society, notions of femininity were perpetuated within rhetoric that actively attempted to stimulate women's involvement in the war effort. In fact, she argues, though wartime needs allowed women to temporarily enter male dominated fields, it was "the traditional labour of women, their unpaid labour in the home and their volunteer labour, that was mobilized on the grandest scale during the war."³ Wartime rhetoric sought to entrench patriarchy instead of eliminate it, leaving the collective female experience with no lasting legacy for feminism in the post-war era.

³ Ruth Roach Pierson, *They're Still Women After All: the Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p. 23.

According to Pierson, then, whatever change did occur as a result of women's participation in the war effort was temporary. This continuity with prewar gender notions was one, she argues, that echoed women's own beliefs, as well as the beliefs of government officials and advertisers, both of which most often would "hint at and occasionally even stress the expectation of a rapid return to normalcy once the war was over."⁴

Though Pierson's focus is on the Canadian context, historians across the Atlantic have argued that a continuity of prewar gender notions also continued to flourish in postwar British society. Though women adopted new roles in Britain at the request of a government facing a severe shortage of labour, and lived through the trials of the Blitz, British historian Penny Summerfield points out that the government wanted women to respond to the call to the factories, but was unwilling to make fundamental changes in areas that had traditionally been women's responsibilities.⁵

The conclusion that, both in Canada and in Great Britain, the notions of women's place as being entrenched in the home, in their 'natural' and 'proper' roles as wives and mothers, continued into the postwar era holds significance for the story of war brides emigrating to Canada. These gender assumptions dominate the ideology that shaped the education of brides. Though the Canadian Wives' Bureau sought to provide brides with an outlet for questions and information, they did so through a gendered framework that perpetuated the rhetoric of women's roles as wives and mothers and consumers.

In the post World War II era, gender ideology was closely connected to consumerism. Part and parcel of women's role as wives and mothers was their job to

⁴ Pierson, p. 132.

⁵ Penny Summerfield, *Women Workers in the Second World War: Production and Patriarchy in Conflict*. (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

ensure the health and welfare of their families by acting as consumers over their domestic sphere. They ensured that the everyday needs of their families were met using products that advertisers directed at them, recognizing their central role as the decision makers of the household market.

Especially in the British context, the war does seem to have produced some increased recognition of women's importance and savvy as consumers. Early advertising did not reflect the daily lives of women in wartime Britain, producing patronizing advertisements reminding women to "keep mum" and "keep smiling" demonstrating the advertisers' reluctance to acknowledge women's role as active and discriminating consumers. The Ministry of Information echoed many of these patronizing messages. Perpetually seen as fragile and unstable, advertisers projected the message that women needed help from, or protection through, consumer goods to weather the storm of the war. Following the government's lead in propaganda campaigns, advertisers were also, as yet, unwilling to acknowledge and reflect in their work the realities of women's day-to-day experiences on the home front. The government, for its part, "proceeded on the assumption that the mass of their fellow citizens [needed] to be cajoled and wheeled into acceptance of their obligations."⁶ Women were to stay happy citizens, providing a safe cheerful haven for soldiers.

Yet, the messages of women's passive role in, and reluctant response to, the war on the home front changed gradually after the onset of the Blitz. Starting in September 1940, London faced intense bombing from enemy attacks. No longer could the home front remain a safe haven for returning and visiting soldiers. However, the early and

⁶ Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II* (London: George Allen & Unwin), p. 22.

constant fear of women's revolt in the face of rationing and difficult times now seemed unfounded. There may have been grumbling about wartime conditions, but the mental imbalance leading to an outright giving up that experts had predicted in the early years of the war never materialized.

Rendered even more difficult was a British woman's ability to provide for her family given increasing shortages of consumer goods. As Norman Longmate has suggested in his book, *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life During the Second World War*, "[a]lthough in most homes money was now more plentiful than before the war, the smallness of the rations made careful shopping more necessary than ever."⁷ The British government and producers of consumer goods in wartime England recognized the difficulty of women's task to provide for their families with few resources. Women's patriotic duties became thus intertwined with their ability to choose and consume goods sparingly and effectively.

In a Canadian context, consumerism became equally intertwined with women's postwar lives. Here, too, producers of consumer goods recognized the importance of women's roles as consumers. Women acted as the gatekeepers to the family markets. This focus on women as consumers had started in the 1920's and 1930's, when "the work of housewives shifted from production to consumption," and the postwar years brought with it a new intensity of consumer production and consumption in the lives of North American families.⁸

⁷ Norman Longmate, *How We Lived Then: A History of Everyday Life During the Second World War* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1971), p. 148.

⁸ Margaret Hobbs and Ruth Roach Pierson, "'A Kitchen that Wastes No Steps...': Gender, Class and the Home Improvement 1936-1940." *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, Vol. XXI, No. 41 (May 1988), p. 19. For a discussion of consumerism in the post World War II era, see Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

The gender ideology of the postwar era was thus shaped by women's experiences prior to and during the war. This ideology fuelled the assimilation attempts of Canadian officials, focusing their education on women's roles as wives, mothers, and consumers, and shaping their education to Canadian life. As Franca Iacovetta has demonstrated in her article, "Making Model Citizens: Gender, Corrupted Democracy, and Immigrant and Refugee Reception Work in Cold War Canada," postwar female immigration works attempted to "reshape immigrant women's cooking, shopping, and child-raising patterns."⁹ The focus on these traditionally female issues also applied to British war brides, whom officials and organizations sought to 'Canadianize.'

Equally important to understanding the education of war brides is examining how war brides responded to government efforts. Both Linda Gordon and Franca Iacovetta explore the ways in which female immigrants negotiated the messages of 'educators.'¹⁰ Furthermore, they demonstrate that women selected information and resources that were relevant to their own needs. Education and assimilation was thus a dialectic process between immigrants and the 'host' society.

This process is definitely true of the work of the Canadian Wives' Bureau. Women used the resources provided, while selecting the information they felt would be useful to their immigration. Also, as we will see later, the idea that the Bureau was responding directly to the interests of war brides, and not simply prescribing the

⁹ Franca Iacovetta, "Making Model Citizens: Gender, Corrupted Democracy, and Immigrant and Refugee Reception Work in Cold War Canada." *Whose National Security: Canadian State Surveillance and the Creation of Enemies*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2000), p. 154.

¹⁰ See Franca Iacovetta, "Making 'New Canadians': Social Workers, Women, and the Reshaping of Immigrant Families," *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) and Linda Gordon, *Heroes of their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence, Boston, 1880-1960* (New York: Viking, 1988).

boundaries of their immigration, only reinforces the notion that the education of Canadian war brides was a process in which they were very active participants.

The Department of National Defence, which had taken over the immigration of British war brides from the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources in August 1944, faced increasing pressure to establish a department that would deal with problems, address inquiries, and provide information to the British war brides waiting to come over. Partly, this demand was a result of the sheer number of marriages that were taking place, and the fact that there did not seem to be a decline in the number in sight. Therefore, the government recognized their need for help in handling the logistics of the movement.

There were also, however, calls from the public and from within the military structure to create a body that would educate war brides about Canada, allowing them to get to know this new country before they even left their own shores. As the Adjutant-General of the Department of National Defence asserted in 1945 in a letter to the Canadian Military Headquarters in London,

It is held... that the function of the Army is greater than the mere dumping of the girls into Canada with no thought for what awaits them, among strange people and in-laws yet to be understood... it is only by close teamwork that these girls can be settled properly is indeed a great responsibility. To "ship" them willy-nilly is not the answer.¹¹

This concern for the welfare of the female immigrants, as discussed earlier, is pervasive in the history of female immigration in Canada. Part of the reason the movement of these women was such a "great responsibility" was that it required the supervision, protection, and preparation worthy of not only a woman, but a married British woman.

¹¹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 12, C-5218. Letter to Canadian Military Headquarters, London, from [J].M. for A.C. Spencer, Brigadier, Acting Adjutant-General, Department of National Defence [DND]. Feb 14, 1945.

The Canadian military's response to these calls was the creation of the Canadian Wives' Bureau, a division of the Canadian Military Headquarters in London. Begun in 1944, the Bureau was created especially to respond to the growing needs of wives who were waiting to join their husbands in Canada. A letter from November 1944 details the vision government officials held for this temporary body:

In the United Kingdom the "Canadian Wives' Bureau" acts as a Clearing House for the dissemination of information, and gives immediate reply and guidance in all cases which require assistance or direction: Dependents are encouraged to communicate with the Bureau and there is a very close liaison with the various British government departments and the Voluntary Service Organizations. It should be noted that no reasonable effort is spared to create an atmosphere of personal interest and it is felt that such an atmosphere could usefully be maintained after arrival in Canada.¹²

Charged with this responsibility, the Canadian Wives' Bureau was the centre of activity for policy involving war brides.

The archival correspondence in military files does not reflect the gender composition of the Canadian Wives' Bureau. The correspondence discussing policy and structure all seem to reflect a male operated Bureau. In other words, at a decision making level, the officials of the Canadian Wives' Bureau seem to all be male. It is a male conceptualization of the 'Canadianization' of women that gets put into effect in educating women. Yet, it is important to note that the memories of war brides point to contact with female officials. For the most part, these female contacts seem to be those representatives present at the Canadian Wives' Club meetings, as will be discussed later. Many of these representatives, however, were from volunteer bodies, and not the Canadian military. It seems, then, that the 'Canadianization' of British brides was planned by male Canadian military officials, and carried out by female representatives of

¹² NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to the Secretary, DND, from PJ Montague Major General In Charge of Administration, CMHQ. Nov. 8, 1944.

volunteer organizations – organizations, as will be seen later, that had more experience in the traditional ‘women’s work’ of female immigration than did the Canadian military.

The Canadian Wives’ Bureau served as the first point of contact for war brides requiring information or assistance. First and foremost, the centre would serve as a contact for women who had any questions about their upcoming journey. From the allowances of foreign currency, to information concerning securing a divorce from a husband who proved to be bigamous, the Canadian Wives’ Bureau dealt with war brides’ problems or concerns regarding their journey and provided advice to anxious brides. Whether the war brides visited the office in London, or sent their questions via the countless number of letters the Bureau received daily, this aspect of their work dealt with war brides on an individual basis.

The Bureau was also a focal point for the correspondence and inquiries of non-war brides taking an interest in the women’s journey. Department of National Defence files are filled with requests from various parties to be part of the war bride immigration. A letter from Kathleen Strange, author of the autobiographical work *With the West in Her Eyes*, offered up her services as a lecturer to the overseas wives of Canadian servicemen if the government was willing to pay her accommodation. As a British immigrant bride of the First World War, and former Prairie farmer, Strange asserted that her experiences would be relevant to the women awaiting their passage. She stated that she had been “shocked at the misconceptions some of them seem to have concerning this country.” Further, she reminds the recipient at the closing of the letter she “[makes] this offer in the sincere belief that I can be of definite use and value at this present time and feeling sure

that my own experiences would help others.”¹³ She did not detail information about the price of her services, or whether it was simply a matter of wanting to help young British girls. These kinds of offers of assistance were plentiful, from individuals and organizations alike. How they heard of these attempts to educate British brides is unclear. Some may have had personal connections to brides through Canadian servicemen. Others may have read magazine articles reporting the efforts of the Canadian Wives’ Bureau, the Red Cross and other groups. Other prominent personalities may have had connections with officials involved in the education and immigration of war brides.

Commercial interests also sought to become involved – to their own advantage. A letter from the Timothy Eaton Company written in February 1944 is one example of the interest of Canadian companies in the education of these British war brides. In it, a representative of their Advertising and Promotion Department signalled Eaton’s desire to contact the overseas wives of Canadian servicemen. As he soon explained, “our purpose in wanting this list is that we believe these people would appreciate receiving a booklet...and that this service would enable British Brides to more quickly fit into the Canadian picture than otherwise might be the case.”¹⁴ Here again, the impetus to be part of the acculturation and education process of British war brides is evident, especially if the willing participants have an interest in war brides’ roles as Canadian consumers, as would be the case with Timothy Eaton and Co.

¹³ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to DND, ‘War Brides Division’, from Kathleen Strange (Canadian Author’s Association). December 22, 1944.

¹⁴ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10401. Letter to A.L. Jolliffe, Director of Immigration, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, from Mr. Selkirk, Advertising and Sales Promotion, T. Eaton Co. Limited. Feb. 28, 1944. Letter states that a ‘dummy’ of the booklet the Eaton company wished to provide to War Brides was included as an attachment to the letter. The said attachment, however, does not appear in the file.

Strange and Eaton's used similar rhetoric in offering their services. Both emphasize their connection with the war brides on a cultural or imperial level. While Strange touts her status as a British immigrant, the rhetoric used by Eaton's in their appeal highlights the same imperial connection. Though Eaton's representatives promise to keep advertisements to a minimum they reserve the right to include a phrase at the back of the booklet: "This booklet comes to you through the courtesy of the T. Eaton Co. Limited – the Empire's largest Department Store Organization."¹⁵

Like the lessons learned by British advertisers in a time of war-related product shortages, Eaton's wants to introduce themselves to British war brides early in order to gain a strategic position upon their arrival as a familiar name in a land of unfamiliar surroundings. In that sense, they hoped to gain access to a domestic market that was set to increase by close to 48,000 family consumers, namely women, almost instantly. By identifying themselves with the empire, and becoming a symbol of Canadian life and opportunity, Eaton's sought to become a link between the two worlds.

Perhaps Mrs. Strange hoped to promote her book through her lecture series, which might have been picked up by war brides in order to get a glimpse of what their future held – especially those settling in isolated communities in western Canada. Though both these offers were turned down by the Canadian Wives' Bureau, these kinds of correspondence provide a glimpse into some of the ways in which different sections of Canadian society conceptualized the arrival of these women, and also why they took such an enthusiastic interest in their education as "Canadians."

The most important aspect of the Bureau's work, and its largest function, was to educate Canadian women about Canadian life. They placed so much focus on this

¹⁵ Ibid.

education for two reasons. The first reason stemmed from the concern that, until their involvement with the Canadian Wives Bureau, the only information available to those brides about Canada came from their husbands. There was a danger, officials felt, that husbands may have glorified life in Canada. The women for whom this misinformation was a reality may have envisioned Canada as a 'land of plenty' – an unrealistic and long-held popular representation of North American life. Certainly, the memories of their husbands' ability to procure goods scarce in England must have added to this perception. Similarly, many women continued to receive scarce goods during the war through the mail after their husbands had returned home. One war bride remembers that her mother-in-law was "always sending parcels of stuff... stockings for one thing, goodies, cookies and things. Stuff we couldn't get at the time."¹⁶ Another war bride recalls that her Canadian relatives sent her silk stockings and Red Rose tea bags in the mail. She related that she and her aunt spent the evening cutting open the bags to make tea, since they did not have them in England and did not know how to use them.¹⁷ Lily Sutton remembers receiving parcels from her husband in the mail, containing "six or eight cans of salmon, and he sent nylons and ... chocolate."¹⁸ These gifts of scarce goods before and after the war could only reinforce the vision of Canada as a land of plenty available to all. In 1945, a National Defence official complained that

The question of how best to bring the girls back to earth and actual Canadian ways with less relation to Hollywood kitchens, modernistic apartments, each one her own car, etc. is a live topic whenever a few get together and the subject of brides comes up. This in the main is not frivolous or gossipy discussion but evidence of the extent to which the matter is to the fore in the

¹⁶ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 31, 2002.

¹⁷ Phone interview with Patricia Loop, Ottawa, May 21, 2002.

¹⁸ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

minds of all who have come in contact with the problem, or the girls themselves.¹⁹

Wherever these rose-colored impressions originated, the government's creation of a new body devoted to the questions and needs of these women was supposed to – in theory – combat those false ideas and doubtless disappointment that would be the result. By creating a body specifically as a resource for war brides, they could thereby maintain control over shaping what these women learned about Canada. They could ensure that war brides left home armed with both realistic and favourable impressions of Canadian life.

The second reason to educate British brides before their immigration was to instil in them the sense that they would be settling into a cultural environment that was markedly different from the one they left. As discussed earlier, Canada was still in the process of defining and redefining its national identity, making the lesson that Canada had a distinct culture of its own such an essential one for young British immigrants – a culture that was not inferior or 'colonial' in comparison to Britain.

An upset Canadian Legion official wrote a stern letter to the Department of National Defence, explaining his concern about exactly what impression these women would have of their new country. Creating the right impression was essential, he argued, because, "Arriving in a new country, these women are very susceptible and nothing derogatory should be said to them about Canadian life. In fact, if men are going to hold conversations with them they ought to praise the land that will be the home of these new

¹⁹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 12, C-5218. Letter to Canadian Military Headquarters, London, from [J].M. for A.C. Spencer, Brigadier, Acting Adjutant-General, Department of National Defence [DND]. Feb 14, 1945.

Canadians.”²⁰ As English women, they were desirable immigrants, and should look favourably on their upcoming immigration. They should not be encouraged to believe that their move was a step down. Military officials did not want war brides to view Canada negatively for any reason, especially because of any preconceived notion about Canada as the poor ‘colonial’ relative.

The matter of teaching the less tangible aspects of Canadian culture required a more creative approach by the Canadian Wives’ Bureau – a task into which they dove with enthusiasm and fervour. Yet, how does one teach about Canadian identity and culture? An article from *Chatelaine* appearing in April 1943 asks the very same question.²¹ In it the author suggests that the attempt to identify a distinct Canadian culture was an essential step for Canadians to take since, “Canada has evolved by 400 years of living as a daughter state, domineered over, but also indulged, petted, spoiled.”²²

The author suggests, however, that the relationship was changing, since,

Canada has already a strong and rapidly developing personality; what she needs is to become conscious of it and by doing so to give it direction. Every Canadian should understand the characteristics of our nation, our good qualities and our weak ones, the special gifts and strategic position that will, if widely used, enable us to make a very great contribution to the world community.²³

Canada was coming into its own, and it was time for Canadians to recognize that change. Even more importantly, the recognition of this achievement by immigrants, especially those who had always thought of Canada as their colonial cousins, was essential to the realization of that independent identity. Finally, as mothers of future Canadians, war

²⁰ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 6, C-5218. Letter to Lt.-Col. GH Ellis, Office of the Adjutant General, DND, from J. Maxwell Allan, Acting General Manager, Canadian Legion War Services. Oct. 30, 1944. Allan was referring to reports he had heard that some employees on the train had made some joking remarks to a war bride, Mrs. Cholet. The nature of these comments or jokes were undisclosed.

²¹ Donalda Dickie, “Can We Teach Love of Country?” *Chatelaine* (April 1943), 31.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

brides had an important role to play in the development and perpetuation of that identity and love of country. It was their duty to instil it in their children. Though the article was written by a member of the public, the notion of Canada's sense of self seems to have been pervasive as it is prevalent in the concerns of military officials in charge of war brides' immigration. These Department of National Defence officials, then, had a special responsibility to ensure that war brides were guided to the proper vision of their new home.

The educational endeavours were primarily undertaken by the Canadian Wives' Bureau, run by the Department of National Defence, which worked in conjunction with other areas of government, namely External Affairs and the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources. They also worked with voluntary organizations in order to give women the largest possible scope of information, and to create the sense that the education of these women was a national responsibility. For example, in terms of lecturers as will be discussed later, military officials sought to "secure suitable and reliable personnel from some of the Army services, such as RCAMC, Canadian Chaplain Services, CWAC, Canadian Education Services, and also from the Auxiliary Service Organizations."²⁴ Many of the organizations or branches of the military that the government turned to for cooperation were predominantly female. The call for Canadian women's participation is reminiscent of early female organizations that worked in conjunction with government immigration officials. The Canadian Wives' Bureau, with its male leadership, still recognized that, in many ways, the protection, education and supervision of female immigration was 'women's work.'

²⁴ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to the Secretary, DND, from CS Booth (Brigadier) for MGA, CMHQ. Nov. 27, 1944.

It was important for all parties involved in the education of war brides, including the Canadian Wives' Bureau, Red Cross, and guest lecturers, to ascertain what women wanted to learn. One letter from Canadian Military Headquarters demonstrates that the government took an interest in the nature of information requests that came in from brides. Brigadier C.S. Booth related to the Secretary of the Department of National Defence that

While these British wives are anxious to learn as much as possible about Canada, enquiries received to date from some hundreds of individuals, and conversations with many others, indicate that their main interest is their future home, i.e. housing, Canadian cooking, household management, clothing, child care and nutrition, house-furnishing, industrial insurance, schooling and kindred subjects.²⁵

It is difficult to say without doing a survey of the original correspondence how representative these topics were of what women asked for. Nonetheless, these traditionally female topics fit snugly into the pattern of postwar gender roles. In emphasizing nutrition, childcare, and schooling, the popular topics highlighted women's role as mothers of new Canadians. Similarly, with lectures and films on household management and household furnishings, the lessons learned by members of the Canadian Wives' Clubs centred on their role as wives, leaders of the domestic arena, and, by extension, the link between that arena and the world of consumerism. If the assessment of military officials was accurate, war brides recognized the centrality of their roles as wives and mothers in postwar life, and actively sought out the tools to effectively fulfill that role in a Canadian society. By learning to play these roles, the theory went, war brides would become effective citizens.

²⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to Secretary, DND, from CS Booth (Brigadier) for MGA, CMHQ. Nov. 27, 1944.

The Canadian Wives' Bureau created an extensive structure to carry out the 'Canadianization' of British war brides. Its end goal was to "arouse, maintain and quicken their interest in Canada and things Canadian."²⁶

The first step was to create a welcoming and comfortable environment for women to visit that would allow them a space to call their own, and would provide an opportunity to meet other brides. Since this central office would be the first impression that the women would have of Canada when they came to put their names on the priority list – the first step in facilitating their journey to Canada – strict instructions were set out for its development:

In addition to the required offices for supervisory and general staff, provision is being made for a Lounge-Writing Room – Rest Centre for the use of these Canadian wives. It is desired that this lounge, a high standard of initial furnishings and equipment, and the upkeep thereof, be established and maintained, having in mind the upholding of the prestige of Canada in the UK as reflected in these official Dominion Headquarters....A supply of up-to-date Canadian journals, periodicals and newspapers should be kept constantly on hand for use of the visiting dependents.²⁷

The officials that wanted to create a comfortable and stylish piece of Canada for the exclusive use of British war brides seem to have succeeded in their endeavour if John Doupluce's description is any indication of how the Canadian Wives' Bureau contrasted with the war ravaged external surroundings of London. This 'high quality' environment could not have done much to dispel what officials saw as an unrealistic view of Canadian life and conditions.

²⁶ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 8, C-5218. Memorandum from the Department of National Defence, "Transfer of Dependents – UK to Canada." July 3, 1944. This memorandum stemmed from a meeting of over 25 government and military officials that created the structure of the bureau outlining its various functions and divisions, as included in the attached Appendix A to the memorandum.

²⁷ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 8, C-5218. Memorandum from the Department of National Defence, "Transfer of Dependents – UK to Canada." July 3, 1944.

The Canadian Wives' Bureau boasted various educational services as well as the above-mentioned facilities. One of the most widely used of these services was the Canadian Wives' Bureau Library. Though it had modest beginnings, and occasional difficulty securing material in a time of paper shortages, the library soon grew into a thriving resource taken advantage of by war brides across the country, especially those in more isolated or rural settings.

Fiction and non-fiction books collected and subsequently lent out by this lending library held value as educational tools while they provided the brides with an entertaining and informative look at Canada. Not simply prescriptive, the Canadian Wives' Bureau used the library as one of several tools to spark interest and excitement in the wives with regard to their new home. By November 1945, one official boasted that the library

Now contained over 5,500 books, all of which are written by Canadian authors on a wide range of non-fictional subjects. The fictional books, numbering some 1,000 volumes, are all written with Canadian settings. As a new wife's name is recorded by the Canadian Wives' Bureau she is automatically sent a circular... explaining that she may borrow books from the library... If a woman shows a desire to receive books these are mailed to her fortnightly at no charge. Over 300 books are sent out and recorded each day.²⁸

The more books officials could gather from various sources, the higher the odds that war brides would find an aspect of Canada they were interested in exploring. By widening their audience of war brides, officials hoped to more fully prepare the group for their new life.

The books' topics varied. Often the subjects reflected or related to women's role as wife and mother. A request for an extra 1000 copies of *The Canadian Mother and*

²⁸ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, C-5220. Memorandum by Roy L, Lieutenant Colonel, Director, Canadian Wives' Bureau, "Functions of Information and Welfare Section, CWB." Nov. 15, 1945.

Child, by Ernest Couture²⁹, as well as a book entitled *Daily Diet During Pregnancy*,³⁰ was sent out in 1944. Published by the Ministry of National Health and Pensions in 1943, Ernest's work advocated the advances of scientific motherhood. Advances in health care and hygiene allowed for the better health of mother and child – if the proper methods were followed. He writes, “the mother or future mother who ignores the various methods of maintaining her well being and that of her child, that is to say, who does not put into practice the good principles of maternal hygiene, is inexcusable.”³¹ With all these messages, as Cynthia Comacchio has pointed out in her book, *'Nations are Built of Babies': Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children 1900-1940*, mothers “incorporated into their childrearing practices those ideas that best suited them in terms of practicality, personality and economics. Some mothers followed advice closely, while others discarded it completely.”³² The active selection of information undoubtedly also applied to the education of war brides. Still, the seemingly large demand for Couture's book suggests that war brides were interested in learning what the scientific world had to say about pregnancy and motherhood.

Works like Couture's were relevant for new wives since they anticipated their roles as Canadian wives and mothers and sought to educate them in childrearing philosophies that were promoted by experts in postwar Canada. As Mona Gleason has

²⁹ In Mona Gleason's, “Disciplining Children, Disciplining Parents: The Meaning of Advice to Canadian Parents, 1945-1955” *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, Vol. 21 (May 1996), p. 195, Gleason relates that Ernest Couture became the head of “Division of Child and Maternal Hygiene of the Department of Pensions and National Health” by 1937, and that, by 1953, his above mentioned book had undergone 12 reprints.

³⁰ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to PHL, from George Carter, for the Director of Repatriation, DND. Nov. 14, 1944.

³¹ Ernest Couture, Dr. *La Mere Canadienne et son Enfant* (Ottawa: Ministre des Pensions et de la Sante Nationale, 1943), p. 2. The quotation is loosely translated.

³² Cynthia R. Commachio, *'Nations are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children 1900-1940*. (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), p. 12.

pointed out in her research on prescriptive literature directed at parents in the postwar years, scientific thought of the era informed the way in which officials believed children should be raised. Medical and scientific officials in this era “encouraged Canadians to look to professional guidance rather than trust their own judgements or rely on past experience.”³³ This is especially true in the case of immigrant women since their past experiences were influenced by conditions in another part of the world. This kind of prescriptive literature, as Gleason has pointed out in her work, “was aimed at producing happy and well-adjusted young people, psychologically inspired advice rested on the necessity of first disciplining parents.”³⁴ In the case of war brides, it was important for women to learn to not only become ‘good’ mothers but to use products and customs that were touted by Canadian parenting authorities. In this sense, war brides had to become ‘good’ Canadian mothers.

Other topics of library books reflected the contemporary anxiety about the recognition of Canada’s position as a country separate from Britain. As discussed earlier, it became important to demonstrate the tangible differences between the two countries. The simplest way to do so was to ensure that the library’s shelves were stocked with works dealing with subjects such as geography, population, and sheer scale of land. This was accomplished by regularly appealing to the provinces to send the Bureau literature directed at tourists that would adequately reflect those issues. The letters sent to provincial tourism organizations worded their request as a means to securing a very important end. Though in short supply in wartime, the booklets, if they could be secured, would “endeavour to prepare [the wives] for their entry into Canadian life and their

³³ Gleason, p. 189.

³⁴ Gleason, p. 190.

ultimate complete adjustment.”³⁵ The requested booklets included 1000 copies of “La Province de Quebec (New France in Canada),”³⁶ 500 copies of “Winnipeg – Where a Western Welcome Awaits You”³⁷ and 250 copies of “Outdoors in New Brunswick.”³⁸ The government further pressed the importance of getting these booklets to war brides as one that was, “of prime importance to our Dominion and the proper dissemination of information to them regarding their future homes will be realised as a matter in which your province will have a responsibility and doubtless will wish to cooperate wholeheartedly.”³⁹ The topics chosen to educate war brides also seem to demonstrate the desire to instruct new immigrants about regional differences within the Canadian landscape. In this way, the government extended the responsibility for educating these brides beyond their own resources, making it a matter that would serve the interests of the federal and provincial governments alike, as well as Canada as a nation. It is still difficult to assess, however, to what degree the interest of war brides can be reflected in the books that they chose. This is because it is important to recognize that, while war brides picked the topics that interested them from the list of library books available to lend, it was the government that compiled the list. In this sense, their interest in provincial booklets may signify what women found the least uninteresting, as opposed to the most interesting.

³⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to Director, Tourist Bureau – Province of Quebec, from George Carter, for Neeland, Director of Repatriation, DND. Nov. 14, 1944.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter to Director, Department of Public Works, from George Carter, for Neeland, Director of Repatriation, DND.

³⁸ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol.9, C-5218. Letter to Director, New Brunswick Bureau of Information and Tourist Travel, Fredericton, from George Carter, for Neeland, Director of Repatriation, DND. Nov. 14, 1944.

³⁹ Ibid.

Another aspect of the education of British war brides awaiting their journey to Canada was the publication and distribution of various pamphlets specifically designed to acquaint war brides with their new home. Though these works display the same strong threads of postwar gender roles, and lessons to women as wives, future mothers, discriminating consumers, and citizens-in-training, it is this last aspect that seems to fuel the creation of these pamphlets. Here again the evidence is clear that although the imperial connection these women represented made them desirable immigrants, Canada's emerging self-consciousness about its distinct identity created the seemingly compulsive desire of Canadian officials to explain to war brides all the characteristics that made Canada different from Britain.

The most widely distributed publication, entitled "Welcome to War Brides," was sent to each bride upon her registration with the Canadian Wives' Bureau in London.⁴⁰ While still in its planning phases, Canadian Military Officials outlined its intended message. Specifically, as women faced countless challenges and tribulations in the months and possibly years ahead, the booklet sought to endow them "with an appreciation that satisfactory adjustment to Canadian life can and will be achieved by a receptive mind and a willingness to cooperate."⁴¹ The booklet outlines the logistics of the journey the war brides would be taking, including tickets provided, baggage restrictions, and details about their Canadian citizenship. It also provides a glimpse into the 'foreign' culture that waited. Topics in this regard include the racial make-up of Canadians, geography and weather, domestic life and nutrition, shopping and leisure activities, and

⁴⁰ "Welcome to War Brides," Published by the Department of National Defence and the Wartime Information Board (1944).

⁴¹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 185, C-5218. Memorandum, "Booklet for Brides," from CWB, Fraser Capt. June 20, 1945, p. 12.

religion and education. The booklet thus attempts to provide war brides with a survey of Canadian culture and identity.

In emphasizing topics like shopping and domestic economy, the booklet addresses women's traditional roles. These topics were important since they were the points at which women would be intersecting with the larger community and the world of consumerism. The booklet described the importance of growing one's own produce to take some strain off of the domestic income, the housing shortage in Canada, the greater selection of clothes in Canada, the structure of major department stores, the convenience of self-serve grocery stores, and the novelty of mail-order catalogue shopping. The booklet also explained the various organizations open to war brides for help or to join, as well as a glossary of English versus Canadian expressions to increase war brides' ability to fit into Canadian life.

The government focus on defining a separate and equal identity for Canada is equally evident in "Welcome to War Brides." Its organizers warn from the beginning, that "If you should unwittingly convey the impression that you regard Canada as in any way a dependency of Britain, you are likely to find that many people will temper their welcome with coolness. Canadians are proud that they stand on their own feet as a nation." Reinforcing the point, the booklet asserts that, "Canada is not just an extension of Britain, nor is she subordinate or subject in any way to the United Kingdom Government. She is a sovereign nation of her own right – one of the free countries which constitute the British Commonwealth of Nations."⁴² Learning these lessons about Canada's place on the world stage was a fundamental part of the education of the postwar immigrants, especially those from Britain. So, too, was the recognition of women and

⁴² "Welcome to War Brides," p. 12.

families' role in nation-building. Finally, the pamphlet asserts, "You are going to Canada to make it your home, to bring up Canadian children, to become a Canadian yourself. The sooner you make the transition, the happier you and your husband and children are likely to be."⁴³ The education provided by military officials, voluntary organizations, and specifically, the Canadian Wives' Bureau was a means to that end.

The goal of providing this information in the booklet about Canada's identity and about women's roles as wives, mothers, and consumers, was to help facilitate the assimilation of war brides into Canadian life. The booklet provides the following sound advice to brides anxious about their transition to Canadian life:

You will be asked hundreds of times how you like Canada. If you can make your answer an enthusiastic "I love it!" you will make friends right and left. Canadians are deeply in love with their country – just as you are with your homeland... Whatever you do, for the sake of your happiness, don't run down the part of the country you find yourself in, any more than you would criticize a meal in a friend's house... Of course you will be lonely for your old friends and family, and homesick for your country at first. It's only natural that you should be and Canadians will understand and sympathize: but – don't make too open a display of it any more than you would display your personal troubles if you were still in Britain. Keep busy and interested, that's the best cure-all."⁴⁴

These words of advice demonstrate that the Canadian military wanted war brides armed with the practical information they would need to adjust to Canadian life, as well as the emotional tools to handle the hardships their immigration might bring.

Though "Welcome to War Brides" was the most prominent booklet to be distributed to British war brides, the idea of producing literature specifically geared to British war brides was a popular one. The Canadian Wives' Bureau created another booklet to respond specifically to war brides' questions about their journey, focusing much less on cultural issues than their more comprehensive "Welcome to War Brides."

⁴³ Ibid, p. 19-22.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, secure in the idea that their imperial connection would be a comfortable familiarity for war brides, produced a booklet of their own.⁴⁵ The idea of producing a booklet conforms to one aspect of the mandate of the IODE, which was to educate immigrants from all countries. Originally the suggestion of Princess Alice, the creation of a booklet was “enthusiastically adopted by the Committee.” The booklet was designed to give war brides “information about Canada which most guide books omit [and] will be sent to England to be given to each new Canadian with her passport.”⁴⁶ The plan to give the book to brides when they received their Canadian passport is interesting, since the symbolism is undeniable – the new Canadian’s passport, a symbol of their adopted identity and responsibility as citizens, would be tied to the messages espoused by the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire. The elements included here that typical guide books might have omitted included information regarding various clubs, especially women’s organizations like the IODE and the Young Women’s Christian Association. The booklet also included a section entitled, ‘Log of My Journey to Canada,’ and a focus on the role of women in Canada. An article from *Saturday Night Magazine* September 1944 related to its readers that the booklet was “in the form of a chatty, newsy and warm welcome from Canadian women to those who soon will be our compatriots.”⁴⁷ The introduction, which serves as a heartfelt welcome from the organization to the brides, notes, “Canada is Canada because the women of long gone days but undying memory neither faltered nor failed in times that called for more

⁴⁵ “From Kith to Kin,” Published by the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE), National Head Office. Ottawa: The Runge Press, n.d (circa 1944).

⁴⁶ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, Pt. 4, C-10401. Memorandum to Mr. Jolliffe, from J.M.B., Office of the Director, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources. May 31, 1944.

⁴⁷ “The IODE’s Brochure Tells them the Truth About the Canadian Ways.” *Saturday Night* (Sept. 9, 1944).

than mortal strength.”⁴⁸ Thus, the booklet is directed specifically at women and emphasizes their nation-building capacities.

The booklet’s association of Canada and the IODE in the minds of new immigrants would only enhance the legitimization of the organization’s central role in Canadian life in the eyes of both war brides and the Canadian public. It was essential, then, to plant that idea in their minds before they ever left home. The booklet is reminiscent of the military’s “Welcome to War Brides,” as it addresses the same issues of general knowledge, cultural identity, and the unique characteristics of Canadians and the society that they have built – a society that has its roots in the imperial connection, but whose long growing independence was sealed by its experiences and leadership in the recent war. This similarity in focus was probably the government’s main reason for not allowing the I.O.D.E.’s booklet to be distributed en masse with their own. Instead, interested war brides would have to hear about the booklet from their local Canadian Wives’ Club.⁴⁹

The formation of local clubs was central to the conceptualization of the Canadian Wives’ Bureau itself. The arrangement was fairly straightforward:

A geographical cross-index of the dependents is maintained and clubs are organized in those areas that contain the largest number of dependents. Organization does not proceed, however, until a desire for a club is expressed by several dependents and it is from these individuals that the executive of the proposed club is initially selected. The actual work in connection with the running of the clubs once organized is carried out by the members of the clubs themselves. DCWB arranges to supply material for one meeting per month to each club in the form of lecturers, films, etc. Usually these are provided at the

⁴⁸“From Kith to Kin,” p. 5.

⁴⁹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 7, C-5218. Letter to Repatriation 2, from JR Neeland, DND. Nov. 2, 1944.

request of the club on a specific subject which the members themselves desire information.⁵⁰

In this way, the government catered to the interests and concerns of the war brides themselves, and reached women in large numbers. The network of clubs also provided a focus for their attempts at acculturation.

Since the Canadian Wives' Bureau delegated responsibility for resuming the clubs to the brides themselves, they sought to do more than simply prescribe the course of their instruction. Instead, these clubs allowed space for the war brides to shape their own education. Nonetheless, the process still ensured that the lecturers and films at the clubs received the government stamp of approval. As was the case with the library facilities, war brides may have chosen their topics of interest, but the Canadian Wives' Bureau provided the resources to fulfill those needs.

The clubs gave officials easy access to war brides in various areas of the country. Creating a network of clubs and information specifically for war brides also served to get the message across that "Canada is very ready and anxious to welcome them, that Canada wants them and their families and to make them feel that they are not going to an entirely strange country."⁵¹ The clubs thus reinforced the notion that British Brides were 'desirable' immigrants that could be enthusiastically moulded and shaped into the ideal postwar Canadian citizens. Therefore, they could be allowed and indeed encouraged to concentrate on issues that interested them, with the Canadian Wives' Bureau ready to oblige.

⁵⁰ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. Memorandum "Functions of Information and Welfare, CWB." Section entitled "Club Organization." Author Roy L., Lieut-Colonel, Director, Canadian Wives' Bureau. Nov. 15, 1945.

⁵¹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 8, C-5219. Minutes of Meeting, June 27, 1944.

Though the attempts to educate British war brides and shape them into model Canadian citizens came in various forms, they reached their largest audience when communicated within the space of the Canadian Wives' Clubs. The question then becomes, how many groups existed, and how many women attended their meetings, participating in the cooking demonstrations, or sitting as an audience member in a lecture on Canadian currency? A letter from March 1945 asserts that there were sixty war brides Clubs "in full operation."⁵² Yet, correspondence from later that year asserts that the membership had reached 8,000 in 32 clubs across the country, and it was "hoped to increase the number of functioning clubs to sixty by early in Jan. 1946."⁵³ The number of clubs varies somewhat in different pieces of correspondence.

The estimates seem to indicate that women did actively take an interest in the clubs and requested the formation of groups in their area - a necessary requirement according to the plans set out by the Canadian Wives' Bureau. It became evident in interviews with war brides, that women serving in the forces were not usually participants in these kinds of groups. One war bride, a WAAF, asserted that she "wasn't demobilized until September 45, and I came over in May 46, and I never heard of war brides' groups. I knew they were taking the war brides over... I didn't know there were war brides groups at all."⁵⁴ Since enlisted women would have been concerned with their daily military duties, the membership of the war brides clubs seems to have been made up of civilian women. Statistics of the make-up of the clubs do not seem to exist, making it difficult to ascertain what percentages of women were civilian or military. Yet, it is interesting to

⁵² NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 12, C-5218. Letter to Commissioner, Bureau of Publications, Regina, Saskatchewan, from J.H. Neeland, for P.W. Clarke, Colonel, Director of Repatriation, DND. March 6, 1945.

⁵³ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. Nov. 15, 1945.

⁵⁴ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 31, 2002.

note that civilian war brides would probably have had less contact with Canadian servicemen than their enlisted counterparts who often were stationed and worked closely with groups of Canadians.

The women who joined a local club, after hearing about it in the paper or through the officials at the Canadian Wives' Bureau, went primarily to get information about Canada. They could not have been disappointed with the efforts to meet that desire. Mrs. Pat Loop recalls that those who determined the agendas for the meeting, seemingly war brides who took the initiative in forming the leadership with the collaboration of Canadian Wives' Bureau officials, showed the women films of western Prairie Provinces, examples of farm equipment, and wheat waving in the wind.⁵⁵ Lily Sutton remembers that the films she saw at the club showed "what the cities looked like. Documentaries – they showed you Toronto, Montreal."⁵⁶ Since Lily Sutton eventually settled in Montreal, these films must have given her a preview of where she was going.

Not just limited to lessons on geography, the sessions war brides recalled attending conveyed information on Canadian currency, the differences in shopping, and cooking instructions, as will be discussed later. Here again, these lessons emphasized the gender division of postwar life. The information prepared them for their roles as Canadian wives, mothers, and consumers.

The war brides' clubs were also used to ascertain what progress the Canadian military was making in facilitating the immigration of brides. Since women were perpetually awaiting word of their departure to Canada, Canadian wives' clubs provided an opportunity to have regular contact with Canadian Wives' Bureau officials and other

⁵⁵ Phone interview with Pat Loop, Ottawa.

⁵⁶ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

war brides for news of shipping arrangements. Mary Sancton recalls that by joining the clubs,

You felt that you were keeping in touch with the shipping. I have a note in my diary that at one meeting, we were told they got three ships specifically allocated for taking these war brides over, and that would accommodate, I think, 1200 passengers. So, they were sort of stringing us along during this period. We felt we were keeping touch with what was happening. What I learned from – the most important thing I learned from this part... [was that] if I gave up my job so that I could be available to go at short notice, I had a much greater chance of leaving... and that's what happened in the end... I had learned that if I was available to go more or less 24 hours notice, that I had a better chance. I was hoping... to celebrate our first anniversary together, and I did manage that.⁵⁷

These clubs, then, not only provided Canadian officials with easy access to British war brides, but also gave war brides a direct line of contact with officials and information regarding their immigration.

The eagerness with which women joined Canadian Wives' Clubs must have been partly because of the opportunity it presented to meet other women facing the same journey and uncertainty, as much as it was a willingness to learn about a culture they were expected to adopt. Mary Sancton recalls that she had heard about the group when she went to Sackville House to inquire about her passage. She asserts that the clubs "did serve the purpose of making contacts, so you might, if you were going to a rather lonely place, discover someone who was going there too or nearby that you could keep in touch with. I met this one woman... I guess we kept in touch, until we moved away from Montreal."⁵⁸

When asked why war brides attended these clubs, one of the reasons women cited speaks directly to the government's worries about brides having an unrealistic impression of Canadian life, and being disappointed on their arrival. Lily Sutton mentioned the Red

⁵⁷ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

Cross members that were helping to run the club, and related their eagerness to give brides a real understanding of what was awaiting them in Canada:

Actually I think they were very honest about things, they just told you about things. [When talking about money] officials would say 'well, that's what it is now, but don't expect it to be like that when you get there, and don't expect that the salaries are going to be that high. After the war when everybody came back, jobs were not that easy to get. [Canadian servicemen] made good money for Britain, what they got overseas was good money, but when they got back here, it wasn't.⁵⁹

Lily Sutton went on to say that the lessons of the Canadian Wives' Bureau gave the war brides the right mind set with which to face their new lives in Canada. She relates that

I think they were trying to get across to us that, once you leave England, you have to put that part of your life – don't forget it – but put it behind you. When you get to Canada, you are going to have new situations, new people, a new way of life, and if you don't adjust as best you can, you're not going to make it. It is going to be very difficult for you. [When] you leave England, you leave England. You're going to Canada and Canada is your new life and you have to try to fit in as much as you can. It's going to take time, you're not going to do it right away, but give it a chance. They said if you try to do it the way you did in England or Scotland, or Holland, or wherever you come from, it's not going to work. You're going to make everybody miserable... mostly yourself, because you are the odd one out. It's not going to work. You have to give everybody a chance. You have to be open-minded to people who would try to make friends, and you have to try to adjust as much as you can. I think that was the best thing that people said.⁶⁰

The attempt to 'Canadianize' war brides was multifaceted. Their assimilation meant an emotional and psychological journey, not just the physical one across the Atlantic. The lessons also highlight the government's concerns about war brides' impression of Canada; they presented a Canada distinct from Britain, and wanted war brides to be prepared for how difficult the 'Canadianization' process might be.

The experience of acculturation, then, was one that Brides shaped continually by their attendance, and suggestions for lectures or films according to their own interests and

⁵⁹ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

⁶⁰ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

concerns about their impending journey to Canada. In this way, British war brides were active participants in their own education and acculturation.

Cooking was a major theme in the efforts to educate and 'Canadianize' British war brides. Frequent demonstrations of Canadian styles of cooking and the 'typical' Canadian diet took place throughout the country in the two years following the war, when the majority of war brides left for Canada. This focus only re-emphasized the point that these women needed to be taught Canadian ways in order to more adequately fulfill their duties, in this case, cooking for husbands and children.

The information conveyed on the topic of cooking is a good example of how the circle of influence in the education of war brides continually widened further than the military to include philanthropic organizations such as the Red Cross. Though their contribution to the movement of dependents was most central once the actual voyages of ships and dependents was underway, the Red Cross also played a part in the education of British war brides on their own shores. In a Red Cross News Bulletin from October 1945, a headline related, "St. Catherine's Girl Helps British Wives."⁶¹ The article explains Miss Ruth Adam's lectures and cooking demonstrations to British Brides during a "two-day convention sponsored by the Canadian Wives' Bureau."⁶²

The lecture itself seemed to have two messages: learn to cook Canadian, and do not forget your own specialties. As the article relates, "Miss Adam also advised them not to forget their own culinary specialties such as scones and Yorkshire pudding. At the same time she urged them to get busy and practice on pancakes and Canadian style

⁶¹ *News Bulletin*, Ontario Division, The Canadian Red Cross Society, Vol. 2, No. 8, Sept-Oct 1945. This *News Bulletin* was part of the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives at Canadian Red Cross Society Headquarters in Ottawa.

⁶² *Ibid.*

salads.” She urged this sort of experimentation since she “explained the importance Canadians attach to well-balanced diets and said the time spent in planning meals would pay off in saving doctor and dentist bills.” The purpose of her lecture, then, was not only to create more familiar meals for husbands with high expectations for women who may or may not have had much experience in the kitchen, but also to remind them of their duty to make the right kinds of choices for the health and welfare of their families.

However, the menu highlighted Canada’s ability to access goods British brides could not get at home. Miss Adams attempted to “demonstrate what Canadians like to eat. [She] brought along a real apple pie, tea biscuits, a white cake with fudge icing, several types of salads, and the biscuit part of a strawberry shortcake.”⁶³ Given that these women had been facing six years of severe rationing, the sudden appearance of white cake and apple pie must have had much the same effect as the ‘gay chintz curtains’ and up-to-date periodicals in the waiting room of the Canadian Wives’ Bureau. Though the Canadian Wives’ Bureau was originally created to dispel images of Canada as a land of plenty, the rich dishes and abundance of produce could not have done much to quell the vision of their new home as a land of plenty and opportunity.

Eventually, by 1945, this focus on Canadian cooking methods and the countless calls for demonstrations culminated in the creation of a fair sized pamphlet “Canadian Cook Book: for British War Brides.” The letters of welcome that form its introduction signal one goal in the booklet’s production, namely, the hope for war brides’ “happiness and successful establishment in a new country.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ “Canadian Cook Book: For British War Brides.” Issued by Division of Women’s Voluntary Services under the authority of the Hon. J.J. McCann, Minister of National War Services, 1945.

The cookbook would have been a helpful guide for war brides learning Canadian cooking methods. Firstly, it provided a guide to meals and products that would not have been a culinary option in rationed Britain. Even though Canadians also faced rationing, the length and severity of their shortages were less than the brides had felt in Britain. Faced with new choices, and a wide range of new products, the cookbook provided a guide to what meals their families would enjoy. Perhaps even more useful, however, were the explanations of the differing logistics between the war brides' adopted country and their experiences at home. They provided a description of the differing styles of kitchens and grocery stores, a list of appliances and other culinary tools that would be useful for every bride, and perhaps most importantly a guide to the conversions of measurements. Phyllis Lockyear can recall receiving a cookbook from the Canadian military, which she remembers because she "didn't know very much about Canada."⁶⁵

A "Liberty Short Report" from September 1946 echoes the usefulness of this guide for future Canadian female cooks. The author asserts it would help to make the transition to Canadian life a little smoother for both husbands and wives. In fact, the author muses, "It is...too bad that the book can't be sent to a lot of wives who have lived in Canada all their lives; for one thing it puts proper (tremendous) emphasis on the importance of pie to average Canadian male appetite. (Native brides please note)."⁶⁶ The same author does take issue with one aspect of the cookbook, however, namely the recommendations the book makes for the brewing of a pleasing cup of coffee. This is a fairly serious concern of the reviewer, as he states, "No No! No! Never make coffee for a

⁶⁵ Interview with Phyllis Lockyear, Ottawa, April 15, 2002.

⁶⁶ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 25A, C-5219. "Liberty Short Report," author signs his name as L.G., and the article is dated by hand in the file as September 28, 1946.

man with less than two tablespoons per cup of water; there is a serious movement afoot to make this one, single, solitary malpractice sufficient grounds for divorce.”⁶⁷

By creating an easy-to-follow guide to ‘cooking Canadian’, government and military officials were able to present a sort of paint-by-number path to success in the maintenance of gender roles in the postwar Canadian context. As Franca Iacovetta has asserted in her article, “Recipes for Democracy: Gender, Family, and Making Female Citizens in Cold War Canada,” these kinds of lessons “prioritized middle class ideals regarding preparations and consumption – clean and uncluttered homes, formal dining rooms or kitchen “dinettes,” and a stay at home wife and mother.”⁶⁸ They were not simply directions for successful meals, but a guide to the successful adoption of Canadian ideals concerning gender, consumerism, and citizenship. They served as undeniable reminders of “the power politics embedded in food wars and customs.”⁶⁹

In offering basic information, counselling, and sound advice, the government prepared women for the real journey they were about to take. Yet, something had to be done about preparing women for their emotional and cultural journey as immigrants. The Canadian Wives’ Bureau served as focal point in the education of these women. The messages it sought to spread about Canadian life, culture, and identity were an important first step in the acculturation of British war brides to Canadian life. These messages reinforced traditional views of women’s place in society. They emphasized their domestic role as wives, mothers, and consumers. Yet, through this extensive machinery of ‘Canadianization’, war brides were the only ones who could determine its

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Franca Iacovetta, “Recipes for Democracy: Gender, Family, and Making Female Citizens in Cold War Citizens.” *Canadian Women’s Studies*, Vol. 20, No.2 (2000), p.15.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 20.

effectiveness. They certainly took advantage of the resources provided by the Canadian Wives' Bureau. This is evident from the number of women who borrowed books from the Lending Library, visited the waiting room of the Bureau, and attended cooking demonstrations given by the Red Cross. Finally, they showed their hunger for information in the numbers that joined Canadian Wives' Clubs. However, the women may have been equally interested in the bonds of friendship they would form with other Brides in the same situation. They negotiated the messages of Canadian citizenship and womanhood presented to them, accepting only what would truly serve them in their journey, or those ideals that matched their own value systems. They may have found the information useful without wholeheartedly adopting a view of women's role that placed them back in the confines of the domestic world.

War brides used the intense interest in their situation exhibited by officials, volunteers, and even major department stores, to their advantage in order to facilitate their transition and prepare themselves for what awaited across the ocean. War brides were thus active participants in their own journey, and teachers in their own education. The business of "postwar happiness" that John Duplouce described at the beginning of this chapter would be one that war brides themselves would help to define.

Chapter 4 “The Next Time I Come to England, I’ll be a Canadian”

The next step in the immigration of the women and children is the one that has received the most attention in the literature devoted to the stories of war brides. This physical journey across the Atlantic and Canada is where academics and popular historians have placed the most emphasis. However, historian Jenel Virden, who has studied the history of war brides immigrating to the United States, asserts, “Immigrants become immigrants from the moment they make the decision to leave home. British war brides are no exception.”¹ As we have seen with the Canadian Wives’ Bureau’s in-depth preparation and education of war brides, the emotional journey of the war brides began long before their physical movement across the ocean. In this sense, the long process of preparation and education in which war brides seem to have actively participated forms an integral part of their immigration. This participation is especially significant since their decision to immigrate, through their marriage to Canadian servicemen, often came long before the Canadian government was able to get the mass immigration underway.

This mass movement was a component part of the longer journey. The Canadian government must have recognized that this physical journey was the most visible part of the process of ‘Canadianization’ of the British war brides. It was, in large part, to facilitate this journey that the Canadian Wives’ Bureau was created. The transit of dependents was widely covered by the Canadian media and talked about by the Canadian public. It was on this leg of the journey that war brides left the familiar surroundings of Britain and the care of their families to be placed solely under the supervision and protection of the Canadian government and its representatives.

¹ Virden, p. 64.

Chosen by the Department of National Defence and the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources to oversee this important movement, the Canadian Red Cross Society played an essential role in the immigration of British war brides. Besides organizing and supervising the overall logistics of the immigration, the Red Cross was put in charge of coordinating the journey with other organizations and reporting on its progress, comforting women, and taking care of the brides' small children. These extensive duties, and the constant presence of Red Cross officials along the way, gave the Red Cross society a central role in shaping the experiences of war brides.

Female immigration had long been seen as the work of women's organizations. As Barbara Roberts has stated in her article, "Ladies, Women and the State: Managing Female Immigration, 1880-1920," the involvement of women's organizations in the immigration process "established, maintained and operated an extensive and effective network designed to meet the needs of women immigrants, and to provide services and facilities to make the immigration experience possible as well as more comfortable."² In this sense, the immigration of women was conceptualized by government male immigration officials, but very much carried out by female reformers. The involvement of women in the movements of female immigrants was enhanced in the 1920's when these women's organizations were replaced by government and professional women who exerted influence over the field through a Women's Branch of the Department of Immigration. This collaboration of government, non-government organizations, and later professional female immigration officials to facilitate the immigration of British women

² Barbara Roberts, "Ladies, Women and the State: Managing Female Immigration, 1880-1920." *Community Organization and the Canadian State* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), p. 112.

was a tradition upon which the Canadian military, through the use of the Canadian Wives' Bureau, seem to have drawn as a framework in the movement of war brides.

The nature of responsibilities allotted to the Red Cross was influenced by the way the government conceptualized the significance of the war bride journey. The messages the Canadian military projected at war brides, through the programs and resources of the Canadian Wives' Bureau, reflected society's view of women's place in Canadian life. Gendered assumptions also shaped the plans for the journey to the war brides' new homes.

The view of war brides as favoured British immigrants encouraged officials to make the journey as enjoyable and comfortable as possible. As preferred immigrants whom the government wanted to arrive with a favourable view of their new home, war brides were provided with a celebratory journey to Canada, complete with food war brides had not encountered in years, entertainment, help with their children, and often, musical bands to play tributes to their arrival and departure.

The Red Cross also served as protectors and supervisors of the war brides on their way to Canada. The Red Cross attempted to maintain the moral tone of the journey by acting as the protectors of women travelling by themselves or with small children. As female immigrants travelling without male relatives, war brides, it was felt, needed an organization to look after their interests and needs, and to shelter their immigration from any hint of impropriety.

The impetus to supervise and protect women has a long history with female immigration to Canada. As Julia Bush has explained in her article, "The Right Sort of Woman': Female Emigrants and emigration to the British Empire, 1890-1910," female

immigration societies, working in conjunction with male policy makers, saw this role as central to their work. Bush states that

Moral surveillance was integral to a philosophy of female immigration, which, despite its sometimes-emancipatory aura, stood rooted in a class-bound patriarchal society and racist imperialism. Servant girls were believed by the emigrators to be far more prone than their middle-class sisters to kick over the traces both in their work and in their general behaviour. Unless firmly regulated by the benevolent hand of emigration committees both in Britain and in the colonies, they risked bringing the whole movement into disrepute.³

Bush emphasizes that this focus was not simply based on the worries of “temporary bad publicity.”⁴ Instead, their intentions to protect immigrant women stemmed from the gender notions of their time, that made supervision and protection necessary so that immigrant women could become “the pure and virtuous mothers of the ideal Canadian home and the foundation of the moral Canadian nation.”⁵ The notions guiding the immigration of women, as is evident from Bush’s work, were also entrenched in a class-based ideology that looked down from the middle class reformers to equate ‘lower’ classes with a more lax morality.

Conceptualized in a later period than the immigration that Bush examines, the journey of war brides raised anxieties for officials who recognized that thousands of women and children travelling without escorts might raise eyebrows among the Canadian and British public. As well, if Cheryl Butler’s assumptions about the majority of war brides’ status as working class women rings true, the idea that they would have required more supervision and protection would have been a common thought in the minds of the Canadian public. Since the Canadian government had agreed to pay for the journey, it

³ Julia Bush, “‘The Right Sort of Woman’: Female Emigrators and Emigration to the British Empire, 1890-1910.” *Women’s History Review* 3:3 (1994), p. 396.

⁴ Bush, p. 397.

⁵ Barbara Roberts, “‘A Work of Empire’: Canadian Reformers and British Female Immigration. *A Not Unreasonable Claim* (Toronto: The Women’s Press, 1979), p. 188.

was their responsibility to ensure that war brides arrived in Canada happy and safe. To do this, they would need help.

Other organizations also recognized the magnitude and significance of the mass immigration of war brides. From 1943 until the majority of war brides had arrived in Canada in the first two years following the war, various organizations sought a position in the network involved as the caretakers of British war brides, in part, in order to legitimize the need for their work in the postwar world, and gain government funds with which to further their work. Large national organizations including the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Salvation Army, and the Women's Institutes perpetually sought the government's approval for their involvement in the war bride journey. Some organizations touted their experience in working with immigrants, while others highlighted their organization's connections to, roots in, or familiarity with the 'Britishness' of these women. This connection was, according to several organizations, evidence that their organization should be made an integral part of the journey.

The Young Women's Christian Association wrote to the government several times in the last few years of the war in order to ascertain how the government was planning to deal with the increasing numbers of overseas marriages. Believing that their "experience in work with immigration in the period between the two world wars may be of very great value,"⁶ they argued that their Travellers' Aid Program was the most logical body to handle the number of women that would be travelling across Canada. Officials of the YWCA reported that

⁶ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter from Mrs. Harvey Agnew, President, National Council of the Young Women's Christian Association, to Hon. T.A. Crerar, Minister of Mines and Resources, Immigration Branch, n.d.

All of the facilities of the Travellers Aid Department are at the disposal of travellers. There are 19 such departments across the country and in all of the 44 towns and cities in which the YWCA has established work, Travellers' Aid assistance is given. There are 39 employed staff members carrying this work and you will be interested to know that during 1943, 127, 507 trains have been met and 208, 296 people served by staff across the country.⁷

The YWCA felt that this long experience with travellers, many of whom were recent immigrants to the country, was directly relevant to the upcoming immigration of British war brides. Dealing with women who were travelling alone or with children required certain finesse – a quality in which the YWCA claimed they had been well trained. The organization, as had been true of their earlier work, hoped to supervise and protect the large group of women coming to Canada. The YWCA boasted a long list of facilities specifically for travellers including dealing with baggage and tickets, contacting relatives, assisting with emergency funds, and locating overnight accommodations.

The YWCA sought to draw on their experiences with female travellers to become, if not a central player in the immigration of war brides, a strong partner in a joint effort with other organizations to “form a chain from coast to coast... to arrange a continual travel service,”⁸ for the comfort and supervision of war brides. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the work of the YWCA had involved “enact[ing] a comprehensive program of control and minute supervision over every aspect of the lives of female immigrants, whom they presumed could not be relied upon to choose a morally pure path.”⁹ They maintained this level of organization through ‘matrons’ meeting trains, a series of hostels, and networks of female contacts and information that would facilitate the settling in of new citizens.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. Report “Travellers’ Aid Service of the YWCA – Available for Service Men’s Wives arriving from Britain.” N.d. No author given.

⁹ Roberts, p. 194.

The Salvation Army also repeatedly offered its help with the immigration of war brides, particularly upon their arrival in Canada, seeking a prominent role in the process. Throughout 1943 and 1944, officials of the Salvation Army, and more notably its Immigration and Colonization Branch, wrote to various governmental departments asserting their desire to provide services to British war brides. A briefing on one such letter from February 1944 related that Lt. Colonel William Gray, Resident Secretary of the Salvation Army's Immigration Branch, again attempted to convince officials that their longstanding services were appropriate to meet the needs of British brides. The director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources stated that

[Gray] said that the S.A. is anxious to have Government use their organization at the ports and at various railway junction ports where they have hostels; he mentioned Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, Brandon, Regina, Vancouver, at which points overnight or weekend accommodation could be given to these dependents transferring from one train to another.¹⁰

Though their service had not been solely focused on women, they had handled large-scale women's immigration, and their services were national and ready to be used for this purpose. They continually pushed to be included in the process but were repeatedly rebuffed by government officials who claimed that they had not yet decided on the issue.

The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire had several reasons for believing that their organization should be central to the immigration of war brides from Britain to Canada. They contacted government officials several times before the matter was fully decided in order to offer their services. Not only had they dealt with female immigrants in the past, but the group had also maintained female immigrants and their education as a

¹⁰ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter from A.L.J [Joliffe], Office of the Director, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, Feb. 17, 1944.

central focus. They had even organized and commissioned the publication of an educational booklet for British war brides, entitled "From Kith to Kin".¹¹

As well, the IODE was an organization that emphasized strengthening British ties. Though other groups could say they also had roots in Britain, the IODE was developed around a sense of the 'Britishness' of the women that made up its ranks. This 'imperial connection' was one that the IODE felt should give them a central role in the government's decisions concerning the immigration of war brides.

Similarly, the Women's Institutes, another Canadian women's organization, felt they should be involved in the process. Like the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, the group focused more on education than on the logistics of transporting war brides. Still, they also highlighted a British connection when explaining why they should be part of the immigration. Mrs. Cameron Dow, President of the Federated Women's Institutes, further asserted that, "Many brides coming from Great Britain will know the Women's Institutes since this organization of Canadian origin has become firmly embedded in the rural life of England, Scotland, and Wales."¹²

Unlike organizations like the YWCA and the Salvation Army, which had their roots in Britain, only later coming to Canada, the Women's Institutes, like the IODE, were originally Canadian organizations. They had developed in Canada in the earlier part of the century and were groups of women bound by their common residence and interest in rural society. This focus only reinforced their claim to a role in the immigration process of war brides. Their involvement would make rural women who had had contact

¹¹ For a discussion of the booklet produced by the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire for British war brides, "From Kith to Kin," see Chapter 3.

¹² NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter from Mrs. Cameron Dow, Port Daniel West Que., President, Federated Women's Institutes of Canada, March 7, 1944.

with the Institutes in Britain “feel at home.” Ultimately, the organization sought a long lasting relationship with the war brides. Officials aimed to “have the nearest branch institute do its utmost to help these young women adjust themselves to Canadian motherhood customs and to make them feel that they are a well-prized gift to Canada.”¹³

These organizations had several reasons for their early concern and offers to assist in the immigration of war brides. They corresponded with the government in the period when it was just beginning to formulate the way that it would deal with the mass immigration. While the WI and the IODE sought to help with the education and follow-up of war brides in their new homes, and the YWCA and the Salvation Army wanted to supervise the transportation of dependents, all were national organizations with extensive resources. The organizations all agreed on the need for the protection and supervision of female immigrants in order to help them transplant the right kinds of moral qualities to Canadian families. They were also united in their feeling that working with female immigrants was women’s work. By offering their participation in the journey of war brides, the organizations reaffirmed their commitment.

Furthermore, the organizations all had experience dealing with immigrants, especially female immigrants, travelling with small children. They offered the use of their well-established resources including hostels, monetary funds, officers, etc, to ensure that the journey of the war brides and their children would take would be as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. With the same ‘Britishness’ upon which some of these organizations were built, the organizations saw the war brides as ‘desirable immigrants’. However, especially since war brides were women travelling alone or with children, the organizations believed that their understanding of women travellers and

¹³ Ibid.

female immigrants would enable them to effectively supervise and protect them on their journey to reunite with their husbands.

These offers form some of the first correspondence in government files regarding war brides. Organizations also offered their services in order to make their names recognizable in the public eye and to the eyes of British war brides. In the same way that Timothy Eaton Co.'s offer to publish a booklet for the benefit of the Brides was a way of introducing his department stores and products to new Canadian consumers, so too must organizations have seen the journey of war brides as an opportunity to establish themselves as central to Canadian life in the minds of 'good British stock' like war brides. Since the Canadian public and media had already paid so much attention to the journey Canadian servicemen's chosen brides were about to take, the association of their organization's name with the comfort and care of the Brides was a positive public relations move.

Officials of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources spent a good deal of their time responding to these requests with expressions of gratitude. Finally, government officials promised they would be kept informed of progress when the government began to deal with the issue. More specifically, they assured the organizations that "as soon as Government [had] decided as to the directing authority, they [would] be consulted and their services properly used."¹⁴

Mr. Joliffe, Director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources, received and responded to many of the organizations' letters. In January 1944, he directed a memorandum to other members of the Department of Mines and

¹⁴ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Memorandum from Director, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to T.A. Crerar, March 18, 1944.

Resources, relating exactly what volunteer organizations had already recognized, namely that

Considerable advance planning will be required to meet this situation, the same including arrangements for berthing on ships, providing conductresses for ocean voyage, port reception and entertainment, providing escort staffs, medical care, reception arrangements at destination, etc. We are already receiving inquiries in this regard. The Travellers Aid Department of the National YWCA and the President of the IODE have expressed their willingness and desire to take part in this work.¹⁵

On assuming responsibility for the war brides' migration the Department of National Defence recognized the importance of using non-governmental networks to assist the immigration of this large group of women, as the various Immigration departments had throughout the history of female immigration in earlier the decades. They responded to the numerous calls to appoint an organization as the main player in this process. Forced to deal with the situation, they appointed the Canadian Red Cross Society as the main agency to facilitate and supervise the transport and overall immigration of war brides.

An informal meeting of military and immigration officials on March 10, 1944, suggests that the Red Cross had failed to recognize the government's intention that the arrangement be temporary. Partly, this problem seems to have been the result of miscommunication between the Department of Mines and Resources, Immigration Branch, and the Department of National Defence.

Since the Department of National Defence officially took over the actual immigration of war brides in August 1944, the question of which organization would be chosen to participate actually fell to them. In response, the Department of National Defence appointed the Red Cross the central organization dealing with the transportation

¹⁵ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter from Mr. Joliffe, Acting Director, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources to Hon. T.A. Crerar, Jan. 19, 1944.

of war brides for a three month period. This lack of discussion between departments was evident at the March meeting when Mr. Joliffe, the Acting Director of the Immigration Branch at Mines and Resources, was recorded as saying that "in prewar days other organizations had also been meeting the boats. At times there was a certain amount of friction. He wondered how the Red Cross came to be handling the whole business."¹⁶ It had not been on his authority or that of his department that the Red Cross had been solely assigned the responsibility.

Organizations that had offered their resources and services repeatedly in the previous two years marvelled at the same question of how the Red Cross had been given primary control of the immigration of British brides. To the organizations that had been swept aside in favour of the Red Cross, it seemed as though the Government had failed to live up to its promise of including them in the immigration process. The organizations responded angrily to what appeared to be a deliberate exclusion. Mrs. W.B. Horkins, National President of the IODE, contacted the Department, to express her strong feelings on the situation to Immigration officials who had not been privy to the Department of National Defence's decision to place the Red Cross in charge. Mr Joliffe later reported:

This lady was most incensed and states that a conference was being held with representatives of the Federated Women's Institutes of Canada, the Young Women's Christian Association and the Canadian Legion. Mrs. Horkins indicated that the organization had not been fairly treated and said that if the Red Cross had taken over the matter she supposed the voluntary organizations could withdraw their offer of help. [I] verbally informed Mrs. Horkins that so far as I was aware, no decision had been made by Government and that the

¹⁶ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. "Minutes from an informal meeting held in the Office of Brigadier M. Noel, DAG (D), Rm 612, Date building, on Friday, 10 March, 1944 at 1000 hours, to discuss problems of Canadian Transportation for Dependents of members of the Canadian Armed Forces."

Red Cross had taken over the work it was not on the authority of this department.¹⁷

The situation had seemed to develop out of the control of the various government officials and departments. Their failure to deal with the issue of responsibility almost immediately cost them the help of organizations.

By April 1944, the Department of National Defence had sorted out the matter and decided where each organization would help to form part of the immigration process for transporting dependents to their homes in Canada. The Red Cross was no longer a temporary participant in the war bride journey, but was the central figure of the operation. Through the course of various discussions, military officials "agreed from the first that one organization should look after the work in transit. The Red Cross is the only organization in Canada able and equipped to do this work satisfactorily. Lesser organizations might not be prepared to admit this."¹⁸

This discussion was an important one. The immense interest expressed by organizations alone signalled to the government that the journey of war brides was one that would not go unnoticed or pass without scrutiny. Logistical practicality necessitated that government officials look for the largest and most efficient body to supervise the immigration of British war brides. With over "3,000 branches in Canada, covering almost every community," the Department of National Defence felt that the Red Cross fit this bill.¹⁹ The fact that one of the strengths of the Red Cross lay in the field of medical

¹⁷ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Memorandum from Director, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to T.A. Crerar, March 18, 1944.

¹⁸ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 8, C-5218. Memorandum from Marcel Noel Brigadier to A.C. [DND], April 4, 1944.

¹⁹ Ibid.

expertise, must not have escaped officials who sought to bring shiploads of women and small children to Canada safely and comfortably.

The Red Cross was chosen for this duty because its officials were already mobilized for the war effort, it held national and international stature as an organization, it could provide appropriate medical care for women and children, and it had participated in the journey of the comparatively small number of First World War brides and immigrants through the 1920s by providing nurseries and child care at Canadian ports. Though the YWCA was actually on the ships with First World War war brides, the Red Cross was heavily involved with reception activities at various ports, providing comfort to women upon arrival in various cities along the journey. The Annual Report of the Women's Division of the Department of Immigration and Colonization in 1922, notes that the services of the Red Cross at the various ports were undertaken "on account of [the Red Cross's] international scope," as welfare work, and "as a piece of Canadianization effort, the desire of those responsible for it being that the newcomer on his arrival in this country gets the proper Canadian contact."²⁰ As would be the case in the arrangements made for war brides during the Second World War, during the First World War, "while the Department was responsible for the travelling arrangements of the soldiers' dependents, their comfort and reception was looked after by various voluntary organizations throughout Canada."²¹ This temporary measure of having the Red Cross's participation in the journey of Second World War war brides was sought to ease the journey of the smaller number of Brides coming to Canada before the end of the war.

²⁰ "Report of the Supervision of the Women's Division, Mrs. J.S. Robson," in the "Report of the Department of Immigration and Colonization for the Fiscal Year Ended March 31, 1921." Sessional Papers No. 18 (Ottawa, 1921) p. 60.

²¹ NAC, RG76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 3, C-10400. Memorandum from [illegible] to Mr. Jolliffe, Acting Director, Department of Mines and Resources, Immigration Branch. November 29, 1945.

The directive was meant to only be effective for three months in 1944, giving Canadian officials more time to deal with the issue.²²

The central role assigned to the Red Cross was one that the Department of National Defence hoped would ensure the smooth transit of British women to Canadian life. However, the Government assured organizations that this delegation did not negate the importance of the role of other groups in responding to the women's arrival.

Cooperative committees all over the country, formed of various organizations including the RCAF Auxiliary, Red Cross, IODE, and YWCA, Salvation Army, and the Women's Institutes among others, continued to plan services and resources for war brides *after* their transit – indeed, as soon as they stepped off the train.

As early as April 1944, a central joint committee formed of many of the organizations mentioned above, was planning “to provide for the care of dependents during the stop over, [to] furnish a shopping service, furnish an entertainment service for taking them to movie shows or drives around the city.”²³ These plans are one example reflecting the desire of government officials and organizations that war brides not only be taken care of on a basic level, but also be pampered and entertained. The special care of war brides sets their story apart from the experiences of other immigrant groups.

As the sole organization in charge of British war brides and their children during transit, the Red Cross had fairly straightforward responsibilities. They were to meet war brides in London and deliver them to the hostels where they would stay overnight while

²² NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter dated Dec. 7, 1944. It is unclear when this three-month period began and ended. The adverse reactions to the decision by other organizations like the YWCA, IODE, WI, etc., were at their peak in March and April 1944. The government seems to have made the decision at that time.

²³ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 10, C-5218. “The Canadian Red Cross Society, Quebec Provincial Division. Notes by D.J. Corrigan, Red Cross Commissioner, Red Cross Provincial Division for Col. F.W. Clarke, Re: Meeting of Wives and Children from Britain.” April 1, 1944.

they awaited the processing of their paperwork. Usually the next day, war brides and their children were escorted to the ship that would take them to Canada. On the journey across the Atlantic approximately six V.A.D.'s, or female Red Cross Escorts, would "[make] rounds of the cabins. [at] night and morning. The V.A.D.'s gave minor medical care, helped in preparing innumerable baby formulae, reported serious illness to the M.O, gave instructions on cleanliness, gave disaster instructions and made absolutely sure that the passengers attended lifeboat drill,"²⁴ for the duration of the sailing. At the port of entry, in most cases at Pier 21 in Halifax Harbour, Red Cross escorts would help to facilitate the paperwork process of immigration officials. From there, the Red Cross organized the Brides onto trains, ensured that their relatives were informed of their impending arrival, and made sure they were delivered to their proper destinations.

Yet the Red Cross fulfilled a larger role for war brides and their children along the way. They coordinated the efforts of other volunteer organizations, liaised with the government concerning the status and problems with the journeys and advocated improved general and safety conditions for the women. They also provided emotional and physical comfort to anxious war brides, and provided quality help with childcare at every step of the journey. All of these responsibilities worked to ensure that war brides had a comfortable and enjoyable journey.

The Red Cross was to act as a co-ordinator of its own services, as well as to oversee the resources offered by other organizations like the YWCA, Salvation Army, and IODE. This strategy had two desired effects. It took advantage of as many resources for war brides from as many contributors as possible. In so doing, the government sought

²⁴ "Canadian Red Cross Corps Toronto Detachment: 1940-1961." By Jane McGillivray. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

to ensure that the immigration would be successful in the eyes of the public and a positive experience for the war brides. As well, having the Red Cross coordinate the efforts of all groups maintained a place for organizations that had threatened to remove their support and resources as a result of the hasty decision on the part of the Department of National Defence to push them aside.

Government officials asserted that the “[Red Cross] should coordinate its own efforts with those of other organizations in Canada in order that the services of the personnel, and facilities of all other available organizations may be used to the best effect and with all due public recognition of the perks performed by the other organizations.”²⁵ In this way, the government received the resources and cooperation of key Canadian organizations, especially those with experience dealing with female immigrants and small children— not a speciality for the Department of National Defence. In return, the organizations were given the opportunity to play a role in the war bride journey. They would also have their names become familiar to British war brides, who were potential members or supporters, as well as help the organization become recognized as major players in Canadian society by the ‘public,’ as the above quotation suggests.

Most importantly, the arrangement created a cooperative atmosphere that could only benefit British war brides. From the war brides’ own prospective, the situation allowed them increased access to information, support or protection to alleviate the anxieties of travelling alone or with children to their new homes. As the government recognized,

The greatest need of the girl wives who are coming to Canada as Canadian citizens is to have them introduced into groups and organizations in their

²⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 10, C-5218. Letter from Neeland for F.W. Clarke, Director of Repatriation to Miss Louise Gates, General Secretary, YWCA, Jan 25, 1945.

residential areas in order that feelings of strangeness, loneliness or homesickness may be combated intelligently and that they may be quickly assimilated into Canadian life.²⁶

Whether these efforts succeeded in the acculturation of war brides to Canadian life remains to be seen. The reference to the war brides as 'girl wives' – young and in need of support, but still married women – only reinforces the idea that the government felt they needed the protection, supervision and guidance of government officials and organizations. The reference also points to the larger theme of the journey of war brides being couched in gender notions of the postwar era. Certainly, the organizations provided education, information, Canadian contacts, and access to organizations that could be a lifeline to isolated war brides after their journey had come to an end.

One of the main responsibilities of the Red Cross representatives in charge of the journey was to ensure both the emotional and physical comfort of war brides. As each war bride said goodbye to parents and loved ones, she often moved directly into the care of Red Cross officials who would bring her to a war bride Hostel in London to await her departure. As the first point of contact in the movement toward Canada and away from everything that was familiar, Red Cross Representatives had to help console distraught or anxious wives. One war bride recounted:

My parents knew I was leaving and my father insisted on riding the train to Waterloo Station with me. When I walked towards the exit, he walked a few steps behind me. A woman in Red Cross uniform approached me, called me by my name and asked me to follow her. I took advantage of the moment to turn and blow a kiss to my father. He stood still and waved – a picture forever etched in my memory. Neither of us knew when, or if, we would see each other again.²⁷

²⁶ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 10, C-5218. Letter from Neeland for F.W. Clarke, Director of Repatriation to Miss Louise Gates, General Secretary, YWCA, Jan 25, 1945.

²⁷ "Welcome to Canada." Personal memories of war bride Jean Spear, December 23, 1994. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, p. 2.

This moment must have been familiar to most of the Red Cross V.A.D.'s who accompanied war brides through various stages on their journey. The Red Cross volunteers were the most visible resource war brides had when they were in the midst of leaving everything familiar behind. One war bride related that her family came to send her off at the station, but she would not allow them to accompany her to London. She recalls that "enough was enough. It's kind of traumatic to say goodbye, and you're not going to see them next week."²⁸ Leaving the shores of England was especially difficult for war brides, when bands, often playing on the dock, played songs like "Will You No Come Back Again?"²⁹ Lily Sutton relates, "The first night, I think there were a lot of tears shed... we were leaving. We didn't know if we'd ever get back."³⁰ The Red Cross aimed to create the most comfortable environment for war brides that included providing some emotional support on the initial stages of their journey. War brides were able to access the emotional support systems provided to get through the difficult days of their journey to Canada.

Mary Sancton's diary entry from her voyage across the Atlantic illustrates the mix of emotions that many war brides probably felt, faced with the emotional trauma of leaving the familiar, and the excitement of what Canada seemed to have to offer. She wrote:

When looking at the docks it was strange to think that next time I come to England I'll be a Canadian. Food still wonderful. Orange juice, cereal, bacon and eggs, rolls and marmalade. For lunch soup, fish, meat if we wanted it... pineapple, biscuits and butter, coffee. At 2pm we sailed. Band was playing on quay, and if it had gone on much longer I would have been in tears. As it was, I had a lump in my throat. A few people were there to wave farewell. And thus, nine hundred British

²⁸ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 3, 2002.

²⁹ Interview with Marjorie Berry, Ottawa, May 20, 2002.

³⁰ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

girls set off to make homes in the New World... A dreary day and, by the end of it, I was fed up with Canadian wives!³¹

Mrs. Sancton's choice of words in this diary passage, namely the use of 'Canadian wives' as opposed to 'British women' or 'British war brides', signifies that she identified them as such even as they were just leaving the shores of England. It would seem, then, that the war brides adopted a 'Canadian' identity before they arrived in their new homes.

One of the most important responsibilities bestowed on the Red Cross Society by the military authorities in relation to the war bride journey is prominent in the Red Cross Society's Annual Report from 1944, "that of caring for the welfare and comfort of dependents."³² In this capacity, Red Cross representatives on ships and trains spent time walking the aisles or decks, armed with "headache caplets, bandages, absorbent cotton,"³³ and other instruments to relieve the physical ills of war brides and their children. Children may have been more prone to ills, discomfort, and even seasickness, faced with ships and trains that carried large numbers of both women and children. The physical needs demonstrate that the medical experience of the Red Cross made them good candidates for the important and central role of chaperoning the immigrants along their journey.

Ensuring the physical comfort of war brides was advanced by another aspect of the Red Cross's responsibilities, namely, acting as a liaison with representatives of the Canadian government. Red Cross representatives were able to use their communication with government officials to complain about conditions that inhibited the physical comfort of the women on the journey. Further, they were able to advocate changes that

³¹ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002. Mary Sancton's last comment came on the seventh day of the journey.

³² Canadian Red Cross Society, *Annual Report*, 1944, p. 97.

³³ "Escorting British War Brides," *The Courier: For Red Cross Workers*. 4: 20, May 23rd, 1946, p. 7.

would ensure a more pleasant experience for the new Canadians. For example, after some winter voyages to Canada where children were inappropriately dressed to handle Canadian winters, the recommendation was made for the Canadian government to provide extra children's clothing coupons for British mothers.³⁴ In April 1945, a report of two escorting officers from the Red Cross, authored by Mrs. Goodeve, complained of the "Lack of sufficient cabin accommodation." She went on to lament:

The washing and drying facilities are very poor... The troopdeck sections, in our opinion, are probably all right for disciplined bodies of women, but they cause considerable heartache for mothers and children to live in them for any length of time... The women berthed in D or E deck run considerable danger every time they carry their children up the two flights of steep, iron steps.... This is definitely not first class accommodation. Circulation of air is extremely poor and washing and sanitary facilities are not fit for women of this calibre.³⁵

The gendered notions of what women could 'handle' in this era defined what accommodations and services were appropriate for their 'class.' One military official explained:

Women can't be expected to undergo the same deprivations and handicaps aboard ship which camp and barrack trained troops take as a matter of course. Extra safety precautions are demanded when women and children are travelling. For these reasons alone, transportation of the war brides to Canada has to be a much slower process.³⁶

The idea that the brides were women meant that they deserved better treatment – 'first-class' treatment. As women and mothers travelling alone, and especially since they were the 'chosen wives' of former Canadian servicemen, their journey had to go beyond the simple standards afforded troops being repatriated. The issue of class reappears again in

³⁴ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 10, C-5218. Letter from Mr. Neeland for A.E. Walford, Major General, Adjunct-General, DND (Army), to CMHQ, Dec 30, 1944.

³⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536, Vol. 185, C-5218. "Report of No. 2 Escorting Officers." By Mrs. Goodeve, Canadian Red Cross Society, April 17, 1945.

³⁶ Ibid.

the above statement by military officials. The thousands of war brides were a far from homogenous group and cannot be slotted into any one class with certainty, yet, Cheryl Butler asserted that the women were mostly of the working class.³⁷ This idea is contrasted by the notion that government officials spoke of their higher 'class' and 'calibre' as women, wives, and mothers, cannot be understood without looking into the context of gendered notions of women's superior moral character. It was this character they were expected to transplant to their Canadian homes and children. The women thus had to be protected from a harsh journey and made as comfortable as possible. The Red Cross pushed the military from using ships designed for troops to ships that were appropriate for women and children.

This advocacy on behalf of war brides by the Red Cross seems to have been taken seriously, since in a list of ship arrivals at Halifax's Pier 21 the ship that was described in Mrs. Goodeve's letter, the S.S. Nea Hellas, does not appear again until 1948 and, then, carrying Displaced Persons.³⁸ The ship does not seem to have made any other journeys to bring war brides across the Atlantic.

When the Red Cross noted that women and children were getting sick along the journey, they complained to the government. One member of the Red Cross Civilian Service, a division that accompanied women on their train journey, complained that the train upon which she had supervised war brides "was dirty, unbearably hot, women were fainting and suffering. Long before their arrival in Montreal they were asking how much

³⁷ See Cheryl Butler, "Janey Canuk: Experiences of World War II British War Brides Who Emigrated to Canada." *M.A. Thesis* (1995) University of Toronto.

³⁸ "Post-War Ship Arrivals [1945-1948]." List compiled by and held at the Pier 21 Resource Centre, Halifax, Nova Scotia.

longer to Vancouver and we did not dare tell them how long they had to bear it.”³⁹

These conditions prompted Red Cross officials to advocate for change on behalf of the war brides. Ensuring suitable travel provisions seems to have been a priority for Red Cross officials even if the war brides themselves did not always have as strong objections to the conditions they faced on ships and trains. One government official reported that he “personally spoke to some of the dependents... and they appeared to be quite satisfied that everything possible was being done for them and no complaints had been registered up to that time.”⁴⁰ The Red Cross was readily available for this and other kinds of crisis management. As one war bride related, when her baby’s belongings were stolen, quite possibly by another war bride, the Red Cross was there to replace and provide the goods that she needed for the journey.⁴¹

Another major responsibility the Red Cross took on was that of child care.

Though each woman had to take care of her own children on the journey to Canada, the Red Cross developed various strategies and provided countless resources for making the mother’s job easier. The Red Cross regularly lobbied the government to provide larger numbers of disposable diapers to facilitate the changing of children, and prevent the spreading of disease. This measure was necessary primarily because of the awkwardness of washing ‘nappies’ at sea. Furthermore, the Red Cross ensured that every journey of

³⁹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 25, C-5219. Letter to unknown recipient, by W.G. Evans, Red Cross Civilian Service, n.d.

⁴⁰ NAC, RG 24, HQ 8536, Vol. 185, C-5218. “Report on Embarkation Drafts 19/19A.” Submitted by Capt. R H Pilman, Repat 4, n.d.

⁴¹ Interview with Marjorie Berry, Ottawa, May 20, 2002.

dependents was properly equipped with "first aid kits and supplies of children's clothing."⁴²

Perhaps the most widely talked about resource for war brides with children was the nursery set up by the Canadian Red Cross at the Pier 21 in Halifax, the port of entry for most voyages of dependents and their children. This nursery allowed war brides a chance to leave their children under good supervision while they dealt with the intricacies of the process of officially becoming a Canadian citizen. The second purpose was simply part of the added effort that the Red Cross put into their dealings with war brides to ensure their comfort on their journey, and helped to ensure the health of the many small children in transit. An article in the Red Cross Magazine, *DESPATCH* proudly boasted that

While mothers are busily making last-minute arrangements before train departure, children are bathed and received adequate supply of milk, soup and prepared foods. In a comfortable room... the babies rest in neat cribs while older tots frolic about the floor and play with toys, already accustomed to the pleasant surroundings.⁴³

Not only were all these services 'first-class', but also, as *Chatelaine* exclaimed to Canadian-born mothers in May 1944, "everything is free."⁴⁴

The final facet of the Red Cross mandate in dealing with war brides was their obligation to supervise and protect war brides. The question then becomes, protect them from whom or what? A 1947 article in Reader's Digest, entitled "I was a Male War Bride," demonstrates the American Government's conceptualization of the war bride

⁴² NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Letter from Inspector in Charge, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Atlantic District Superintendent, Ottawa, Feb. [21] 1944.

⁴³ "Mothers, British War Babies... Brides... Get Red Cross Welcome in Atlantic Port." *DESPATCH*, Canadian Red Cross Magazine, Dec 1943, n.p. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

⁴⁴ "They're talking about... Bouquets to -." *Chatelaine* May 1944, p. 45.

experience as one that is distinctly female. After various mishaps involving officials assuming this 'war bride' was a woman, he relates the end of his bizarre journey:

As we walked down the gangway, and I was about to set foot on U.S. soil for the first time, a sergeant barked: "Hey, you, get the hell back on that ship!" My wife stepped into the breach. "But Sergeant," she said sweetly, "he is my war bride."
 "Oh, I'm sorry, sir – uh, ma'am. Well, then, I guess it's all right. Go ahead, keep her."⁴⁵

Though this reversal of gender roles takes place in the American context of war bride immigration, the Canadian government was equally focused on viewing the experiences through the lens of the female gender. It is unclear how many, if any, 'male war brides' came to Canada.

The image of war brides travelling without familial male supervision was one that had continually caused discomfort among immigration officials. The situation created in the minds of officials and the public the necessity of ensuring that the Brides were well supervised and protected from any moral improprieties. Supervision by an organization like the Red Cross would maintain the moral tone of the journey. Without that high moral tone, the war brides might have been seen, in the eyes of the public and the media, as being of questionable character. The government had invested large expenditures into the education and transportation of 'model' immigrants, and the Red Cross was there to help maintain that perception. This was beneficial for the families of war brides, since, as one war bride commented, "their mothers weren't so upset about them travelling because Red Cross was in charge from the time the ship sailed until the girls were met by their

⁴⁵ "I Was a Male War Bride." The Reader's Digest. November 20, 1947, p. 4.

new relatives in Canada.”⁴⁶ Husbands also felt more secure that the Red Cross was supervising the Brides’ journey, ensuring their safety and comfort.⁴⁷

Regardless of the high moral tone of the journey as portrayed to the Canadian public, there seem to have been rumours spreading amongst war brides that women on ships were being turned back for promiscuous behaviour. Though no war bride has cited an individual directly who was sent back as a result of her impropriety, many war brides seem to have heard the reports.

Yet, government records demonstrate only a handful of references to ‘misbehaviour’ on the part of war brides. A memorandum from the Department of Mines and Resources from 1946 contains the following information:

Colonel Ellis of Repatriation telephoned this morning stating that when he was at the station on Sunday night he met a young Naval officer who informed him that four girls (dependents) who were on the AQUITANIA had been sent back to England on the grounds of immoral practice, and also there had been other similar cases... I told Colonel Ellis that I had not heard of any such cases.⁴⁸

Another account points to soldiers’ wives being “held by authorities at ports of disembarkation on account of their conduct during the voyage.”⁴⁹ Similarly, the YWCA recorded one of the problems it sought to resolve for war brides, to “[help] disentangle indiscreet friendships started on board a ship.”⁵⁰ One war bride noted that “Some of [the women] were talking about [how] some of them were fooling around with the soldiers

⁴⁶ “Canadian Red Cross Corps Toronto Detachment: 1940-1961.” By Jane McGillivray. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa, p. 19.

⁴⁷ “37 Service Wives and Tots Arrive Here on “Brides” Special Spring Balminess Welcomes New Canadians to New Home.” The Evening Telegram. N.d. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

⁴⁸ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 461, File 705870, pt. 8, C-10401. Memorandum from Commissioner of Immigration, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Mr. McCrum, [June 8] 1946.

⁴⁹ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 461, File 705870, pt. 7, C-10401. Memorandum from W.R.B., Office of the Director, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Mr. McChum, May 5, 1945.

⁵⁰ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Report “Travellers’ Aid Service of the YWCA from the National Council YWCA, March 11, 1944.

that were escorts... I mean, who knows if it was true or not but there were lots of rumours.”⁵¹ None of these references are comprehensive but they provide a glimpse into the few indiscretions that may have occurred along the war brides’ journey.

Since the references are few and far between, the pervasive recollection among war brides that many women were sent back as a result of these alleged indiscretions seems to simply be a myth, or war bride ‘urban legend’. Each war bride had become, “under [Order-in-Council] PC 858... Canadian citizens upon entry and as such cannot be deported.”⁵² This reality meant that the government would have been unable to deport women from Canada after their entry for this kind of ‘immoral’ conduct. It is unclear whether the rumours about promiscuity amongst war brides were fuelled by a government that wanted to ensure the image of a supervised and protected immigration of single women, or whether it was the result of war brides’ own anxieties about their journeys. What is most interesting about the rumours is their pervasive appearance in the memories of war brides and almost complete absence from government and military files.

The more abstract ideas that shaped the way the government viewed the mass immigration of British war brides are equally important to understanding the significance of the journey to Canadian society and the messages that were directed at war brides. As is evident in the educational phase of their ‘Canadianization’, the transit of war brides and the involvement of the Red Cross were meant to promote certain ideals. Specifically, officials organized the journey, their resources, and their continued education of the Brides, and even their entertainment around the women’s projected postwar roles as

⁵¹ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

⁵² NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 13, C-5218. Report/Memo from Col. George H. Ellis for F.W. Clarke, Colonel, Director of Repatriation, Department of National Defence, March 31, 1945. This Order in Council dated February 9, 1945, ordered that Canadian dependents became Canadian citizens upon their landing in Canada.

wives, mothers, and consumers. The last role was reinforced by the prevalence of goods available on the ship that would not have been available to war brides at home. These ideas also promoted a sense of identity for war brides.

Nonetheless, war brides were able to individually negotiate and select their use of the messages and services presented to them. Women used the available resources to their advantage as they continued to receive large quantities of information about their new homes, about aid for themselves and their children during the journey, and about the companionship and support of other women facing many of the same questions, anxieties and fears.

The services provided for the war brides on the journey reinforced the importance of their role as women in the consumer world. As discussed earlier, women's position as consumers was central to gender concepts of the time. The war brides' experiences on ships and trains involved exposure to scarce foods, Hollywood movies - on one ship a Ginger Rogers film, and free disposable diapers - an emphasis that not only created an enjoyable environment for the war brides, but also reinforced the notion of Canada as a 'land of plenty.'⁵³ The Canadian Wives' Bureau had originally attempted to curb unrealistic or 'Hollywood' type impressions of Canadian life early on through the educational phases of the Canadian Wives' Bureau. Yet, Canadian representatives showered war brides and their children with gifts, toys, and foods on ships, trains, and in welcoming centres, that had been in little to no supply in Britain in the war years.

Most war brides cite their strongest impression of Canada as being shaped before their arrival, by the abundance of food on Canadian sponsored ships, trains, and at welcoming facilities or from servicemen - consumer goods that they had not had access

⁵³ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

to in the war years. Similarly, Mrs. Renton recalled that at the first meal on the ship, when the table of war brides were given a bowl full of apples, “everyone dove for these large red apples.”⁵⁴ After years of rationing in Britain, the sight of “chicken, eggs, ice cream and apples,” along with items like bacon, eggs, bananas, oranges and cream cakes, all seemingly in abundance, “created the greatest impression,”⁵⁵ on war brides, who often ended up ill as a result.

What resonates most clearly in the memory of war brides in relation to the variety of food they were suddenly exposed to, was the presence of white bread, or white dinner rolls. At a time when white bread was considered superior quality, wartime bread was scarce and certainly not white. One war bride described that the bread they were accustomed to “looked like they had dropped the flour on the floor, swept it up, then baked it into the bread. It wasn’t black – it was a dirty shade of grey. Horrible looking stuff and it didn’t taste that good.”⁵⁶ The appearance of white rolls on the dinner table at each meal struck many war brides, as one woman put it, as “gorgeous.”⁵⁷ Mrs. Audrey Renton seemed to agree with that assertion, as she remembered that the white dinner rolls on the ship appeared to be “the whitest thing in the whole world – white as angels wings.”⁵⁸

The Red Cross and military officials did more than provide basic Canadian goods that were not available to British women during wartime and might seem like extravagant choices to the brides. They also ensured that war brides and their children were supplied

⁵⁴ Interview with Mrs. Audrey Renton, North Gower, April 23, 2002.

⁵⁵ Newspaper Article, source unknown. Held in a scrapbook at the Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa, c.1943.

⁵⁶ Joyce Mar Anderson, Personal Interview. Pier 21 Resource Centre Interview Collection. Interviewed by Steven Schwinghamer, 24 July, 2000.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Interview with Audrey Renton, North Gower, April 23, 2002.

with extra treats of various kinds. One war bride commented, "It was a pleasant surprise to many of the war brides that we could purchase whole cartons of chocolate bars in the ship's canteen."⁵⁹ Similarly, a Red Cross report from 1944 relates that on the train journey, often referred to as a 'War Bride Special', officials "distributed toys to the children and cigarettes to the adults... We have recently given about 50 of the most lovely stuffed animals [to children]. The rattles distributed to the infants are extremely popular but so expensive and difficult to obtain – the cheapest are 25 cents."⁶⁰ The Red Cross tried to make the trip as entertaining as possible as well, by placing "portable gramophones [sic] and records... on trains at Montreal," as well as supplying war brides with newspapers, magazines, and assorted games.⁶¹ This kind of entertainment also served as diversions and distractions for restless war brides and children during the long journey across the Atlantic. One war bride recalled that Mackenzie King, en route back from the Victory Parade in London, spoke to war brides on the ship one night, while other nights included a performance by an opera singer, games of bingo, with prizes such as chocolate and bags of wool.⁶² Phyllis Lockyear recalls a "lovely farewell party" the night before the ship of war brides docked in Halifax.⁶³ Even if the consumer goods and entertainment were not scarce or extravagant by Canadian standards, they were goods and experiences missed by British women that were sought out by officials to make the war bride journey more comfortable. The goods thus reinforce the notion that the

⁵⁹ Rosalind Elder-Walsh. Pier 21 Resource Centre Collection of war bride Stories.

⁶⁰ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. "Treats Distributed." Report of Trip Number Three – Red Cross Civilian Train Service. Report written by Mrs. Mackeen, Chairman, Canadian Red Cross Port Services Committee, March 31, 1944.

⁶¹ Annual Report, 1944. Canadian Red Cross Quebec Division, p. 42. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

⁶² Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

⁶³ Interview with Phyllis Lockyear, Ottawa, April 15, 2002.

Canadian military and volunteer organizations continually attempted to instil a good impression of Canada in war brides before their arrival.

Another intense impression war brides had upon arrival was the ready access to shopping facilities available to consumers, and the abundance of goods for sale. Here again, the impression regarding shopping must have been created in part by the differences between what war brides saw in their new country and the memories of their experiences in wartime Britain.

Many war brides attempted to replenish their wardrobes on stopovers along the train journey across Canada. This endeavour often caused problems, as one newspaper article from 1943 reports,

In the excitement of buying a pair of silk stockings when the train stopped at Mont Joli, Que., Mrs. D. Newhall of Sutton, Surrey, bound for Oshawa, left her purse with \$35 on the counter but got the stockings. The Red Cross gave her \$5 for the rest of the trip.⁶⁴

The phenomenon of women holding up trains because of last minute shopping rushes, in some cases for up to three hours, is fairly common in the stories told by war brides about their trip across Canada.⁶⁵

The Red Cross recognized the difficulties faced by women wanting to make a good first impression on their in-laws with only wartime supplies of clothing and makeup, as well as the women's desire to take advantage of an accessibility to consumer goods like clothing to which they were not accustomed for themselves and their children. Here again officials sought to improve the facilities available to war brides by advocating change in available goods or facilities on ships, trains, and at welcoming centres. In the

⁶⁴ "250 Soldiers, War Brides: All Are Glad to be Here." Unknown Source, possible Toronto Daily News. Feb 15, 1944. Held in scrapbook in the Canadian Red Cross Archives, Ottawa.

⁶⁵ Doris Marshall, Pier 21 Resource Centre, Collection of War Bride Stories.

process, they hoped to diminish the amount of time spent waiting for war brides on shopping trips during short stopovers.

In 1946, government officials discussed the possibility of stocking trains with various kinds of cosmetics. They established that certain items would be necessary, including, "Good sized jars of a) face creams, b) shades of rouge, c) 3 shades of lipstick, d) Kleenex for application. These kits if and when available could be placed in the washrooms on dependent trains for the use of the girls."⁶⁶ The fact that this discussion takes place between two high-ranking male officials only highlights the importance officials placed on providing access for war brides to consumer goods that were deemed necessary for the comfort and happiness of women. Officials felt that these products would serve as "a great morale builder for these girls especially under these trying times."⁶⁷ It is important to recognize, in the face of earlier examples of war brides' eagerness to access consumer goods, that war brides created this kind of demand. The war brides thus actively shaped policy by their actions along their journey, which pushed officials to react. The officials' inquiries into placing makeup kits on trains was, then, motivated not only by a recognition that the products would make the journey more comfortable to brides but also by the desire to facilitate the logistics of the immigration, and stop women missing trains and connections as a result of quick shopping trips.

As Kathy Peiss has pointed out in her study of makeup *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture*, makeup during the war came to be seen as a kind of resistance to the trials of wartime life. She notes that, "lipstick enabled women to put

⁶⁶ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. Letter from Major-General B.W. Browne, Assistant National Commissioner, Canadian Red Cross Society, to Geo. H. Ellis, Colonel, Director of Repatriation, DND, July 3, 1946.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

on a brave face, 'conceal heartbreak or sorrow,' and gain 'self-confidence when it's really badly needed.'"⁶⁸ Providing makeup and other beautifying goods for war brides on their journey, it was hoped, would improve their physical and emotional comfort, maintain their emotional strength during the difficult times, and improve their impression of the journey as a whole. This kind of concern for war brides can also be seen in the example of Red Cross officials who, upon arriving with war brides in Winnipeg, "took [the war brides] all off the train, and marched [them] all down the street to Eaton's and gave [them] a pair of nylons."⁶⁹

Yet, the motivations underlying the efforts of military officials, and their representatives in volunteer organizations like the Red Cross, seem to go beyond an assurance of personal physical comfort for dependents. The suggestion of the Canadian Red Cross official to provide makeup plays into postwar concepts of femininity and female attractiveness to men. After a long and difficult journey, products available for beautifying and feminizing would help to start war brides' married life off on the right foot. For many women, it had been months or even a year since their husbands had been demobilized to Canada. As Kathy Peiss has pointed out, in the immediate post war years, "beautifying showed 'women's own sense of pride' and respect for the men 'we try most to please.'"⁷⁰ After all, the government had a vested interest in the future and stability of marriages between husbands who fought for the country and wives that the Canadian government had paid to bring over.

⁶⁸ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), p. 240.

⁶⁹ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 31, 2002.

⁷⁰ Peiss, p. 239.

Though British war brides came from various countries and regions within the British Isles, varying socio-economic backgrounds, and with diverse interests and personal histories, officials dealing with war brides seem to have understood them as a homogenous group. Certainly the resources and facilities supplied for their use were provided indiscriminately. Officials seemed to want to create a war bride identity. This identity was of 'desirable' female British immigrants – celebrated in large part because of their being chosen by Canadian servicemen - maintaining the best qualities of their British ancestry but becoming distinctly 'Canadian,' and needing extensive support systems throughout their immigration since they were often travelling with young children.

The creation of this hybrid war bride identity was reinforced by songs and poems written on the way across the Atlantic.⁷¹ The large number of photos and newspapers articles celebrating their arrival at their destinations, and the creation of "souvenir copies of the photographs taken on this occasion,"⁷² all contributed to the visibility of these groups and the creation of a uniform experience of war brides in the memory of the Canadian public. Newspapers often featured pictures of war brides and their children being reunited with their husbands, with headlines like the one in a March edition of the *Evening Telegram*, which read "37 Service Wives and Tots Arrive Here on 'Brides' Special" – Spring Balminess Welcomes New Canadians to New Home."⁷³

⁷¹ The Resource Centre at Pier 21 has maintained a collection of war bride poems and songs, some of which came from the journey across the Atlantic. These songs include such titles as, "Mid-Atlantic," "War Brides," "Thoughts on Leaving England," and "War Brides Song." This last selection was written by war brides aboard the *Lady Rodney*.

⁷² "Reception for War Brides," *News Bulletin* Ontario Division of Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa. Vol. 2, no. 7, Aug. 1945, p. 2.

⁷³ *Evening Telegram*. The newspaper was found in the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives (9.1). The exact date of the newspaper is unknown, but appeared sometime in March 1946. Other examples of media attention devoted to war brides' arrival are "New Canadians Prepare For Long ..." *The Evening Telegram*

For war brides themselves, the nature of the mass immigration gave them a space in which to develop relationships with other women and develop a group identity through their immigration experience. Many brides relate developing a cooperative spirit that helped them to bear difficult conditions. In discussing the lack of doors on the toilets on the S.S. Letitia, one war bride related that she and “this Joyce MacKay that I made friends with – she’d hold up a coat, so that I could slip down and wash.”⁷⁴ Another related that her friendship with a long-term friend had “started on the ship that brought us to Pier 21 51 years ago.”⁷⁵

They also found in each other’s companionship resources to help them in their new roles as wives and mothers. One war bride related that “by the time I got to Shelburne, I had a recipe for making a pound of butter stretch for two, a recipe for war cake, and a bag of apples, oranges and chocolate bars.”⁷⁶ Lily Sutton recalled that groups of war brides with children stuck together. She recalls that

The ones with children, we all talked to each other... we were all in the same thing. Some of the kids got sick. Some of the mothers got seasick. We all sort of looked after each other ... sort of kept together. We were all worried sick about the kids falling off the ship or something. We kept them on a harness if [we] were up on deck, because God forbid anything happened. At night, when you had children, after you had your dinner, you got together for an hour or so, then the children went to bed. We wouldn’t leave them alone in the cabin. We stayed there. Maybe two or three of us if we had cabins close together, we sort of gather in one cabin, just to keep an eye on the children.⁷⁷

Another war bride related during their time in Canadian military facilities on their journey, women “talked and everyone was always showing photos of their families, and

(December 30, 1944), “British war brides and their children arrive to live in Toronto...” *The Globe and Mail* (April 3, 1944), and “British Brides’ Spring Surprise,” *The Vancouver Sun* (May 5, 1945), “250 Soldiers, War Brides: All Are Glad to be Here,” *Toronto Daily News* (February 15, 1944).

⁷⁴ Jeannie Frances MacKinnon, Personal Interview. Pier 21 Resource Centre Interview Collection. Interviewed by Amy Coleman, 6 June 2000.

⁷⁵ Olive Minnings. Pier 21 Resource Centre, War Bride Collection, War Bride Stories.

⁷⁶ Joan Peterson, Personal Interview, Pier 21 Interview Collection, 6 March 1946.

⁷⁷ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

telling tales about where they were going.”⁷⁸ Through this large-scale female immigration war brides used the situation to develop support systems and obtain information that would help them adjust to their new lives.

On a more basic level, the more that officials tried to make the journey comfortable, enjoyable, entertaining, and safe, the better the journey was for the war brides involved. Whether they felt connected to a homogenous war bride identity as was reflected in newspapers, photographs, songs, and speeches, the nature of the voyage gave them a space in which to take advantage of the resources officials provided. They could, in turn, use those resources, education, and relationships to ease their transition into Canadian life.

War brides continually expressed their gratitude for the services provided for them by the Red Cross and government officials, and for the treatment they had received. One letter from a war bride in 1944 thanked the Red Cross for “In short in every way the Red Cross helped to make our journey out here as comfortable and pleasant as possible, attending to those little details of comfort which official arrangements are inclined to overlook.”⁷⁹ Also, they often asserted that the warm welcome they received gave them a positive outlook on the years to come in Canada.⁸⁰ However, when one war bride was interviewed and informed that many women wrote to thank officials, she expressed her sincere surprise. She noted that she had always felt that the journey was “my right. It never would have entered my mind... [as a Canadian citizen] this was my right.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville. May 3, 2002.

⁷⁹ Letter from Mollie Thorne to Mrs. Ella M. Mawer, Canadian Red Cross Society, May 5 1944. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Archives, Ottawa.

⁸⁰ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter from Phyllis E. Morganstern, to unknown recipient. October 10, 1944.

⁸¹ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

The physical journey having come to an end, and the war brides having now arrived at their new homes, the final phase of their journey, and the longest part of the 'Canadianization' process was still to come. War brides had left everything familiar behind. When they left the train at their various destinations, the women left the comfort and protection of the Red Cross, and the support and identity provided by the group voyage. They now faced their new lives armed with the information and perceptions they had gained about Canada, its people and culture, before their arrival. They took on their roles as wives, mothers, consumers, and citizens in the only partially familiar Canadian postwar context.

Chapter 5 Keeping a Stiff Upper Lip

In the literature that attempts to tell the story of war brides from beginning to end, the part where war brides have left the boat and train and begin to settle into their new lives in Canada often signifies the end of the story. Yet, in some senses, it is really just the beginning. It is only when British war brides arrive in Canada that they begin to formulate relationships with husbands, in-laws, and neighbours in a Canadian context. These fundamental first days, months, and years were the times for which the Canadian Wives' Bureau had been preparing brides. The educational facilities of the Bureau, and the resources of voluntary organizations, had been conceptualized to facilitate exactly these transitions. Only when they began to settle into the roles of wife and mother, and the daily responsibilities that those roles entailed, could war brides truly take advantage of this knowledge and preparation. Making their transition more difficult, they embarked on this part of their journey, indeed the longest part, without the group support that had characterized previous sections of their immigration.

Yet, this settlement time also saw an emergence of other resources directed at war brides that sought to facilitate their 'Canadianization'. Government policies at this stage aimed to integrate war brides into Canadian life by viewing them as full Canadian citizens. As was the case with other new Canadians of the postwar years, the adjustments, problems, and questions war brides faced were dealt with by a large spectrum of volunteer and welfare organizations.

These volunteer and welfare organizations sought much the same goals as the groups that had expressed interest in war brides while they were still in Britain. They aimed to teach British war brides the meaning of being a wife, mother, and consumer in

the Canadian context. In exchange, they sought to become associated with, and gain members from, the ranks of this solid British stock. Nonetheless, as discussed earlier, war brides derived advantages to suit their own needs in the process. They joined organizations, sought counselling, and took cooking lessons, to meet their interests and serve their purposes.

Rather than being passive receptors of a manufactured Canadian identity, war brides actively sought out avenues for developing an identity in their new homes, as well as opportunities to maintain their strong ties to Britain. In the process, war brides formed clubs that meshed those identities together, and allowed them the companionship of women in a similar situation, as they interpreted the meaning of their journey in their own way. As a result of all the difficulties many of these women faced, the groups helped to contribute to the historical memory of the Canadian war bride experience – an image that continues to be formed today.

Getting off the “War Bride Special” trains signified leaving behind the shared anxieties and support of the large numbers of war brides. This moment must have been one of the most terrifying for war brides who had, in spite of their long time to anticipate this day, little idea what to expect. War brides now had to build a life in Canada without the immediate support of their family and their new friends. Many felt they would have to face the rest of the journey alone.

War brides had to wait until, in some cases, long after the war to travel to Canada. As a result, many arrived in their new homes with the knowledge that they would have to rebuild, or in some cases, build, a relationship with the husbands who awaited them. Mary Sancton remembers the train ride to Montreal, when the war brides she was with

were “all getting dolled up to meet the husbands we hadn’t seen in a while,” and hearing one woman comment, “those fellows must think they are quite something, what we are going through to meet them and live with them.” She comments that the woman “was right. We were all taking a gamble and...one or two of them told me that their fathers had assured that they had enough money to pay their passage back if things didn’t work out.”¹ The glamour of the uniform long gone, many brides had difficulty even recognizing the husbands they had known so well. One war bride remarked, “He was a nice looking man in a uniform when he left England. When I got over here, I met this guy in a pinstripe suit and spats – he looked like a gangster! I thought, what have I done?”² Audrey Renton recalls seeing her husband and asking herself, “Where was my husband? Where had the flash gone to?”³

For many, this part of the journey also involved the developing of relationships between children and their fathers. Some fathers had not yet met the children that now came to be part of their lives. When asked about the initial interaction between her husband and her son, Lily Sutton recalls, “He didn’t want anything to do with him. That wasn’t Daddy, Daddy was the man in the picture.”⁴ She soon added that the first night they arrived in Montreal, her two year-old son “wouldn’t go to sleep at all, I had to sit there and hold his hands through the bars until he went off to sleep.”⁵ It would take time for children to identify the man before them as the man they had only previously known through pictures and letters.

¹ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

² Wicks, p. 118.

³ Interview with Audrey Renton, North Gower, April 23, 2002. Mrs. Renton later explained that the reference to ‘flash’ was actually a reference to the buttons on military uniforms. She stated that keeping your uniform in the best condition, including having polished buttons, was the only way to distinguish yourself from the other servicemen and women.

⁴ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

⁵ Ibid.

Relationships also had to be developed with in-laws and neighbours. A desire to impress their new families, and fit into the community, was often met with what one Bride described as “the Olde Curiosity Shop.”⁶ The stream of neighbours and friends that came by to meet the new bride often made the first few days of her arrival a whirlwind of activity and entertainment. One war bride recalls that her husband’s entire family met her at the station. She was subsequently brought to her sister-in-law’s house where she met even more people. She recalls that the experience “was overwhelming. I couldn’t remember any of the names, I didn’t know who anyone was, and they didn’t seem to stand still enough to figure it out.”⁷ Mary Sancton recalls a similar experience when she was taken out to dinner in Montreal with her husband’s family, since they were all looking forward to meeting their youngest brother’s British wife.⁸

For many brides, however, they were not so much entertained, as the ones providing the entertainment. The brides’ accents, varying expressions and surprise at their surroundings provided amusement and a sense of exoticism for those that came to visit. Their accents and manner of speaking set them apart, sometimes only for a few years as their accents began to fade. For others, this difference remains today.

Historian Jenel Virden has suggested that the fact that British war brides were English speaking is one of the aspects that set their experiences apart from other immigrant groups in America and the same could apply to Canada. Yet, it also puts them in a similar situation, since “they spoke with an accent that often set them apart from a

⁶ Wicks, p. 119.

⁷ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 3, 2002.

⁸ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

society into which they were trying to blend.”⁹ Many brides remember this first adjustment period as a tiring and exciting welcome to their new lives.

Some of the most vivid initial impressions of Canada reoccur in the stories of British war brides. Coming from similar wartime experiences of rationing and perpetual shortages of consumer goods, most war brides commented on the differences in food availability and consumption in their immediate environments. One woman wrote home about the differences she found in the shops of Montreal:

Gus and I went shopping and really Mum I could have just wept to see the shops full of everything and you at home so short. The furniture is positively marvellous and so reasonable and such lovely things. They have lovely little bedroom suited for kiddies all painted with pictures...here is just like we've seen on films.

As for food, well, it wonderful. The meals mother has prepared have been gorgeous, plenty of butter, lovely peaches and plums Mother bottled, tomato juice, grape fruits and I've had a banana!! Last night I went out for dinner with Gus and two of his best friends and had a steak and honestly Mum the size of it was one week's ration at home. I couldn't eat half of it...It's just like coming to another world...I'll try and get a catalogue and send you.¹⁰

For many war brides, the seemingly unlimited supply of food reinforced the image the Government had tried to avoid, but seemed to perpetuate at every turn - that of Canada as a 'land of plenty'. One war bride related that she would often send home large parcels of goods that were scarce in England, and that whenever she saw a nice dress, she would often buy it to send to her sister at home.¹¹ The abundance of food often created guilt for war brides who were all too aware that their families in Britain would continue to face rationing until long after the end of the war.

⁹ Virden, p. 120.

¹⁰ Mary Borgeois, Pier 21 Resource Centre, Collection of War Bride stories. Mrs. Borgeois included a letter addressed to her parents in the first few weeks of her stay in Canada, in her story for Pier 21. It is from this letter that the quotation is taken.

¹¹ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 3, 2002.

Other adjustments faced by war brides include a change in lifestyles. Stories circulated about London girls that found themselves in the backwoods of Alberta, facing challenges they had not anticipated. One war bride remembered her request for a nice warm bath after her arrival, where she was promptly “handed [her] coat and given a flashlight and shown to the outhouse.”¹² Patricia Loop, who originally settled in Alberta with her husband, stated that she had not been prepared for the “vastness” of the landscape. She recalled that it was approximately twenty-two miles to the nearest store, and thirty miles for her children to get to school each day.¹³ Similarly, one war bride missed the theatres of London when adjusting to her life in Calgary. She wrote home to tell her family “we were really in the west, [because] some cowboys had tied their horses to the fence.”¹⁴ Audrey Renton, who was an aerobics instructor for the WAAF’s on several Air Force bases in England, noted that when she and her husband moved to a small town outside of Ottawa, “rural discussions with other women bored her silly.”¹⁵

Most common to the stories of war brides, however, were the early feelings of homesickness, loneliness, and isolation. Without the immediate support of their families, and surrounded by new faces and environments, war brides often found the transition difficult. Coupled with the realization that most did not anticipate ever seeing their families again, this time of reunions, new family, and new citizenship, was a difficult one. One war bride commented that the transition to her new life was difficult since “the thing, you see, [is that] you don’t have anybody of your own. They’re all his friends, all

¹² Wicks, p. 119.

¹³ Phone interview with Pat Loop, Ottawa, May 21, 2002.

¹⁴ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), May 3, 2002.

¹⁵ Interview with Audrey Renton, April 23, 2002.

his relatives. There is nobody there that's specifically yours."¹⁶ Having been protected and supported by countless offers to help before their departure and along their journey, war brides often felt isolated in their new homes, and forced to fend for themselves. Here again, women become the link between cultures, in this case between British society and Canadian life. It is the women who adjust to the Canadian life by following their husbands to Canada.

For those women who faced additional problems, however, the transition to Canadian life was made even more difficult. Correspondence between government departments and various welfare organizations highlight the various kinds of issues that unlucky brides faced upon their arrival in Canada. As will be seen later in the section, the government had to understand the problems these women faced in order to decide how the issues would then be approached and, hopefully, resolved.

The first set of problems arose from the war brides' misunderstanding regarding the conditions that awaited them in Canada. Many women cited their shock upon arrival at the desolateness of their husband's hometown, or the poorer sections of the city in which his family lived. The government attributed the unhappiness of these war brides to their "lack of knowledge of our Canadian conditions."¹⁷ One official of the Department of National Defence asserted, that "a number of cases have developed where girls are now saying, "we would not have come out so soon if it had been all explained to us clearly." The official goes on to explain that it was not that husbands had lied to their wives about their lives. However, he went on to demonstrate that, "A 'humble house'

¹⁶ Interview with war bride (name withheld upon request), Brockville, May 3, 2002.

¹⁷ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 3, C-10400. Letter from J.S. McGowan, Director, Canadian National Railways, Department of Colonization and Agriculture, to Mr. Joliffe, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, Nov. 11, 1943.

sometimes turns out to be a 'shack' and other nomenclature is used that while not building up a case, certainly might be said to savour of glossing over a poorer situation however much the original intention was to the contrary."¹⁸ The issue, then, was the misrepresentation of Canadian life by servicemen. Concerns arising from this problem had originally fuelled the creation of the Canadian Wives' Bureau. The Bureau was meant to educate future Canadian women about the country that awaited them. The literature that the government produced for that purpose was limited, however, in so far as immigrants interpret the messages provided and select only the information they wish to use. The subsequent showering of gifts, food, and free resources for war brides probably only reinforced an expectation of Canada as a 'land of plenty' for all. Making matters worse, war brides who faced unexpected surroundings had received their misinformation from their main and most trusted source of information about their new lives, their husbands.

According to the Canadian Wives' Bureau correspondence, the shock over unexpected conditions and misrepresentations originated, in part, from a rural and urban divide. An official from the Edmonton Family Welfare Bureau reported the case of Mrs. Bell, a war bride who was very unhappy with the conditions she faced in her new home. The Welfare Bureau official explained that

She was given to understand by the Immigration Authorities that an inquiry had been made, she found on arrival here that she was to go to a home which had neither bathroom nor toilet facilities, and where she was expected to share a single bed with one of her new relatives. Mrs. Bell is a London stenographer of apparent refinement, and we would think possibly with well-established ideas as to her status. She has come to a working-class home. Our own feeling is possibly that her husband who has the D.F.M., and

¹⁸ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter from A.E. Walford, Major General, DND (Army), to CMHQ, London, Jan. 15, 1945.

apparently won his commission overseas, has, in uniform, considerable more glamour than a person of his background would have in peace-time.¹⁹

It was evident to Canadian welfare officials that the experiences of women who had been residents of big cities or of a higher social class than the family into which they married, presented difficulties in the acculturation process. Many of these problems were even more pronounced for the smaller number of war brides who arrived before the end of the war. In many cases preceding their husbands, this small group of women were even more isolated from loved ones and familiar surroundings. For the women who were forced to remain in England until their husbands had been repatriated to Canada, their adjustment at least included the husband they were moving to join. The government felt that no matter how much they prepared British war brides for the realities of Canadian life, it was, ultimately, the "responsibility [of] the husband to be his own interpreter of local conditions that have to be faced by them jointly."²⁰

Other women arrived to find that their husbands were in bigamous relationships, or were refusing to support them upon their entry into Canada. A letter from the Canadian Wives' Bureau from March 1945 related that, in one case, an Ottawa war bride was being held by police "on a charge of attempted suicide." The letter went on to explain that the woman had been extremely distraught because "the husband is evidently mixed-up with another woman."²¹ This case is most extreme, but still signals that life for

¹⁹ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 705870, pt. 3, C-10400. Letter from Kathleen M. Jackson, Executive Director, Edmonton Family Welfare Bureau, Edmonton, to Miss Nora Lea, Assistant Executive Director, Canadian Welfare Council, Ottawa, Nov. 10, 1943.

²⁰ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 10, C-5218. Letter from A.W. Walford, Major General, Adjutant General, to CMHQ, Attn: Department of Canadian Wives' Bureau, Jan. 23, 1945.

²¹ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 750870, pt. 5, C-10401. Letter from V.N. Gill (Major), Officer, Civilian Repatriation Section, Canadian Wives' Bureau, to Mr. C.G. Congdon, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, March 1, 1945.

war brides upon arrival was not always as happy as government officials and the Brides' themselves had hoped.

Often, many of these problems were detected in the pre-arrival investigation into war brides' new homes, and in the paper work process involved in the preparations for the journey. This investigation involved the Red Cross visiting the intended home of the war bride and ensuring that her husband could be found and had suitable living arrangements for her on her arrival. However, it was not unknown for husbands to simply not show up at the train station. Others found that their husbands were abusive, a situation most often related to government officials by welfare organizations who had been contacted by war brides looking for help. One Canadian Red Cross report detailed the case of a war bride who, upon arrival, found that her husband was "quite irresponsible and spending his gratuity and pension money primarily to buy liquor, and is most of the time in a drunken condition."²² These unexpected conditions often brought war brides into contact with Canadian welfare and voluntary organizations that petitioned the government for help and advice in dealing with them, such as the Edmonton Family Welfare Bureau mentioned earlier, who wrote to the government on behalf of a war bride who could not cope with her surroundings in Canada.

One of the biggest factors contributing to the difficult transition of war brides was the intense housing shortage Canadians faced in the immediate post war years. Officials asserted in April 1945 that war brides' transition depended on the economic and political conditions war brides faced in the country upon their arrival. In dealing with war brides, government officials argued, they were faced with "the problem of properly timing and

²² NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. Letter from B.W. Browne, Assistant National Commissioner, Canadian Red Cross Society, April 10, 1945.

arranging for their arrival so that they will fit into economic life of this country... Those, therefore, that are not absorbed into the economic life of the country become a charge upon the civic, provincial, or Federal governments.”²³ It is interesting to note that these male officials are viewing women and families as an integral part of the economic life of the nation. Women’s roles as wives, mothers, and consumers in the domestic sphere, then, were recognized in this context as regularly intersecting with the larger economy of the public sphere. For war brides, their arrival coincided with a large housing shortage that presented a particular problem for the close to 50,000 new families that sought homes in which to settle and build their lives. Some people asserted that the reported unhappiness of some brides would be immediately settled once the housing situation was resolved. A military official reasserted that “If the average soldier is given a chance to make a decent living, with respectable living quarters where he can house his family which he certainly is unable to do now due to the shocking lack of a building programme I feel certain that many of these wives will settle down and be a great asset to our country.”²⁴

This lack of housing became a focal point for understanding why the transition of many women was not as smooth as the government had originally hoped. Many welfare organizations recognized the seriousness of this problem. They petitioned the government to do something to rectify the situation, in the name of women they had welcomed to Canada a short time before. In 1945, the president of the Ottawa Branch of the Canadian Red Cross called the conditions facing these women “deplorable” and

²³ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 13, C-5218. Report by Col. George H. Ellis for F.W. Clarke, Colonel, Director of Repatriation, Department of National Defence, March 31, 1945.

²⁴ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 12, C-5218. Letter from Mrs. Gordon Reid, Royal Canadian Engineers, Auxiliary Welfare, Ladies Auxiliary of Royal Canadian Engineers, Montreal, to CMHQ, Repatriation Division, March 12, 1945.

suggested that there was no reason they should be treated differently than Canadian women. He noted:

As I traverse the City of Ottawa I see the very excellent accommodation being provided for the CWAC, the WRNS and the WD of the RCAF and other female personnel while these soldiers' wives are suffering the indignity, which, in my opinion, is a black eye to Canadian its responsibility to these new citizens.²⁵

The Red Cross President also stressed the urgency to change the conditions, when he stated that "We think here is an instance where Government regulations and Orders in Council must be brushed aside if we are going to remove a condition in [Ottawa] which, in our opinion, besmirches not only the capital city but Canada as a nation."²⁶ Certainly, the Red Cross's experience in the transportation of war brides, and the immense number of resources devoted to ensuring their comfort, must have seemed a significant contrast to the Government's seemingly 'hands-off' approach to dealing with war brides once they had been 'delivered'.

For many brides, the lack of housing, and more specifically, affordable housing, meant that their first months or years were spent living with various other family members, most often parents-in-law. This physical proximity to a new family could provide comfort, and ease the feelings of loneliness and homesickness. It could provide an opportunity to learn about Canadian cooking, shopping, and living from a mother-in-law who had years of experience in those roles. Most of the women interviewed lived with their in-laws for a period of time. Though most stated that their husband's family was kind to them, and that they often learned about Canadian cooking and housekeeping from their mother and sister-in-laws, they also related that they were relieved to

²⁵ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 185, C-5218. Letter from Finley McRae, President, Ottawa Branch, Canadian Red Cross, to Dr. James J. McCann, Minister of National War Services, Ottawa, April 27, 1945.

²⁶ Ibid.

eventually start life in their new homes. Even where relations between war brides and their in-laws were good, war brides lacked control over their own households.

Recognizing the dire housing situation, welfare organizations, members of parliament, and the Canadian Wives' Bureau pushed for a solution, calling the housing shortage the "great enemy of proper and happy adjustment."²⁷

Living with in-laws could cause considerable friction and frustration. The situation often depended on whether the wife was warmly welcomed by her new family, or whether the marriage was not a happy one in the eyes of in-laws. Friction could be the result of language, religious, or class differences. A memorandum from the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources reported the case of Mrs. Gordon, whose parents-in-law had "threatened to break up the marriage if they can." The problem stemmed from a difference in religion. Mrs. Gordon was having trouble with her in-laws because "this girl had married a Jewish boy and the parents-in-law are annoyed that he has taken a gentile wife."²⁸ Situations in which the bride was not welcomed in her husband's family were especially difficult when housing shortages necessitated that the new couple and the unhappy in-laws live under the same roof.

The same can be said of British women who entered homes where family members did not speak English. In one sense, if parents-in-law were recent immigrants they might have insight into the feelings war brides were experiencing. On the other hand, they may not have approved of their son's marriage to an English woman. British brides who married French Canadian servicemen often faced similar struggles of being a

²⁷ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 13, C-5218. Letter from Minister, Department of National Defence (Army), to Rev. H.R. Pickup, Presbyterian Church, May 18, 1945.

²⁸ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 460, File 750870, pt. 4, C-10400 to C-10401. Memorandum for file, by A.L.[Joliffe], Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, April 29th, 1944.

different language and possibly religion than the family and community they were joining. In either case, the religious and language differences placed added strains on an already trying time for war brides.

In general, war brides faced these problems with courage and perseverance. No stranger to hardship, and well trained in the British tradition of 'keeping a stiff upper lip,' war brides made the decision to make the best of the situation. One woman recalls that her first night was the setting for that decision. She remembers that, "My thoughts turned to all the hardships during the war – the lack of food and clothes, the bombing – and I thought, I have tolerated all that and I must be brave enough to accept this new life."²⁹ This decision, indeed one made by most war brides, was fuelled by wartime memories, strength of perseverance, and a hope for the future.

A much fewer number decided that the hardships they faced were too much to bear. Correspondence between government officials and representatives of volunteer organizations discussed the cases they encountered of women who pleaded to be helped to return back to England. Letters from distraught war brides provide a glimpse into the reasons they wished to return home. One woman pleaded, "I'm writing to ask if you could help me to go back to England. I've been in Canada a year on the 27th of this month. I have a boy 2 ½ years old also a baby six weeks old. My husband has left me with just \$20 and my house rent is \$20.00 per month."³⁰ Others stressed the urgency of their desire to leave Canada. A letter from June 1945 simply states, "I wish to return to

²⁹ Wicks, p. 120.

³⁰ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. Letter from Mavis Flanagan, Barriefield, Kingston, to unknown recipient, n.d.

England to take up residence with my mother permanently. Please give this your earliest attention.”³¹

These pleas, coupled with negative publicity concerning conditions facing war brides, forced the government to decide how they were going to interpret their responsibility in the situation. The overwhelmingly favourable stories initially presented by newspapers were soon replaced by glimpses that the immigration of this protected group of women was not as smooth as had been originally anticipated. Members of the public begin to enquire about the government's handling of the affair, especially individuals who felt they had a connection to the brides, whether in terms of being connected to servicemen who had married British women or because of a common heritage with British war brides. One writer addressed a letter to the Department of National Defence asking, “According to a radio announcement heard lately, your Dept. publishes a booklet for war brides. But does it help the girl to check up on his character before she marries him?”³² The writer goes on to explain that

I had the exciting experience of having a girl fly into my arms and to the sanctuary of my apartment, after her husband had been drunk on wood alcohol for days; after he had pawned the valuable furs for \$15.00 which had been given to her by a doting father before she left Scotland... But what does Canada do to assist in such cases? I, a Scott myself, am so truly Canadian in thought myself now, that I want to write something that will help to lift the bad impression this girl got because she did not know how to check up on a Canadian soldier's character.³³

³¹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, C-5218. Letter from C. Murray to unknown recipient, circa dated, June 1945.

³² NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 9, C-5218. Letter from Mrs. MHT Alexander, Vancouver, Active Member of the Canadian Women's Press Club, Vancouver Branch, Dec. 31, 1944.

³³ Ibid.

In the eyes of this writer, and indeed, the mind of a public growing increasingly concerned, the Canadian government had a responsibility to protect war brides from horrific or abusive conditions.

Problems were created by the trauma of war as well as by abuse. An August 1944 letter from Gordon Sinclair, radio broadcaster, asked for confirmation in regard to a circulating rumour he had heard from various sources. The rumour involved a war bride who had arrived at the Exhibition Grounds in Toronto to meet her husband who was returning from the war. Sinclair described that "she had not heard why he was coming home... The girl, however, was not prepared for the horrible sight of her lover being brought from the train in a basket because he lost two legs and one arm."³⁴ Rumours of abused or neglected women or traumatic stories of brides' lives after arrival, all provided bad publicity with which the government had to deal. Though the Government could not supply specific information to the press regarding how many women had returned to Britain, they continually asserted that numbers were small compared to the number of marriages that worked out. Nonetheless, they were continually "taking steps to counteract the adverse publicity of the "heartbreak Ships" variety"³⁵ appearing in newspapers both in Canada and in Great Britain. This kind of sensational story of heartache would probably have peaked readers' interest more than repeated stories of happy brides and their husbands settling into married life without much trouble.

Faced with pleas from war brides, bad publicity from the press, and pressure to get involved by welfare organizations and voluntary bodies who heard directly from

³⁴ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 3, C-5218. Letter from Gordon Sinclair, to Hon. James Holston, Minister of Department of National Defence, Aug. 10, 1944.

³⁵ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 462, File 705870, pt. 10, C-10402. Letter from L.B. Connery, Superintendent of Publicity, Department Veterans' Affairs, to Mr. A.L. Joliffe, Immigration Branch, Department of Mines and Resources, Jan 10, 1947.

unhappy women, the government began to defend its actions. There was frustration on the part of government officials who had attempted to make the brides' journey as smooth as possible and now faced negative publicity. A letter from the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources to External Affairs from 1947 remarks, "We feel our servicemen's dependents have been treated very generously and altogether too much publicity has been given those few, who have for various reasons returned to their homes in the Old Land."³⁶ In order to counteract the negative publicity, officials continually asserted that "the overwhelming majority of overseas marriages of Canadian servicemen are as successful as even the most optimistic could expect."³⁷ Though they refrained from providing the public with numbers to substantiate this claim, inter-departmental correspondence suggests that the number of women who returned to England, or ended up estranged or divorced from their husbands, was only a small fraction of the majority whose marriages lasted.

The question of responsibility for war brides after their transportation still remained a contested issue. Although most women remained in Canada, the minority who wished to leave absorbed much government attention. One of the largest debates between government officials involved a small number of women who had attempted to return to the United Kingdom through the port at New York, and remained penniless as they awaited their departure. The correspondence debating the merits of advancing fifty dollars to these war brides continued over the course of more than a month, with the advance finally being rejected. Officials of the Department of National Defence argued

³⁶ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 462, File 705870, pt. 10, C-10402. Letter from Director, Immigration branch, Department of Mines and Resources, to Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Department of External Affairs, April 3, 1947.

³⁷ Newspaper Article, unknown source, Canadian Red Cross Archives, Scrapbook. The quote was reported to be from the Department of Veterans' Affairs, n.d.

that their responsibility ended with the transportation of women to Canada.

Representatives of the Department of External Affairs concerned with Canada's international reputation lamented the unwillingness of the Canadian government to assist these distressed citizens abroad. It would, they argued, "injure the picture we are trying to paint of a Canadian nation, distinct from the U.K., and able to look after its own citizens abroad."³⁸ As in the education of war brides, concern for the nation, sometimes more than for the women, governed the response.

Government officials generally argued that the responsibility for war brides was now out of their hands. They had asserted throughout the immigration process that women who married Canadian servicemen were Canadian citizens on landing in Canada. Therefore, any further assistance should be provided, not by the federal government, but by municipal or provincial welfare agencies:

Once the dependent arrives in Canada she is a Canadian citizen and takes the domicile of her husband and therefore in cases of need applies to the municipal or provincial Welfare Bureaux. In other words, in the case of British wives, it is felt that they should not be treated as a class separate in the community, but should be considered as part of the community and as such be eligible for all such benefits of relief.³⁹

In part, this stance reflected the government's continued desire to have war brides viewed as Canadian citizens, party to the same rights and privileges as any other citizen of the country. At the same time, it eliminated the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that, after their arrival, war brides would have a smooth transition to Canadian life.

³⁸ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 462, File 705870, pt. 10, C-10402. Letter from Dr. H.L. Keenleyside, Department of Mines and Resources, from Mr. Laurent Beaudry, Acting Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, April 23, 1947.

³⁹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 25, C-5219. Letter from George H. Ellis, Director of Repatriation, to The Deputy Minister, June 25, 1946.

The government made local and provincial welfare and voluntary organizations the main contact for distressed war brides. Not every organization was happy with this arrangement. A continuing jurisdictional debate had been ranging throughout the twentieth century between the federal government and local welfare agencies on the topic of immigration. The federal government set the standards and policies for allowing immigrants to enter the country, and then left them to be cared for by local agencies that resented that these new citizens were suddenly left under their charge. A letter from the Mayor of the Edmonton in 1946 expressed his frustration with being asked to provide access to already over-used resources to help these immigrants. These women, he felt, were the responsibility of the military and the federal government. He related that the women were being pushed back and forth between departments and organizations that are unequipped to meet their needs. Finally, he asserted, "They are not rightfully our problem, but someone should shoulder the obligation and at once."⁴⁰ Like other municipal and provincial officials that saw distressed war brides as an added problem to an already large burden, he felt that it was the responsibility of Immigration officials to take care of the women until their cases were resolved.

In order to help those war brides having marital, familial, or monetary difficulties, military and Immigration officials turned again to those organizations that had repeatedly offered their resources and support at other parts of the immigration process. Their plan was to act simply as a "post office rather than a social agency."⁴¹ The familiarity of the

⁴⁰ NAC, RG 76, Vol. 461, File 705870, pt. 9, C-10401. Letter from H.D. Ainlay, Mayor, City of Edmonton, forwarded to Hon. J.A. Glen, Minister of Mines and Resources by James McKinnon, Minister of Trade and Commerce, Oct. 10, 1946.

⁴¹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1-3, C-5220. "Minutes of Meeting held at Office of Director Canadian Wives' Bureau at 2:15 p.m. on 19 Nov. 1945. Report written by Roy W. Lant, Lieur-Colonel, Director, Canadian Wives' Bureau, Nov. 19, 1945.

Canadian Wives' Bureau to British Wives who had used it as the focal point of their questions and concerns meant that they often received many of the complaints and pleas for assistance from war brides once they had settled in Canada. The visibility of the Bureau negated its ability to remove itself completely from the acculturation process. Nonetheless, the Canadian military attempted to keep their involvement to a minimum by:

Endeavour[ing] to pass on these cases to organizations such as the Red Cross, I.O.D.E, Acorn Club, etc and a method of handling them will evolve which will not require any other than the mere passing along of information from DND to the agency concerned.⁴²

Unwilling to provide return transportation to Britain, the overwhelmingly male officials of the Canadian government sought to pass the cases of 'maladjustments' to Canadian life to local organizations. The officials from these local bodies, mostly female, could interact with the war bride directly and more fully meet her needs with advice and personal counselling.

The government found these organizations more than willing to help. The Red Cross followed up the transportation of war brides with a visit to their new homes, "to see if there is anything she needs and to see if she is contented with her new surroundings."⁴³ Similarly, the YWCA took up the cases of war brides who were facing unhappy marital relations. Providing advice and support, the organization contacted the officials and services they thought would be most useful in each case. In one instance, the YWCA received information concerning a woman who was settled in "an isolated community in the Maritimes." Officials quickly took action by "[writing] the nearest C. of E.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Report of Aid to Dependents of Service Personnel From United Kingdom." Annual Report 1944, Canadian Red Cross Society, held in the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa, p. 100.

clergyman and in a few days were able to return a very assuring report.”⁴⁴ In this way, organizations, informed by the government of problem cases, were quick to move to meet the needs of war brides distressed in their Canadian surroundings.

On a wider scale, these same organizations sought to facilitate the settlement of, and provide resources for, war brides who were more successfully adjusting to their lives and surroundings in Canada. Many visited the brides new to their neighbourhoods to check on their welfare. Most war brides interviewed mentioned that they had been made aware throughout their journey that the services of the Red Cross were available to them if they needed help. Lily Sutton relates that she believed that the Red Cross “notified the churches in the area where you lived, because I hadn’t been here very long and I did get a visit from a couple of women from the Presbyterian Church, because I was Presbyterian. They came and welcomed me and asked if I’d like to go to meetings.”⁴⁵ Similarly, several war brides mentioned receiving a visit from the ‘Welcome Wagon’ informing them about the various organizations available to them in the community. Organizations like the Red Cross, Salvation Army, YWCA, IODE, as well as church organizations provided classes and activities that would help to ‘Canadianize’ British war brides.

The organizations arranged cooking classes, lectures dealing with motherhood and childcare, and language classes for those who had married into a non-English family.⁴⁶ A British Columbia branch of the Red Cross wanted to organize “a course of Instruction of Cookery” using the cookbook that had been prepared for war brides before

⁴⁴ NAC, MG 28I, Vol. 14, File 9. Minutes of a meeting of the National Travellers’ Aid Committee, June 27, 1945, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

⁴⁶ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 10, C-5218. Letter from Louise Gates, General Secretary, National Council of the YWCA, to Directorate of Repatriation, DND, Jan. 15, 1945.

their departure from Britain.⁴⁷ They proposed having war brides come into the homes of Red Cross hostesses in order to prepare and partake in a meal selected from the cookbook. This event was one way of teaching skills women would find useful in their daily responsibilities as wives. The occasion also attempted to integrate women more fully into Canadian communities. Similarly, another branch of the Red Cross, this one in Kingston, offered "Reserve and Home Nursing classes."⁴⁸ It is significant that these resources for war brides were directed toward their role as wives and mothers. They were meant to facilitate the transition into family life in the same way that the Canadian Wives' Bureau hoped their early classes would develop a proper understanding of women's role in the Canadian context.

Local organizations also got involved in welcoming British war brides into their communities. Getting involved with organizations often helped women to meet people in their immediate environment, make friends, and settle into Canadian life. Audrey Renton began to teach Sunday school, while Marjorie Berry became a Girl Guide Leader – an activity she had enjoyed in England. Mary Sancton joined a pottery class with her sister-in-law, while Phyllis Lockyear felt that becoming involved with the church helped her to become more familiar with her neighbours and integrated into her community. These married women became active members, and often leaders, of their communities.

Religion remained a central part of Canadian life. Many of the groups war brides' joined were church-based organizations. For example, a small leaflet was designed for British war brides in 1944, and was meant to welcome the Brides to Canada on behalf of

⁴⁷ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 25A, C-5219. Letter from Mrs. Allan Stevenson, National Director, Nutrition Services, Canadian Red Cross Society, to Lt. Col. G.H. Ellis, DND, Aug. 22, 1946.

⁴⁸ "Kingston Branch active in Red Cross and Peacetime Program." News Bulletin, Ontario Division, Vol. 3 No. 9, Sept. 1946, p. 6.

the "Christian women of our country." The leaflet was a collaborative effort on the part of representatives from the Baptist Church, Church of England, Presbyterian Church, and United Church. They encouraged women to join a church immediately. They reminded brides that, "we do hope that you and your husband will talk things over together and will together decide on a church home where you can worship and work as a family."⁴⁹ Here, again, the focus of organizations that sought to reach out to war brides was in their roles as wives and mothers.

Perhaps the most useful organizations that developed were British war bride Clubs. These groups were often started by volunteer organizations like the Red Cross or YWCA, but soon came to be run by and for war brides themselves. It is difficult to know how many war bride groups existed around the country. Certainly, some lasted longer than others. As women got established within their communities and began to have children, their spare time and need for the support of other war brides often decreased, leaving the group with fewer and fewer members, until many clubs ceased to exist. Still, many groups managed to continue with smaller numbers while women dealt with the demands of their growing families, only to have war brides seek out the clubs when their children had grown older.

Still, some women purposely avoided these kinds of reunions with other Brides. Mary Sancton related that she avoided joining a war brides' group in Montreal because she "didn't want to get involved in what she thought would be a griping session. Here I was, I had married a Canadian, I had made this choice, and I didn't want to sort of cling

⁴⁹ NAC, RG 24, HQS 8536-1, Vol. 7, C-5218. Enclosure to letter from PJ Montague, Major General In Charge of Administration, CMHQ, to Secretary, DND, Oct. 26, 1944.

to my being British.”⁵⁰ She felt that her involvement in a war bride group might inhibit her ‘Canadianization.’ Similarly, another war bride recalled that a woman she knew stopped attending meetings, because she would return to her husband restless and longing for home after each meeting. Seemingly, the club only reminded some women of what they had left behind. For other war brides, their family responsibilities made it impossible for them to attend, or their homes were too far from the meeting places.

The England Scotland Wales Ireland Canada Club, otherwise known as ESWIC, was an Ottawa-area club started by the Canadian Red Cross Society. Though Red Cross officials helped to facilitate the meetings with women in the first year of the club, within a year its executive was taken over by British war brides. Some of the ESWIC members reported hearing about the club through their husbands who were still in the military together, through mothers-in-law who passed on information about the club they had heard about from other women in the community, or through reading about it in local newspapers.

The club held weekly meetings and special events for war brides in Ottawa. Interest in the group was strong in the local press, which often reported details of their activities and upcoming events. An ESWIC newsletter from 1946 details the activities participated in by the over 100 members of the group:

Last year the following events were arranged: - a summer picnic, a social evening, a Christmas Dance and bazaar, and parcels of toys made by members were sent to a children’s hospital in Great Britain. This year we have held a St. Valentine’s Dance, a sale of work is planned for the autumn and we have had speakers from the Canadian Mothercraft Society, the Department of Agriculture and a Beauty Culture expert address our meetings.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

⁵¹ Newsletter from Mrs. B. Ullrich, President of ESWIC Club, May 1946. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Archives, Ottawa.

A report of the Entertainment Committee for 1946 demonstrates the extensive list of activities that the club organized for newly arrived brides:

During the year speakers have been invited to the Club. The first invitation was accepted by an expert on Beauty Culture, and a demonstration and lecture were arranged. Miss Hewwitt of the Mothercraft Clinic has lectured on baby welfare and mothercraft. Miss Batchelor of the Consumer section of the Department of Agriculture has visited the club several times with interesting information on nutrition, canning, and with tips of [sic] purchasing merchandise. A member of the YWCA has explained the facilities available there, and invited all Club members to take part. One of the most interesting speakers was Mr. Austin Cross whoes [sic] subject was "This is your Canada." The lively debate which followed this speaker was the basis of an article by Mr. Cross in the *Evening Citizen*.⁵²

As shown by this passage, the relationship between the war brides and organizations like the Red Cross, who started the club, and the YWCA, whose facilities were often used as the meeting place for the club, had clearly continued since their arrival in Canada. A newspaper article from the *Ottawa Journal* in January 1955 relates news of a fashion show at the local YWCA. The article details that the event comprised, "Humorous skits [which] were interspersed with the showing of reasonably priced fashions from Zellers Ltd., suitable for the housewife from dawn till dark."⁵³

Through ESWIC war brides explored issues involving their roles as Canadian wives, mothers and consumers. Phyllis Lockyear recalls that the club provided a place for war brides to carry out an "exchange of ideas and views, about cooking, and different sorts of entertainment, and local churches and places that one could go."⁵⁴ A letter written by a member of the ESWIC executive in 1952 speaks directly to the fears other women had about the war bride clubs keeping women from becoming truly Canadian.

⁵² "Report of the Entertainment Committee for the Year 1946." Donated from the personal collection of Mrs. Jean Spear, ESWIC executive member. Mr. Cross's article in the *Evening Citizen* was also provided from Mrs. Spear's personal collection. The title of the article is "Cross Town With Cross." The exact date the article appeared is unknown.

⁵³ "Lady Nye Attends ESWIC Fashion Show." *Ottawa Journal*, Jan. 16, 1946.

⁵⁴ Interview with Phyllis Lockyear, Ottawa, April 15, 2002.

Mrs. Spear explained that “We were determined that it shouldn’t become a gossip club for unsettled wives, but endeavoured in every way to get to know the Canadian way of life through lectures, demonstrations, films, etc.”⁵⁵ In this way, many of the topics they dealt with were reminiscent of the lessons the Brides had been taught by volunteer organizations and government officials, and the methods they had used to teach women. Now in the Canadian context, war brides sought out these kinds of clubs, especially in the early days of their lives in Canada, in order to continue their ‘Canadianization’ on their own terms.

Since the organizations were run by war brides and brought together those who had moved to a certain geographical area or city, they often provided necessary companionship and an escape from loneliness and isolation felt by these recent immigrants. A letter written by Mrs. Jean Spear to a newspaper in December 1952 highlights that providing companionship was one the club’s main goals. She states that the ESWIC club, “in its initial stages... fulfilled a real need for a meeting place for lonely girls in a strange country.”⁵⁶ Members of the ESWIC Club often remarked that the club helped them through the difficult times of their transition to Canadian life. Pauline Dubue, an ESWIC member, remarked, “[ESWIC Club] was a place for war brides to meet and feel at home. I met friends there and we have remained friends ever since.”⁵⁷ A newspaper article from 1995 stressed the importance of group cohesion by stating that the group “provided badly ‘needed company’”. Some of us became even closer than

⁵⁵ Letter to newspaper submitted in December 1952. From the personal collection of Mrs. Jean Spear, ESWIC Executive member.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Pauline Elizabeth Dubue, Pier 21 Resource Centre, Collection of War Bride stories.

sisters.”⁵⁸ Thus, when they most needed the support of other women facing similar difficulties, war brides sought each other’s companionship in the form of a group that they controlled. The clubs become one of the most obvious examples of the ways in which war brides played an active role in their acculturation through their control of the group and the topics of interest they chose to explore. As well, the clubs demonstrate that many women actively sought out the companionship of other brides in the same situation in order to facilitate their settlement into Canadian life.

Even though the ESWIC club was meant to provide a physical space for war brides’ continuing education and ‘Canadianization,’ the members often enjoyed the environment it provided since it brought together women who “could speak the same language.”⁵⁹ This common language was not just English, but rather a cultural language or frame of reference common to many of the war brides. Phyllis Lockyear recalls that when she would have some of the club members over to the house she and her husband shared with his family, her mother-in-law “would often be a little annoyed... because she could hear the conversation about how [Canada] was different [from England]. The flowers smelled different and the vegetables tasted different.”⁶⁰ In this sense, one of the most important purposes of the formation of war bride clubs, for the war brides who joined them, was to maintain a strong connection to their British heritage.

Though most resources that had been made available to war brides had been focused on making the women Canadian citizens, the war bride clubs focused a great deal of their time on recognizing and celebrating a nationality to which they were still attached. One example of celebrating this connection was the ritual of inviting the

⁵⁸ “War Brides: Fifty years later they’ll reunite in Ottawa” *Ottawa Citizen* (May 27, 1995), p. C3.

⁵⁹ Interview with Marjorie Berry, Ottawa, May 20, 2002.

⁶⁰ Interview with Phyllis Lockyear, Ottawa, April 15, 2002.

British High Commissioner's wife to their various events. In December of 1946, the ESWIC group invited "Her Excellency, Lady Alexander [to be] present at the Christmas tea arranged for members."⁶¹ In 1952, Lady Clutterbuck, the British High Commissioner's wife, was made honorary president of the ESWIC Club.⁶² Finally, in honour of the Queen Mother's birthday in 2000, the ESWIC Club sent a group photo and birthday greetings.⁶³

The war brides' connection to Britain, and indeed, their British heritage and identity, has remained strong over the years. Certainly, the interests they demonstrated and the activities they organized, openly celebrated this strong British connection. The group offered a short escape from their Canadian environment and provided its members with "a touch of home."⁶⁴ It is in this sense that the focus of the group differs vastly from the resources and events focusing on 'Canadianization' that were previously organized by various organizations for the benefit of British war brides. War brides' acculturation process continually negotiated the meshing of both British and Canadian identities. War brides actively defined their identity as new Canadians. This identity did not replace, but rather included, their British heritage.

These efforts at maintaining a connection with Britain seem to confirm what historian Jenel Virden has asserted about war bride clubs in the United States. Virden argues that these groups "related to their national heritage and not their gender. The fact that they were female was secondary to their cultural identity."⁶⁵ The documentation of

⁶¹ Newsletter written by ESWIC Club Executive to Mrs. Dunbar, Dec. 16, 1946. Held at the Canadian Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

⁶² Newspaper Article, Unknown Source, March 18, 1952. Held at Red Cross Society Archives, Ottawa.

⁶³ Documents from the personal collection of Mrs. Phyllis Lockyear, member of ESWIC Executive.

⁶⁴ Phone interview with Pat Loop, Ottawa, May 21, 2002.

⁶⁵ Virden, p. 106.

the activities of the ESWIC Club, and the memories of the women who still belong to the organization, however, suggest that Virden's argument is only partially correct.

Certainly, war brides' efforts to continue their Canadian education after their arrival, and their connections to a common British identity, point to Virden's argument that their experiences in War bride clubs were predicated on their nationality.

However, the education they received, both before they left England and after they arrived in Canada, also centred on prominent postwar gender notions of women's roles as wives, mothers, and consumers. More importantly, perhaps, their immigration as war brides was a fundamentally female experience. Hence, their membership in war brides' clubs was based on their gender roles, as well as their ethnic identity. It seems most likely that war bride clubs were formed and were, in many cases, long-running because the members shared similar experiences as British female immigrants to Canada.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

The ESWIC Club of Ottawa met on May 31, 2002 to hold their annual get-together of war brides and their children. Unlike the days when the members met every few weeks, the executive members now organize a yearly event to celebrate the women's long-standing relationship to the club and to each other. This year's event was an afternoon tea at the Britannia Yacht Club in Ottawa. While interviewing several members of the ESWIC Club over the months preceding the gathering, I had heard details of the event and witnessed the preparation of nametags and the extensive work that the 'reunion committee' put into its organization. I was also honoured with an invitation to the tea.

As I sat and watched the afternoon's proceedings, I recognized the playing out of several themes I had been exploring in both the interviews with war brides, and the government material. What was most evident was the sense of a group identity. Many of the women present had been involved with the ESWIC since its early days when it was housed at the Y.W.C.A. in Ottawa. Others only became involved in the club when their children had grown and they had more opportunity to seek out the company of women who had had similar immigration experiences. The speaker mentioned their early work of social welfare programs within the group, of raising money for women who fell on hard times, and of visiting war bride friends in the hospital. Various members were acknowledged for their contribution to the work of the group - whether as president, former treasurer, the group's 'comedian', or constant volunteers. It was clear to me as an outsider that there was a definite sense of a collective experience and belonging within the members of the group.

Even the small number of children who accompanied their parents to this afternoon reunion had a sense of collective memory. They reminisced about the days they had spent playing together when their mothers met for a meeting. They mentioned articles that had appeared in the newspaper when they were small children, showing off the children of British Brides in local interest stories that highlighted the group's activities. They asked about each other's siblings, and traced their family's moves through other countries and parts of the city over the years.

Though the collective memory of the group was based in part on their experience as women undergoing the physical immigration to Canada, their connection seemed to be more fully centred on their experiences with the Club. It was their smaller gathering of women and their growing children for more than fifty years that kept them returning to the reunions, instead of their common experiences with the larger group of British women that came to Canada. This connection demonstrates the importance or focus women retain on the time after their arrival as opposed to their preparation for their journey and education for Canadian life.

There were, however, themes that emerged from this afternoon amongst war brides that were common to the women interviewed who had not joined war bride organizations after their arrival in Canada. The issue of the path that connections and identity to Britain and Canada take after more than fifty years was common to most of the women interviewed. As considered earlier, war brides seem to have adopted a hybrid nationality over the years. Attempts by Canadian officials to 'Canadianize' them, their desire to become Canadian women, and their lingering identification with, and attachment to, Britain all create an identity that is impossible to slot into one distinct

category. As their Canadian children grew and war brides established connections in their community, their identification with Canada, for which the Canadian Wives' Bureau and their supporters helped to prepare them, began to grow and war brides seem to have begun to 'feel' more Canadian. Mary Sancton reflected, "my loyalty is to Canada. I think it came very quickly. I think probably... by the time I moved to Stanstead [after two years in Montreal] ... we got involved very quickly in the local community. That was my first real home in Canada... when I first thought that Canada was home."¹ Several war brides noted that the transition to self-identifying as Canadian happened without a conscious recognition that such a transition had taken place. Lily Sutton explained, "you live here all the time, and everybody else is Canadian. You don't think about it – it just happens."² This self-identification as Canadian was evident in most war brides interviewed.

Another similarity that emerges amongst the war brides interviewed is their attachment to or identification with Britain. Unlike their identification with Canada, which seems firm, the difference in war brides' loyalty to Britain seems to be more a question of degree. Most war brides interviewed had returned to Britain several times, in some cases to live for a period of time, in most others only to visit, and commented on how it was not the Britain they remembered. 'Things' appeared to be different, and they stated that they could not live there anymore. Many of the war brides began to feel that Britain was "where I come from – it's not home."³ They often pointed out that they had been in Canada for more time than they had ever lived in Britain.

¹ Interview with Mary Sancton, May 13, 2002, Montreal.

² Interview with Lily Sutton, April 18, 2002, Montreal.

³ Ibid.

Furthermore, they related that these trips to England helped them to recognize just how Canadian they had become.⁴ Mary Sancton recalled that when her family returned to live in England for a year, after ten years of living in Canada, the ways in which she had changed became clearer to her. She remembers that

I was thrilled to see old friends, but I did realize that I had become Canadian... in strange ways. There was a local church sale and thinking of life as it was [when we lived] in Fredericton, it was quite provincial and things were done sort of properly, I had become accustomed to dressing up for tea parties... where the hostess would invite some people from 4-5, then others from 5-6, and pouring tea was a privilege, and that sort of thing was quite different for me. But this church sale in England, I dressed up reasonably well, white gloves and put on what I considered to be smartish shoes, and then it dawned on me when I got there, of course that wasn't the English style, particularly in the country you wear your tweed and brogue shoes, and in these funny little ways I had changed.⁵

Though they may have become more Canadian over the years and recognized the changes that Britain had undergone in their absence, they still felt an attachment to British symbols and personalities. Lily Sutton related that "Once in a while, like the Queen Mother's funeral, that brings [the attachment] back. There is still a little bit there. I think [that]... I'd like to have been there for that, I'd like to have seen that. Like when Prince Charles married Diana, I think I'd like to have seen her."⁶ It is important to note, however, that their lingering attachment to British symbols, like the monarchy, is a pattern that does not conflict with their adoption of a Canadian identity. The commonwealth relationship between Canada and Britain, the same relationship that volunteer organizations and the Canadian Wives' Bureau touted to help ease war brides'

⁴ Barry Broadfoot makes a similar point in his book, *The Immigrant Years: From Britain and Europe to Canada, 1945-1967* (Vancouver: Douglas McIntyre, 1986), p. 51, when he discusses the "1000 dollar cure" – the name given to the phenomenon of war brides' homesickness being cured by a thousand dollar trip back to England. The trips often made brides realize how much they appreciated their lives in Canada.

⁵ Interview with Mary Sancton, Montreal, May 13, 2002.

⁶ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 18, 2002.

transition to their new lives in Canada, was one that facilitated the adoption of an identity that incorporated both Canadian and British loyalties.

This lingering British attachment was also evident at the ESWIC afternoon tea. One of the major topics of discussion was the president's attempt to arrange for a meeting with the Queen on her anticipated visit to Canada. As well, a representative of the British High Commissioner was involved in the day's festivities, as had been the case throughout the years. Similarly, one of the activities for the participants was a game of guessing the featured British landmark, including St. James and York Minster. These reminders of their British origins were an integral part of the war bride reunion.

So, too, was the war brides' sense of their place in Canadian history. The speakers welcomed a daughter of one member of their club who had created a documentary on war brides that had featured the stories of several long-standing members of ESWIC. They had also been welcoming and encouraging when it came to my own work on the topic. Mrs. Spear, the President of the club, speculated that afternoon, as she had at other times that

Nearly 50,000 war brides had 2 or more children each, who in turn had 2 or more children. That's half a million Canadians influenced by this one-time immigration. Perhaps these women also had an impact on their communities, churches, schools, politicians, the media but the true focus for their influence was on their children.⁷

War brides present at the reunion seemed to have a strong sense of their importance in relation to Canadian history. They recognized that their stories represented more than a movement of women and children from Britain to Canada. They cite the war years and the thousands of romances that developed from them as a unique atmosphere that led to

⁷ "Speech following the premier screening of the documentary 'The War Brides: From Romance to Reality' at the Museum of Civilization, February 7, 2001 – 7:00 p.m." From the personal collection of Mrs. Jean Spear, President of ESWIC. Club.

their immigration. Furthermore, they cite their experiences in war bride groups in Britain, on ships crossing the Atlantic, and especially in war bride Clubs like ESWIC, as part of the process for creating a war bride 'identity'. In fact, the clubs were often the most poignant contributors to that identification with the label "war bride" since women who did not belong to these clubs seem to identify less with the "war bride" identity.

When asked about the role memory played in their experience as war brides, many recalled that their experiences in Canada have not always been easy. They related that like any other immigrant, their lives in Canada have had their ups and downs. Lily Sutton recalled that

I probably don't remember the bad parts, and just remember the good parts. There must have been parts where I was very depressed when I got here... There must have been times when I thought I can't take this, we have to go. But we didn't. We stuck it out. I think I'm glad we did. I couldn't imagine living anywhere else. Not now. No, this is home. This is home. Life is very changeable isn't it? You never know what is going to come up.⁸

War brides recognized their journeys were not without difficult adjustments. However, the women interviewed uniformly asserted that they do not regret their decisions to marry Canadian men, nor do they regret their decisions to move to Canada.

As indicated by Lily Sutton, the filtering process of memory may accentuate positive rather than negative experiences, especially for women who successfully adapted to Canadian life. All the women interviewed for the purpose of this study viewed themselves as having been fortunate in their experiences in Canada. They considered themselves lucky in comparison to some stories they had heard of other war brides who were abandoned by their husbands or treated badly by in-laws and members of the

⁸ Interview with Lily Sutton, Montreal, April 13, 2002.

community. Each woman, in one way or another, described herself as one of the 'lucky ones.'

The self-selection of the war brides who volunteered to be interviewed prevents much of an exploration of the negative experiences of war brides – or rather, the ones that were so negative that women's marriages failed or they returned to Britain. Future studies of war brides would benefit from interviewing women who would be more representative of the negative experiences of the war bride, to determine if there were any connections or patterns in their experiences, and to determine the nature of the problems they faced. This kind of analysis would be useful for assessing whether problems were more widespread than had been recognized. From the women interviewed for this study, and if the historiography of war brides is any indication, those negative cases are not at all representative of the larger experience of war brides. Again, however, this assumption could be a product of the sources. Women who do not want to participate in interviews, and who are not willing to tell their stories because of negative experiences, are more difficult to access than women who identify positively with the war bride identity and want to have their stories documented. Women who do not wish to participate in interviews will be less likely to contact researchers in response to advertisements or requests for participants. As a result, historians have yet to explore the virtually untold story of the unromantic side of the war bride story. Though those experiences may be less numerous, the stories of women who came in contact with voluntary organizations and before the Canadian Wives' Bureau as a result of a wartime romance gone wrong, are equally historically valid and worthy of study.

Similarly, government files that deal with the cases of war brides' facing serious problems, namely the restricted individual case files of the Canadian Wives' Bureau, were not accessible for the purposes of this study. The reviewed correspondence deals primarily with women preparing for their voyage, and less centrally the experiences of the women after they arrived. As a result, the specifics of the problem cases are more difficult to examine. The files contain only several token references to problem cases and do not explore the numbers of unhappy brides in any detail. Further studies of war brides would benefit from an examination of the restricted case files, to observe the interaction of the Canadian Wives' Bureau and the women using their services to see how the Bureau directed messages at war brides in distress, and how the women selected and negotiated these messages and services to improve their situations.

The interaction between war brides and the organizations that took an interest in their immigration and 'Canadianization' has been a central aspect of this study of war brides. The catalyst to the contact between the two groups, namely wartime romance and marriage, was only the beginning of a developing relationship between government and brides. Even before the numbers of brides reached their war-end levels, the government began to organize the logistics of the war brides' journey. In the context of Canada's continual assertions of uniqueness and independence and postwar notions about women's role in society, the Canadian military formed the Canadian Wives' Bureau to prepare women for their journey through education and 'Canadianization'. In the tradition of late nineteenth and early twentieth century female immigration to Canada, the Canadian Wives' Bureau joined forces with volunteer organizations like the Red Cross, the YWCA, the IODE, and the Salvation Army to provide protection and supervision of the

women transported under the care of Canadian officials. For the most part, the organizations had experience in the care of female immigrants travelling without male companions, as was the case with the earlier immigration of female domestic servants. Their network of female run services was deemed appropriate for the care of this large group of British women, a group Canadian officials wanted both to be impressed by Canada and its people, and to impress Canadians wary of the wave of British women marrying Canadian servicemen. In order to accomplish both, the Canadian military, through the auspices of the Canadian Wives' Bureau, sought to educate British brides on Canada's geography, culture, and people. Often, this education was carried through lessons in consumerism. Organizations provided Canadian newspapers, magazines, Eaton's catalogues, food classes, and lectures about shopping, as tools for this education. Aspects of consumerism permeated not only the education of war brides, but also their journey to their new homes. The government officials, military, and organizations involved in the immigration of war brides sought to 'Canadianize' the brides in preparation for their roles as wives, mothers, and consumers in the Canadian postwar context.

Though the story of war brides ends in the government files as soon as the women arrive in Canada, for war brides that is only the beginning of their story. As they reunited with husbands, introduced small children to distant family, and started to build a life in Canadian cities and towns, war brides were able to put the messages into action they had selected and negotiated from their 'education', and define for themselves what it meant to be a Canadian woman and consumer. These women joined church groups, voluntary organizations, and war bride clubs like ESWIC, and created an identity that incorporated

both their British roots and their Canadian homes to varying degrees. They used educational materials, female networks of family and neighbours, and the support of other war brides to adapt to the situations they faced. What is important to note about war brides, that has not been examined before, is they faced an eager collaboration of organizations and government that sought to shape their experience, and actively negotiated and selected the tools and information they needed to be successful on their own terms.

Like their wartime experiences, these women faced their difficulties with courage, a sense of adventure, and most importantly, the proverbial British “stiff upper lip.” From the group interviewed for this study, it seems that they were more than successful at becoming an important part of Canadian history and the Canadian cultural fabric. As Mrs. Jean Spear reminded the more than fifty-year members of the ESWIC Club at their afternoon tea, “be proud – we really did make a difference.”⁹

⁹ ESWIC Club afternoon tea, Britannia Yacht Club, Ottawa, May 31, 2002.

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