

IN THE TIME OF SPITFIRES

The Women of St. Charles During the Second World War

Eleanor Suderman
2025



“Women Golfers at St. Charles Donate \$607 to Spitfire Fund”

This headline pops out amidst the countless newspaper clippings collected by St. Charles Country Club former historian Shirley Lush. Among the reports of golf tournaments and champions, of annual meetings and presidents of the Club’s ladies’ section, a 1941 article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* reminds us that the women of St. Charles responded to an urgent need in a time of crisis. Eighty years after the Second World War ended, we remember these women of St. Charles, collectively and as individuals.

PART I:

The Union Jack Flies High



There was a groundswell of patriotic sentiment amongst Canadians as war loomed in Europe in the late 1930s. These feelings were on full display in the spring of 1939 in anticipation of the visit to Canada by King George VI and Queen Elizabeth – a visit intended to bolster support for the United Kingdom at a critical time.

One day before the royal tour was to begin in Quebec City, the May 16, 1939 *Free Press* reported on a tournament at St. Charles hosted by Mrs. George (Gussie) Northwood, President of the ladies' section. Gussie's "Royal Tournament," as referred to by the press, was a tombstone competition – an event in which each player is given a maximum number of strokes she can play and when she has used up those strokes, she plants a "tombstone" to mark the spot of her last stroke.

The entrants to this event were greeted by caddies sporting Union Jacks in their caps and were each given a little flag to mark her tombstone. When the golfers assembled after golf that day they were entertained informally by Gussie who presented the prizes. The bronze was awarded to Mrs. Hugh (Eila) MacFarlane, and the winning silver prize went to Gussie's daughter Barbara who, like her mother, was a brilliant golfer.

Gussie's royal tournament was a prelude to the momentous day when, on Wednesday, May 24, 1939, the King and Queen graced the streets of Winnipeg in an open limousine. The 26-mile long parade route was festooned with flags. An estimated 100,000 people lined the streets to greet the regal procession. One imagines that cheering, amongst the masses, were members of St. Charles Country Club.

Here Comes the King!
The Royal Procession
approaching the corner of
Main Street and Portage
Avenue on
May 24, 1939.
Winnipeg Free Press, Royal
Edition, May 25, 1939



On September 1, 1939 the dreaded war became a reality when the Nazis invaded Poland. Two days later Britain and France declared war on Germany and Canada joined them on September 10. The Second World War had begun.



A St. Charles dance in the 1940s.
Watercolour by Barbra Endres.

The following spring, the official opening of the St. Charles golf season was marked with a dinner-dance. According to the May 20, 1940 *Free Press*, many large and small groups attended. There were a total of 300 members and guests in all.

The evening was a gala affair. Crystal bowls of roses, peonies and snapdragons in shades of pink filled the dining tables and jade green tapers cast a soft glow in the room. The women were dressed in “brightly coloured frocks, stripes in a variety of combinations, floral and geometric silk prints vying with soft crepes, chiffons and laces,” according to the press. After dinner the couples danced in the lounge which was bedecked with ferns and flowers. Here, “a patriotic note was struck, for in honour places were portraits of King George and Queen Elizabeth, draped in Union Jacks.”

All appeared to be normal. At least on the surface.

PART II:

From Golf Balls to War Stamps

From the anniversary book *One Hundred Years at St. Charles Country Club* we learn that Club members became deeply involved in the war. Many of the members' companies were involved in constructing essential new infrastructure, manufacturing aircraft parts and producing military goods and supplies. And, from newspaper archives we discover that the women of the Club were also engaged in the war effort.

Women were integral to the Canadian war effort in the Second World War assuming a wide range of roles. Of over 1,000,000 Canadians in the armed forces more than 50,000 women served full-time. When shortages of manpower occurred, women joined the military, serving as clerical, administrative, communications, trades, and other support personnel. In civilian life, women took on roles once filled by men, from manufacturing aircraft parts and driving buses, to bailing hay and logging trees. For the women of St. Charles, some were in the vanguard of females who joined the armed forces, while for most, their forte in the war effort lay in raising funds and in volunteering.

At the AGM of the St. Charles ladies' section in September 1940 it was reported that in order to support the war effort, War Savings Stamps would replace the golf balls given out as prizes. Furthermore, an entry fee would be charged for competitions and a limit of \$1.00 placed on prizes for weekly events. Any surplus funds would be given to the Red Cross.

War Savings Stamps

Stamps were a popular way to help fund the war effort. War Savings Stamps were purchased at a cost of 25 cents each and put into booklets of 16 stamps, to total \$4.00. After saving \$4 worth of stamps and sending a form to the federal government, the person would receive a War Savings Certificate worth \$5 which could be redeemed for cash seven years after purchase.



A War Saving Stamp booklet encouraging children to empty their piggy banks and buy stamps.

St. Charles followed the lead of the Manitoba Branch of the Canadian Ladies Golf Union (CLGU) which, at the start of the 1940 golf season, declared that golf tournaments would proceed as planned. However prizes would be more or less eliminated, entry fees would be reduced and any net proceeds would be given to war funds. Within a year, sufficient funds had been raised for two mobile kitchens in England, one in Surrey and another in Kent.

Doing a good war-time job . . .

In the early years of the war, the Blitz was a major German offensive against Britain. The British retaliated against the Luftwaffe with planes, the most famous of which were Spitfires. Named after a feisty little girl whose nickname was “little spitfire,” Spitfires became iconic symbols of the war and of victory as they over-powered the Germans. Massive funds were needed to build the fighters and people responded.



St. Paul's Cathedral in London during the Blitz, 1940.

**Women Golfers at St. Charles
Donate \$607 to Spitfire Fund,
Club's Annual Meeting Shows**

Free Press,
September 27, 1941

The September 27, 1941 *Free Press* reported on the fundraising of the St. Charles ladies section. According to the article: “That women who are golfers are doing a good war-time job was shown Friday at the annual meeting of the St. Charles St. Charles Country Club at the clubhouse. Not only have they worked in various branches of the Red Cross and other war-time organizations, but they gave \$607 to the Spitfire fund of golfers.”

NOTE: \$607 in 1942 is equivalent to over \$10,000 in 2025.

The St. Charles women raised money for the CLGU Spitfire Fund which was started in the spring of 1941. A year later the national CLGU had collected \$38,000. Of that, \$25,000 went for a Spitfire and the remainder went for three mobile kitchens for the “blitzed areas.”

Towns and organizations throughout Britain and the Empire, including Canada, raced to raise funds for the fighter planes. In turn they got to have their name on a Spitfire. One Spitfire was reported by the June 17, 1942 *Tribune* to bear the CLGU insignia. Another Spitfire was named “City of Winnipeg,” reportedly funded by the city. The Spitfire with the Winnipeg name still flies in British air shows today as part of a fighter collection in Cambridgeshire.



A Canadian Ladies Golf Union silver pin with the CLGU insignia.



Galloping Teas



“Galloping teas” were a unique Spitfire fundraiser which began in Britain, moved on to Canada, and eventually to Winnipeg. They began here in February 1941 when Dorothy Hoskin of Harvard Street held her first tea, launching a series of galloping teas. Women named Dorothy (and her friends) paid admission, drank tea, and proceeded in “chain-letter fashion” to host more teas, always with a Dorothy as hostess. The teas successfully raised money for a Spitfire which was named “Dorothy of Great Britain and Empire” all by women and girls named Dorothy.



Patriotic tournaments . . .

On August 27, 1943 the St. Charles ladies' section staged a fundraising "patriotic tournament" that would become an annual event for the remaining years of the war. The invitation was open to the women of Winnipeg and outside the city; with or without a handicap. There were 9 and 18-hole competitions in the morning and bridge was played in the afternoon. In 1944 the *Tribune* reported that there were 123 participants for golf and enough bridge players for 28 tables. Prizes for the various competitions were all donated.

The proceeds of the 1943 tournament was \$817.75; a year later the women raised \$1203.70. The money was donated to the Prisoners of War Parcel Fund of the Canadian Red Cross, a fund which supplied Canadian prisoners of war with clothes and other comforts, including weekly parcels of food.

The war took its toll. At the 1941 ladies' section Annual General Meeting it was reported that entries in women's competitions were down because women were busy with the war effort. A year later, for the same reason, the Manitoba Branch of the CLGU considered whether they would eliminate some of their competitions. A decision was made and in 1943-44 there were no Manitoba Ladies Amateur and in 1943-45 there were no City & District Championships. At St. Charles, the Men's Club Championship was cancelled for 1940 and 1941, although the Women's Club Championship continued during the war years.

The war was consuming on many fronts, including staffing at St. Charles, where it became a significant problem. Membership plummeted and the Board seriously considered closing the doors of the Club. But with belt-tightening at all levels, the St. Charles Country Club survived.

As leaders of the ladies section, its Presidents encouraged, supported and praised the work of the women for their war efforts. As President Florence Graham, at the 1942 AGM stressed, "both playing and clubhouse members of the club have surely justified their existence as members of a golf and social club by their work for the war effort."

A Salute to the War-Time Presidents of the St. Charles Ladies' Section

1940 – Grace Tryon
1941 – Nan McLaren
1942 – Florence Graham
1943 – Irene Flood
1944 – Eila MacFarlane
1945 – Charlotte DesBrisay



PART III:

The Northwood War Tales

Stories of the eminent Northwood family of St. Charles have been documented in the annals of the Club. There are accounts about George, architect of the current clubhouse, and about his wife Gussie, her golfing feats and leadership roles in the Club's ladies' section. Their four daughters have also been written about. But until now, aside from George's experience in the First World War, their war stories have not been told.

The year the Northwood clubhouse opened was also the year the First World War began. That year, 1914, George Northwood joined the 8th battalion to fight in the war, leaving behind his pregnant wife Gussie to care for their three small daughters: 7 year-old Mary, 5 year-old Marget, and 3 year-old Rosamund. Gussie moved the family to Santa Barbara, California where their fourth daughter Barbara, was born in 1915.

Within less than a year overseas, in April 1915, George was captured by the Germans and was held captive in a prisoner of war camp. He returned to Winnipeg when the war ended three years later, now as a Major. For his services George Northwood was awarded the Military Cross.

Gussie . . .



Gussie Northwood
Free Press, November
26, 1942

For reasons we shall soon discover, Gussie Northwood's volunteer energies in the Second World War were focused on support for the air force. In fact, she became chairman of the Manitoba division of a nationwide organization called "Wings for Britain." This centralized body coordinated all funds raised for Spitfires.

Wings for Britain, aside from its coordination function, also raised money to fund Spitfires. One such fundraiser in 1941 was the sale of merchandise with a crest on the goods which were sold at Eaton's, Hudson's Bay, Birks-Dingwall and the Jaeger stores. A blue and white poster like the one on the following page, donated by a local company, was used as advertising for the goods.

Another fundraiser undertaken the following year was a western Canada raffle of six paintings by Canadian artists. The Winnipeg display was held on the fifth floor of the Hudson's Bay store.

The fundraising efforts proved to be successful. Within the first few months of operation, the Canadian Wings for Britain had collected \$450,000, meaning that 16 Spitfires were named at a cost of \$30,000 each.

This is what we know of about Gussie Northwood's war efforts. As for her daughters, there is more to tell.



A fund raising poster of the early 1940s Battle of Britain era.

Mary . . .

Mary, the eldest, married Richard Bonnycastle in 1931. Three years later their first child, a son, was born, followed by the birth of two daughters. So Mary's story of raising young children during a war echoed her mother's experience of a quarter of a century earlier, although it appears that Mary's husband stayed at hand. Mary would later follow in her mother's footsteps when she assumed the presidency of the ladies' section in 1959, a year before Gussie passed away.

Marget . . .

The second of the Northwood sisters was Marget who, when playing in a golf tournament in Montreal in 1937, decided that this was the place for her and she moved East. We don't know how this happened, but Marget attained the prestigious position as private secretary to Air Marshal William Avery Bishop, none other than the decorated and storied Canadian flying ace of the First World War, "Billy" Bishop.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, Bishop was promoted to the rank of air marshal in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). In 1940 he was appointed Director of Recruiting for the RCAF and became instrumental in setting up and promoting the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan which trained many thousands of airmen in Canada during the war.

Marget was promoted and became Air Marshall Bishop's confidential secretary, a role requiring exceptional organizational skills and aptitude in providing administrative support to this top-level official. There is little doubt that Marget's solid education in her earlier years at Rupert's Land Ladies College (precursor to Balmoral Hall), Kelvin High, and the finishing school at Mademoiselle de Palerne's, Versailles stood her in good stead.



Being a confidential secretary was her day job, but Marget also devoted two nights a week in the Red Cross Office Administration Corps. According to 1941 *Free Press* reports she was appointed as Company Sergeant Major after taking courses in First Aid, ARP (Air Raid Precautions), military law and drill. A year later she was promoted to second lieutenant in "A" company of the office section of Red Cross Corps.

Left: Marget in uniform as Company Sergeant Major of the Office Administration section of the Canadian Red Cross corps. *Free Press*, July 7, 1941.

When Air Marshal Bishop resigned his post in the RCAF in 1944 because of health issues, Marget moved to Washington. There she assumed a position in the Canadian embassy in the office of the air attaché. Here Marget received her greatest honour.

On November 23, 1944 the *Free Press* reported that Flight Officer Marget Constance Northwood RCAF (Women's Division) of Winnipeg was invested at the Canadian embassy with the Order of the British Empire (OBE) by Ambassador Leighton McCarthy. This highest honour conferred on Canadian citizens prior to the establishment of the Order of Canada in 1967, was typically for exemplary military service. Marget had achieved that level.



Marget (left) at the Canadian embassy in Washington receiving her OBE from Ambassador Leighton McCarthy (second from left), *Free Press*, November 23, 1944.

Rosamund . . .

Like her older sister Marget, Rosamund, the third of the Northwood daughters sought to live elsewhere. Only she went further afield, in 1938, settling in England.

With the outbreak of the war a year later, Rosamund went into service as a VAD (Voluntary Aid Detachment) in Royal Airforce Hospitals. The VAD was a voluntary unit of civilians who provided nursing care for military personnel in the United Kingdom in both world wars. In 1942 it was reported that Rosamund was stationed at Royal Air Force hospital in Ely, Cambridgeshire.



A group of British VADs in uniform in the Second World War.

In 1942 the *Free Press* and *Tribune* stated that on September 1, Rosamund had wed Charles Pritchard, DFC, RAF (The Distinguished Flying Cross, Royal Air Force). She was given in marriage by Air Marshal Harold "Gus" Edwards, the chief overseas officer responsible for all RCAF personnel. This is the limited information we have about Rosamund Northwood.

Barbara . . .

The youngest Northwood also left Winnipeg. In June 1940 Barbara joined her older sister Marget in Ottawa who at the time was the confidential secretary to Air Marshal William Bishop. Barbara became Bishop's second secretary and was involved in recruiting. Like her sister, Barbara worked in the office administration section of the Canadian Red Cross.

In May 1941 Barbara was selected to take an administration course in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. She became part of the original class of the course offered in Toronto by Havergal College.

After graduation in October of that same year Barbara joined the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force (CWAAF). Doing so was new for women. Before the Second World War, Canadian women hoping to serve their country had only one option: to work within the field of medicine. But, when male recruitment began to dwindle and war demands continued to increase, the military was forced to re-think its policy and on July 2, 1941, the CWAAF was born.

Two days before Christmas 1941, the *Free Press* reported that Assistant Section Officer Barbara Northwood, age 26, arrived from the East, the Assistant Section Officer of the CWAAF posted to a station in No. 2 training command. Her job was to interview applicants for the CWAAF in the Winnipeg RCAF recruiting centre. The press followed what happened at the centre, noting one recruit in particular. She was, they reported, an acquaintance from Barbara's golfing life – her former rival Donna Baxter who had defeated Barbara to win the Manitoba junior championship in 1932.



Barbara Northwood
Assistant Section Officer
Free Press December 23, 1941



Barbara Northwood
Staff Officer, RCAF
Women's Division.
Free Press December 23, 1941

Barbara was on the move for the next few years. In July 1942 she took on a post at air force headquarters in Ottawa. Ten months later she was back in Winnipeg, this time as Staff Officer for the RCAF Women's Division. Then in 1944 there are reports of Barbara returning home on leave from bases in Saskatchewan to visit her parents in their Lucerne Apartment on McMillan Avenue.

After the war Barbara would marry George Wilson Blackwell of Cheshire, England and they settled in California. When she passed away at age 94 Barbara's obituary noted her enjoyment in serving as a recruiting officer of the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Clearly this had been a significant time in Barbara's life.

In their volunteer work and in their roles in the women's military, the Northwood women served their country during the throws of the Second World War.

PART IV:

The Wartime Worker Bees

We've seen the women of St. Charles demonstrate their war effort as a collective in raising funds and as individuals in the military. And there were those, who like Gussie, stepped into volunteer roles. We don't have information on the majority women of St. Charles but some recognizable names stand out in the newspapers of the time.

One such person is St. Charles member Mrs. John (Mauriel) Rogers who most famously in 1937 was the first woman west of Ontario to win the Canadian Ladies Amateur Championship. The June 17, 1942 *Tribune* reported that she (Mauriel), "who in the past played 18 holes of golf a day was now spending two days a week at the Red Cross, one day a week with the V-Bundle Society as well as serving as regional officer for the Girl Guides and a canvasser for other war activities."

The same article goes on to report on the overall reduction in support for golf tournaments because of women supporting the war effort. A *Tribune* columnist explained that this was because in past year "the lady golfers don't hit a golf ball as straight and as far on an average as they used." The journalist added that it was of little significance to them that they didn't hit the ball like they used to. Their focus now was on more urgent demands.

"By far the largest contribution by Canadian women to the war effort was through their unpaid labour in the home and their volunteer work," according to Ruth Pierson who wrote about Canadian women in the Second World War. The following stories illustrate some of their work.



From *Canadian Women in the Second World War*, 1983

In September 1939, at the very beginning of the Second World War, the women of Winnipeg organized. They began by creating a list of the women available for volunteer war services. The Central Volunteer Bureau (CVB) was thus born – operated and governed by women.

At the bureau's first Annual General Meeting held at the St. Stephen's Broadway Church a year later, there were reports on a range of initiatives such as tag days, camps, evacuees, and foster parent education of evacuated English children. Amongst the women presenting reports were two familiar names: Mrs. Gordon (Margaret) Konantz presenting the financial report and a report on salvage (more on salvage to follow), and Mrs. Douglas (Titeen) Laird reporting on refugee clothing.

In January of 1942, the board of the CVB unanimously voted Margaret Konantz as its representative to the Winnipeg Civil Defence Committee. The same year she was elected as president of the bureau, continuing in this role in 1943. Margaret also became deeply involved in other aspects of war time volunteering, as we'll soon see.

The bureau meanwhile became an essential agency for coordinating the extraordinary volunteer work undertaken during the war. The agency performed a vital function and in fact continues to this day as Volunteer Manitoba.

“V” is for victory . . .



“V” became a rallying symbol of victory amongst the Allies during the Second World War. Winston Churchill certainly promoted it and in Winnipeg the V was adopted by an organization of women. The group, formally known as V-Bundles of Manitoba for Britain, collected clothing and quilts, mended and packaged them, then shipped them overseas.

Left: The V hand gesture was popularized by Winston Churchill .

V-Bundles was formed in September 1941, an organization of diverse women's groups with Mrs. James A Richardson at its helm. On the committee was Titeen Laird. Titeen was an esteemed, long-time member of St. Charles who, amongst many other accomplishments, made a name for herself as the first winner of the Manitoba Ladies' Amateur Championship in 1921. Not only was she an excellent golfer, she repeatedly took on leadership roles on the ladies' section executive and was its President in 1938.



Children amidst the rubble in a blitzed London.



Titeen Laird
Free Press,
October 2,
1937

MRS. DOUGLAS LAIRD is the new president of the ladies' section of St. Charles Country club, and is preparing to face a year of uncounted interest in ladies' golf, with the Denaline champion on the St. Charles rolls for next year's play.

Titeen was director of the workroom in V-Bundles. This was the place where volunteers mended the clothing they received and according to one report, were "highly skilled in making over all sorts of garments. Presto, in a twinkling sister's old ski jacket becomes a woolly winter coat for the baby."

V-Bundles set up shop in downtown buildings, first in the Somerset Building on Portage Avenue and later in the Hargrave Building on Hargrave Street. Considerable space was required to assemble and process the items especially when towns and villages throughout the province, and from as far afield as British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Ontario began sending in their goods. Within the first two months of operation V-Bundles had sent two tons of clothing to Britain. By January of 1943 V-Bundles had sent 24 tons of clothing and quilts.

To fund their expenses V-Bundles sold Christmas cards and silver pins with the V-Bundle logo. Within months V-Bundles had sold 4300 Christmas cards and 900 V pins.

V-Bundles operated until April 1945. When they held their closing tea, Titeen was honoured for her work with a corsage.

Sterling Silver
WWII Victory "V"
Bundles of
Manitoba Badge
sold to raise
funds.



Salvage became her game . . .

At the time Margaret Konantz became involved in the Central Volunteer Bureau in 1939, she was 40 years old and at the top of her golf game. Ten years earlier, with two young children at home, she had been elected as President of the St. Charles ladies' section and the same year had won the Manitoba Amateur Ladies Championship. When in June 1941 she won the City & District championship the *Tribune* described Margaret this way: "When she plays golf she plays it with undivided attention and concentration." This ability to focus was one of the skills that may have factored into her success on many fronts. Always big into volunteering (see below) her work during the Second World War took her abilities to new heights.



Margaret Konantz
Free Press, October 22, 1941.

**Margaret Konantz
Volunteer Work Resume**

Junior League:

Founding member;
President (1928 to 1930);
Major fund-raiser;
Organizer of Junior League Thrift Shop;
Board member

Miscellaneous Volunteer Work:

Winnipeg Hospital Aid Society
Winnipeg General Hospital
White Cross Guild
Convalescent Hospital
Crippled Children's Society
Community Chest of Greater Winnipeg
International Junior League Association
Central Volunteer Bureau
Council of Social Agencies
Canadian Welfare Council
Canadian Centenary Committee

University of Manitoba Archives

During the Second World War there was an enormous demand for raw materials. Scrap metal and steel to produce tanks, airplane engines and ships was at the top of the list. A "Saucepans for Spitfires" crusade in Britain was championed by Canadian-born media-tycoon-come-Minister of Aircraft Production, Lord Beaverbrook to appeal to the public to collect unused scrap metal. But there was demand for other items too, like paper, glass, records, old sheet music, books, leather. A seemingly odd request was for animal fat and bones. The newspaper ad on the following page explains why.



This ad appealed to housewives in the December 3, 1944 *Free Press* stating:

"There is a serious shortage of Fats and Bones and the only way in which this shortage can be overcome is by the day-to-day saving of every dripping, every scrap of fat and every bone, cooked or uncooked or dry. Fats make glycerine and glycerine makes high explosives – explosives to bomb the Axis partners – Adolph, Benito, Tojo, sink their U-boats, destroy their tanks. Bones produce fat. Also glue for war industry."

The Winnipeg Patriotic Salvage Corps was born in the summer 1940, the brainchild of Margaret Konantz, we read in the October 22, 1941 *Free Press*. The purpose of the corps was to collect and sell what we today refer to as recyclable materials to the companies in need of them.

The Salvage Corps took off in big way. By October 1941 the organization had sold over \$40,000 worth of salvage; enough to fund eight mobile kitchen units. The *Tribune* sang Margaret's praises: "The Salvage Corps owes its amazing success to her boundless enthusiasm. She has been the heart and soul in this venture since its origin."

A truck outside the headquarters of Winnipeg Patriotic Salvage Corps headquarters at 755 Henry. The truck was sent to England to serve there as a mobile kitchen.



**Two-Ball Match
To Mrs. Konantz,
Mrs. Northwood**

Tribune
May 17, 1941

From Golf Greens to Recruiting Convention

In May 1941 the *Tribune* reported on the first competition of the golf season of the Manitoba Branch, CLGU held at St. Charles Country Club. It was one of the largest tournaments staged in years with 164 players from all clubs of the city. "Premium honours" were awarded to Margaret Konantz and Gussie Northwood, winners of the two-ball competition.

Six months later the same newspaper shows these same women pinning name tags on each other at the opening of the "MD (Military District) No. 10's monster recruiting convention" at the Fort Garry hotel. Hundreds of delegates were present from all over the district – the Province of Manitoba, Districts of Keewatin, Kenora, Rainy River and Thunder Bay. Margaret and Gussie were two of them.



Margaret & Gussie at the recruiting convention.
Tribune November 10, 1941

Margaret was always in search of volunteers. In March 1942, at the annual reunion luncheon of the Rupert's Land School Alumnae association, Margaret made an appeal for an army of 4000 women for her new salvage drive scheme – a block program. She explained the plan. Each neighbourhood block would have a captain responsible for informing the other women in her block to have their salvage bundled for pick-up on their designated day. The program would save time and reduce costs and enable the 67 trucks to collect 33 tons of paper in one day. In a 1944 *Free Press* article, the columnist reminded women: "Sort out your salvage before putting it out for your pick-up truck. And speaking of trucks, most of the drivers are girls, volunteers who drive in heavy snowdrifts and bright summer sunshine. Most of them work two or three days a week."



Excerpts from a salvage drive ad in the June 2, 1944 *Tribune*.

The block program was considered to be Winnipeg's greatest contribution to the national voluntary service. The Winnipeg Patriotic Salvage Corps was declared by the Director of the National Salvage Campaign, Charles LaFerle, as the strongest, most aggressive and most enterprising of the 1,750 voluntary salvage groups operating throughout the Dominion.

The *Free Press* declared: "Mrs. Konantz's golfing characteristics are typical of most of her other undertakings. Those who work with her in connection with the war charities will readily agree. The Salvage Corps owes its amazing success to her boundless enthusiasm. She has been the heart and soul in this venture."

Ultimately, millions of pounds of fats and bones were collected across the country. The Winnipeg Patriotic Salvage Corps alone collected 690,554 pounds of bones and 323,001 pounds of fat over its five years of wartime operations. And this was only one component of its salvage collection!

Margaret's reputation for her work on salvage went well beyond Manitoba's borders. On two occasions she was selected by the Canadian government to be part of small delegation of women sent to Britain. In the winter of 1942 the four Canadian women, Margaret as one of them, sailed on small freighter to Britain. They spent three weeks touring England and Scotland where they networked with their British counterparts in wartime voluntary services. In February 1944 Margaret was back in Britain on a similar mission, again one of four women, the only one from Western Canada.

After both trips abroad Margaret shared her experiences and learned how others were engaging in the war effort. In 1942 and 1943 she spoke on volunteer services in salvage and studied volunteer work being done six cities across the western provinces. On returning to Canada in 1944, Margaret shared the stories of a wartime Britain with groups such as the Central Volunteer Bureau, Manitoba Teacher's Society, Canadian Club, National Council of Jewish Women, and the Wartime Pilots Association. She told stories of the blackouts, the rationing, the monotonous diet, and the constant humming of planes overhead. She reported on work being done by British volunteers like filing names of people in a bombed London; serving food in mobile kitchens; helping people who had lost everything obtain clothing; and caring for infants residential nurseries. It seemed that Margaret was everything, everywhere, certainly when it came to volunteer work and to salvage!

**Mrs. Konantz Lauds
Women Of Britain**

**Vivid Impression Of Britain
Given By Mrs. Gordon Konantz**

**Mrs. Gordon Konantz Tells
Of Volunteer Work in Britain**

Free Press articles
Top: February 12, 1944
Middle: March 18, 1944
Bottom: April 6, 1944

In 1946, amongst the hundreds of recipients of honours bestowed on the military and civilians after the war, Margaret Konantz was one of them. She was awarded the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (OBE). This British order of chivalry, rewards contributions to the arts and sciences, work with charitable and welfare organizations, and public service outside the civil service. For Margaret's exemplary volunteer work she was bestowed this prestigious honour.



OBE medal.

Conclusion



When the Second World War ended on September 2, 1945 the world rejoiced. At St. Charles, on the roof of the Lush family cottage tucked between the 1st tee box and the 9th green on the North Nine, a Union Jack billowed in the breeze. It was posted there, we are told, by a nimble 21-year-old Shirley Lush.

Thank you Shirley for inspiring this story about the women of St. Charles in the time of Spitfires. And, thank you to those women for “rising to the occasion” during a momentous time in history. This too is part of the heritage of St. Charles.

Sources

Books

Huck, Barbara & Whiteway, Doug. *One Hundred Years At St. Charles: A Centennial History*. Winnipeg: Heartland Associates Inc. 2004.

Suderman, Eleanor. *Stories Waiting to be Told: The St. Charles Ladies' Section 1905 – 1940*. Blurb. 2024.

Websites

Government of Canada. *Women at War*.

<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/en/remembrance/classroom/fact-sheets/women>

Manitoba Historical Society. <https://www.mhs.mb.ca/>

March, William. *RCAF Women's Division*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. 2016.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/rcaf-womens-division#TrainingBegins>

Military History Library. *The C.W.A.A.F.*

<https://valourcanada.ca/military-history-library/the-c-w-a-a-f/>

Mosby, Ian. *Food on the Home Front during the Second World War*. McMaster University. 2014.

<https://wartimecanada.ca/essay/eating/food-home-front-during-second-world-war>

Newspaper Archives. <https://newspaperarchive.com/>

Pierson, Ruth Roach. *Canadian Women and the Second World War*. Canadian Historical Association Booklet No. 37. Ottawa.1983.

<https://archive.org/details/canadianwomensec0000pier/page/n7/mode/2up>

Sarty, Roger & Dundas, Barbara. *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*. The Canadian Encyclopedia. 2006.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/women-in-the-military>

Whalen, James. *The Scrap That Made A Difference*. 1998.

<https://legionmagazine.com/the-scrap-that-made-a-difference/James M. Whalen>

<https://www.flyinglegends.com/supermarine-spitfire-lfvb-ep120>

University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections. *Margaret Konantz: An Inventory of Her Papers at the University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections*. Winnipeg, Manitoba. 1979.
https://archives.lib.umanitoba.ca/collections/complete_holdings/ead/html/konantz.shtml

University of Western Ontario. *Save while supporting the war*. War, Memory and Popular Culture Archives - - London, Ontario.
<https://wartimecanada.ca/document/second-world-war/>

Watson, Greig. *Spitfire funds: The 'whip-round' that won the war?* British Broadcasting Corporation. 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-35697546>

Wikipedia: Various Citations.