



VAD nurses' aides, from the Ruby Ayre collection.

Patronage

The Honourable Joan Marie J. Aylward, Lieutenant Governor of Newfoundland and Labrador, will serve as Patron of the Women in Nursing and Conflict Commemorative Statue Project.

COMMEMORATIVE STATUE PROJECT

HONOURING NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
WOMEN IN NURSING AND CONFLICT

Mission Statement.

To create a lasting monument to educate the public about and to honour the role of Newfoundland and Labrador women in nursing for their service past and present, their sacrifices for the preservation of peace and their roles at home or overseas.

A draft rendering of the statue has been completed by sculptor Morgan MacDonald at the Newfoundland Bronze Foundry.





Bertha Bartlett was a VAD volunteer who served in the First World War and died in 1918 while caring for wounded soldiers.

Everyone knows a nurse. Everyone has received care from a nurse. With open arms, nurses welcome new life into our world and they stand as quiet guardians when a person takes their final journey. Nurses provide care at every stage of our existence. They do so with relentless compassion, empathy and an unwavering dedication to care.

The story of modern nursing is familiar to us all. Less well known is a solemn and deeply moving chapter in our history:

the story of women in nursing who gave so much in service to others, sometimes paying the ultimate cost with their own lives.

The military casualty rate of First World War was unprecedented due to prolonged fighting, the nature of trench warfare and new lethal weapons. Medical service was critically important. As a Dominion of the British Empire, Newfoundland women responded to the call to serve.

They joined many British and allied nursing organizations including the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, the Joint War Committee of the Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance, the British Territorial Nursing Force, the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), the Canadian Army Medical Corps and the US Army Medical Corps. Their service was wide-ranging geographically, including France, Belgium, and the Mediterranean theatres of war as well as on the home front in Great Britain and Newfoundland.

This memorial is one part of that tribute. It belongs not only to one community, but to the whole province. Nurses are everywhere, and each of us has been touched by a nurse at some point in our lives. Sharing those stories of past and present service will help us build a stronger awareness of the contributions of women in nursing.

This project is being launched with the collaboration and support of The Trail of the Caribou Research Group, the not-for-profit partner overseeing charitable support for this initiative. Contributors will receive a tax receipt for donations. In addition to the statue, the public will be invited to share stories about the service of women and nurses to build greater awareness of their contributions. A further legacy element to remember and support future scholarship and education will also be initiated.

You can help honour their service. You can help remember them. You can share their stories. Donations are accepted at trailofthecaribou.ca, where you can also share your stories of nurses.

Hospital ward from the collection of Newfoundland VAD nurses' aide, Ruby Ayre.



Many women involved in the WPA went on to join the Women's Franchise League and cited the nurses' service to their country as one justification for the vote.

This monument will serve as a testament to women and nurses in conflict for their care, empathy and kindness. Personal sacrifice and resilience have long defined the contributions of women and nurses in times of conflict. Through their service, they not only cared for the wounded and vulnerable, but also helped uphold the human dignity on which lasting peace depends. Their legacy reminds us of the true cost of peace, and of the profound gift of democracy and all that it makes possible.

Red Cross workers at Government House, February 1917.



Nursing could be dangerous especially near the front at Casualty Clearing Stations, on ambulance trains and motor vehicles retrieving the wounded, and at base hospitals in danger of enemy bombing or being overrun. There were long shifts, supply shortages, overcrowding and a flood of badly wounded patients after major battles. It required endurance and stamina to be a nursing "first responder." Pathogens and exhaustion took their toll.

Nursing on the home front in Great Britain could also be challenging, especially on the large, understaffed wards of massive military hospitals. Service in the smaller, temporary auxiliary convalescent hospitals

was less physically demanding but maintaining soldiers morale in the face of long-term physical and mental wounds was crucial.

Trained nurses and VADs also worked in the military hospitals established in St. John's during the First World War.

In 1918, Issac Morris, St. John's businessman,



German Iron Cross given to VAD Francis Cluett by German officer under her care.

VAD Francis Cluett in her VAD dress uniform.

politician, and writer who lost his son Edward with the Regiment in 1917, aptly wrote:

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Warriors and statesmen will be honoured, and every department of the Service will be remembered; but among them all – brave and self-sacrificing as they were – no monument will be more deserving, nor will awaken deeper emotions, than those which will be erected as memorials to women, who as nurses... went forth at duty's call, and did their share to alleviate the sufferings of the soldier-lads.

The history of women in nursing who volunteered for the harshest conditions is a testament to their courage and dedication to service. Their service to Newfoundland and Labrador and to the heartbreaking number of those wounded and lost is an under told story that deserves acknowledgement and recognition.

Women have continued to serve in theatres of conflict throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, later including combat roles. Indeed the history and knowledge of the contributions of women and nurses from Newfoundland and Labrador in the Second World War, the Korean War, as well as service in Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and other areas also remains under told and

Nursing Sister Frances Cron and Lieutenant Maisie Parsons were trained nurses from Harbour Grace.



opportunity exists to learn more about those important contributions.

Newfoundland and Labrador has undergone a reinvigoration of remembrance that has in part been shaped by the repatriation of the Unknown Newfoundland Soldier and the centennial of the Newfoundland National War Memorial in 2024. 2025 also marked the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote and hold public office in Newfoundland. It also shone a bright light on the story of women before, during and after the First World War.

These two important milestones provide an opportunity to educate the public about our rich history and to invite the people of the province to share their stories. The extraordinary legacy of women in nursing in our province continues to inspire us. Their historic and ongoing contributions are a source of profound pride for nurses, and for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

The monument to honour women in nursing and conflict will be erected on the grounds of Government House in St. John's, an historic location parallel to the National War Memorial and in proximity to the downtown core. Government House, the people's house, was also a centre of mobilization for the Dominion-wide Women's Patriotic Association (WPA) that recruited nurses and VADs and founded two military hospitals in St John's. The WPA prepared surgical supplies, funded the purchase of an ambulance, and raised funds for a hospital ward in England for sick and exhausted nurses.