

Music, Movies, and Meals: Halifax's Local Contributions on the Home Front

by

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Abstract

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The Second World War turned Halifax, a small city that is the capital of Nova Scotia, into an overcrowded port city at the edge of the Canadian Home Front. Due to the large transient population in the city at the time, there was a sizable demand for entertainment, and for related services. This thesis explores three ways in which the city hosted its temporary guests: through music, movies, and food and drink. Each of these areas is explored through a case study: music through the Halifax Concert Party Guild, movies through the Capitol theatre, and food and drink through the dry canteen known as the North End Services Canteen and a social club which provided liquor, the Ajax Club. Special attention is given to services provided to sailors, who made up a large proportion of the service personnel in the city. This work demonstrates that independent organizations and local business branches also aided the war effort, despite the limited historiographical attention paid to them.

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Dedication

For

Charlotte Guy Jeffries

1921 - 2019

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Introduction

Halifax was not loved by all its guests during the Second World War. A small city in Nova Scotia, it had only a population of 50 000 to 60 000 when the war began.¹ Just months after war was declared, the city became flooded with new inhabitants. Housing, which was seldom available, was overpriced and overcrowded. Barracks could not accommodate all or even most of the population arriving in the city. Against advice from the Canadian government, family members of those posted in the city and those looking for work also moved in. Unlike some of the more central locations in Canada, such as in Ontario and Quebec, Halifax experienced more severe shortages for the everyday person than for workers who moved to Montreal or Toronto.

Another issue that faced visitors and Haligonians alike concerned the strict liquor laws. Compared to other Canadian provinces or other countries, Nova Scotia still had few places to drink publicly such as bars or taverns. The prohibition movement had swept the province and most of the country from the late nineteenth century, becoming stronger at the beginning of the twentieth century and eventually leading to strict laws against consumption of alcohol. By the early 1920's most provinces had restricted liquor, but then scrapped those laws by the end of the decade. By 1930, Nova Scotians were allowed to purchase liquor again, but the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission still restricted where people were allowed to drink. Drinking in public was explicitly banned. Accordingly, most canteens during the Second World War in Halifax did not serve liquor. Those of officer rank in the services were often invited to private clubs, but that left nowhere for the ordinary sailor, soldier or flyer to find a drink. They were not allowed to drink in

¹ Graham Metson, *An East Coast Port: Halifax at War 1939-1945*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1981), 34.

their barracks or on the ships, and unless they were personally invited to a private club or home, a drink would have had to be consumed in the streets or in illegal, underground bars.

Entertainment in a more general sense was also difficult to find. There were many activities available, but still, it was difficult for organizations to keep up with the demand. Theatres, restaurants, and parks were simply overcrowded. There was not enough space for everyone to enjoy these activities. Lines were long, such as for the Capitol Theatre, where most days there were patrons lined up out of the theatre, down the street and around the corner. On top of this, the wage that sailors, soldiers and airmen received did leave room for spending outside of the necessities. Those who could not afford entertainment, such as movie tickets or entry to a dance, relied on the free services that service organizations, those that already existed or had sprung up because of the war, provided out of generosity.

The port city of Halifax, despite restrictive circumstances and shortages, put enormous efforts into making those who entered its city comfortable. When government and military resources were at their limits, the public stepped in to fill any obvious void. Local and national organizations opened hostels, clubs, and canteens to provide service personnel with food, fun and a place to rest their head at night. Throughout Canada, over 3 000 charities were registered under the War Charities Act. While there were many charities, organizations, businesses and individuals that put their efforts forward to make the transient population feel welcome, often national organizations were the ones that received most of the credit for wartime volunteerism. This makes sense in some respects, as national organizations are typically more widely known. Groups such as the Red Cross, the Knights of Columbus, the Salvation Army, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) are just some examples of nationally known organizations that helped with the war effort. Often these

organizations had already been established before the Second World War, already helping at other times of crisis such as during the First World War or the Halifax Explosion. Others, such as the YMCA, had served communities in peacetime as well. As these organizations were typically already established and experienced, it is understandable that most of the public's attention focused on these groups. Perhaps with better record keeping methods due to their longevity or size, these larger groups have also tended to receive a larger portion of attention in the historiography of wartime volunteerism. Yet there are many more organizations or businesses which contributed to the war effort that have been less well known, due to their smaller size or simply because they specifically opened to help with the war effort and closed their doors when service personnel went home. Though they may have only helped the Home Front in a specific region, these groups still deserve the same type of recognition and historical analysis as other, more widespread and well-known organizations of the same nature. In some ways, local efforts may have been more tailored to the needs of the city or town they served. Halifax, in this sense becomes a special case as it was one of the most important Canadian ports during the war. One of the world's deepest ice-free harbours, Halifax Harbour was continuously busy with shipping traffic during the Second World War. With the large resulting transient population, Halifax needed all the help it could get when it came to hosting its visitors.

The efforts of the volunteers were what often changed negative attitudes about the city due to its overcrowding and shortages to a more positive outlook. Without the contributions of these volunteers, it is difficult to assess what would have become of Halifax during this time of stress and need. Yet these volunteers were present, providing different ways to ease worries, donating necessities and offering entertainment. This thesis will examine three different charities

or businesses that aided the war effort and thus impacted the role of Halifax as a Home Front port. Through these cases, different forms of hosting or entertaining guests will be explored.

The thesis comprises three chapters, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first, centred on the Halifax Concert Party, explores a variety of ways in which volunteers entertained soldiers, sailors, and airmen who were either stationed in or passing through the province. The Halifax Concert Party, formed by locally well-known radio host Hugh Mills, nicknamed “Uncle Mel”, had more than 700 volunteers who helped put together shows across the province. The group included singers, dancers, musicians, comedians and staff to help organize events, schedule volunteers, coordinate costumes and props, and many more who worked behind the scenes to make sure that the group’s concerts ran smoothly. The Concert Party travelled across the province, on to ships in the Halifax Harbour and even to Europe at the end of the war to help entertain those who were serving their country.

The second chapter will focus on a local branch of a national business. The Capitol Theatre was built in 1930 on Barrington Street in downtown Halifax. The Capitol was one of the first theatres built in North America specifically to prioritize film. As one of nine theatres available in Halifax by the time of the Second World War, the Capitol was a popular spot for locals and travellers alike. Though live acts were also often performed at the theatre during the war, the modern technology and pseudo-medieval atmosphere at the theatre provided entertainment and escapism through film for a city constantly reminded of the war. The theatre, besides often hosting complimentary shows for service personnel or the public, also helped in local efforts to raise sales of victory bonds. Local efforts were not only helped by charities, but businesses helped the war effort as well, often in coordination with charity efforts.

The third chapter focuses on food and alcoholic drinks. Two specific cases will be examined through this chapter. The first is the North End Services Canteen. This canteen was started locally by a group of wives of Navy personnel who wanted to help the war effort. The dry canteen first focused on making sure that recreational activities, such as dances, games, music, and books were available. Afterwards, due to the popular demand for its facilities, the canteen started to make meals after having started off with offering snacks such as chocolate bars and other necessities like cigarettes. Once the popularity of the canteen soared, sandwiches and desserts were offered. Typically, unlimited cups of tea or coffee were included in the modest pricing. The other venture on which the chapter will focus is the Ajax Club. The Ajax Club was opened by some of the volunteers from the North End Services Canteen and spearheaded by Janet McEuen, who enlisted the sisters Edith Girouard (born Macneill) and Isabel Macneill to help her open the new social club. The club was founded by the three women in order to address the lack of alcohol available to sailors in the city. In a much more lavish setting than the North End Services Canteen, the Ajax Club provided a relaxing atmosphere for service personnel to be able to have a drink. Contrasts and comparisons will be made between the two establishments to show two different ends of the spectrum of what food and drink establishments were available to sailors in Halifax during the Second World War.

With a particular focus on female volunteers, the three chapters demonstrate differing ways in which Halifax opened its doors to those who travelled through during the Second World War. As Halifax is a port city, the experiences of sailors are more prevalent than those of soldiers or airmen. This is simply due to the nature of the city, as its large harbour attracted more naval activity than seen with the army or air force. Indeed, one of the organizations examined, the Ajax Club, only admitted sailors. The locally-initiated charity groups, along with the case of a local

theatre owned by a national chain, exemplify the variety of organizations involved. All of these groups hosted individuals through music, movies and meals. This thesis demonstrates that Halifax was a host city of a large transient population during the Second World War and that it made efforts outside of government or military jurisdiction to meet the high demand for entertainment services. Entertaining guests became a five-year enterprise, and civilians did all they could to provide comforts to their guests in a time of crisis.

Broad context may be found in the treatment of the related wartime entertainment history of Great Britain. For example, looking at the success of the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA), Basil Dean details the British entertainment system throughout the Second World War in his 1956 book. Dean's interpretation also includes his own experiences and insights, having lived through the Second World War himself. Previously an actor, Dean had also served in the First World War, and so helped to arrange entertainment during both conflicts. Examining the seven years of ENSA's operations, he tells the history of this group from his own perspective. The theatre and both war efforts, he maintains, were mutually beneficial, each helping the success of the other in difficult times.²

ENSA, USO, RAF Gang Shows, Unit and Divisional Concert Parties, GI Shows, and Stars in Battle are covered in Richard Fawkes's 1978 work, *Fighting for a Laugh*. Examining entertainers within Britain and their performances in Europe, Fawkes gives a larger scope of British wartime entertainment than does Dean. Including some Canadian performers as well, Fawkes establishes a baseline of comparison for Canadian and British entertainment efforts,

² Basil Dean, *The Theatre at War* (Toronto: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1956).

arguing that no matter the capacity, entertainers helped every person who watched their troop performances fulfill their duties³.

The existing historiography in this area is important though fragmented. The topic of wartime volunteerism in Halifax is not entirely unexplored. One of the earlier historians who tackled Halifax's experience during the Second World War was Thomas H. Raddall. In *Halifax: Warden of the North*, originally published in 1948, Raddall argues that though the citizens of Halifax could give their time in various organizations to help entertain and feed servicemen, nevertheless as restrictions of the war tightened, there was little left to give. With rationing of essentials such as tea, coffee, sugar, butter, and other foods or items that were necessary to make the simplest of meals, Raddall states: "when they were exhausted he could offer little more than a comfortable chair." In this situation, "he" refers to the general civilian and the resources they had available for the guests in Nova Scotia. Though gestures such as this were initially seen with gratitude, as servicemen were grateful for anything they were offered out of kindness, the charm of this kindness started to wear out. Raddall argues that this sentiment contributed to a lack of discipline that in turn resulted in the VE day riots in the city.⁴

A more collective view of Halifax's Home Front efforts is provided by Graham Metson's *An East Coast Port: Halifax at War 1939-1945*, published in 1981. Metson's book, specifically focusing on the Second World War, provides photographs, quotations, and stories from local people. Local events, organizations and contributions are explored in the collection, giving a voice to local volunteers such as Marjorie Whitelaw, who volunteered at the Ajax Club. She and others were able to express their achievements or disappointments from wartime. Metson's book

³ Richard Fawkes, *Fighting For A Laugh* (London: Macdonald and Jane's Publishers Limited, 1978).

⁴ Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax: Warden of the North*, (Halifax: Formac Publishing Limited, 1971).

does not provide much analysis of wartime hosting but does include quotations expressing how the city was overrun, unable to deal with the large demand for entertainment services, and the displeasure of locals or transients due to this experience. He does, through his selection of quotations, point out that a variety of charity organizations or local businesses helped fill the wartime demand, adding a significant amount of aid to the services provided by the three branches of the military and the government, whose aid was lacking.⁵

By 1983, Ruth Roach Pierson had published her *Canadian Women and the Second World War* booklet with the Canadian Historical Association. In her publication, she argues that though women made significant contributions on the Home Front in newly-found work opportunities, this term of work did not make any significant advancements in allowing women to permanently work in these fields. Pierson states that these efforts, though appreciated through wartime, did not create any societal changes to further acceptance of women working outside of the home in non-traditional fields. Though Pierson's work does not specifically focus on wartime Halifax or its volunteerism, it does demonstrate one of the leading arguments in the historiography of women's wartime paid and unpaid work.⁶

Patrick B. O'Neill describes a transition from Britain providing entertainment to Canadian soldiers during the First World War, to (as the war progressed) eventually turning over this responsibility to Canada due to rising costs. Emerging from these changes were Canada's own concert parties, notably the singing and comedic group the Dumbells. O'Neill argues that others are typically overlooked due to the Dumbells' popularity post-war and the mix of talents

⁵ Metson, *An East Coast Port*.

⁶ Ruth Roach Pierson "Canadian Women and the Second World War" Canadian Historical Association Historical Booklet no. 37, *The Canadian Historical Association*, (1983).

presented. Professional entertainers, often under the auspices of charity groups such as the YMCA, were sent to France on tours, frequently experiencing rough conditions as they visited the front lines of the war. O'Neill does also point out that other forms of entertainment, such as cinema, were available at some camps. Overall, O'Neill argues that the Dumbells became a symbol of wartime entertainment to those on the Home Front, although the scope of Canadian entertainers overseas during the First World War is larger than simply this one famous troupe.⁷

By 1985, James F.E. (Jay) White's Master's thesis, *The Ajax Affair: Citizens and Sailors in Wartime Halifax*, had been completed. Through this case study, White analyzes the creation of the social club and the controversies surrounding it. The club was founded to address the lack of available alcohol to all ranks of the Navy, but closed just over a year after its creation because its liquor license was not renewed. White, who interviewed at least one of the founders of the club, presents a detailed analysis of why the club may have closed and the political or societal pressures that led to its becoming internationally known and a highly controversial case. White's work is the only one that gives a detailed account of the club from its creation to its closure.⁸

Only a few years after her contribution to the Canadian Historical Association's Historical Booklet series, Ruth Roach Pierson published a full-length work entitled *'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*. This book is one of the best known in the historiography of Canadian women and their roles on the Home Front during the Second World War. Perhaps due to its pessimistic view on the enduring change of women's roles after the Second World War, Pierson's work challenged much of what was available in the previous historiography on the topic and that has likely contributed the impact of her work. This

⁷ Patrick B. O'Neill "The Canadian Concert Party in France" *Theatre Research in Canada*, 4:2 (Fall 1983).

⁸ James F. E. White "The Ajax Affair: Citizens and Sailors in Wartime Halifax, 1939-1945" (M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984).

book echoes Pierson's argument that women's lives remained largely unchanged after the Second World War, in that they reverted to the home as men returned and took back their jobs, and she argues that real societal change did not ignite until decades later.⁹

In 1990 – in a work significant for the film history of Halifax and other Canadian centres – Manjunath Pendakur detailed the economic and political influence that the American film industry has had over the Canadian industry. Pendakur has attributed a rise in American film due to the popularity of productions in Hollywood to being one of the reasons that the Canadian film industry has not risen to have the same political or economic significance as the American industry. As a result, the American film industry has had significant economic and political power over Canadian regulations regarding film. Pendakur argues that while Canadian film failed to grow at a comparable rate to the American industry, US influence impacted the construction of theatres, sale of companies and the films featured in Canadian cinemas.¹⁰

The Second World War remained a popular research topic through the 1990's in Canada. Jay White continued work on the Home Front, publishing an article called *The Homes Front: The Accommodation Crisis in Halifax, 1941-1951* in 1992. In this work, White looks at the lack of housing in the early years of the Second World War, and how the transient population, largely including service personnel, heavily added to the housing shortage seen in Halifax through that decade. His work gives further context to the overcrowding the city saw during the war. White states that the war initiated these issues of housing and overcrowding in Halifax, and they had an

⁹ Ruth Roach Pierson, *'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).

¹⁰ Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian dreams and American control the political economy of the Canadian film industry* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990).

impact lasting at least a decade as a focus on Halifax's Navy still existed after the Second World War ended.¹¹

Canadian Entertainers of World War Two, written by W. Ray Stephens and published in 1993 takes a look at different concert parties and other entertainment groups throughout Canada during the Second World War. Though the title of his work suggests an inclusive range of concert parties throughout Canada, no concert parties from the Maritimes are included. The book mostly focuses on concert parties from Ontario and Quebec. Stephens includes a personal touch to his book about a family member who was a wartime entertainer. This may have motivated Stephens to maintain a certain focus through his research, though he also suggests that he reached out to various groups and only those he heard back from were included in his study. It is unclear who Stephens contacted about his research, and if the exclusion of the Maritimes from his book is due to a lack of available research at the time or a lack of interest in exploring the region's concert parties. Nonetheless, Stephens does provide details of Canadian concert parties throughout the Second World War, including some smaller groups rather than just those run by military services. His work provides examples for comparison for the purposes of this thesis¹².

In 1999, Sharon M.H. MacDonald completed her Master's thesis on 'hidden labours', or volunteerism, during the Second World War. Primarily focusing on women's contributions, she examines women's more traditional roles during wartime and how their unpaid labour contributed to the war effort in Nova Scotia. Attention is also given to patriotism, as MacDonald argues that women filling traditional roles during wartime have been interpreted as being patriotic, and what propaganda may support or counter that assumption. MacDonald ultimately

¹¹ White, *The Homes Front*.

¹² W. Ray Stephens, *Canadian Entertainers of World War Two* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1993).

argues that though there are signs that some women were overtly patriotic, others were pacifist, but that women were absent from decision-making on matters of war and peace, and used their volunteer efforts in support of all who were impacted by the afflictions of war.¹³

In 1999, Patrick B. O'Neill wrote another piece on Canadian concert parties in times of war. This article, "The Halifax Concert Party in World War II," examines the Halifax Concert Party, which was one of the most successful concert parties in Canada during the Second World War. Due to its success, it was awarded the unique opportunity to travel through Europe at the end of the war and perform for service personnel waiting to be discharged and sent home.

O'Neill focuses on the creators of the concert party, the Mills family, as well as some of its most popular volunteers. Special attention is given to members of the small group who toured Europe. O'Neill argues that the Halifax Concert Party was one of the most effective in the country, and significantly aided in boosting morale and the overall war effort for the Halifax Home Front¹⁴.

A year later, Cynthia Henry's collection of newspaper articles, stories, and schedules for the Capitol Theatre was published. The book, *Remembering the Halifax Capitol Theatre, 1930-1974*, chronologically explores the business's operations. Henry's work demonstrates that the Capitol Theatre, one of the many Canadian theatres owned by Famous Players, became an important part of Halifax's community. Mostly fond stories of the cinema are shared throughout the book, with a special focus on the cinema's opening, its wartime operations, and its eventual demolition well after the war had ended.¹⁵

¹³ Sharon M. H. MacDonald "Hidden Costs, Hidden Labours: Women in Nova Scotia During Two World Wars" (M.A. thesis, Saint Mary's University, 1999).

¹⁴ Patrick B. O'Neill, "Halifax Concert Party in World War Two" *Theatre Research in Canada*, 20:2 (Fall 1999), <https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/tric/article/view/7086/8145> (accessed 24 February 2018).

¹⁵ Cynthia A. Henry, *Remembering the Halifax Capitol Theatre 1930-1974* (Halifax: Atlantic Black Book, 2000)

Laurel Halladay, like O'Neill, focuses her work on wartime entertainment. Unlike O'Neill or Stephens, Halladay specifically looks at the contributions of enlisted performers to morale among soldiers, sailors and airmen. Her Master's thesis, entitled *Ladies and Gentlemen, Soldiers and Artists: Canadian Military Entertainers, 1939-1946*, offers a history of Canadian military entertainers and of the performance groups in the navy, army and air force. She explains in her work that each of these sections of the services was tasked with creating its own entertainment groups for its divisions. Halladay's work argues that enlisted entertainers were more effective at boosting morale among servicemen and were in turn preferred by those serving their country over other forms of entertainment or concert parties created by civilians. Halladay refines this argument in her article "*It Made Them Forget About the War For a Minute*" *Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force Entertainment Units During the Second World War*. Her work differs from those of O'Neill and Stephens, as they both stress that local or civilian concert parties made as much of a positive impact on Canadian servicemen.¹⁶

Marilyn J. McKay describes cinema murals in her 2002 book about Canadian mural paintings from the 1860's until the 1930's. McKay notes that the commissioning of the large murals that surrounded the Capitol viewing room was unusual for the Maritimes at the time of its opening in 1930. She states that mural paintings for businesses tended to be smaller in this area, and were still uncommon compared to their prevalence in other regions of the country such as

¹⁶ Laurel Halladay "'It Made Them Forget About the War For a Minute': Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force Entertainment Units during the Second World War" *Canadian Military History* 11:4 (2002), 20-35; Laurel Halladay "'Ladies and Gentlemen, Soldiers and Artists: Canadian Military Entertainers, 1939-1946'" (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 2000).

Quebec. From her work, it can be seen that the Capitol theatre and its commissions represented an exception to the rule, aspiring to an unusual level of luxury for the high-class theatre.¹⁷

Focusing more specifically on Halifax's wartime contributions is Stephen Kimber's 2002 *Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs: Halifax At War*. Kimber uses historical evidence, including first-person accounts, to construct a narrative of Halifax in the Second World War. Kimber uses various narrators, typically local volunteers or political figures, to convey different aspects of the city's relationship to the war. Though all analysis is done through the historical characters' eyes, these are based on real people and their interviews or primary sources found on their experiences. Due to this, Kimber's work does not add much historical analysis from his perspective on wartime Halifax, except through the introduction and postscript. Overall, he argues that the experience of living in Halifax during wartime was difficult, but that the experiences encompassed in this time had a positive effect on those who lived through them.¹⁸

Laurel Halladay continued to research Canadian entertainment in wartime, in 2004 examining the history of female impersonation as a means of entertaining servicemen. Halladay, focusing her work on military enlisted entertainers, explains the changing perspective of male to female cross-dressing performers throughout the Second World War. She argues that these performers were a critical element of entertainment groups which typically had small numbers of women involved, if any at all. At the beginning of the war, these entertainers were not associated with or assumed to be homosexual due to this practice. Yet Halladay makes a correlation with the rise of enlisted women and female performers with increasing stigmatism towards male to female cross-dressing performers. This resulted in decreasing popularity of impersonation shows

¹⁷ Marilyn J. McKay, *A National Soul: Canadian Mural Painting, 1860s - 1930s* (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002)

¹⁸ Stephen Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers and Blind Pigs: Halifax At War* (Halifax: Double Day Canada, 2002)

and an increase in suspicions of homosexuality. She argues that these changes were not due to a lack of skills on the part of these entertainers, but that by the Second World War the expectations of audiences had changed, amid rising notions that cross dressing was somehow connected to sexually deviant behaviours.¹⁹

Jeff Keshen's work, notably his 2004 book entitled *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* completely opposes the arguments of Pierson, arguing that women's wartime work liberated their social standings and showed society that more male-dominated professions could be women's work too. Keshen and Pierson's works show the extremes of the arguments concerning women's wartime paid and unpaid labour in the historiography. Whereas Pierson argued that women had been used as a reserve labour force, only called upon when society deemed it necessary to fill roles left by men, Keshen states that society became more accepting of women in an occupational sense because of the wartime experience.²⁰

Also in 2004, Paul Moore, Michèle Dagenais and Robert Lewis wrote their book about "movie palaces" in Canada, a term that has been used often to describe the Capitol theatre. Focusing specifically on cities such as Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver, this work provides further context to the creation of these elaborate theatres in the 1930's and how the Capitol fitted into the string of luxury venues throughout the country. The three authors argue that movie

¹⁹ Laurel Halladay "A Lovely War: Male to Female Cross-Dressing and Canadian Military Entertainment in World War I" *Journal of Homosexuality*, 46:3-4, (2004), 19-34.

²⁰ Jeff Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

palaces were placed in larger cities because they would get more traffic and be more in demand in these locations rather than in rural towns.²¹

William D. Naftel was one of the best-known historians of Halifax's wartime history. In 2008 he published an extensive history on the city throughout the Second World War. Each topic or group mentioned in this chronological survey often has a few pages dedicated to their descriptions. Naftel argues that though life was difficult throughout the war -- including the city's declining reputation due to a lack of resources, housing and entertainment for the visiting population -- overall more opportunities were available, and life became better for the people of Halifax after the war. He argues that Halifax changed from a "penny pinching" city to one that, due to the war, was opening and willing to invest in local infrastructure²². The next year he published a photographic history of Halifax during the Second World War, which complemented his previous book well.²³

Lauren Oostveen wrote in 2009 on the Capitol theatre. Though her article is short, it analyzes the physical traits of the theatre rather than its history, encompassing aspects such as the medieval castle theme, the mezzanine, woodwork, décor and new film technology. Also included are a number of photographs, and Oostveen takes note of the features through which the theatre established its reputation for luxury²⁴.

²¹ Paul S. Moore; Dagenais, Michèle et Robert Lewis, "Movie Palaces on Canadian Downtown Main Streets: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver" *Urban History Review*, 32:2, (2004), 3-20.

²² William D. Naftel, *Halifax at War: Searchlights, Squadrons and Submarines 1939-1945*, (Halifax, Canada: Formac Publishing, 2008).

²³ William D. Naftel "Wartime Halifax: The Photo History of a Canadian City at War: 1939-1945" (Halifax, Canada: Formac Publishing Company Limited, 2009).

²⁴ Lauren Oostveen, "From the Vaults: The Capitol Theatre" *Spacing Atlantic* (October 2009) <http://spacing.ca/atlantic/2009/10/17/from-the-vaults-the-capitol-theatre/> (accessed 24 January 2020).

Jason Wilson's 2012 study, entitled *Soldiers of Song: The Dumbells and Other Canadian Concert Parties*, explores the rise, successes, experiences and eventual downfall of Canadian concert parties. While the focus is on the First World War, an important comparative perspective is provided for the later conflict. Military concert parties, to which this book limits its scope, excluded female performers, and so female impersonators took prominent roles. With two major types of impersonation, traditional and satirical, impersonators became a vital part of concert parties, with some even performing in the interwar period. Once women could join the cause later in the war years, the demand for this type of performance dwindled. Mainly focusing on the Dumbells, Wilson describes their Canadian schedule and travels abroad and argues that, deliberately or not, Canadian concert parties filled a need for increasing morale in a way approved by authorities²⁵.

Offering similar comparative insights, Amanda Laugesen's 2013 work centres on Australian soldier concert parties during the First World War and their organized entertainment for soldiers, as well as the reactions of their audiences. Her work underlines that entertainment provided an escape from everyday realities for soldiers, a chance to immerse themselves in a common culture found between soldiers. For the entertainers themselves, performing meant escaping some of the harshness of the war while still contributing to the war effort. Though entertainment had a massively positive effect on soldiers, Laugesen argues that performers were equally positively impacted by these experiences. In 2015, two years after her previous work, Laugesen again writes on the topic of entertainment provided during and after the First World War. Laugesen explores the impact of film on Australian soldiers who served during the First

²⁵ Jason Wilson, *Soldiers of Song: The Dumbells and Other Canadian Concert Parties*, (Waterloo: Wilfred University Press, 2012).

World War, examining the effect of cinema on their leisure time and overall morale in a 2015 article. While asserting that cinema was a part of a larger scope of recreation activities available throughout the war, Laugesen demonstrates that cinema provided both immediate entertainment and a way for soldiers to stay connected to popular culture. The author argues that she is filling a void, as there is no significant historiography on soldiers' relationship to cinema. Examining the relationship soldiers had to cinema before, during, and after the war has led Laugesen to conclude that this relationship developed over time, becoming an integral tie to society as part of an audience, but also as a personal experience.²⁶

Robert and Tamara P. Seiler published their book on cinemas on the Canadian Prairies in 2013. Focusing on the development of film in Western Canada, Seiler and Seiler's work gives a history of Canadian film industries, such as Famous Players, and how the industry changed from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth century. This publication serves as a comparison to other theatres in Canada, such as the Capitol, while also providing broader context on theatre development.²⁷ Seiler and Seiler's work is much more specifically focused on Western Canada than Pendakur's book, yet looks more at the Canadian film industries and specific theatres whereas Pendakur's work provides more history of Canadian and American relations and regulations surrounding film.

In 2014, Randi Green finished an Honours thesis which compared the Capitol Theatre in Halifax with the Imperial Theatre in Saint John, New Brunswick. The two theatres both faced

²⁶ Amanda Laugesen "More than a Luxury: Australian Soldiers as Entertainers and Audiences in the First World War" *Journal of War & Culture Studies*, 6:3, (15 November 2013), 226-238; Amanda Laugesen, "Forgetting their troubles for a while: Australian soldiers' experiences of cinema during the First World War" *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 35:4 (October 2015), 596-614.

²⁷ Robert Seiler et Tamara P. Seiler, *Reel Time Movie Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Prairie Canada, 1896 to 1986*, (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013).

possible demolition, but whereas Saint John was able to preserve the Imperial, Halifax saw the Capitol fall in 1974. Green gives a short history on each theatre before analyzing explanations for why one theatre was saved while the other was not. Green argues that the contrast was owing to the different time frames within which the two were threatened, and to differences between the cities' preservation movements.²⁸

Dorothy Annette Grant added to the historiography of Halifax's Second World War efforts by specifically focusing her book on Charlotte Guy Jeffries. Jeffries, as one of the most popular performers of the Halifax Concert Party, was part of the small group of performers who made the journey overseas to entertain servicemen waiting to go home after the war. Grant follows Jeffries's life from infancy to the early 2000's, paying special attention to her experiences throughout the Second World War. Grant shares personal experiences from Jeffries's life throughout her biography, adding further understanding of the Halifax Concert Party and the state of Halifax as part of the Home Front.²⁹

In 2017, the Halifax Women's History Society published a pamphlet on the history of women's volunteer work in Halifax during the Second World War. This pamphlet was paired with the unveiling of the monument called *The Volunteers*, located on the Halifax waterfront. *The Volunteers* focuses on female volunteers doing tasks that are not often widely considered as wartime work, such as serving food, making materials such as baskets, and collecting scrap. The pamphlet keeps to this theme, exploring the idea that traditional female roles could still be considered as wartime volunteerism, and that women that did not have to fill 'men's jobs' in

²⁸ Randi Green "A Tale of Two Theatres: Discourse and Outcome in Preservation Attempts" (Honours Thesis, Saint Mary's University, 2014).

²⁹ Dorothy Annette Grant, *Turn the Other Cheek: A Story of Courage and Perseverance*, (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2016).

order to contribute to the war. Various wartime organizations structured around volunteerism, including the North End Services Canteen, are featured with a brief description.³⁰ Two years later, the Halifax Women's History Society's Chair, Sharon M.H. MacDonald, wrote an on The Three Debs, a musical group which performed as part of Hugh Mills' Halifax Herald Concert Party Guild. Two of the three members of the band were part of the group that headed to Europe to perform for servicemen who were waiting to be released from service. This article, besides its connections to *The Volunteers*, serves as another example of important though often underestimated wartime volunteerism.³¹

Two very recent articles provide additional perspectives on the history of movie theatres, one of them specifically on the Capitol and the other providing a more general insight into theatre history. Nicholas Fowler gives a short overview of the history of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax in a 2019 article, complementary to the work of Oostveen. Including photographs and an advertisement for shows at the theatre, Fowler gives a revealing perspective on the Capitol's atmosphere and its status as a landmark on one of Halifax's busiest streets, together with other related insights on wartime Halifax. David Sutherland and David States, meanwhile, examine a case of discrimination in a Nova Scotia theatre. Comparing Henry Bundy's experience at the Dundas theatre in Dartmouth to that of Viola Desmond years later in New Glasgow, this work illustrates the powerful though unwritten policies discriminating against African Nova Scotians at theatres in the province. Bundy had chosen a seat in the theatre but was told to move as it was

³⁰ Halifax Women's History Society, "The Volunteers: A Project of the Halifax Women's History Society", (November 2017), <http://halifaxwomenshistory.ca/the-musical-marsh-family>, (accessed 1 November 2019).

³¹ Sharon MacDonald, "The Musical Marsh Family During Wartime in Halifax" *The Halifax Women's History Society*, (2014), <http://halifaxwomenshistory.ca/the-musical-marsh-family> (accessed 1 November 2019).

in a “whites only” section. The two episodes, involving Bundy and Desmond, one before and one after the Second World War, provide powerful combined evidence of racialized barriers.³²

Throughout this historiography, there have been authors such as MacDonald, Naftel, Metson, and Kimber, who have specifically focused their works on the experiences of Halifax during the Second World War. As with this thesis, much of their analysis is directed at volunteerism or service personnel. The type of volunteerism varies, from recognizing women filling roles that were new to them, or roles that were already socially accepted as women’s work. Works by Keshen and Pierson both look at Canada as a whole, adding specific examples to support general trends for their debates on whether the Second World War initiated the acceptance of women in different labour roles. From this debate, it can be acknowledged that historians in the field tend to lean more towards Keshen’s side of the debate, or instead focus on the opportunities civilians had or made during the war, sometimes altogether leaving out how this may have impacted their futures. Writings such as Kimber’s stressed how Halifax changed geographically, with many temporary buildings being erected and torn down, or ambiguous feelings that Halifax would ‘never be the same.’ Though this is likely a realistic feeling of many who travelled through or lived in the city during the war, explanation of exactly how their lives have changed is not always detailed. While Pierson’s and Keshen’s work provide a great understanding for the baseline debate about how women’s roles changed during the war and typical trends of paid and unpaid workers, works more specific to Halifax will be consulted throughout this thesis.

³² David Sutherland with David States, “Precursor to Viola Desmond: Henry Bundy Visits Dartmouth's Dundas Theatre” *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society*, 22, (2019), 97-102.

Other writings such as MacDonald's provide a more detailed, overarching experience of workers in Nova Scotia. While MacDonald's work specifically looks at women's unpaid labour and their often-unrecognized aid to the fighting of the Second World War, scholars like Metson, Naftel, and Kimber overview all of Halifax's wartime efforts. These works provide further details to show what day to day life was like for those living in Halifax during the Second World War, and how different charity groups or businesses interacted with each other to give a fuller understanding of the community during this time. The insight gained from these works is valuable in assessing the following case studies of music, movies and meals in Halifax, interconnecting the three forms of aid and how they served service personnel, especially the large population of sailors in the city. Their works along with the articles and theses of Jay White give further knowledge about the issues surrounding civilians and service personnel in the city such as over crowding, lack of entertainment, low pay of personnel, and lack of access to alcohol or places where liquor could legally be consumed. All these issues influenced the organizations that sprang up or reached out to support not just the general war effort, but those individuals who were serving their country. This thesis will add to the historiography by demonstrating how smaller volunteer organizations who are often forgotten as a type of aid to the community helped Halifax through the Second World War, thus adding variety to the historiography.

Another type of organization that is often left out of the war effort narrative are businesses. Businesses, perhaps forgotten due to fact that workers were paid rather than volunteers, aided the war effort through donations, helping to raise funds, use of their facilities and providing their services. While this thesis uses the Capitol theatre as a case study of a business that addressed rising demand for entertainment in the city, mention of other businesses such as Labatt's (which donated materials to the Ajax Club) are mentioned throughout this

thesis. The Capitol theatre unfortunately has suffered from lack of academic attention. Though shorter pieces by Oostveen and Fowler have been written on the theatre, Henry's work is the most extensive on the subject. Though Henry has clearly done the most work on the theatre by researching and publishing a collection of primary sources, no academic analysis of the theatre's wartime contributions exists outside of brief mentions in works that overview Halifax's wartime contributions such as Metson's, Naftel's and Kimber's. Furthermore, most writings about the Capitol theatre do not extend more than a few pages or are overshadowed by its controversial closure and demolition in 1974. The chapter of this thesis focused on the Capitol theatre will help fill a large gap in the historiography, but also add to the works done on Halifax's general wartime contributions, which lacks focus on businesses and their efforts. Works about cinema, such as Pendakur's and Moore, Dagenais and Lewis add further context by providing a history of cinema in Canada and an analysis of cinematic trends during this period.

Separated from the debate on Halifax's efforts is the history of wartime entertainment for Canadian service personnel. This section of study is split in two, between scholars researching enlisted entertainers and others writing about civilian concert parties. Military entertainment has a longer historiography in part because civilian entertainment groups were not as numerous during the First World War. Enlisted entertainers dominated the First World War's entertainment options in part due to the fact that Canadian wartime entertainment was under the umbrella of the British ENSA until partway through the war. By the time the Second World War occurred, there was more opportunity for civilian concert parties in part due to the changing types of entertainment service personnel expected. Given this drastic change in style and history, both Dean and O'Neill's works provide this context for studies of the Second World War. Halladay's work dominates the Canadian enlisted entertainment field with comprehensive works on both the

First and Second World War, though her works tend to focus on the First World War. How ideas of sexuality, humour, and film effected what types of live entertainment were acceptable between the two World Wars demonstrates that the Canadian military concert parties were a dynamic, lively and relatable form of entertainment for soldiers, sailors and airmen. Her works claim that military entertainment was more effective because enlisted entertainers could better relate to service personnel and therefore were better at boosting patriotism. Other works such as O'Neill's article on the Halifax Concert Party and Stephen's book show the value of civilian concert parties. The debate over wartime entertainment largely stems from the differences between enlisted entertainers and civilian concert parties. While Halladay argues that military entertainers could relate to their audiences because of their shared work in the military and therefore provide a morale boost through patriotism, the other side of the debate is not fully developed. This thesis will help cement the opposing side of the debate to Halladay's work. This thesis argues that civilian concert parties did provide just as much value to service personnel as military concert parties did but focused on escapism rather than patriotism to aid morale. One form of concert party was not superior to the other, both equally impacted the war effort by providing different types of entertainment.

This thesis will explore three different subsections or types of ways the city of Halifax entertained its guests throughout the war. Invited or not, service personnel and the rest of the transient population that flowed into Halifax after September of 1939 needed its help, and as a good host, Halifax did its best to make its guests feel at home.

Banding Together: The Halifax Concert Party

As the Second World War started, Halifax became a natural port of embarkation for Canadian soldiers en route to join Allied forces overseas. Halifax also served as a front for Canada in the Battle of the Atlantic, meaning that soldiers were stationed to Halifax or Nova Scotia to help defend the nation. Such an effort resulted in an influx of people into the city of Halifax. Armed forces personnel, from the army and air force, but primarily from the navy crowded the port city. The population of Halifax before the war was about 50 000 – 60 000 people, but as the war commenced, easily rose to over 100 000 by 1940.¹ A quickly increasing population resulted in the rising question of how Halifax, as a host, could provide recreational services for its sojourners, while also bolstering morale. Expansion of entertainment was not only vital to keeping Halifax orderly, but to the greater war effort.

Concert parties, bands of performers used during wartime, entertained groups such as soldiers at concerts. The use of concert parties was not a new phenomenon of the Second World War. In the context of the hardships of military service at the time, they had become popular in Canada in the nineteenth century.² In 1842, Sir J.E. Alexander had advised units in British North America to provide entertainment for soldiers to distract and de-stress them from the impacts of war.³ Concerts had also been noted for the ability of entertainers to leave their audience feeling patriotic or with a sense of comradeship.⁴ Though not the primary reason to employ entertainers,

¹ Graham Metson, *An East Coast Port: Halifax at War 1939-1945*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 34.

² Patrick B. O'Neill, "Halifax Concert Party in World War Two" *Theatre Research in Canada*, 20:2 (Fall 1999).

³ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁴ Laurel Halladay "A Lovely War: Male to Female Cross-Dressing and Canadian Military Entertainment in World War I" *Journal of Homosexuality*, 46:3-4, (2004), 24.

this could be an important additional benefit of military concerts. The main objective was to increase soldiers' morale. In the twentieth century, concerts in general became more accessible and affordable, allowing them to become a popular source of entertainment for multiple economic classes.⁵ Concerts became a favoured form of wartime and civilian entertainment, which resulted in prioritizing the creation and sustenance of concert parties during the world wars.

Famous Canadian groups such as the Dumbells fulfilled the role of military entertainment during the First World War. The Dumbells, a Canadian military concert party, was made up primarily of enlisted men.⁶ Before 1915, Canada had relied on the British to fund entertainment. As the war drew on, and became more expensive, charity groups such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Knights of Columbus and YMCA had to begin paying for entertainers. Some did provide entertainment services freely or at a low cost, but it was clear that further services were needed. Accordingly, Canadian soldier parties began to grow and popularize. The Canadian Expeditionary Force, Canada's overseas fighting force during the First World War, mandated the raising and maintaining of Canadian soldiers' morale.⁷ This requirement was met through the creation of "concert parties", helping optimize the fighting potential of Canadian soldiers.⁸

Comedy became one of the most popular modes of entertainment. Due to the harsh conditions of the war, dark humour (or black comedy) soared in popularity.⁹ Yet the lack of enlisted women also meant a lack of female performers. To fill this void, cross-dressing became

⁵ Historica Canada, *Concerts*.

⁶ Jason Wilson, *Soldiers of Song: The Dumbells and Other Canadian Concert Parties* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 3.

⁷ Canadian War Museum, Life at the Front...Military Structure, "The Canadian Expeditionary Force", <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/life-at-the-front/military-structure/the-canadian-expeditionary-force/> (accessed 2 March 2020).

⁸ Wilson, *Soldiers of Song*, 1.

⁹ Wilson, *Soldiers of Song*, 3.

another popular element of concert parties. Two major types of cross-dressing performances emerged. The first took a more traditional approach, focusing on supposedly feminine traits in a serious and societally normative sense. The second focused on farcical femininity. Instead of dressing to look convincingly like a woman, this style drew attention to the failure of the performer's female disguise.¹⁰ Added to this was a symbolism for the soldier's war experience. Just as the men at shows were supposed to believe that male cross-dressers were imitating female performers, drag comedy represented the sentiment of many men feeling as though they had been tricked or misled into signing up for the war effort.¹¹ Drag was not seen as threatening to heterosexuality at the beginning of the war due to the homosociability of the forces.¹² The type of comedy and performance style of drag were new or foreign to some, which could have been related to the feeling personnel had of fighting in the war effort.¹³ This, in turn, meant that it was acceptable for soldiers to laugh at this dark style of comedy or at the drag performers, because the soldiers were dealing with unusual circumstances themselves. The lack of focus on homosexuality meant that the cultural environment could be flexible.¹⁴ These groups became widely popular, with both Canadian and British concert parties using female impersonators along with actors, comedians, and singers.¹⁵ Often female impersonators also took on other entertainment roles, like comedy and acting. Their popularity forced the Canadian military to acknowledge the connection between low morale, disciplinary problems, exhaustion, and overall job performance to the availability and quality of entertainment.¹⁶

¹⁰ Halladay, *Lovely War*, 21-22.

¹¹ Halladay, *Lovely War*, 22.

¹² Halladay, *Lovely War*, 23-24.

¹³ Halladay, *Lovely War*, 21.

¹⁴ Halladay, *Lovely War*, 23-24.

¹⁵ Wilson, *Soldiers of Song*, 41.

¹⁶ Laurel Halladay "'It Made Them Forget About the War For a Minute'" Canadian Army, Navy and Air Force Entertainment Units During the Second World War" *Canadian Military History*, 11: 4, (Autumn: 2002), 34.

The Dumbells gained immense popularity, even touring Canada years after the end of the war.¹⁷ Their performance in Halifax and interwar success may have provided inspiration for Halifax to continue an interest in live performances. Though filled with military-hired entertainers rather than civilians, these groups set the stage for the development of civilian concert parties. As a result of their demonstration of the benefits of entertainment for morale during the First World War, emphasis was put on establishing military entertainment when the Second World War began.¹⁸

After the First World War, amateur performances in Halifax grew in demand.¹⁹ Famous musicians such as Portia White started their careers through volunteering their services, until they were in high enough demand to make a living off their profession.²⁰ Amateur performances included various forms of entertainment, meaning Halifax had a large pool of talented performers to call on by the time World War II commenced.

Despite the popularity and effectiveness of concert parties, comforts and relief seem to have been the most underrated types of wartime volunteerism. Perhaps due to the tangibility of collecting scrap or organizing blood drives, the contribution of other types of volunteerism is easier to understand. Yet service personnel needed distractions and uplifting activities. One way to do this was to provide entertainment. Anything from playing music, comedy, dancing and singing were used by the Halifax Concert Party to entertain soldiers, sailors, airmen and those serving with the Merchant Marines in Halifax. On a national scale, the Halifax Concert Party has tended to be overlooked in collections of Canadian entertainers, as in the general works on the

¹⁷ Wilson, *Soldiers of Song*, 167-171.

¹⁸ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 22.

¹⁹ William D. Naftel, *Halifax at War: Searchlights, Squadrons and Submarines 1939-1945* (Halifax: Formac Publishing, 2008), 172.

²⁰ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 172.

subject of W. Ray Stephens.²¹ This seems to fit into a larger of theme of the Maritimes sometimes being overlooked or barely noted by historians focusing on Canada's contributions to the war effort. Some local historians and writers, such as William D. Naftel, Dorothy Annette Grant, Graham Metson, Patrick B. O'Neill, Sharon MacDonald and Stephen Kimber do shine light on the Halifax Concert Party's wartime activities. In his work, Patrick B. O'Neill describes the group's career from its creation to the members' return home from their service abroad post-war.²² Historian Sharon MacDonald and journalist Dorothy Annette Grant focus on specific women who were entertainers for the concert party.²³ Though their works are detailed, scholars focusing more broadly on volunteerism in Halifax, or Nova Scotia have not emphasized entertainment as a wartime contribution in comparisons with other volunteer experiences in the city or province. Yet there were concert parties across Canada, and the Halifax group was known as the most developed civilian concert party in the country. Despite this lack of integration of entertainment into the sphere of Canada's and women's volunteer contributions, this section will examine the Halifax Concert Party – or, to provide its formal title, the Halifax Concert Parties Guild.

The Halifax Concert Parties Guild was a group of volunteer and typically amateur entertainers in Halifax who performed at shows organized for military personnel passing through the city or stationed in the province. Its name, later changed to the “Halifax Herald Concert Party”, was inspired by its sponsor the *Halifax Herald* newspaper.²⁴ The organization was

²¹ W. Ray Stephens, *Canadian Entertainers of World War Two*, (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1993).

²² O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

²³ Sharon MacDonald, “The Musical Marsh Family During Wartime in Halifax” *The Halifax Women's History Society*, (2014).

Dorothy Annette Grant, *Turn the Other Cheek: A Story of Courage and Perseverance*, (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2016).

²⁴ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

founded in 1939 by Hugh Mills, with help from his wife, Jean Mills, and his sister, Gertrude Mills. Hugh Mills was known as the networker for the Concert Party, often coming up with the big-picture ideas for the group. Jean Mills was the organizer, making sure that her husband's ideas came to reality. Gertrude Mills scheduled performers, connecting them with costumes, props, and instruments.²⁵ After the group's creation, its mission was to find talent to perform across Nova Scotia in theatres, halls, clubs, hospitals, bases, and on ships in the Halifax harbour.²⁶ The troupe's volunteers went the extra mile to perform, from climbing onto ships in the middle of the winter wearing evening gowns to driving for hours to spots like Stanley Airport, not far from Windsor.²⁷ As noted in the provincial publication *Nova Scotia Helps The Fighting Man*, "concert party groups went everywhere."²⁸ Including comedy, singing, dancing, magic, and musicians, the Halifax Concert Parties Guild was well-respected and praised for its wartime contributions.²⁹ Performances, or concerts, were typically organized by rounding up available entertainers to create a complete show. The Concert Party became the go-to choice for entertainment needs. Halifax was overflowing with soldiers in desperate need of recreation. Entertaining both soldiers stationed in the city and those waiting to be shipped abroad, the Halifax Concert Party Guild helped fulfill this need.

Hugh Mills was a well-known local businessman and radio personality. He owned the prominent Halifax department store Mills Brothers and had a full schedule outside of managing the store. He was known for his weekly show on CHNS radio, featuring local talents and "Uncle

²⁵ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 174-175.

²⁶ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 175.

²⁷ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

²⁸ The Government of Nova Scotia, "Nova Scotia Helps the Fighting Man: 1945 Edition" (Halifax: The King's Printer, 1945).

²⁹ NSARMS, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Various newspaper articles convey this message, such as "Uncle Mel's Concert Parties Praised in Newspaper Article" or "Praises Show From Home". Articles are undated with an unknown publication. Microfilm 1098.

Mel”, a character who introduced various acts by entertainers.³⁰ It was especially popular with children.³¹ Apart from this, he was also heavily involved in the Theatre Arts Guild. As an actor, Mills played parts in local shows, providing many contacts with performers in Halifax. On more than one occasion, through the Theatre Arts Guild, he met performers who would later appear in his radio and concert party shows.³² Mills had connections with the entertainment community of Halifax and put these to use throughout the war.

One of the performers was Charlotte Guy (married name, Jeffries). In school, she had a special talent for music and her parents had enrolled her in a music class. Not long after, she learned to play the accordion. Due to her interest in music, she volunteered to work hat check and setup at a local theatre. It was not long before others found out about her talents and asked her to help the Theatre Arts Guild. Guy met Mills at the Theatre Arts Guild. To this meeting she attributed her subsequent hiring at Mills Brothers, where she started as a part-time sales assistant and then became full-time. Charlotte was known as a local favourite salesperson at the department store. Due to her connection with Mills, who knew she was a talented musician, she was brought into the Halifax Concert Party by him and appeared on his radio show³³. Guy believed that her appearances on Uncle Mel’s show likely contributed to her popularity later with her performance partner, Lila Tredwell.³⁴

Guy also met Lila Tredwell at the Theatre Arts Guild. Looking past a backdrop that she was working on, Guy noticed a woman sitting by herself. As she went over to chat, as Grant

³⁰ O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

³¹ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 173.

³² Grant, *Other Cheek*, 11.

³³ Grant, *Other Cheek*, 11

³⁴ Grant, *Other Cheek*, 12.

states, Charlotte and Lila instantly bonded over their love for piano and piano accordion.³⁵ It was not long before the two started to perform together. This interaction not only led to a friendship, but to the pairing of Guy and Tredwell in many of the Concert Party's performances.

Throughout their searches to find talent, the Halifax Concert Party had 700 volunteer entertainers and managers sign up to help their shows.³⁶ Volunteers often had day jobs and would perform at or help organize the shows after a long day at work or having to go to work the next morning. Often entertainers performed at more than one show in a week.³⁷ The organizers would help to ensure that performers had transportation to the shows and were able to go home to put on their evening wear between work and the show. Other volunteers did everything from helping to set up equipment, to managing the smaller groups in which entertainers often performed, or serving refreshments.³⁸

Help organizing was also provided by the Halifax Civilian Committee,³⁹ which worked as a liaison between the civilian and military personnel, performing tasks such as helping to organize concert parties. The committee arranged the locations of the shows and when visiting performers were in town, scheduled military concert party members to perform with the Halifax Concert Party. Along with the excellent organization skills of Hugh Mills, this helped ensure the party's success locally, nationally, and internationally. Through his correspondence, some such as William Fields of the Department of National Defence, argued that the success of the party on

³⁵ Grant, *Other Cheek*, 11.

³⁶ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

³⁷ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

³⁸ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

³⁹ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

its own and in comparison to other districts in Canada was due to his direct and constant involvement.⁴⁰

The entertainers had lavish costumes, instruments, equipment, and recordings to entertain the military. Many of these items were donated or discounted, such as costumes rumoured to come from former New York Broadway productions. Receiving the supplies was difficult, as often ships carrying the evening wear were met by an enemy ship or sunk before arriving in Halifax.⁴¹

There was a significant amount of support for the Halifax Concert Party from the Canadian government and military. The local Board of Trade was particularly interested in entertaining soldiers after damage had been done during riots that had followed the end of the First World War. Some argued that the riots likely happened because there was little entertainment available for soldiers, and perhaps could have been avoided if military personnel had had a distraction. Another reason some scholars attribute to causing the violence of the riots is a poor relationship between the residents of Halifax and the service members. The Board of Trade showed its support through the creation of the Regional Citizens Committee, which would work to create good relations between the city and military.⁴²

It had been difficult to find forms of entertainment for personnel staying in the city. There were bars and restaurants, but many would quickly fill up or were only accessible to people of high status or connections. Before the war, Halifax's population was about 60,000, but it almost doubled in the next two years. Due to this, entertainment, as well as infrastructure such as

⁴⁰ Letter forwarded to Hugh O. Mills from "Bill" (William Fields) Department of National Defence, Army Division, Ottawa, June 20th, 1944. Originally addressed to Isadora Bennett of the American Theatre Wing in New York.

⁴¹ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁴² O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

housing, had a difficult time catching up. The ratio of women to men in the city was 1 to 10, making it difficult for servicemen to find a date. Many were housed by local families who had an extra room for personnel or civilians to stay in their home and have dinner with them. Some also went skating on lakes in the city or visited Dingle Park by the North West Arm. Service personnel were often on a budget and could not afford to spend money on entertainment.⁴³ The Halifax Concert Party provided a venue to keep military men busy and was free for personnel to attend. On 15 May 1944, the Concert Party celebrated its 2000th show. In the invitation, Hugh Mills wrote “remember that a date in a Concert Party is a date with service men, who have cancelled their dates, their futures, and often their lives – for us.”⁴⁴

The Halifax Concert Party played a large role in raising the morale of troops in the city and gave performers the opportunity to entertain. Military performers hired to accompany the military sometimes joined in their shows before travelling overseas. Military entertainers who were in the city were often asked volunteer their time to do performances with the Halifax Concert Party. En route to Europe, often with time spent in Halifax before sailing overseas, military performers sometimes joined acts or shows of the Halifax Concert Party. This was done out of convenience, to add variety, or to feature a well-known entertainer.

During the Second World War, large entertainment networks were set up abroad, most notably the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) and the United Service Organization (USO) that helped provide entertainment to British and American soldiers.⁴⁵ The ENSA took volunteers from the entertainment industry, often professional entertainers,

⁴³ Canadian Broadcasting Company “Dancing Was My Duty” *Absolutely Maritimes* (2013), Accessed online: <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2398389403>

⁴⁴ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Invitation written by Hugh O. Mills on behalf of the Halifax Concert Parties Guild, Celebration of 2000th Concert Party, May 15th, 1944.

⁴⁵ Basil Dean, *The Theatre at War*, (Toronto: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1956).

employing by 1944 almost 4 000 artists. The USO, which paid its performers, had about 5 424 on salary.⁴⁶ In Canada, entertainment was split between the different sectors of military service. The Army had “The Army Shows”, the Air Force the had “The Royal Canadian Air Force Shows”, and the Navy had “The Royal Canadian Navy Shows.” Within each of these three sections, smaller concert parties were formed.⁴⁷ They travelled throughout Canada and overseas to entertain soldiers both on the Front and on the Home Front. As early as in 1940, the Canadian Army Command had a total of ten military bands, each with 28 individuals. The groups consisted of 27 artists and one bandmaster.⁴⁸

The effectiveness of military concert parties compared to civilian concert parties has been debated. Historians such as Laurel Halladay argue that civilian concert parties could provide some recreation for soldiers but were less effective due to their lack of relatability. She states:

...civilian groups seemed too out of touch with the military to relate to them in any way through music. As civilians, they were less effective in enhancing the extremely important spirit of comradeship because they themselves were not members of the military team and thus were unfamiliar with service conditions and social trends within the military⁴⁹.

Though civilian entertainers may have not been able to relate to the work of military personnel, this could provide a valuable form of escapism for soldiers, to a degree not matched through military entertainment.⁵⁰ Instead of constantly being reminded of their duties, for a minute, servicemen were able to forget, or even pretend that they were civilians again. Perhaps not as effective at bolstering morale, this form of escapism may have instead calmed anxieties or stresses, providing distraction. Military performances were subject to military approval, and

⁴⁶ Richard Fawkes, *Fighting For A Laugh*, (London: Macdonald and Jane’s Publishers Limited, 1978), 13.

⁴⁷ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 24-27.

⁴⁸ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 22.

⁴⁹ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 24.

⁵⁰ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 24.

typically not influenced by musical trends.⁵¹ Unlike their military counterparts, civilian concert parties were subject only to the approval of their organizers and audiences. Civilian parties may have had more flexibility with the types of shows they performed as well as their schedules. As O'Neill states, "although the Military Concert Parties did much for the morale of the Canadian fighting forces, the Civilian Concert Parties were even more active."⁵² There is no simple comparison between the two. Civilian parties can be rated on more than their comparison to military concert parties or on the one objective of inspiring patriotism, such as the quality of their performances and hospitality, adding to the overall recreation and relaxation of a soldier on the Home Front. Though civilian and military concert parties may have had different nuances or motives, it is unlikely that military performers were exclusively better performers than found in civilian parties. As will be seen later in this chapter, performers from the Halifax Concert Party were scouted to become enlisted entertainers, and therefore were of just as high of caliber as military entertainers. Thus, military and civilian concert party groups fulfilled similar needs, even though often called upon in different locations or at different points in time.

It is also unlikely, due to their different strategies, that one was "more effective" than the other. Positive effects on morale, the confidence inspired in a group facing a hardship, could be gained through either raising patriotism or providing escapism. It is due to an unfulfilled need that civilian concert parties arose, suggesting that the military was unable to fill the need of recreation completely, and that help from civilians was required. As William Naftel states, "The Dominion Government and the armed forces by and large took no responsibility for keeping their charges occupied during their idle hours, and it showed."⁵³ While this may be an overstatement,

⁵¹ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 23.

⁵² O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁵³ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 181.

Naftel does rightly make the point that military entertainment was not sufficient in itself to provide recreation to all service personnel. Though civilian concert parties may not have been as focused on instilling patriotism as they were providing escapism, nevertheless they were filling a need that was left open by shifting demographics due to the war. Through letters quoted later in this chapter, it will be clearly demonstrated that dozens of soldiers and their divisions thanked the Halifax Concert Party for their help in raising the morale of troops.

As the war came to an end, military entertainers were often among the first groups sent home, as they had served overseas for years.⁵⁴ Due to this, there was a need for civilian performers in Europe. Soldiers awaiting demobilization also needed a morale boost, to be distracted from the unrest that arose due to boredom and impatience to be sent home, often with interminable delays. The groups sent to fill this void were categorized as “Special National Concert Parties.”

Hugh Mills, who was overseeing a concert aboard the transport vessel RMS *Lady Nelson* in Halifax Harbour, offhandedly mentioned this program while at a bar. Hearing about the opportunity, the officers of the ship offered them spots on the *Lady Nelson* heading to Europe as a thank you for their hospitality. After this night, Mills took the opportunity to contact the Canadian military and gain permission to accompany the crew through the concert party organization.⁵⁵ Mills planned a trip to New York to visit the American Theatre Wing before his proposal. He was helped by his friend William (“Bill”) Fields, who worked with the Department of National Defence in the Army Branch in Ottawa. Fields wrote a letter to Miss Isadora Bennett of the American Theatre Wing in New York before his trip, telling her to treat Mills well as he

⁵⁴ O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁵⁵ O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

had done more for the troops than any other individual, or perhaps organization, in Canada.⁵⁶

Before sending a letter off to the Canadian military, Mills again contacted Fields, who offered the following advice:

- 1) To point out that the Halifax Concert Party Guild has been entertaining groups longer and more consistently than any other similar civilian concert party in Canada. Also, to mention that the number of shows in which they had performed was higher than other groups.
- 2) That this trip would be a fitting reward or climax for the volunteers who had selflessly performed for five years.
- 3) That the group would be small, around 12 people, and mostly women. It would be inexpensive to fund the group travelling in Europe as it was so small. Female performers were preferred by the soldiers.
- 4) No salary should be asked for the performers; it must be a volunteer trip. This was because the long process of approving salaries would delay approval of the trip. Though no salary would be paid, rations, quarters and transport would need to be supplied.
- 5) To convince the Canadian military that sending the Halifax Concert Party would not open a 'flood gate' for every civilian group in Canada to ask to tour abroad.⁵⁷

Mills followed this advice. He highlighted the idea that it would cost the Canadian government very little as only eleven entertainers would be travelling and most of the costs were already covered. The cost of travelling to Europe was covered by the *Lady Nelson's* officers' invitation,

⁵⁶ NSARMS, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter forwarded to Hugh O. Mills from "Bill" (William Fields) Department of National Defence, Army Division, Ottawa, June 20th, 1944. Originally addressed to Isadora Bennett of the American Theatre Wing in New York.

⁵⁷ NSARMS, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from "Bill" (William Fields), Department of National Defence, Army Division, Ottawa, August 20th, 1944.

and they would stay in Army barracks and eat their rations while aboard. Mills also brought to light that the Halifax Concert Party had had the most performances out of any concert groups in Canada and it would be a good way to end their service on a high note.

Most of the entertainers were women, except for one, and were described as being more popular with soldiers.⁵⁸ There are two distinct possible reasons for the popularity of women as entertainers. One was the lack of women in the military presence abroad, and women entertainers would have reminded the men of the women in their lives back home or life outside of the war. This inclusion of women also served to reinforce traditional gender roles, with the sexualization or high feminization of performances.⁵⁹ The second may have been a discontent with male entertainers. As many men experienced loss and hardship on the front, soldiers could have felt a resentment towards men who were not serving in the forces. O'Neill argues that male performers in large numbers may have reminded them of how different their lives would have been if they were not fighting in the war or sparked the thought that if more men had joined the military, the fight might have been easier. Though there may be some truth to that statement, many entertainment groups such as ENSA and USO had both male and female performers. The introduction of female entertainers into concert parties had meant that drag performers became less common. Drag performances had changed from featuring comedy during the First World War to focusing on the anxieties about their war service and about gender roles. As many women had taken on roles left empty by men serving for the military, these anxieties were given a voice in drag performances to help ease this anxiety. Instead of a farcical impersonation, traditional impersonations became more popular partly because they helped calm anxieties about gender

⁵⁸ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁵⁹ Halladay, *Lovely War*, 30-31.

roles.⁶⁰ Drag transformed from its less stigmatized role during World War One to becoming non-normative, and in turn, defiant and unsuccessful.⁶¹ Female impersonation soon came to be seen as outmoded, as “real women” were incorporated into concert parties.⁶² Thus, high demand for female entertainers no doubt influenced Mills’s decision to bring an almost entirely female group to Europe.

The group – consisting of ten female performers and one male -- included Lilia Tredwell, Charlotte Guy Jeffries, Dorothy Hamilton, Genevieve Lockervie, Ginger Fraser, Irene Spence, Janet MacPherson, Doris Marsh, Mary West, Marjorie West and Julius Silverman.⁶³ Tredwell and Guy were pianists and piano accordionists who accompanied most acts. MacPherson and Marsh were part of a trio that sang together with Grace Buck who did not accompany them on the trip.⁶⁴ Spence was a dancer. Hugh and Jean Mills accompanied the women overseas. There were thirteen additional people from Halifax who came with the group. Twelve helped the group set up their shows, while the other worked as liaisons with the military⁶⁵. The Halifax Concert Party became one of seven groups from Canada to tour after the war ended. The trip was sponsored by the *Halifax Herald* and the *Halifax Mail*.⁶⁶ All were suited in military uniforms while travelling abroad. Leaving in July of 1945, the group started their journey back to Halifax in mid-December.

⁶⁰ Halladay, *Lovely War*, 26.

⁶¹ Halladay, *Lovely War*, 32.

⁶² Halladay, *Lovely War*, 29-30.

⁶³ O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁶⁴ Halifax Women’s History Society, “The Volunteers: A Project of the Halifax Women’s History Society”, Unknown publisher, (November 2017), <http://halifaxwomenshistory.ca/the-musical-marsh-family>, (accessed 1 November 2019).

⁶⁵ O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁶⁶ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 176.

Charlotte Guy most often performed as part of a duo with her partner Lila Tredwell. Due to their excellent musical skills, which had been showcased on Uncle Mel's radio show, both were asked to become part of the group travelling to Europe as the war ended. Guy was initially reluctant to accept, as she had a congenital skin condition on the right side of her face that she felt must be covered by elaborate make-up for performances, and which caused her embarrassment when not concealed. However, she changed her mind after arrangements had been made for her to share her accommodations with Irene Spence, her long-time friend.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Grant, *Turn the Other Cheek*, 1, V, 3, 3-4, 7.



Lila Tredwell (left) and Charlotte Guy (right) and pictured with their piano accordions⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ Photo 1, Charlotte Guy Jeffries Papers, provided with the permission of use from Charlotte Guy Jeffries. Photo taken between 1940 and 1945 by Wright Photography in Halifax.



Lila Tredwell (left) and Charlotte Guy (right) display their piano accordions along with their performance gowns and jewelry⁶⁹.

After five months spent performing in 100 concerts, most of the women went back home.⁷⁰ Charlotte, however, visited England to see one of the world's best plastic surgeons regarding her facial condition, a port-wine stain. The doctor, Mr. Archibald McIndoe, had

⁶⁹ Photo 2, Charlotte Guy Jeffries Papers, provided with the permission of use from Charlotte Guy Jeffries. Photo taken between 1940 and 1945 by Wright Photography in Halifax.

⁷⁰ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

become well-known for treating the facial injuries of military personnel, particularly burns suffered by air force personnel.⁷¹ Charlotte spent six months at the famous Queen Victoria Hospital in East Grinstead, undergoing multiple surgeries. While there, she played piano for other patients in the Canadian wing of the hospital. She made friends during her stay and even travelled to Czechoslovakia with other patients to see a hockey game. At one time, she became the only Canadian patient in the hospital, and was known as “Miss Canada.” The Mills family had arranged for her visit to the hospital. Gertrude, Hugh Mills’s sister, was reading a more recent publication of the same magazine in which Charlotte had discovered her facial make-up when she saw an article about McIndoe. She contacted the doctor and likely Gertrude told McIndoe that his medical fees would be completely covered. There is no record for proof and the issue was never discussed with Charlotte, but it is assumed that the generosity of her friends in the Mills family are to thank for covering the costs of the procedure, as Charlotte never received a bill from the hospital.⁷² Thus, her stay at East Grinstead had reflected the commitment and closeness of the Halifax Concert Party.

Another group in the Concert Party was called The Three Debs – presumably short for The Three Debutantes. They were an ensemble of three female singers, who also sang on a radio show for a year and a half. Janet MacPherson, Doris Marsh, and Grace Buck made up the group, and they were managed by Mary Marsh, Doris’s sister. The Marsh sisters had grown up on a farm in Little Bras D’Or, Cape Breton. Their mother was a talented pianist and moved their family to Halifax in 1936 after being widowed.⁷³ The sisters attended business school in Truro together, afterwards moving back to Halifax, and working as secretaries during the war⁷⁴. Mary’s

⁷¹ Grant, *Other Cheek*, 51.

⁷² Grant, *Other Cheek*, 57.

⁷³ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

⁷⁴ “Mary Elizabeth (Marsh) Johnstone” Obituaries, W.J. Dooley Funeral Services, (July 31, 2014).

involvement with the Concert Party sparked her interest in theatres and musicals. She, along with the other entertainers, were trained by the well-known musician Lois MacGregor.⁷⁵ After the war she returned to Cape Breton, producing musicals.⁷⁶ Both women spent their time volunteering, perhaps inspired by their wartime work.⁷⁷

The Three Debs also joined the Concert Party that travelled to Europe after the war. Doris indicated that she was nervous about leaving her mother in Halifax, but excited to travel across Europe. As she was waiting to be picked up and driven to the ship, she heard the report of the ammunition explosion on Magazine Hill in Burnside. Despite the disruption, their ship left the harbour. Doris described the work as tiring but enjoyable.⁷⁸

As organizers of the group, Hugh and Jean Mills accompanied the performers. Hugh Mills, as Uncle Mel, hosted the shows, while Jean Mills chaperoned the entertainers in the persona of Aunt Mel.⁷⁹ After a week of vacation when first arriving in Europe, they were ready to start their tour. They spent most their time in England, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Germany. The Netherlands had the largest number of Canadian soldiers, and so it served as a high priority. But the group also spent a month in Germany, which entertainers described as a situation that could be depressing. They stayed at barracks, or in family homes that were often in poor condition.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, locals and host families were friendly towards the entertainers. They performed largely for military personnel, but Doris also describes a touching moment

⁷⁵ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

⁷⁶ “Mary Elizabeth (Marsh) Johnstone” Obituaries, W.J. Dooley Funeral Services, (July 31st, 2014).

⁷⁷ “Doris (Marsh) Parks” Obituaries, In Memoriam, (September 27th, 2012).

⁷⁸ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

⁷⁹ O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁸⁰ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

where they stopped to play for orphaned Jewish children who were awaiting adoption in the United States⁸¹.

While accompanying the Canadian military, the Halifax Concert Party was under their protection, but also served under the direction of ENSA.⁸² While overseas, the performers were treated like military personnel, eating rations, wearing uniforms and being asked to behave as though they were military personnel. But these women were not military personnel, despite their wartime contributions, and often giggled or did not correctly comply with orders. As civilian volunteers under the protection of the Canadian military, they had the unique opportunity to experience post-war Europe while not have fought on the front. At the end of their tour, except for Charlotte, the group travelled back home on the RMS *Queen Elizabeth* to New York, then travelling on by train to Halifax. Doris described the experience as “sobering”, as travel was crowded and filled with those who had not been home for years⁸³.

During and after the war, Hugh Mills received dozens of thank-you letters from military organizations and individuals who had seen shows performed by the Halifax Herald Concert Party Guild. The first in Mills’ collection is dated October 31, 1942, from A.E.F. Wright, the Chairman of the Carnival Committee.⁸⁴ The Carnival Committee handled entertainment arrangements for Royal Canadian Ordnance Corps (RCOC.) Wright expressed his sincere appreciation for the show and how it had contributed to the morale of the attendees. Some did not realize the effect the Concert Party would have, such as Clare E. Stratlon, from Scotland, who wrote, “I never knew music could do so much to brighten up a ship and make the boys feel

⁸¹ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

⁸² O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁸³ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

⁸⁴ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Lieutenant A.E.F. Wright, Chairman of Carnival Committee, October 31st, 1942.

more at ease.”⁸⁵ Another letter, written by a Major Brown, stated that the performance had created “pleasant memories in the hearts and minds of every soldier fortunate enough to attend.”⁸⁶ A further correspondent was among many who wanted their well wishes extended to the concert party, stating “the wonderful work done by this concert party who have unselfishly and untiringly devoted their time and talent in providing for the services is highly appreciated by all ranks.”⁸⁷

These letters frequently also expressed gratitude for gifts. The Halifax Concert Party had been active in collecting supplies or comforts for those in need during the war. In one case, a grateful Lieutenant in Command of the HMCS Manitoulin expressed his appreciation for a gramophone.⁸⁸ Gramophones were especially important to the recreation of men at sea, as they were not allowed to have radios on the ships. Many letters sent thanks for records, photographs, and in one case a ukulele.⁸⁹ One Sergeant thanked the party for a gift of records, stating that they were the sailors’ only source of music.⁹⁰ The Concert Party also donated to other groups serving the war effort, such as the Canadian Women’s Army Corps (CWAC). On December 5, 1942, Captain T.E. Dunn wrote to Mills to express his gratitude for tables, chairs, and a flower stand. These materials went towards furnishing the personal quarters of the CWAC of the 21st Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA).⁹¹ The Halifax Concert Party itself also received donations, including a station wagon that was used as transportation for the entertainers. Paying forward this

⁸⁵ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Clare E. Stratlon, Scotland, September 7, 1943.

⁸⁶ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from F.F.M. Brown, V.D., November 3, 1942.

⁸⁷ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter forwarded to Hugh O. Mills originally from M.G. Doyle, Royal Canadian Airforce, September 20, 1943.

⁸⁸ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Lieutenant W.M. Atkinson, R.N.R., HMCS Manitoulin, December 12, 1942.

⁸⁹ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Lieutenant M.M. Maeteuyie, Commanding Officer on H.M.S. Kilkhampton, December 19, 1943.

⁹⁰ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from J.G. Ruckh, Sgt, Canadian Naval Ship “Lady Nelson”, January 12, 1944.

⁹¹ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Captain T.E. Dunn, RCA, December 5, 1942.

generosity, the station wagon was sometimes lent to those visiting the city, such as Frieda Held, Assistant Director of the Women's Voluntary War Services, Department of National War Services.⁹²

Along with his generosity, Mills was in frequent contact with Canadian military groups who wished to put on their own shows for personnel or needed additional materials for their military concert party. One example is the Royal Canadian Air Force, in a letter to Hugh Mills of September 6, 1944. After thanking Mills for the show his unit attended in August, Mel Warner asks Mills for any songs or skits that he could spare and send to the air force. On the letter is a drawn on large check mark on this question, suggesting that Mills had found something and sent it along to Warner.⁹³ Mills also sent costumes on loan to military bases looking to put on their own shows, such as the RCAF base in Maitland, Nova Scotia.⁹⁴

Both O'Neill and Grant have acknowledged Hugh Mills as making a driving contribution to the Halifax Herald Concert Party Guild's success. His networking, organization, time, and effort were necessary to make his concert party arguably the most popular in the country.⁹⁵ On top of this, it is estimated that the comforts and means of entertainment distributed by the Halifax Concert Party to soldiers totalled \$11 500 000 in value.⁹⁶

While celebrating the contributions of women as volunteer entertainers, it is also important to recognize that men and those of diverse backgrounds were entertainers as well, or

⁹² NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Muriel L. Gibson, December 11· 1942.

⁹³ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Mel Warner, Royal Canadian Airforce, September 6, 1944.

⁹⁴ NSARMS, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O Mills, from M.E. Waren, Royal Canadian Airforce, May 31,1944.

NSARMS, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O Mills, from M.E. Waren, Royal Canadian Airforce, June 19· 1944.

⁹⁵ O'Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

⁹⁶ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 176.

aided their success. As featured in “The Volunteers”, a pamphlet created by the Halifax Women’s History Society, there appears to be an image of an African Nova Scotian trio performing for Uncle Mel’s Talent Club. While this photo may be promising to the historian, there are still questions as to the extent to which minorities were included in concert activities and what they experienced. Was the talent club just another name for the concert party, or a different group run by Mills? How were performances and resources for minority performers and volunteers prioritized? What were interactions between these performers and others in the city like? Were they well received by their audiences? Though this photograph does seem to indicate some degree of inclusion, it appears through examination of the group photos of the Concert Party in Europe that there were no performers of any visible minority.⁹⁷ Unfortunately, there has been no mention or photos of these performers in the Hugh O. Mills Papers seen in the Halifax Women’s History Society pamphlet. As a researcher, one must acknowledge that these discoveries illustrate just how much work needs to be done to ensure a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the historical record.

It may be tempting to see these women as servicewomen, as their uniforms suggested. While their contributions to the war effort were extensive, they were civilians. Having a unique experience of being supervised by the military abroad after the war, but having held up the Home Front back home gave them insight into two different wartime experiences. Their concerts overseas saw as many as 1500 in the audience at each show.⁹⁸ In total, including the 100 shows performed abroad, the Halifax Concert Party presented about 2 400 shows.⁹⁹ Thus, the Halifax Herald Concert Party’s wartime contributions went a long way towards alleviating the distress of

⁹⁷ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, unidentified scrap book page.

⁹⁸ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

⁹⁹ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 175; O’Neill, *Halifax Concert Party*.

military personnel from the hardship of war. As MacDonald states “Although their efforts are now mostly forgotten, civilian volunteers during the war mustered the amateur talent and the organizational framework to produce a continually changing roster of performances over a six-year period.”¹⁰⁰ Personal letters to Mills after the war confirmed not only the gratitude service personnel had for the group’s work, but that it had created lifelong memories. As Dave Roberts, who seemed to be a friend of Mills’ made during the war, wrote to Mills

Please give my kind regards to your sister and Mrs. Mills, and to as many of the party as are still about. They may not remember much about that quiet, rather speechless bloke, who used to sit in the corner of the office, but it will be many a long day before he forgets them.¹⁰¹

Their service not only boosted the morale of those military personnel for whom they performed but changed the course of their own lives as well. These women were able to take the opportunity to be professionally trained and perform for large audiences, and dedicated time to what must have already been long days travelling across Nova Scotia and Europe. The Halifax Concert Party Guild contributed to the success of the war on the Home Front and overseas, serving both their communities and the nation.

¹⁰⁰ MacDonald, *Marsh Family*.

¹⁰¹ NSARM, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh O. Mills from Dave Roberts, September 17, 1946

The Capitol Theatre: “The Show Place of the Maritimes”

A walk to the end of Spring Garden Road in Halifax, to where it intersects with Barrington Street, provided an entirely different view in 1939 than it does over eighty years later. Drawing a crowd in 1939 were the bright lights of the Capitol Theatre. Coming up by then on its first full decade of service, the Capitol Theatre had been built in 1930 in the location of the Academy of Music, later known as the Majestic Theatre. The Majestic was bought by the entertainment corporation Famous Players in 1927 and was torn down in 1929 to make way for the new cinema.¹ Attached was a four-story office building.² The Capitol Theatre was a ‘first-run’ theatre, meaning that it showed new, good-quality films. The Capitol, the Orpheus, and the Casino were the three main first-run theatres in Halifax.³ With seating for about 2000 patrons (2014 to be exact), the Capitol would become an exceptionally popular motion picture venue in wartime Halifax.⁴

In the early twentieth century, film had begun to boom. That it did so was surprisingly controversial, as some believed that film had a bad influence on those who watched it. In response to this concern, the idea emerged of lavishly appointed theatres that would attract the approval of the upper classes.⁵ This in turn generated a belief that high-quality films deserved an appropriate atmosphere and would attract upper-class patrons. The practice was also used to

¹ NSARM, Microfilm: 7642, The Mail Star, “A Second Golden Age? Neptune is the direct descendent of the Strand and Garrick Playhouses” by J. Lynden Best, Thursday, October 19, 1972, 42.

² Cynthia A. Henry, *Remembering the Halifax Capitol Theatre 1930-1974*, (Halifax: Atlantic Black Book, 2000), 2.

³ William D. Naftel, *Halifax at War: Searchlights, Squadrons and Submarines 1939-1945*, (Halifax: Formac Publishing, 2008), 145.

⁴ Halifax Municipal Archives, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Mail Star The Chronicle Herald*, “Big Screen Memories Still Flicker Brightly”, by Peter Duffy, Thursday, September 9, 1999, A9.

The Halifax Mail “Theatre Staffs Attend Dinner” Monday, December 18, 1944, in Henry, *Remembering*, 37.

⁵ Manjunath Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams and American control the political economy of the Canadian film industry*, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990). Canadian Electronic Library (Firm), Novanet (accessed 20 February 2020), 53.

draw in more customers and, it was hoped, increase the income of cinema. Theatres that were ‘first run’ received the best quality films first to show their audiences, and the best equipped theatres were the ones that gained this access to distribution. If new, more elaborate theatres were built, they could push out the already existing ‘first run’ theatres and create a competitive market. As World War I materialized, some Canadians specifically noticed more American films in their cinemas, which was especially notable considering that Canada had been filled with imperial patriotism. There was an effort by some Canadian companies, such as the owners of Canadian Paramount Pictures Corporation Limited to order more British films to be shown in their Canadian theatres.⁶ The Canadian government also inserted itself into the industry to promote war propaganda. The increased popularity of film grew after the war, and the momentum continued into the 1920s. In the early 1920s the entrepreneur Nathan Louis Nathanson bought Famous Players and began strategically placing theatres and ensuring exceptional service in order to provide visitors with a new form of entertainment. This mandate resulted in Famous Players expanding and building their deluxe styled theatres, many of which bore the name “Capitol.”⁷ Due to various acquisitions and distribution deals across Canada, Famous Players became, according to Manjunath Pendakur, “clearly the dominant company in Canada’s motion picture business.”⁸ The company effectively had a monopoly over Canada, either making deals with smaller theatres or buying them outright.⁹ Urban theatres that had a large seating capacity and were ‘first run’ theatres generated the greatest income.¹⁰ Due partly to a laissez-faire attitude in film policy, a focus by the Canadian government on war and other types

⁶ Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams*, 53.

⁷ Robert Seiler et Tamara P. Seiler, *Reel Time Movie Exhibitors and Movie Audiences in Prairie Canada, 1896 to 1986*, (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2013), 185-186.

⁸ Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams*, 72.

⁹ Paul S. Moore, Michèle Dagenais et Robert Lewis, “Movie Palaces on Canadian Downtown Main Streets: Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver” *Urban History Review*, 32:2, 3-20.

¹⁰ Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams*, 72.

of propaganda, as well as a fascination with Hollywood, more films shown in Canada were filmed and created in the United States.¹¹ By the time the Halifax Capitol was built, Famous Players was in a favourable position to be expanding its luxury movie company across the country.

Few scholars have specifically written about the Halifax Capitol and its history. Most of the coverage that the Capitol has received is in the form of newspaper items or brief internet articles. Some who have specifically covered the topic include Cynthia Henry, Randi Green, Alex Nickerson, Peter Duffy, Nicholas Fowler and Lauren Oostveen. Alex Nickerson wrote a piece that was featured in the 1970s in the Halifax *Mail Star*. He detailed the Capitol's glamour and compared it to another 'movie palace' in Boston.¹² In 1999, Peter Duffy covered Cynthia A. Henry's research and a meet-up she had with past patrons or employees of the Capitol.¹³ Henry is one of the best-known researchers of the Capitol Theatre. Growing up in Halifax during the end of the cinema's life, she witnessed the destruction of the theatre. This likely inspired her interest in the topic. Henry has made a collection, called "Remembering the Halifax Capitol Theatre", which was published in 2000.¹⁴ Her publication includes an introduction written by Henry, a timeline of all the films and live performances known to have been presented at the theatre in chronological order, and a section of personal stories shared by past employees and patrons. The timeline is complemented by newspaper advertisements, articles, letters and photos relating to the Capitol in each part of its history. Her collection will be used as a source book throughout this chapter, with details on which specific article, movie showing, or photo is being

¹¹ Pendakur, *Canadian Dreams*, 78.

¹² HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, "The 1930's: era of the great 'movie palaces'", by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

¹³ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Mail Star The Chronicle Herald*, "Big Screen Memories Still Flicker Brightly", by Peter Duffy, Thursday, September 9, 1999, A9.

¹⁴ Henry, *Remembering*.

cited. Though filled with sources, Henry's book does not provide an academic analysis of the Capitol's history, but rather a collection of primary sources and reconstructed timelines.¹⁵ Marilyn J. McKay included an analysis of the design of the Capitol, specifically the commissioning of the murals for its theatre, in her book discussing Canadian mural paintings. She argues that the Capitol was an exception to the rule in the Maritimes, where commissioned art for commercial purposes was not as popular as in other provinces in the country.¹⁶ McKay also states that the size of the murals made the commissioning unique.¹⁷ In 2009, Lauren Oostveen published an article on the Capitol in "Spacing Atlantic", a subsection of *Spacing Magazine*.¹⁸ Her article mostly showcases different features of the theatre, pointing them out specifically in multiple photos. Along with these details, she provides a brief narrative about the overall existence of the Capitol Theatre. In 2014, Randi Green covered the Capitol in comparison with the Imperial, located in Saint John, New Brunswick. Green analyzes the attempts to conserve the theatres, while including a brief history of both, noting that the Imperial was successfully saved while the Capitol was torn down due to the time difference of when each campaign was brought up as well as the historical context of each city.¹⁹ Nicholas Fowler's article gives a brief history on the Capitol, mainly detailing its opening and its destruction.²⁰ Published in 2019, Fowler's work is one of the most recent on the Halifax Capitol. Similar to Oostveen's writing, this is a brief article summarizing the main details of the Capitol's 43 years in Halifax. Henry has clearly done the most research on the Capitol. Green and Fowler have both

¹⁵ Henry, *Remembering*.

¹⁶ Marilyn J. McKay, *A National Soul: Canadian Mural Painting, 1860s - 1930s*, (Toronto: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 67-68.

¹⁷ McKay, *National Soul*, 67-68.

¹⁸ Lauren Oostveen, "From the Vaults: The Capitol Theatre" *Spacing Atlantic* (October 2009) <http://spacing.ca/atlantic/2009/10/17/from-the-vaults-the-capitol-theatre/> (accessed 24 January 2020)

¹⁹ Green, *Tale of Two Theatres*, ii.

²⁰ Nicholas Fowler, "The Capitol Theatre" *Historic Nova Scotia* (March 2019) <https://historiconovascotia.ca/items/show/99> (accessed 22 January 2020).

published history-based works on the topic, but neither focuses significantly on the Second World War, instead looking more to the opening and eventual destruction of the Capitol. Though it has been acknowledged by historians such as William Naftel that theatres in Halifax, including the Capitol were significant to aiding morale and adding entertainment to a city that was in dire need, details about specific shows, events and experiences are not detailed outside of Henry's collection.²¹ Thus, an overall analysis of the war years remains to be written.

Famous Players still owned the Halifax Capitol Theatre during the Second World War²². It was not the only Famous Players theatre in the city, as the Oxford, Garrick, and Orpheus were all operated by the same company.²³ The Halifax Capitol was often compared to the Paramount in Boston. Both were among the "Hollywood Palaces" of the time. Though both theatres provided a high-quality experience, some of those from Halifax who visited Boston claimed that the Capitol was superior as it sat more patrons and provided a better movie watching experience.²⁴ There was also another Capitol in the Maritimes, located in Moncton, New Brunswick. Moncton's Capitol Theatre was built in 1922 and was converted to a cinema later. The Moncton Capitol was less than half the size of the one in Halifax, seating only 783 people. In the early 1990s, the city of Moncton bought the theatre and restored it to its original live performance stage, where concerts continue today.²⁵

²¹ Naftel, *Halifax at War*.

²² HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Mail Star The Chronicle Herald*, "Big Screen Memories Still Flicker Brightly", by Peter Duffy, Thursday, September 9, 1999, A9.

²³ *The Halifax Mail* "Theatre Staffs Attend Dinner" Monday, December 18, 1944, in Henry, *Remembering*, 37.

²⁴ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, "The 1930's: era of the great 'movie palaces'", by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

²⁵ Capitol Theatre (Moncton, New Brunswick), "History" <https://capitol.nb.ca/en/your-capitol/item/6-the-beautiful-capitol-theatre> (accessed 17 February 2020).

When the Halifax Capitol opened on October 31, 1930 its owners worked on making a connection to the community.²⁶ They portrayed the Capitol as becoming a landmark of Halifax and “the show place of the Maritimes.”²⁷ This included an advertisement that was featured in the Halifax *Mail Star*, stating that the Capitol opening was “The Greatest Event in Nova Scotia’s Theatrical History... a great new era in entertainment, service and comfort revealed to Halifax in a veritable palace of undreamed luxury and splendour.”²⁸ Besides this, the Capitol printed souvenir programmes to be released at the opening of the theatre. The souvenir programmes passed out on opening night listed multiple films. Two of these were Halifax-specific. The first was entitled “Historic Halifax.” This film was a camera tour of the city. The second film was called “George Arliss salutes Halifax,” in which the famous actor George Arliss starred in a short film produced in England especially for the opening of the Capitol theatre.²⁹ The film was produced by Warner Bros. Arliss was likely chosen for this role because he starred in the feature film of the evening, *Old English*. In total, about six films were shown on opening night, most of them being short films to entertain the viewer before the main feature was presented. Their aim was to introduce Halifax to the new theatre, to become part of the social life and community of Halifax, and of course to build up their clientele. The Capitol theatre hosted live shows, but it was clear that its future was focused on motion pictures. As the company clearly outlined in the opening pamphlet “Your HALIFAX-CAPITOL THEATRE is one of the first to be built entirely in anticipation of scientific entertainment miracles of the present and the future – talking pictures

²⁶ Halifax Municipal Archives, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, “Service Manual: Famous Players Theatres” booklet, 1.

²⁷ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, “Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930”, 8.

²⁸ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, “The 1930’s: era of the great ‘movie palaces’”, by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

²⁹ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, “Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930”, 4.

and other developments future generations will know and enjoy.”³⁰ The Capitol planned to remain in Halifax for the long run, hoping to evolve through the decades as the city did.

The Capitol provided a high-quality atmosphere for its customers. The ushers and some other staff wore pressed uniforms with red or white jackets and blue slacks or dresses. In the 1930s, going to see a film entailed dressing up. All genders wore pillbox hats and had silver or brass buttons on their uniforms.³¹ The doorman wore a tuxedo to welcome guests into the building. As the staff were well dressed, patrons were expected also to wear their best.³²

Adding to the magic of the theatre was its theme. The Capitol was designed to mimic an English medieval castle. It was equipped with a drawbridge connected to chains to make it appear as though the bridge had been lowered for guests to enter, a knight standing in the lobby to guard the entrance to the mezzanine, a fireplace in the lounge, gargoyles that watched over patrons, as well as arches, paneling, wood work and windows that fitted the medieval theme.³³ This was thanks to architect Murray Brown as well as interior designer Emmanuel Briffa.³⁴

Mixed with this medieval theme was a level of sophistication to match the tuxedos and other glamorous evening wear. A chandelier and red carpets were among the most notable signs of luxury in the Capitol when it opened.³⁵ The theatre had cord red plush seating, while the lounge had heavy tapestry seating. Stage drapes were made of plush and silk.³⁶ Yet the custom-

³⁰ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, “Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930”, 2.

³¹ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 145.

³² HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Mail Star The Chronicle Herald*, “Big Screen Memories Still Flicker Brightly”, by Peter Duffy, Thursday, September 9, 1999, A9.

³³ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, “The 1930’s: era of the great ‘movie palaces’”, by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

³⁴ Oostveen, *From the Vaults*.

³⁵ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Mail Star The Chronicle Herald*, “Big Screen Memories Still Flicker Brightly”, by Peter Duffy, Thursday, September 9, 1999, A9.

³⁶ Unknown newspaper, unknown publication date, “Capitol Is Real Asset To Halifax: Capitol Theatre Is Most Modern Play House In Dominion”, in Henry, *Remembering*, 2.

made paintings which greeted patrons in the theatre also added to this atmosphere. Eight large historically themed paintings hung high up on the walls of the theatre on either side of the screen. Emmanuel Briffa, who had designed and decorated about 200 theatres throughout North America, also took on the project of designing the new Halifax Capitol. He was originally from Malta and had been trained as an artist in Naples and Rome.³⁷ Briffa eventually moved to Montreal and made his career in Canada.³⁸ Included in his vision were spots for eight re-created paintings in the theatre, all of them from already-existing paintings. These were hung high up, as to overlook the room. Though five of these eight paintings would be more generally about Nova Scotia, the theatre had three re-creations especially made on the topic of Halifax. Briffa consulted Harry Piers, the Curator of the Nova Scotia Museum at the time, about which paintings should be re-created for the Capitol.³⁹ The paintings that made the final cut and eventually hung in the theatre included “The Founding of Halifax” by Charles Jeffreys, “The Halifax Tandem Club” by William Eager, and “The Shannon and Chesapeake” by John Theophilus.⁴⁰ In “The Founding of Halifax”, Horseman’s Fort which was built in the 1750’s on a section of Barrington Street was depicted. Horseman’s Fort was used as an early defense for the British who had landed in Chebucto and planned on colonizing the area.⁴¹ The second, “The Halifax Tandem Club”, showed members of a social and sports clubs arriving at Grand Parade.⁴² They were preparing to go on an excursion on Old Windsor Road. Dalhousie College or what is now used as

³⁷ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, “The 1930’s: era of the great ‘movie palaces’”, by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

³⁸ McKay, *National Soul*, 67.

³⁹ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, “The 1930’s: era of the great ‘movie palaces’”, by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

⁴⁰ McKay, *National Soul*, 67.

⁴¹ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, “The 1930’s: era of the great ‘movie palaces’”, by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

⁴² HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, Untitled Letter or Speech, by Jeffrey Spalding, Co-ordinator of Gallery Programme, February 1978, 1.

City Hall can be seen in the background.⁴³ The third painting, “The Shannon and the Chesapeake” was a reproduction of a John Theophilus original. The painting depicted the United States warship the *Chesapeake* being towed into Halifax Harbour after a defeat by the HMS *Shannon* offshore from Boston during the War of 1812.⁴⁴ The other five were entitled “The Siege of Louisbourg” by R. Paton, “The Order of Good Cheer” also originally painted by Charles Jeffreys, and “Loyalists Arriving at Shelburne”, “The Landing of the Loyalists”, and “Wolfe Landing at Louisbourg” all by unknown artists. The size of the murals and the fact that they represented local history was unusual for the commercial or professional mural painting business, which was typically commissioned to paint smaller local landscapes. This selection of images presents an ideal Nova Scotia, a Nova Scotia which glorifies historic battles and its colonial history. It may also connect to the thought of better times for Nova Scotians who were facing the Depression as the theatre was built. The Capitol’s artistic choices reflected the escapism that viewers could experience through its films, but also broke the trend of landscape painting. The Capitol wanted to remind visitors of Halifax’s history, while reminding them of its lavishness and modern cinematic advances. The decision to include these paintings was made by a committee of people who included local businessmen and employees of Famous Players.⁴⁵ The paintings added a personal touch to the theatre which told patrons that the Capitol acknowledged their history and that they too would become a part of it.

Besides the atmosphere of the theatre, the Capitol was eager to point out that it used newer technologies, such as a “...weather manufacturing plant which assures your healthful

⁴³ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, Untitled Letter or Speech, by Jeffrey Spalding, Co-ordinator of Gallery Programme, February 1978, 1.

⁴⁴ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Mail Star The Chronicle Herald*, Opinion Section, “The 1930’s: era of the great ‘movie palaces’”, by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

⁴⁵ McKay, *National Soul*, 67-68.

comfort both winter and summer.” The weather manufacturing machine, it seemed, worked to keep temperatures comfortable and the air clean for patrons all year around. Air was supposed to be sweet or fresh, described as “wine-like” or “eternal spring” in the theatre’s opening souvenir programme.⁴⁶ Another modern product that the theatre promoted was its use of asbestos to make the building fireproof. The company claimed that a “modern automatic asbestos curtain fully protects the patrons of any danger of fire from the stage.” Though after the 1970s use of asbestos in buildings became less common due to health concerns, in the early twentieth century asbestos was a new and popular building material. Along with the asbestos, the building was protected by the installation of sprinklers.⁴⁷ Another innovation, though not installed until late 1943, was popcorn machines.⁴⁸ The machines were specially designed to make popcorn fresh for the intermission.

The Capitol also focused attention on its new motion picture screen, which was a big attraction to visitors. As the theatre stated upon its opening, “the Capitol was one of the first in North America to be built specifically as a motion picture cinema to accommodate the advent of talking pictures.”⁴⁹ Unlike some other theatres on the continent that had either continued their focus on live performances or converted their old theatres to be suitable for motion picture viewing, the Capitol was specifically built for film watching. Modern electrical panels were installed to control the theatre lights. These controls let the lights be dimmed or colour schemes to be added. Speakers hung from the ceiling. Though movies was its focus, the Capitol did host

⁴⁶ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, “Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930”, 8.

⁴⁷Unknown newspaper, unknown date of publication, “Capitol Is Real Asset To Halifax: Capitol Theatre Is Most Modern Play House In Dominion”, in Henry, *Remembering*, 2.

⁴⁸ “1940” Section of Schedule, October 24, ““Popcorn” is coming to the Capitol...”, in Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

⁴⁹ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, Untitled Letter or Speech, by Jeffrey Spalding, Co-ordinator of Gallery Programme, February 1978, 1.

live shows in its large viewing space: the theatre was "...able to accommodate any large travelling theatrical production which may visit the city."⁵⁰ Phyllis Fenerty, who attended the grand opening of the Capitol Theatre with her mother, was astonished by the filming techniques used, sharing that:

Just before the movie began, George Arliss appeared on the screen welcoming us to the new Halifax Capitol Theatre. He pointed with uncanny accuracy to various points of interest in the theatre, such as the velvet seats and the iron chandeliers, including the scenes of early Halifax pictured high up on the walls. It was if he was right there, sitting on stage talking to us!⁵¹

It was clear that new filming techniques on the large motion picture screen made an impression on patrons. With the lavish décor and high-end technology features of the Capitol, the theatre wanted to communicate that "Nothing is too Good for Halifax."⁵²

With glamorous surroundings came an expectation for a high level of service. Each member of the staff who interacted with the public had certain behaviours and procedures that they were strictly required to follow. The ushers were valued as among the most vital staff of the theatre. They were tasked as the hosts of the theatre and were told to "regard the patrons as [their] personal guests" Everything from escorting patrons to their seats, helping children reach the water fountain, and handling disagreements or dangerous situations were among the responsibilities of the ushers.⁵³ The doorman was among the staff the most responsible for the theatre's operation. Doormen were tasked with knowing show schedules, greeting guests, and were expected to know the names of as many patrons as possible, especially local celebrities or

⁵⁰ Unknown newspaper, unknown date of publication. "Capitol Is Real Asset To Halifax: Capitol Theatre Is Most Modern Play House In Dominion", in Henry, *Remembering*, 2.

⁵¹ Quotation from Phyllis Fenerty, right of page, in Henry, *Remembering*, 1.

⁵² HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930", 6.

⁵³ Halifax Municipal Archives, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Service Manual: Famous Players Theatres" booklet, 3.

other high-status guests.⁵⁴ Cashiers were also expected to know as many patrons' names as they could remember, especially returning customers. Emphasis was put on addressing patrons by their names.⁵⁵ The possibility of repeat sales and cultivating relationships through this practice was prioritized. Politeness was also key to the employee's professionalism, considering the lavishness of the theatre's atmosphere and the dress of both staff and patrons. There were specific instructions on how to address a guest depending on the situation. When requiring a patron to do something such as move a leg out of the walkway, the employee was asked to frame a request as a question rather than a demand. Using a phrase such as "Sir, may I ask you to please move your leg closer to your seat?" was preferred to "Sir, we need you to move your leg out of the walkway." Depending on the group, a different person from the party was to be addressed by a staff member. If a man and a woman were together, the man would automatically be the one who would be addressed. If there were two or more women, the staff member should speak to the oldest of the women, unless it was obvious that one of the younger women was hosting the group. The same protocol applied to a group of two or more men. If there was a large party or a group with both men and women, the staff member was responsible for figuring out which person was hosting the group and trying to direct the conversation towards them.⁵⁶ As stated by the Service Manual "the Motion Picture Industry is becoming more and more universally recognized as an important part of Canadian life."⁵⁷ With this in mind, it was

⁵⁴ Halifax Municipal Archives, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Service Manual: Famous Players Theatres" booklet, 13.

⁵⁵ Halifax Municipal Archives, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Service Manual: Famous Players Theatres" booklet, 12.

⁵⁶ Halifax Municipal Archives, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Service Manual: Famous Players Theatres" booklet, 7.

⁵⁷ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Service Manual: Famous Players Theatres" booklet, 2.

important for the Capitol to make positive first impressions to ensure returning clientele, especially in a city the size of Halifax.

Who was hired at the Capitol Theatre? Patrons were assured that employees came from the finest homes, civility, culture, background and breeding according to the Souvenir Programme for the Theatre's opening. These employees were often described as men, many of whom were graduates, who were planning a career in the theatre profession.⁵⁸ What a "good cultural background and breeding" meant may have been at the discretion of each manager or location, but one must question if racism, sexism and classism were components in the hiring of each staff member. Despite this description, the Capitol also hired women. The employee handbook made sure to note that while male pronouns are used throughout the whole book, that this did not exclude female employees from the same rules as men. The service manual included a photo of a female employee on the front, perhaps trying to be more inclusive, despite not using inclusive language. More likely, the theatre company was trying to portray an image of glamour. The company maintained that "now, more than ever before, the same opportunities are offered to both men and women in the Canadian Motion Picture Industry."⁵⁹

A photograph of the staff of not only the Capitol, but the Casino theatre, Orpheus, Garrick, Family, Community, Gaiety, and Oxford appeared about a year or more before the war began. The photo, seen in Henry's collection, includes men, women and a dog but no visible minorities seem to be present. The same observations may be made on two photos from 1944 and 1945 of staff members in Henry's collection.⁶⁰ Diversity of staff and patrons is difficult to

⁵⁸ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930", 3.

⁵⁹ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Service Manual: Famous Players Theatres" booklet, 1.

⁶⁰ *The Halifax Mail* "Win V Pennant" Monday, November 8, 1943. Staff photo included in article, in Henry, *Remembering*, 36.

assess considering the sources available. However, context can be found in certain cases at Nova Scotia movie theatres of the time, or close to it. The best-known case involved Viola Desmond, who was an African Nova Scotian businesswoman. She visited the Roseland Theatre in New Glasgow in 1946, paid for a ticket and sat down in the “whites only” section. She was repeatedly told to leave the section, staff insisting that she was not allowed to sit in that seat because she was not white. Desmond did not move. She was then arrested and charged with a tax violation, which she later appealed and lost. Another case, though less well-known, had occurred more than a decade beforehand in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia. David Sutherland and David States explain that Henry Bundy lived in Dartmouth in 1934 when the new Dundas Theatre opened. Wanting to see a film, he purchased a ticket and went inside to take a seat.⁶¹ After he was seated, a staff member came to tell him that he had to move to the unwritten “Jim Crow” seating in the front row. An article was run in a local paper explaining that the treatment of Bundy was undemocratic, anti-social, unlawful and unchristian, yet as with Desmond’s later experience, his case was largely ignored for many years.⁶² Any evidence of this type of procedure may not be found in archival sources yet considering these two cases which happened both before and after the Second World War, one must wonder if these practices were also held by the Capitol.

As the Capitol announced its opening in Halifax, it also published pricing and scheduling. The theatre was set to change programs twice a week, starting with Wednesdays and Saturdays. On weekdays, it opened at 1:45pm and showed films from 2pm to 11pm. On Saturdays and holidays, the opening was at 11:45am for a total of five shows starting at 12 noon. Sunday hours

The Halifax Mail “Famous Players Employees In Halifax” Tuesday, January 23, 1945. Staff photo included in article, in Henry, *Remembering*, 38.

⁶¹ David Sutherland, with David States, “Precursor to Viola Desmond: Henry Bundy Visits Dartmouth's Dundas Theatre” *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society* 22, (2019), 97.

⁶² Sutherland and States, *Henry Bundy*, 97.

seemed to differ, with mostly evening shows being available.⁶³ In 1930, pricing was split between matinees (from opening to 6pm) and evenings (from 6pm to close).

Matinee prices:

Child	15¢
Adult	35¢
Loges (boxes)	50¢

Evening prices:

Child	25¢
Adult	60¢
Loges (boxes)	85¢ ⁶⁴

Theatres were in the greatest demand during the evenings, which can be clearly seen here by the price rises taking effect at 6pm. The only exception to this rule may have been holidays or Saturday matinees, when families, friends and couples could go to the theatre for a significantly discounted price compared to the evenings.

Though these prices may have seemed high to a city that had been facing the Depression, as the historian William D. Naftel writes, "...the Capitol was selling dreams, not reality, and the Great Depression presented no threat."⁶⁵ Movie theatres spiked in popularity after the First World War, when film became a form of escapism for returning soldiers.⁶⁶ Escapism was vital for some experiencing financial hardship or other rough patches in their lives. Entertainment had

⁶³ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930", 7.

⁶⁴ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Souvenir Program, Grand Opening of the Capitol Theatre in Halifax Oct 31, 1930", 7.

⁶⁵ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 145.

⁶⁶ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, "The 1930's: era of the great 'movie palaces'", by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

long been a way to focus on far away places or enticing people, and the Capitol was no exception to this pattern of enjoyment and distraction.

Theatre was not, in itself, a new concept to Halifax. The British Navy had a strong influence in Halifax's theatre from the founding of the city until the late nineteenth century, shortly before their presence left the Harbour city.⁶⁷ As Alex Nickerson wrote "between 1770 and 1890, Halifax had been rated the best theatrical and musical city in North America."⁶⁸ As a well-known garrison city, entertainment has proved popular with service personnel and civilians alike. In the spot that would later become the Majestic and then the Capitol, the Academy of Music had stood. Built in 1877, it was "Halifax's largest and best equipped playhouse."⁶⁹ The popularity of cinema increased after the First World War and continued as theatres like the Garrick, the Nickel (later the Family Theatre) and the Majestic showed the city that film could be a fine art.⁷⁰ Many of these theatres still hosted live performances as well, such as the 1925 visit of the Dumbells at the Majestic.⁷¹ Silent film had dominated the 1920s, and it was not until 1929 that "talkies" were introduced into the film-going experience in Halifax. At this time, cinema started to draw in even those who had preferred to stay at home and listen to their radio. By the end of the 1920s, theatres transformed into "movie palaces."⁷²

⁶⁷ Alex Boutilier "The Citadel On Stage: The Rise and Decline of Garrison Theatre in Halifax" M.A. Thesis, Saint Mary's University, (Halifax: 2005), 104.

⁶⁸ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, "The 1930's: era of the great 'movie palaces'", by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

⁶⁹ NSARM, Microfilm: 7642, *The Mail Star*, "Golden Age of Theatre: Haligonians flocked to Academy Lyceum, Empire and King Edward" by J. Linden Best, Wednesday, October 18, 1972, 50.

⁷⁰ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, "The 1930's: era of the great 'movie palaces'", by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

⁷¹ NSARMS, Microfilm 5340, *Acadian Recorder*, "The Majestic - The Dumb-bells" December 5, 1925, 3.

⁷² HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, "The 1930's: era of the great 'movie palaces'", by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

Yet despite Halifax having a reputation for hosting great theatre, most other entertainment in the city took the form of social activities rather than entertainment as such. As Naftel has stated, “Aside from the glamorous Capitol Theatre... the city’s cultural infrastructure depended heavily on socializing with family and friends.”⁷³ Theatre was an activity that most people did not attend alone, although this did not have to be the case. Theatre provided a way for those who did not have friends or family in the city, such as service personnel, to participate in social or cultural activities without feeling socially awkward for being by themselves. It also provided a place to meet new people. While waiting in the line to buy tickets or in one of the lounges waiting for the show to start, others who were likely seeing the same film were also there, and the common topic of the film could be used as an ice breaker.

In 1937, the Capitol held an anniversary event celebrating seven years of business in Halifax. This included a weeklong program with special shows, accompanying which was a special anniversary programme. The Capitol used this opportunity to first thank its patrons, noting that “as we look back over those short years, for seven years is indeed a short span of life in terms of historic Halifax, we are pleased to think that the Capitol has earned a rightful place in the hearts of Haligonians.”⁷⁴ Underlining a continuing connection to Halifax’s history was a repeat showing of the film “Historic Halifax” during the anniversary week.⁷⁵ Not only had it been the first film to be viewed by the public on the Capitol’s screen, but it also implied to patrons that the Capitol was a crucial part of their experiences in the city. Secondly, the Capitol used this opportunity to announce its features. Many of these features had existed when the

⁷³ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 144.

⁷⁴ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, “Capitol Anniversary Week, Special Anniversary Program, Capitol Theatre, Week Commencing Friday, October 29, 1937”, 1.

⁷⁵ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, “Capitol Anniversary Week, Special Anniversary Program, Capitol Theatre, Week Commencing Friday, October 29, 1937”, 4.

theatre opened in 1930 but were not advertised in the opening souvenir programme. These included a General Smoking Lounge with a fireplace, where one could smoke while waiting for the film to begin, two Ladies Cosmetic Rooms, a Men's Retiring Room, a free Hat and Coat Check Room, two Telephone Pay Stations, and a no-charge Direct Taxi Phone.⁷⁶ The Taxi Phone would call the Wade Brothers Taxi Company, which would arrive shortly to take customers home.⁷⁷ Thirdly, this occasion was used to announce changes to scheduling and pricing. Previously having changed on Wednesdays and Saturdays, programs they now changed on Tuesdays and Fridays. The shows or programs were mostly one to two hours long, and started at 2:30pm, 3:30pm, 7pm and 9pm on weekdays. Holidays and Saturdays meant shows started from 2pm⁷⁸. Admission prices had also increased, which most likely was due to inflation and demand,

Matinee prices:

Balcony	27 ¢ plus 3 ¢ tax
Orchestra, main floor	32 ¢ plus 3 ¢ tax
Loges (boxes)	35 ¢ plus 5 ¢ tax
Child	8 ¢ plus 2 ¢ tax

Evening prices:

Balcony	32 ¢ plus 3 ¢ tax
Orchestra, main floor	40 ¢ plus 5 ¢ tax
Loges (boxes)	50 ¢ plus 5 ¢ tax
Child	13 ¢ plus 2 ¢ tax (except in Loges) ⁷⁹

⁷⁶ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Capitol Anniversary Week, Special Anniversary Program, Capitol Theatre, Week Commencing Friday, October 29, 1937", 8.

Unknown newspaper, unknown publication date, "Capitol Is Real Asset To Halifax: Capitol Theatre Is Most Modern Play House In Dominion" in Henry, *Remembering*, 2.

⁷⁷ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Capitol Anniversary Week, Special Anniversary Program, Capitol Theatre, Week Commencing Friday, October 29, 1937", 8.

⁷⁸ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Capitol Anniversary Week, Special Anniversary Program, Capitol Theatre, Week Commencing Friday, October 29, 1937", 7.

⁷⁹ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, "Capitol Anniversary Week, Special Anniversary Program, Capitol Theatre, Week Commencing Friday, October 29, 1937", 7.

Some notable changes were made between the 1930 and 1937 admission tariffs. Prices did increase, and a tax was added to the final price. Balconies were also added as an option for seating purchase. As loges had been available before, it may be possible that the mezzanine pricing was the same as the floor pricing, as it would not have been private seating like the loges. Another option was that the orchestra seating was added to or upgraded, making it more desirable to the patron. The simple demand for orchestra seating over balcony seating may have been adjusted for when making these price changes as well. During the war, the Capitol theatre would be one of many companies forced to add a ten percent entertainment tax on each ticket sale, to its displeasure even though seating at shows remained full.⁸⁰

By the time that the Second World War began, the Halifax Capitol was well seasoned. It was one of nine theatres in the city at the time, which altogether had about 7400 seats. On the Dartmouth side of the harbour, two theatres existed with a total of 1380 seats. Yet despite the theatres being able to accommodate large numbers based on the population of Halifax pre-war, as service personnel and others moved to or through the city, demand increased significantly. As Naftel states, there was rarely an empty seat in a Halifax theatre during the war. The increased demand resulted in long lines, which often could be followed around corners of other streets. Even when a show was sold out, which was frequent during the war, people would continue to wait in line in case a patron did not show up on time or decided to leave early. According to Naftel, moving viewing was relaxed, and patrons often came and went as they pleased. It was the job of an usher to keep track of the seating situation in the theatre, and when a seat became available, offer it to someone in line. Seats did not always come available beside each other.

⁸⁰ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 145.

According to one usher, married couples did not mind taking two seats that were not beside each other, whereas couples that may have been on a date preferred to sit together. It was also popular for friends to attend in groups.⁸¹

A few employees have shared their stories about the busyness of the Capitol during the Second World War. One of these individuals was Phil MacCready, who worked as an usher. Hired when he was fifteen years old, he received a custom fitted uniform which had a white jacket with brass buttons and navy-blue pants with a light blue stripe up the sides. MacCready's time working at the Capitol proved to be busy, as he shared that "this was wartime and Halifax overflowed with servicemen from the Navy, Army, Airforce, and Merchant Marine. The Capitol sold out every evening!"⁸² Elizabeth Ross and Bea Sampson, who also worked at the Capitol, could attest to the number of patrons at the theatre. They recalled, for Cynthia Henry's collection, that while working at the Capitol, they both received calls with complaints from other businesses about how the line from the Capitol, which extended down the street and around corners, blocked the doors of their shops.⁸³ Ross and Sampson had to send ushers outside to manage the line and make sure that there was enough room for patrons of nearby businesses to walk through. There was undoubtedly a high demand for motion pictures in Halifax during the Second World War, and even though Halifax and Dartmouth both had a combined nine theatres, the Capitol's shows were still often sold out.

Films about the Second World War did not start to show up in large numbers on the Capitol's schedule until 1940. On April 24, 1940, the film "Atlantic Patrol" – part of the

⁸¹ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 145.

⁸² Staff photo and caption at the bottom of the page. Photo courtesy of Phil MacCready, in Henry, *Remembering*, 30.

⁸³ *The Halifax Mail*, "Famous Players Employees In Halifax" Tuesday, January 23, 1945, in Henry, *Remembering*, 38.

“Canada Carries On” series – hit the screen at the Capitol. The “Canada Carries On” series was a collection of propaganda films to help boost morale during the Second World War. The series continued after the war to continue building patriotism. This was a ten-minute film which focused on the role of the Royal Canadian Navy in the war effort. It was produced by the National Film Board of Canada and was said to be a thrilling film and of special interest to Halifax. The film was only scheduled for three days of showing, starting on a Friday, meaning that patrons had only the weekend to view the film at the Capitol.⁸⁴ The “Canada Carries On” series was presented at the Capitol additional times through the war, with other films such as “Mrs. Miniver” in 1942, which had a display of civilian defense equipment for air raid protection right in the theatre.⁸⁵ Others included “Train Busters” (1943) and “Up From The Ranks” (1943).⁸⁶ Later in the war, films from the Canadian Motion Picture War Services Committee and Loan Campaign were shown. Some examples included “The Story of a Canadian Hero” (1944), which was produced in Hollywood, and “The All-Star Bond Rally” (1945) produced by Twentieth Century Fox.⁸⁷ Promotion of war-themed films was common throughout the Second World War, with companies and governments using nationalism to sell tickets and promote a positive attitude about the war effort. From the patron’s perspective, films about war fed a curiosity about what being on the front was like and sometimes gave a status update on how the fight against the Axis powers was progressing.

⁸⁴ “Atlantic Patrol” ad., in Henry, *Remembering*, 23.

⁸⁵ “1942” Section of the Schedule, August 20, in Henry, *Remembering*, 31.

The Halifax Mail “A.R.P. Director Endorses Film” August 20, 1942. Caption and photo at bottom of the page, in Henry, *Remembering*, 31.

⁸⁶ “1943” Section of Schedule, in Henry, *Remembering*, 31-35.

⁸⁷ “1944” and “1945” Section of the Schedule, in Henry, *Remembering*, 37.

“1945” Section of the Schedule, in Henry, *Remembering*, 39.

To some, films which updated the public about the war effort were critical to understanding the progression of the war. Citizens could listen to news updates on their radios but seeing scenes from the war or soldiers in action was a new opportunity to the public. Patrons paid to see films such as “For Freedom” in 1940, which detailed the Battle of River Plate, along with the related the destruction of the German heavy cruiser *Admiral Graf Spee* and the rescue of British prisoners from the prison ship *Altmark*.⁸⁸ In 1941, “Scenes of Pearl Harbour” flooded the screen with an address from President Roosevelt.⁸⁹ A film specifically about the Canadian military entitled “Inside Fighting Canada” was shown at the Capitol in 1942 as a summary of the scope of Canada’s war effort.⁹⁰ A year later, the “Invasion of Sicily” was shown, and an advertisement mentioned that a bomber aircraft had been flown across the Atlantic to record this film for Canadian theatres.⁹¹ On November 1, 1943, a film *Spitfire*, highlighting the RAF fighter of that name, was shown.⁹² These films provided an insight, with sound, about the events of the war, which for Canadians had never been as readily available at a local theatre.

Though most films gave patrons insights on what was occurring overseas, a few featured Halifax and its role in the war. In 1942, “The 49th Parallel” was released at the Capitol. An advertisement for the film described the plot as an action drama that began as follows:

U-Boat Attacks Shipping off the Coast of Canada...Their Submarine Sunk by RCAF bombers. Six Nazi Survivors make a desperate bid for freedom! Here is the year’s most exciting adventure drama... a relentless man hunt across Canada.⁹³

⁸⁸ “For Freedom” ad at bottom of the page, Thursday, June 20, 1940, in Henry, *Remembering*, 26.

⁸⁹ “1941” Section of the Schedule, December 12, in Henry, *Remembering*, 29.

⁹⁰ “Inside Fighting Canada” ad, in Henry, *Remembering*, 31.

⁹¹ “Today Canadian Movie Tone News” ad, in Henry, *Remembering*, 33.

⁹² “1943” Section of the Schedule, Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

⁹³ “The 49th Parallel” ad, Thursday, January 29, 1942, in Henry, *Remembering*, 30.

A letter to the Manager of the Capitol, R.S. Roddick, was sent from James A. Cowan, who travelled with the director Michael Powell and his crew while filming. Cowan wrote to Roddick to share experiences from his diary, which included the six weeks spent filming in Halifax. He explained that most of the shots from the film featuring Halifax were of the exterior of the harbour. Cowan ended the letter by discussing that there was some debate over the name of the film, but the filmmakers decided to stick with “The 49th Parallel”. His last words before signing off included wishing Roddick the best of luck with promoting the film.⁹⁴

The following year, the film “K225” was shown at the Capitol Theatre. The movie featured actor Randolph Scott and was released in October of 1943. The plot followed a corvette that was based in Halifax. Included in some of the shots were the Halifax Dockyard and the Bedford Basin. Great feedback was received about this film as residents were “thrilled to see Halifax in a movie.”⁹⁵ In August 1944, another motion picture featuring Halifax came to the cinema. This film was named “Yellow Canary.” The subject was described as “the thrilling story of a Nazi plot to blow up Halifax Harbour.”⁹⁶ Halifax was at the edge of the Home Front and seeing their contributions on film gave the public insight to how their efforts were aiding the Canadian services along with the Allies in the war effort.

Films that were not actually about the war sometimes were paired with a dedication to those who were serving. One example was the December 13, 1940, showing of the “Long Voyage Home” which starred John Wayne and Thomas Mitchell. It was noted that the film was “dedicated to the Merchant Marine who take all the Nazis can give and still get their cargoes

⁹⁴ Letter to R.S. Roderick, Capitol Theatre, Halifax NS, January 12, 1942, in Henry, *Remembering*, 29.

⁹⁵ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 145.

⁹⁶ “1944” Section of the Schedule, August 21, in Henry, *Remembering*, 37.

through to England -- the hard way -- dodging subs, mines, bombs and bullets.”⁹⁷ Meanwhile, most films, whether or not dedicated to those serving their country in the war or about the war, were combined with promoting the purchase of war stamps or victory bonds. During the film “Flight Command”, which was in the theatre in February of 1941, the slogan “Buy War Stamps and Lick Hitler” was advertised.⁹⁸ In June of the same year, “Help Finish the Job! Buy Victory Bonds!” was seen by movie goers.⁹⁹ A simple “Buy War Savings Certificates and Bonds” crossed the screen in 1944.¹⁰⁰ Most of these items were accompanied by catchy slogans to help promote more funding from the public for the war.

Requesting materials to be donated, or the public to conserve materials, were also frequent themes. In 1941, a Red Cross Society advertisement requested pieces of aluminum, claiming that you could “Take a pot at Hitler” by donating.¹⁰¹ Another in 1943 asked viewers to pledge to use less coal.¹⁰² Other promotions were set up directly with the Capitol Theatre as an active player in gathering needed wartime materials. This included dropping off entertainment materials like magazines and books for service personnel who had been hospitalized. Other theatres such as the Garrick and Orpheus participated in these drop-offs too.¹⁰³ Sometimes theatres held special promotions for a specific showing of a movie where they gave away free tickets to shows in exchange for goods. One example comes from a newspaper article entitled “Police Reserves Needed at ‘Aluminum Matinees.’” Police were needed on the scene of these showings not because violence broke out, but because there were “throng of children” who had

⁹⁷ “1940” Section of the Schedule, December 13, in Henry, *Remembering*, 25.

⁹⁸ “1941” Section of the Schedule, February 7, in Henry, *Remembering*, 25..

⁹⁹ “1941” Section of the Schedule, June 17, in Henry, *Remembering*, 27.

¹⁰⁰ “1944” Section of the Schedule, May 8, in Henry, *Remembering*, 37.

¹⁰¹ “1941” Section of the Schedule, September 20, in Henry, *Remembering*, 27.

¹⁰² “1943” Section of the Schedule, November 19, Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

¹⁰³ “Save All Your Magazines and Books” ad, Thursday, May 20, 1943, in Henry, *Remembering*, 33.

lined up for the free admission with an aluminum donation for shows at the Capitol, Casino, and Oxford theatres.¹⁰⁴ In another instance where free tickets to a show would be given to anyone who brought in fats to donate to the war effort, 1200 tickets were distributed.¹⁰⁵

Performers sometimes donated their own funds or used their fame to attract donations to certain charities or funds. In September of 1940, the famous comedienne and performer Gracie Fields made her way to Halifax as part of her cross-country tour. Coined as “England’s Vivacious Comedienne” and “Gracie Fields, Sweetheart of the Fighting Forces!”, her shows were much anticipated and well advertised.¹⁰⁶ She performed as part of the “Wish Me Luck When You Wave Me Goodbye” gala performance in aid of the Navy League.¹⁰⁷ Tickets were sold by the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE). The next year, Fields opened a fund to provide comforts to Merchant Seamen in time for Christmas, making a special appeal on behalf of the Merchant Navy.¹⁰⁸ Another example of was Ruth Draper, a well-known actor who toured on behalf of the Red Cross.¹⁰⁹ Likewise, Marjorie Payne and her Orchestra presented at the Capitol with the help of the Halifax Gyro Club to earn money for the Queen’s Canadian Fund.¹¹⁰ Another celebrity was George Herman “Babe” Ruth, who made an appearance at the Capitol on August 2, 1942. The famous baseball player was already in Halifax to celebrate the

¹⁰⁴ *The Halifax Mail* “Police Reserves Needed At “Aluminum Matinees””, Saturday, September 20, 1941, in Henry, *Remembering*, 28.

¹⁰⁵ “Boys! Girls! Save Up All Fats For The Big Halifax and Dartmouth Theatre and School Fat Salvage Campaign” Thursday, January 6, 1944, in Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

¹⁰⁶ “Come and Hear... Gracie Fields, Sweetheart of the Fighting Forces! At the Capitol September 29th”, in Henry, *Remembering*, 26.

¹⁰⁷ “1940” Section of the Schedule, September 29, in Henry, *Remembering*, 27.

¹⁰⁸ *The Halifax Mail* “Gracie Fields’ Seamen’s Christmas Fund Opened”, Tuesday, December 2, 1941, in Henry, *Remembering*, 27.

¹⁰⁹ *The Halifax Mail* “Noted Stage Star Scores At Capitol” Tuesday, April 22, 1941, in Henry, *Remembering*, 28.

¹¹⁰ “1941” Section of the Schedule, October 19, in Henry, *Remembering*, 25.

opening of the Navy League's new Recreation Centre on the Wanderers' Grounds. While at the Capitol, he took the stage to promote the sale of Victory Bonds.¹¹¹

There were often film showings or live performances through which the charities were given the space to raise relief funds. As part of this initiative, a trial show was held at the Capitol to gauge the potential interest in free motion pictures for men of the services and merchant seamen. The screening included the colour cartoon "Babes in Arms", as well as a pre-show singalong led by F.O. Higgins. Present at the show were 1,980 people, close to a full house at the Capitol.¹¹² Among the service personnel were 270 female guests of the male servicemen. Though the screening was free for service personnel and their guests, some gave voluntary contributions. Organized with the help of Lieutenant V.H. Tillson of the Royal Canadian Navy, this show helped to set a precedent for the demand for theatres in Halifax. Most fundraising shows at the Capitol promoted funds for the Queen's Canadian Fund, the Canadian Army Show and Recreation Fund, the Red Cross, and the Navy League, or promoted the purchase of war stamps and victory bonds.

Of the years of fundraising shows held during the war at the Capitol, one of the most noteworthy was organized by the Canadian Legion. The show included a performance by the Royal Canadian Air Force Band as well as a "V for Victory" demonstration. The Halifax Flying Squadron and Nova Scotia Women's Corps both volunteered their time to ensuring the event ran smoothly. Proceeds went to the Queen's Canadian Fund. This specific event was significant for these organizations for two reasons. The first was that this was one of the biggest concerts ever organized by the Canadian Legion. The second was that the effort was the first united effort of

¹¹¹ "1942" Section of the Schedule, August 2, in Henry, *Remembering*, 31.

¹¹² "1941" Section of the Schedule, January 5, in Henry, *Remembering*, 25.

all the branches of the Legion in the Halifax and Dartmouth area.¹¹³ Another noteworthy and recurring show was “Meet the Navy, a group originating out of the Royal Canadian Navy Show, which used Naval personnel to help entertain other members of the Navy.”¹¹⁴ The Navy show included 135 cast members, who were sailors, WRCNS and musicians. The group was a combination of talented comedians, dancers and singers. Others working with the group were technicians. The show was said to “combine the saltiness of the sea, the freshness of Canadian youth and the precision of Broadway.”¹¹⁵ The group, which formed in 1943, came to Halifax later that year and performed on October 3 at the Capitol. Songs such as “Women at War” and “You’ll Get Used To It” were presented. A “Brothers-In-Arms” parade included flags from Allied countries that had signed the United Nations Declaration.¹¹⁶ The “Meet the Navy” show became popular across Canada and overseas and in total is estimated to have entertained about half a million people¹¹⁷.

The CWAC, WRCNS, and RCAF (Women’s Division) all began later in the war effort to spend time at Halifax theatres with donation boxes for the Red Cross collection. The CWAC was stationed at the Capitol and had the most contributions out of all seven theatres on the peninsula.¹¹⁸ The CWAC was also stationed at the Garrick and the Family Theatres. Women of the Airforce were present at the Casino, Oxford, and Community theatre. The WRCNS took on

¹¹³ *The Halifax Mail* “Capitol Concert By Legion Sunday Night To Aid Queen’s Fund” Saturday, September 20, 1941, in Henry, *Remembering*, 28.

¹¹⁴ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 27.

¹¹⁵ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 28.

¹¹⁶ *The Halifax Mail* “Navy Show Warmly Received In Halifax” Monday, October 4, 1943, in Henry, *Remembering*, 34.

¹¹⁷ Halladay, *Made Them Forget*, 28.

¹¹⁸ “1944” Section of the Schedule, February 28-29, in Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

the Orpheus, Gaiety and Empire Theatres. A total of \$361.57 was raised during the initial days between the seven theatres.¹¹⁹

As part of the war effort, a new week to celebrate military personnel, called “Army Week”, was created. This Army Week was the first in Canada’s history.¹²⁰ It included a heavy focus on military-themed films, such as “Soldier Day”, and live performances to thank those serving. The Capitol’s parent company Famous Players ran the following advertisement in a local newspaper:

Canada’s Army is Tops this Week and Every Other Week!
Famous Players Theatres are proud to salute the Canadian Army...
The Men Who’ll Finish the Job!.....

We’re proud too, of the hundreds of men and women of our company who have volunteered for active service with Canada’s Armed Forces!.....¹²¹

The Sunday of “Army Week” featured a concert with entertainers from the Halifax Concert Party Guild. Hugh O. Mills, nicknamed “Uncle Mel” from his well-known local radio show, was the Master of Ceremonies. Performing under his direction was the duo Lila Tredwell and Charlotte Guy.¹²² Tredwell and Guy were also famed locally for their performances for service personnel at a variety of different venues in Halifax and Nova Scotia throughout the war years.¹²³

Admission to this show was restricted to uniformed Army personnel and their companions, as the performance was meant to show appreciation to those who served in these ranks. The celebration of “Army Week” in 1942 appears to have been the only time it was marked at the Capitol, but it was only one of many war-related live performances featuring military bands or local groups.

¹¹⁹ *The Halifax Mail* “Service Girls At Theatres” Thursday, March 9, 1944, in Henry, *Remembering*, 36.

¹²⁰ *The Halifax Mail* “Army Week Gets Under Way” Monday, June 29, 1942, in Henry, *Remembering*, 29.

¹²¹ “Canada’s Army Is Tops This Week and Every Week!” ad, top right of page, in Henry, *Remembering*, 29.

¹²² “1942” Section of the Schedule, June 28, in Henry, *Remembering*, 29.

¹²³ Grant, *Other Cheek*, 12.

The Capitol Theatre often donated its time and resources to aid war charities and societies but did suffer some losses during the war. On September 8, 1942, the Capitol was broken into. This robbery resulted in \$5,526 going missing from the Capitol. The Capitol was again broken into a few months later, on February 9, 1943. The safe was opened using explosives. This time, a much smaller amount of \$95 was taken.¹²⁴ Besides lost profit due to the generosity of the theatre to wartime charities, further losses were likely taken after an agreement with the government to stop Sunday Midnight shows. This was enacted on October 16, 1943, as the theatre had promised the government to help save fuel.¹²⁵ Reduced shows meant reduced use of resources, but also likely contributed to a loss of income and availability of showtimes for patrons.

Films at the Capitol also touched on issues that had increased or affected Halifax since the beginning of the war. One film was screened on the topic of “social disease” – meaning venereal diseases – with the title, “No Greater Sin.”¹²⁶ Another movie called “Stay ’way From My Door” was about the wartime accommodation problem in Halifax. Halifax had more than doubled its population, with an estimated 120,000 - 135,000 servicemen and civilians in the war years, creating a strain on the housing market.¹²⁷ This created overcrowding in the housing that did exist, with 1 out of 4 households being overcrowded in 1941, increasing to 1 in 3 households by 1944.¹²⁸ The film was created “as National Film Board Sees Halifax.” The film mentioned

¹²⁴ “1942” Section of the Schedule, September 8, in Henry, *Remembering*, 31.

¹²⁵ The Halifax Herald “Capitol Theatre Safe Break (Explosives)” Tuesday, February 9, 1943, in Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

“1943” Section of the Schedule, February 9, in Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

¹²⁶ “1942” Section of the Schedule, July 6, in Henry, *Remembering*, 31.

¹²⁷ “1944” Section of the Schedule, April 4, in Henry, *Remembering*, 35.

¹²⁸ Jay White “The Homes Front: The Accommodation Crisis in Halifax, 1941-1951” *Urban History Review*, 20:3 (February 1992), 119.

that 1400 new homes had been created, that 5500 existing homes with families living in them had offered up rooms, and that there were lots of lines for entertainment venues in Halifax.¹²⁹

The Capitol was intertwined with the war effort and the service personnel who travelled through or were stationed in the city. During the Second World War, civilian and military life were connected daily, as exemplified by movie theatres where the films most often either featured the topic of the war or advertised fundraising for the war. Business boomed throughout the early 1940s partly due to the increased population brought on by service personnel spending time in Halifax. Sometimes special announcements or adjustments were made to shows for service personnel. Anthony Storm, who was a Violinist with the Chebucto Symphony Orchestra recalls "...during the war, on rare occasions, watching a movie and a slide would come up saying 'ships company of HMCS Huron are recalled.' If a ship was making steam, the sailors would have to get up and leave the Capitol."¹³⁰ Patrons and their movie-going experience were also affected by the war. Some found comfort in the shows. One example is of Alfred Doucet and E.M. Langille, who had fought in Normandy and were injured and brought back to a Canadian hospital. Donald Christie, who was an undertaker in Truro, drove the two to the Capitol in a hearse as they needed to lie down on their stretchers. After being carried into the cinema, Christie lifted the backs of the stretchers, to prop the men up so that they could watch the film.¹³¹ Another story comes from Mary E. Reynolds. She came to Halifax from Cape Breton to visit a friend in the Navy with her mother. While she was in Halifax, she experienced her first Air Raid Drill. To comfort her, Reynolds's mother took her to go see a comedy at the Capitol.¹³²

¹²⁹ *The Halifax Mail* "As National Film Board Sees Halifax" Tuesday, April 4, 1944, in Henry, *Remembering*, 36.

¹³⁰ Henry, *Remembering*, 37.

¹³¹ "1944" Section of the Schedule, December 25, in Henry, *Remembering*, 37.

¹³² Stories Section, several pages, in Henry, *Remembering*, 47.

The Second World War ended in Europe on May 8, 1945. On the eve of VE Day, disorder broke out in Halifax which resulted in brawls and break-ins. During what became known as the VE Day Riots, the theatres of Halifax closed.¹³³ The next day, Mayor Allan M. Butler imposed a curfew, which started at 8pm. It was not until almost a week later, on May 12, that the Capitol reopened, as the curfew was extended to 12:30am.¹³⁴ The end of the war brought another unexpected event to Halifax. On July 18, 1945, an explosion came from a naval magazine in Dartmouth. After the first blast, the Capitol decided to close. The Manager told patrons to go home and make sure their windows were open.¹³⁵ This was likely due to the memory of eye injuries caused by windows shattering during the Halifax Explosion in 1917.

Months after the war ended, a group of Halifax's Princess Louise Fusiliers were in Akkrum, Holland. The village was damaged from the war, and in need of some repairs. Some from the group decided to make new signage for the town. They made up signs, including one for the town which said "Halifax", another for the main street which said "Barrington", and one for the local cinema which read "The Capitol."¹³⁶ It was clear that Halifax and its Capitol both had had an impact on servicemen and women, many who had travelled a long way from Canada's shores to fight for its freedoms.

After the end of the Second World War, the Capitol enjoyed three more decades as a fixture of the Halifax theatre community. As Jeffrey Spalding stated in reference to Halifax and

¹³³ "1945" Section of the Schedule, May 8, in Henry, *Remembering*, 39.

¹³⁴ *The Halifax Chronicle* "Theatres Will Reopen Doors In City Tonight" Saturday, May 12, 1945, in Henry, *Remembering*, 39.

¹³⁵ "1945" Section of the Schedule, May 8, in Henry, *Remembering*, 39.

¹³⁶ "1945" Section of the Schedule, September 6, in Henry, *Remembering*, 39.

the Capitol “the city and cinema grew up together.”¹³⁷ Yet the Capitol and Halifax had also grown apart. The Capitol was not doing well financially. The needs of the patrons had changed. As Spalding, who in 1978 coordinated an exhibit on the Capitol, stated, the “Capitol was built at a time when film satisfied our need to learn about far away places. We ‘travelled’ through film. As travel became more accessible and affordable, this appeal lessened.¹³⁸” Going to the movies was also less of a fancy event. People stopped dressing up to see films. Theatre became more of a normal rather than a special activity. Theatres with multiple screening rooms could show more than one movie at the same time, which meant that the Capitol seemed less appealing in comparison. In Halifax alone the Capitol had serious competition, which included the Paramount, also owned by Famous Players, as well as the Garrick which had been rebranded as the Neptune Theatre¹³⁹. The Paramount had newer movie screening technology, while the Neptune Theatre excelled in live performances.¹⁴⁰ Famous Players had plans to add a second screen to the Paramount.¹⁴¹ As the Paramount was more advanced and doing better financially than the Capitol, it did not make sense to Famous Players to keep the historic theatre open.¹⁴²

In the early 1970’s, Maritime Telegraph and Telephone Company (also known as Maritime T&T, Maritime Tel & Tel or MT&T) purchased the Capitol theatre site from Famous Players.¹⁴³ It planned to tear the theatre down. In its place, a business centre and mall would be

¹³⁷ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, Untitled Letter or Speech, by Jeffrey Spalding, Co-ordinator of Gallery Programme, February 1978, 1.

¹³⁸ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, Untitled Letter or Speech, by Jeffrey Spalding, Co-ordinator of Gallery Programme, February 1978, 2.

¹³⁹ Randi Green “A Tale of Two Theatres: Discourse and Outcome in Preservation Attempts” (Honours Thesis, Saint Mary’s University, 2014), 49.

¹⁴⁰ Green, *Tale of Two Theatres*, 49.

¹⁴¹ NSARM, MG 1 Vol 1458, The Scotian Journalist, “The Capitol Theatre: The battle to save it begins” by Walter Plaut, December 6, 1973.

¹⁴² Green, *Tale of Two Theatres*, 49.

¹⁴³ Green, *Tale of Two Theatres*, 49.

built called the “Maritime Centre.”¹⁴⁴ The new building was designed to preserve some of the historic view of George’s Island from the entrance of the Citadel, resulting in the slanting of the towers of the Maritime Centre¹⁴⁵. A. Gordon Archibald, who was the president of Maritime T&T, also said that the new 12-14 story building would have a green space and was considering keeping some of the murals from the Capitol in their new business centre.¹⁴⁶ According to Randi Green’s research “Thirty-three articles were found covering the story within the seven-month time frame, from the sale of the theatre to MT & T to the demolition of the theatre.”¹⁴⁷ The public pleaded with Maritime T&T to reconsider, but to no avail. Before the theatre was to be torn down, props and other moveable items were removed. Often, they were given to groups who could use the materials or safeguard them. Props were turned over to the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD).¹⁴⁸ On May 11, 1974, the destruction of Halifax’s Capitol Theatre took place.¹⁴⁹ Cynthia Henry, who has researched the theatre and interviewed those who visited or worked at the Capitol, was 14 years old at the time of the demolition and recalled seeing the “first hole... through which you could see right into the stage. It was the saddest sight, those red curtains billowing out through that hole.”¹⁵⁰

The close relationship between Halifax and the Capitol lasted 44 years. Eventually, just as the Capitol had always desired, it became a part of Halifax’s history. The theatre, which had brought the newest technologies and features of its day to Halifax, ultimately could not keep up

¹⁴⁴ Henry, *Remembering*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Green, *Tale of Two Theatres*, 54.

¹⁴⁶ NSARM, *The Mail Star*, “Capitol Theatre sold to Maritime Tel & Tel, planned demolition for 12-14 story building” November 1, 1973, 1.

¹⁴⁷ Green, *Tale of Two Theatres*, 54-55.

¹⁴⁸ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, Untitled Letter or Speech, by Jeffrey Spalding, Co-ordinator of Gallery Programme, February 1978, 2.

¹⁴⁹ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Chronicle Herald The Mail Star*, Opinion Section, “The 1930’s: era of the great ‘movie palaces’”, by Alex Nickerson, January 11, 1986.

¹⁵⁰ HMA, C 33, The Capitol Theatre Collection, *The Mail Star The Chronicle Herald*, “Big Screen Memories Still Flicker Brightly”, by Peter Duffy, Thursday, September 9, 1999, A9.

with the competition and progress of the film industry. Perhaps if it had received the investment and attention other theatres did, it may still be standing today. Regardless, the Capitol theatre helped Halifax in its times of need, especially during the Second World War. Not only did the Capitol theatre provide a place of entertainment for citizens and sailors, soldiers and flyers alike, but the live performances and movie screenings it showed provided a way to inspire hope and patriotism during the war, or the opposite of providing escapism in a fantasy world. Off screen, the Capitol helped raise funds, further the donation of materials, and sell of victory bonds and certificates – all to help the war effort. The Capitol theatre, though part of the Canada-wide company Famous Players, helped support local branches of national charities and societies, as well as independent groups in their goals to raise funds and materials for the war effort. The Capitol theatre represents the contributions made by Canadian cinema to the fight to win the Second World War, and that the theatre itself made to Halifax during a time of fear and change.

The Ajax Club and North End Canteen: Food and Drink Services in Second World War Halifax

During the Second World War, Halifax almost doubled its peacetime population, resulting in an increased demand for services. An overcrowded city meant a hungry city, full of people who needed a place to rest their head, have a homemade meal, and maybe grab a nightcap. It was a city full of strangers, most likely travelling its streets en route to serve their country. In a port city, sailors mainly made up those who passed through or were stationed in Halifax, although soldiers, airmen and merchant mariners were also present. Allies from across the world also came into Halifax's port. And Halifax, as a good host, tried its best to feed and house its guests.

With the increasing number of service personnel in the city, even finding a place to sleep was difficult. As Jay White has noted, "Halifax was much better equipped to accommodate ships than people."¹ From September 1939 to December 1940, some 2,800 ships sailed in convoy from Halifax.² In 1940, large numbers of naval sailors were recruited. In January 1940, there were 900 Navy personnel in the city, rising to 1,400 by April. Available barracks could only take 600 of them, which meant that hundreds of men were left trying to find accommodation off site. By the summer of 1940, the Navy had expropriated the Exhibition Grounds, where it placed an annex. At the end of the year, the Navy was training 1,200 at this facility.³ More locations in Halifax, such as King's College, were taken over for training.⁴ The barracks in Halifax during the Second

¹ Jay White, "The Homes Front: The Accommodation Crisis in Halifax, 1941-1951", *Urban History Review*, 20:3 (1992), 119.

² James F. E. White "The Ajax Affair: citizens and sailors in wartime Halifax, 1939-1945" (M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984), 13.

³ White, *Ajax Affair*, 14.

⁴ White, *Ajax Affair*, 16.

World War were described by some as a “shanty town.”⁵ Newspapers reported that some 400-500 went without a place to sleep nightly, and that the demand would increase to about 1000 people looking for a place to stay.⁶ Halifax did not have the infrastructure to handle this population influx. Though temporary housing sprang up in the city, it was still not enough to support the transient population.

Along with a shortage of places to sleep, there was also a shortage of places to drink liquor, a situation that drew on a lengthy history. Early temperance societies, including one in Pictou, Nova Scotia, had begun during the 1820s. The ideas of temperance, which focused on restricting or eliminating alcohol from society, became a widespread belief in Canada. The Canada Temperance Act of 1878 allowed local governments to hold votes to ban alcohol consumption, as the federal government was not keen on banning alcohol due to loss of tax revenue. By 1917, all provinces apart from Quebec had outlawed the sale of alcohol. This meant that alcohol was illegal to purchase or consume. By the end of the Great War, the temperance movement had started to lose most of its popularity. Provinces started to vote to make alcohol consumption legal again. Nova Scotia voted to become a “wet” province in 1930.⁷ Despite allowing alcohol sales again, rules on where liquor could be purchased and consumed were still strict. Halifax remained a community torn on the issue of temperance. Liquor, only available for personal consumption, could be purchased at the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission (NSLC). Any liquor purchased there had to be directly transported to a private residence or club, as no public bars existed. Out of this regulation arose a problem for the rising number of service personnel in the city: there was nowhere for them to drink. Sailors could go to the NSLC to purchase their

⁵ White, *Ajax Affair*, 16.

⁶ White, *Ajax Affair*, 11.

⁷ See: Gerald Hallowell, “Prohibition in Canada” *Canadian Encyclopedia*, August 2013, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/prohibition> (accessed 8 March 2020).

own liquor, but it could not be brought back to their barracks. Also, the NSLC had short hours and was experiencing rationing.⁸ Lack of entertainment was specifically a problem for the Navy, the service primarily represented in Halifax, in that civilian clubs were closed to the lower ranks.⁹ Officers, especially those of higher rank such as captains and above were often invited to some of the private clubs in the city, such as the Halifax Club, and so for them this was not a concern.¹⁰ Admiralty House also only allowed officers in its recreational premises.¹¹ Yet for those rank and file there were very few places to drink, so some resorted to the alleyways and streets of the city.¹²

Inevitably, illegal options emerged, notably “blind pigs”, a form of “underground” bar. As numbers of personnel in Halifax increased, these locations became overcrowded and overrun. Even with blind pigs, there were still few options for service personnel to find a place to drink due to the increase of population in the city.¹³ Often, moreover, sailors of lower ranks could not afford to go to theatres, shows, restaurants, or pay for other forms of entertainment.¹⁴ Not only were entertainment venues overcrowded, but they were also expensive for the average sailor. Activities that were not free to service personnel or offered to them out of generosity were unreachable for many.¹⁵ The situation created both frustration and boredom. As a result, sailors would hang out and drink in public areas.¹⁶

⁸ James F. E. White, “The Ajax Affair: citizens and sailors in wartime Halifax, 1939-1945” (M.A. Thesis, Dalhousie University, 1984), 3.

⁹ White, *Ajax Affair*, 3.

¹⁰ William D. Naftel, *Halifax at War: Searchlights, Squadrons and submarines 1939-1945*, (Halifax: Formax Publishing Company Limited, 2008), 163.

¹¹ White, *Ajax Affair*, 41.

¹² Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 163.

Stephen Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers, and Blind Pigs: Halifax at War*, (Halifax: Doubleday, 2002), 42.

¹³ Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers, and Blind Pigs*, 42.

¹⁴ Raddall, *Warden of the North*, 295.

¹⁵ Raddall, *Warden of the North*, 295.

¹⁶ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 163.

There were some, however, who saw the need to address this problem. Many of the charity groups that opened in Halifax were associated with larger organizations such as the Red Cross, the Knights of Columbus, and the Y.M.C.A. Yet there were two groups which were started locally, the North End Services Canteen and the Ajax Club. These two local charity groups were run by the some of the same volunteer women, the main link between them being Janet McEuen. The McEuen family moved from Montreal to Halifax in 1939, when Lieutenant Commander Stuart McEuen and his wife Janet McEuen – nicknamed “Dolly” – moved into the Lord Nelson Hotel.¹⁷ Stuart McEuen served as a medical officer for the onshore facility HMCS Stadacona, the major Halifax naval base, while Janet McEuen volunteered with the North End Services Canteen along with other officers’ wives.¹⁸ At the Canteen, she helped organize the entertainment.¹⁹ There, she would have had plenty of interaction with, or have witnessed, service personnel stationed in or travelling through the city. She also made connections with women who were avid wartime volunteers, motivated and willing to give up their time.²⁰ Later, McEuen founded a social club called “The Ajax Club”, which focused on providing sailors with access to alcohol in well-furnished, respectable surroundings. Besides access to a bar, the Ajax Club also provided hot meals and sleeping quarters. Janet McEuen founded her new club with two women

¹⁷ Jay White, Nova Scotia Archives and Record Management “Untimely Demise: The Curious Case of The Ajax Club” in the “An East Coast Port' Halifax in Wartime, 1939-1945” series, last revised February 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/eastcoastport/ajax.asp?Language=English> , (accessed 12 January 2020).
 White, NSARM, “Untimely Demise: The Curious Case of The Ajax Club” in the “An East Coast Port' Halifax in Wartime, 1939-1945” series, last revised February 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/eastcoastport/ajax.asp?Language=English> , (accessed 12 January 2020).
 Raddall, *Warden of the North*, 295.

¹⁸ Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax: Warden of the North*, (Halifax: Nimbus, 2010), 295.

Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 64.

¹⁹ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Services Canteen To Give Christmas Party”.

²⁰ Jay White, NSARM “Untimely Demise: The Curious Case of The Ajax Club” in the “An East Coast Port' Halifax in Wartime, 1939-1945” series, last revised February 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/eastcoastport/ajax.asp?Language=English> , (accessed 12 January 2020).

who she had met through the North End Service Canteen, the sisters Edith Girouard and Isabel Macneill.

Edith Girouard was born in Halifax to Murray and Kathleen Macneill in 1905. She attended the Halifax Academy and graduated from Dalhousie University in 1926 with an Honours Bachelor of Science. She taught and became the Dean at Fairmount Junior College in Washington, DC, but returned to Halifax in 1939. Shortly after her marriage to René Girouard, her husband was posted overseas, and she then began working for the Dominion Board of Statistics. Throughout the war, the Macneill sisters volunteered at the North End Services Canteen. This is where Isabel met Janet McEuen, and subsequently she and Edith became involved in the Ajax Club, cofounding the club with McEuen. Edith served as the treasurer for the Ajax Club and the secretary for the NESCS,²¹ while also helping to run the Women's Voluntary Services, under the Department of National War Services. When the war was over and Girouard's husband returned, they moved to Quebec and later Ontario.²²

Isabel was Edith's younger sister. Born in Halifax in 1908, she grew up there and attended Mount Saint Vincent Academy and then the Nova Scotia College of Art, as well as studying for a time at the Heatherley School of Art in London. She worked in England and the United States as a scenic designer in a professional theatre. After the Second World War began, Isabel Macneill came back to Halifax and began to volunteer her time, starting at the North End Services Canteen. As a cofounder, she also worked at the Ajax Club as its secretary. When the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service was founded as part of the Royal Canadian Navy in 1942, Isabel Macneill knew that she wanted to join. She was part of the first group trained. The

²¹ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, "Services Canteen To Give Christmas Party".

²² NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359.

group was nicknamed the “Wrens” as it was modeled after the similar British Women’s Royal Naval Services, abbreviated to “WRNS”. Wrens helped the war effort by doing clerical or administrative work on shore, though were often seen helping with volunteer work that aided the war effort as well. Some Wrens also worked with naval intelligence. Once Isabel Macneill had graduated as a female officer, she was promoted to a lieutenant-commander. This promotion had made her the first and only female commander during the Second World War in the Canadian Forces as well as throughout the British Commonwealth. She could enter any ship, which was an honour only otherwise given to women of the royal family at the time. Macneill served on the HMCS Conestoga and had trained almost 6000 Wrens by the end of the war.²³

The North End Services Canteen opened its doors just six weeks after the Second World War started, on October 14, 1939. Initially it had only \$100 in hand, a donation from the Navy that was used to stock the canteen with chocolate bars and cigarettes.²⁴ The canteen was organized by McEuen with the help of other naval officers’ wives she enlisted. They gained permission from the vestry of Saint Mark’s Church at the corner of Gottingen Street and Russell Street to use its multipurpose hall for their events.²⁵ The hall had an open space, which could be used to set up tables, games, films or other activities such as dances. Desks were available for men

²³ Lillia Stirling, *In The Vanguard: Nova Scotia Women Mid-Twentieth Century*, (Windsor: Lancelot Press, 1976), 17-19.

NSARM, Isabel Macneill Fonds, MG1 vol 3648, Biographical history, <https://memoryns.ca/isabel-macneill-fonds> (accessed 10 January 2020).

²⁴ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, *The Halifax Mail*, “Home Comforts Are Provided Men Of Services: Thousands Entertained At North End Canteen”, Saturday, March 21, 1942.

HMA, Women’s Voluntary Services, CR 43.18, “Various Documents”, “Halifax Temporary Memoranda, Short Title H.T.M., 26th June 1944”.

Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 159.

²⁵ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 159.

NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, photograph, “North End Services Canteen on Russel Street, behind St. Mark’s Church”.

to sit at and write letters back home.²⁶ At the back of the hall, there was a window to the kitchen, through which food orders could be made.

The North End Services Canteen first focused on providing entrainment, later adding hot meals. As Stephen Kimber described, “The canteen had been the first, but far from the last, set up after the war began to provide meals, dances and concerts – a kind of home away from home for the men of the three military services, as well as for the merchant navy sailors from the convoys.”²⁷ Activities such as billiards, ping pong, and dances were featured.²⁸ There were regular dances for all the services on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the church hall.²⁹ Though dances were free for the servicemen, women had to pay 10¢ to get in, and after some repairs at a later location, this price went up to 25¢.³⁰ Often live music would be played at the dances. A record section could also be browsed, with a record player available for listening to music.³¹ When the club began serving meals, they were 5¢, typically including unlimited coffee. Depending on the event, a three-course meal might be served, with a typical menu consisting of soup, cold ham, potato scallop, ice cream, cake and coffee. Otherwise, sandwiches were often served with coffee or tea and a dessert, such as cake.³²

²⁶ Library and Archives Canada, Faces of the Second World War, Image 2189, “Personnel writing letters at the North End Services Canteen, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 6 February 1943.” by Jackson George Kempster, February 6, 1943, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/second-world-war/faces-second-war/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=2189&> (accessed 2 February 2020).

²⁷ Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers, and Blind Pigs*, 55.

²⁸ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 160.

NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen”.

²⁹ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen”.

³⁰ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 159-160.

³¹ Library and Archives Canada, Faces of the Second World War, Image 2190, “Personnel listening to records at the North End Services Canteen, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, 6 February 1943.” by Jackson George Kempster, February 6, 1943, <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/second-world-war/faces-second-war/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=2190&> (accessed 2 February 2020).

³² NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen”.

Due to the canteen's growing popularity, its operations were moved in 1941 to a larger facility on Barrington Street. The canteen as well as the community had noticed that the original site was no longer big enough to accommodate the demand. Seeing this issue, several of the volunteers from the NESC, including the President Mrs. V.S. Godfrey, started a building committee in December of 1941 to raise funds for a new location. With the help of other war organizations such as the Red Cross, architect S.P. Dumaresq, members of the Royal Canadian Navy and businesses raised \$54,261 towards building a new facility for the North End Services Canteen. The canteen opened at the new building on Barrington Street on September 14, 1941.³³ Besides the new kitchen, there was a ping pong and billiards room, writing room and a dance floor. A "Cuss Box" ensured that each time a personnel member muttered a profanity, a donation to help with the upkeep of the billiard tables had to be added. Apparently, donations were infrequent. The new facility had a snack bar at the canteen, a lounge with new red leather furnishings, two billiards rooms with three pool tables total, a reading and writing room, a large auditorium with a stage as well as a darkroom for photography.³⁴ Along with these new additions, the canteen claimed that all the furniture had been bought for under \$2,500, which was considered an "amazing figure" at the time. Attendance at dances also increased in the new facility, with an eight-piece orchestra regularly performing.³⁵

Partly responsible for the move was the presence in Halifax of a group of 5000 French sailors, who had first been subsidized for a Christmas meal in December 1939.³⁶ It is unclear if

³³ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, *The Halifax Mail*, "Home Comforts Are Provided Men Of Services: Thousands Entertained At North End Canteen", Saturday, March 21, 1942.

³⁴ HMA, Women's Voluntary Services, CR 43.18, "Various Documents", "Halifax Temporary Memoranda, Short Title H.T.M., 26th June 1944".

³⁵ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, *The Halifax Mail*, "Home Comforts Are Provided Men Of Services: Thousands Entertained At North End Canteen", Saturday, March 21, 1942.

³⁶ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 160.

the whole group spoke French and English. French concerts were arranged, which may or may not have been a gesture of inclusiveness or a necessity for some sailors. Depending on what ships were in the Harbour, the canteen would also have bilingual entertainment available. French sailors were one of the lowest earning groups of sailors who visited the city, making only 6¢ to 12¢ a day. Their wage was often noted publicly as lower than Canadian or British wages.³⁷ The reasonable prices of the NESC attracted many French and other sailors.

Besides the 5000 Frenchmen who attended a concert under the organization the NESC, which may have been held at another location such the Dalhousie Gymnasium due to the size, there was also a concert with 700 French sailors in attendance, paid for by the Kiwanis Club. The NESC, as it ran almost entirely on donations and any income they received from meals, issued the following statement by McEuen less than a year after the opening:

It is only right that those who are generous to us should know how their money is being spent, what their money is doing for these men who are making it possible for us to live under these clear blue Canadian skies in peace and comfort. Will you in the kindness of your heart plead our cause to your friends. Surely the value of this work must and will be recognized. If you could have seen the amazement and delight on the French laddies faces when they heard our prices, you would hate to think of the work being given up through lack of funds³⁸.

McEuen's letter suggests that French sailors were common patrons at the canteen, and that they could not afford any more than the canteen was charging. It was clear to see that the wages given to sailors were low so that canteens and other charities trying to provide comforts to service personnel had to do so within their limited income

After the move to Barrington Street, meal production increased. At St. Mark's church, the NESC had produced about 10,000 meals a month, but in the new location, 30,000 meals a month

³⁷ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, "Services Canteen To Give Christmas Party".

³⁸ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, "Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen".

could be served.³⁹ Two years after its opening the Canteen had already served 400,000 hot meals.⁴⁰ The productivity of the canteen grew with its popularity, though the over-use of the canteen did create a need for repairs. In particular, the dance floor caved in. The War Charities Committee gave \$1,200 to help with repairs,⁴¹ and in the meantime events were held at other locations such as at the Dalhousie Gymnasium. The NESC held that year's "Canadian Christmas Party" for the Royal Canadian Navy men at the Dalhousie Gymnasium. The dinner, served with refreshments, was supposed to be "as typically Canadian as possible." The space was decorated with a tall Christmas tree, lights, tinsel, spruce, and festive red decorations. A large Naval Orchestra was booked to perform. The NESC's location was expected to reopen in the New Year.⁴² With an increase in visitors to the canteen also came a growing need for more volunteers. Rising income meant that a small staff could be hired as well. By 1944, the organization consisted of 130 volunteers, eight paid staff and one Master of Arms. Many of the paid staff worked cooking in the kitchen. The Master of Arms, Ernest Bradfield, kept order in the Canteen. Most of the time the servicemen policed themselves, however having someone on hand to handle disputes or keep general order helped the busy location⁴³.

The complement of volunteers at the canteen depended heavily on the organization known as Women's Voluntary Services, operating under the Department of National War Services. Edith Girouard, again, was the coordinator, tasked with finding women volunteers of all ages and matching them to locations where they could donate their time. This was done first through filling out a registration card. It appears women would either go to the Halifax Women's

³⁹ Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers, and Blind Pigs*, 118.

⁴⁰ Halifax Women's History Society, "The Untold Story: Women Volunteers". Put URL.

⁴¹ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, *The Halifax Mail*, "Home Comforts Are Provided Men Of Services: Thousands Entertained At North End Canteen", Saturday, March 21, 1942.

⁴² NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, "Services Canteen To Give Christmas Party".

⁴³ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 160.

Voluntary Services Centre or visit a booth at a store such as Zeller's or Simpson's to sign up. Questions about name, age, occupation, nationality, address, volunteer experience, languages spoken, and what types of activities a volunteer would be willing to do were asked. Specifically, women were asked if they were interested in working in a canteen, in child care, doing clerical or office work, conservation work, education, consumer services, in a library, family security services such as clothing clinics, health services, knitting, housing services, magazine sorting, motor transport, packing, nutrition services, public speaking, recreational services such as theatrics, art, youth organizations, in salvaging, sewing, tagging, the civil defence corps or war savings stamps or bonds.⁴⁴ It would also be noted when the volunteer was available, if she was a student, had a job outside of the home, or worked at home. It seemed common that those who were high school students would request to volunteer at the same location and hours as a friend. Most listed one or two friends, though one volunteer requested to work with a group of three other girls. Others said that they were only able to make contributions from home, had to be called at a certain hour or by a certain staff member. Some were explicit about the type of work they did not like, including one volunteer who mentioned disliking canteen work because the kitchen was too hot. After the Registration Card was filled out, another small card would be typed or written with the name of the volunteer, their address, where they were open to volunteering, and their availability. In the description a telephone number was often included, likely to simplify the scheduling of volunteers at various organizations. It was indicated on the Registration Card that once the card was filled out with someone working for the Women's Voluntary Services, that the volunteer would be called for an interview. After the interview, a Placement Card would be made. The front included the name of the volunteer, the date they

⁴⁴ HMA, Women's Voluntary Services Fonds, CR 43.1, "Registration Cards".

registered, their address, phone number, education level, previous volunteer experience and any other remarks. The back of the card recorded where the volunteer served, the date they started, what type of work they did for that organization, their volunteer status (permanent or temporary), and the dates and times they have agreed to work.⁴⁵

A tremendous amount of work needed to be done at the North End Services Canteen. McEuen described nights where she would have washed more than 600 dishes by herself. Other nights, she and one other volunteer would be tasked with serving 40 three-course meals. In 1940, the NESC had access to only one four-ring gas cooker and a coal stove. Though there were plans for a kitchen upgrade, early in the war the canteen did not have any hired kitchen help.⁴⁶ This added to the work that volunteers were required to do, though eventually some kitchen staff were hired to alleviate the workload.

Among the volunteers at the North End Services Canteen was Joyce Purchase, a seventeen-year-old high school student who volunteered on Friday afternoons. Interviewed much later in life, she explained that she was too young to join the services but was pleased when she found out that she could volunteer at the canteen. She served big plates with meat, vegetables and potatoes to the servicemen. Though there was often a dance after dinner, she recalled that her mother would not let her stay, and joked that “I didn’t pick up a sailor at the canteen, I met him in high school.”⁴⁷ Joyce Ripley shared similar stories of her time volunteering. She volunteered with a group of her friends, also serving meals, mostly to naval personnel. Ripley remembered the jukebox playing as they served meals. Afterwards, when the dance started, she was not

⁴⁵ Halifax Municipal Archives, Women’s Voluntary Services Fonds, CR 43.1, “Registration Cards”.

⁴⁶ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen”.

⁴⁷ CTV News Atlantic, “Monument honouring female volunteers during war unveiled in Halifax” by Brett Bundale, The Canadian Press, November 16, 2017, <https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/monument-honouring-female-volunteers-during-war-unveiled-in-halifax-1.3680471> (accessed 2 February 2020).

allowed to attend as the canteen dances were too “fast” for high schoolers.⁴⁸ Many of the women who volunteered did more than serve meals, by also lending a sympathetic ear. One volunteer, Peggy McAlpine, described how she made sandwiches but also “listened to heart break stories.” For service personnel who might be sailing as early as the next day, their night at the North End Services Canteen would have likely been their last in Halifax for a long time. She recalled that “the women were there for these young men... we tried to send them off feeling better.”⁴⁹

Not only did women volunteer to help in the kitchen or serve food, but many volunteered to be called when there was an event, so as to attend themselves. Their job was to entertain sailors, either chatting with them or dancing with them. In total, the North End Services Canteen had several hundred women who were willing to fill these roles, “...all from good homes, most of them with respectable positions, but all of them willing, nay anxious to come and entertain the visitors whenever partners are needed for a dance.”⁵⁰ Apparently not many of the women who danced at the North End Services Canteen were shy about getting on the dance floor. As one volunteer said, “There are no ‘wallflowers,’ as the North End Canteen...Everybody is taught to ‘get in and have a good time.’”⁵¹ Indeed, of all the recorded volunteer organizations in the city, the North End Services Canteen had among the largest numbers of volunteers. Between the kitchen, dry bar and dancing class, there were well over 200 permanent volunteers listed.⁵² This did not include temporary volunteers, who either did not want to sign up for regular shifts or

⁴⁸ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 160.

⁴⁹ The Globe and Mail Canada, “‘Times have changed’: Design of Halifax’s first monument to women unveiled” by Darren Calabrese, The Canadian Press, March 9, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/design-of-halifaxs-first-monument-to-women-unveiled/article34247903/> (accessed 2 February 2020).

⁵⁰ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “An ‘Allied City’: East Coast Base Takes Sailor Visitors to Its Heart”.

⁵¹ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, *The Halifax Mail*, “Home Comforts Are Provided Men Of Services: Thousands Entertained At North End Canteen”, Saturday, March 21, 1942.

⁵² HMA, Women’s Voluntary Services Fonds, CR 43.4, “Permanent Placements”.

were only in the city for a short time. Often volunteers who helped with big events were listed in the newspaper as a form of recognition for their efforts.⁵³

The North End Services Canteen was also recognized for its inclusiveness of different Allied forces. It was common to see French, British and Canadian servicemen interacting with each other. As one newspaper noted, “Look in the dining room. English, French and Canadian men in arms sit side by side. Here, thanks to the generous purses of the population not only Britishers but French sailors whose wage in Canadian currency means very little, can get a first class homecooked meal for a few coppers.”⁵⁴ Australian and Dutch servicemen were also spotted at the canteen.⁵⁵ There was a widespread feeling that “a man never need be lonely if he drifted around to the North End Canteen.”⁵⁶ While welcoming visitors from around the world, the canteen often did have many guests from the Wellington Barracks (the old and still-customary name for HMCS Stadacona), which was a short walk away. To these service personnel, having a home atmosphere in which they could spend time and enjoy a home cooked meal meant a lot.⁵⁷ However, not everyone was welcomed at the canteen.

Yet there were limitations to inclusivity. During the Second World War, canteens and hostels were segregated, meaning that personnel were directed to a place to stay or eat based on the colour of their skin.⁵⁸ Through photos found in the Edith Girouard Fonds, it seems there were few minorities admitted to the North End Canteen. In the Isabel Macneill Fonds, there is mention

⁵³ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Services Canteen To Give Christmas Party”.

⁵⁴ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Services Canteen To Give Christmas Party”.

⁵⁵ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, *The Halifax Mail*, “Home Comforts Are Provided Men Of Services: Thousands Entertained At North End Canteen”, Saturday, March 21, 1942.

⁵⁶ The Royal Canadian Navy, “The Signal Log: News of the Communications Branch of the Navy” 3:11, St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, (September 1945, “Final Issue”).

⁵⁷ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen”.

⁵⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, “‘Times have changed’: Design of Halifax’s first monument to women unveiled” by Darren Calabrese, *The Canadian Press*, March 9, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/design-of-halifaxs-first-monument-to-women-unveiled/article34247903/> (accessed 2 February 2020).

of an Indigenous group of servicemen visiting the canteen called the “Canadian Indian Sharpshooters.” According to Macneill, the men spent months of their free time at the North End Services Canteen. They sailed out on the transport vessel SS *Nerissa*, which had travelled unescorted many times, but on this voyage was sunk by a German submarine.⁵⁹ As regards people of African descent, the historian Janet Guildford noted at the unveiling of a monument commemorating wartime volunteers, “Women’s stories are untold, but African Nova Scotian women’s stories are even less told.”⁶⁰ Throughout this chapter, the lack of sources available on minorities’ relations to the North End Services Canteen and the Ajax Club must be noted.

When men left the doors of the North End Services Canteen, they were sent off well. Many headed back to their barracks or ships with candy, other sweets, apples, and magazines.⁶¹ The canteen also helped arrange drives either back to their ships, or locals would take the servicemen for a drive in their car, then inviting them to their residence for a cup of tea. This work was done in collaboration with the Women’s Canadian Club.⁶² Their objective was to help make private arrangements for men to be entertained in the homes of citizens. These arrangements between the NES C and the WCC were made primarily through Edith Macneill⁶³.

By the end of the war, the North End Services Canteen was serving about 1,000 Allied servicemen daily.⁶⁴ A few months after the war in Europe had ended, the canteen closed on July 31, 1945. The canteen thus served its last night as a home away from home, giving personnel a

⁵⁹ NSARM, Isabel Macneill Fonds, MG1 vol 3648, “Halifax In Wartime, 1939-1946” notes by Isabel Macneill, 3.

⁶⁰ The Globe and Mail Canada, “‘Times have changed’: Design of Halifax’s first monument to women unveiled” by Darren Calabrese, The Canadian Press, March 9, 2017, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/design-of-halifaxs-first-monument-to-women-unveiled/article34247903/> (accessed 2 February 2020).

⁶¹ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen”.

⁶² NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Typed letter by Mrs. C. Stuart McEuen”.

⁶³ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, “Services Canteen To Give Christmas Party”.

⁶⁴ NSARM, Edith Girouard Fonds, MG 1 vol 3359, *The Halifax Mail*, “Home Comforts Are Provided Men Of Services: Thousands Entertained At North End Canteen”, Saturday, March 21, 1942.

last chance to enjoy a hot meal in the facility as they hosted a farewell supper. There was also a last chance to play billiards and ping pong. After guests had gone home, the radio and the lights were turned off. As mentioned by one of the volunteers who helped close up, “the key was left under the mat for the War Services Charities who are taking over the disposal of the building and its contents.”⁶⁵ That was the last time that the canteen had entertained, as the large number of discharges from the Navy and other services meant that the demand for their services had sharply declined.

Though the North End Canteen provided food and often hosted entertainment, it had functioned throughout as a dry canteen, not serving liquor. Janet McEuen had also, however, realized the need for a respectable place where servicemen could consume alcohol and she was determined to create such a space.⁶⁶ In the early stages of this project, McEuen founded a charity to fund her entertainment efforts, registering the Interallied Hospitality and Food Fund with the wartime charities board in 1940, and she then started hosting events and planning entertainment for servicemen.⁶⁷ Through these events, she realized that there was a need for a physical location at which everyday servicemen could relax and rejuvenate their energy.⁶⁸ With a shortage of housing, supplies, and bars, Halifax was in dire need of a sailor-friendly social club. From these experiences, the idea of buying a house and creating a club with food, alcohol, and entertainment was born.

⁶⁵ The Royal Canadian Navy “The Signal Log: News of the Communications Branch of the Navy” 3:11, (St. Hyacinthe, Quebec, September 1945, “Final Issue”).

⁶⁶ White, *Ajax Affair*, 44.

⁶⁷ Jay White, NSARM “Untimely Demise: The Curious Case of The Ajax Club” in the “‘An East Coast Port’ Halifax in Wartime, 1939-1945” series, last revised February 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/eastcoastport/ajax.asp?Language=English> , (accessed 12 January 2020).

⁶⁸ Jay White, NSARM “Untimely Demise: The Curious Case of The Ajax Club” in the “‘An East Coast Port’ Halifax in Wartime, 1939-1945” series, last revised February 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/eastcoastport/ajax.asp?Language=English> , (accessed 12 January 2020).

Raising funds to rent and furnish a house, McEuen travelled through Canada in 1940 to collect donations.⁶⁹ She then found the perfect location for her new club. The house was on the corner of Tobin Street and Queen Street, close to the waterfront. Formerly part of the substantial Odell estate, it had twenty-five bedrooms, meaning that it could accommodate a large social space.⁷⁰ Cyril Robinson, a contemporary who wrote an article on the opening of what came to be known as the Ajax Club, described the property as follows:

...a rambling old house with its beautiful walled gardens was host to the cream of Halifax society during the hoop-skirt era. Last to occupy the house were three spinsters, Fannie, Ella and Kearney, daughters of the senator and Mrs. Odell of Fredericton and Halifax... In the garden, suitably inscribed tombstones perpetuate the memory of dogs and cats, and favourite horses.⁷¹

Soon after Mary Kearney Odell died in 1938, having been the last of three sisters who had occupied the house, an auction was held and most of the home's furnishings were sold off.⁷² Money from the auction was donated to the All Saints Cathedral diocesan fund.⁷³ Yet the house remained unsold and would remain unoccupied for almost two years.⁷⁴ Only a few blocks from the Nova Scotian Hotel, it was far enough away from the downtown area to provide a peaceful place for sailors to unwind.

McEuen decided to call the club the "Ajax Club," after the HMS *Ajax*. The ship was a Royal Navy cruiser that had recently had success against the German battlecruiser *Admiral Graf*

⁶⁹ NSARM, Isabel Macneill Fonds, MG1 vol 3648, "Janet Evelyn McEuen" Obituary.

⁷⁰ Jay White, NSARM "Untimely Demise: The Curious Case of The Ajax Club" in the "'An East Coast Port' Halifax in Wartime, 1939-1945" series, last revised February 2020, <https://novascotia.ca/archives/eastcoastport/ajax.asp?Language=English> , (accessed 12 January 2020).

⁷¹ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article "Club for Navy Men" by Cyril Robinson.

⁷² White, *Ajax Affair*, 39.

⁷³ White, *Ajax Affair*, 39.

⁷⁴ White, *Ajax Affair*, 40.

von Spee in the Battle of the River Plate.⁷⁵ The club McEuen founded seemed to have the support of the community. Across the street was the Fort Massey United Church, which also gave its support for the opening of a club, despite the proximity of the site.⁷⁶ Both Reverend Norrie Anderson and Rear Admiral Bonham-Carter of Fort Massey United Church were consulted about the club. No objections were raised at the time of opening.⁷⁷

Although temperance was still a highly debated issue, having resulted in prohibition in earlier decades, the issue of drinking in public spaces warranted flexibility in creating a club for sailors to take part in drinking out of the public eye. Halifax's prohibition was largely seen as a failure. Jay White argues, in his master's thesis on the Ajax Club, that there were two major causes for this.⁷⁸ The first argument was that prohibition just drove drinking underground, prompting the creation of blind pigs and speakeasies, making prohibition the cause of underground drinking. Others saw bootlegging as the cause of prohibition rather than the symptom. Those on this side of the argument thought that prohibition had been caused because of a pre-existing black market for liquor, rather than prohibition creating this market. Prohibition was not seen by this side as a failure due to the idea of prohibition being unattainable but rather because the government had failed to crack down on illegal sales of alcohol. Some thought that if liquor was eliminated from society, then there would be no desire for alcohol. The Nova Scotia Liquor Act of 1929 was passed as prohibition ended and gave the province control over sales. The Act cautioned against overconsumption, and treated the use of alcohol as a privilege, not a

⁷⁵ White, *Ajax Affair*, 47; NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article "Club for Navy Men" by Cyril Robinson.

⁷⁶ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 164.

⁷⁷ White, *Ajax Affair*, 46.

NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article "Sailors are rescued from demon rum", by J.F. McAree, *The Globe and Mail*, Toronto, March 4, year not known (likely 1942).

⁷⁸ White, *Ajax Affair*, 43.

public right. A reversion to pre-prohibition liquor laws did not occur after prohibition.⁷⁹ Thus, although prohibition had ended well before the Second World War, Halifax had not moved past this debate.

Accordingly, McEuen enlisted the help of some friends made while volunteering to bring the Ajax Club to reality, with Edith Girouard and Isabel Macneill also cofounders. Isabel became the secretary, and Edith the Treasurer. The three also enlisted the help Marjorie Walters.⁸⁰ Also volunteering her time was Mhairi MacLeod Fenton, who was originally from Montreal and had escaped France during the Nazi invasion, later to be evacuated from Boulogne.⁸¹ Fenton became the Ajax Club's Librarian. Miss M. Drummond was the acting chauffeur.⁸² Joan Hodson became the House Supervisor.⁸³ She was from New York, and her working there made it clear that American sailors were also welcome at the club.

The club was prepared entirely from donated time, items or funds. Funds were raised from 100 corporations as well as some private donors.⁸⁴ This money was used to help furnish and fix up the house. As the house had remained unoccupied since the death of Mary Kearney Odell, substantial work was needed. Professional electricians, carpenters, and other trades workers volunteered their time, while the Royal Canadian Navy also contributed personnel. A naval working party would come daily after the club was opened to help clean, polish the floors,

⁷⁹ White, *Ajax Affair*, 43.

⁸⁰ White, *Ajax Affair*, 43-44.

⁸¹ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article "“Club for Navy Men” by Cyril Robinson.

⁸² NSARM, Isabel Macneill Fonds, MG1 vol 3648, "Survivors...Honoured" (full title of newspaper cut off), publication and page number not available.

⁸³ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article "Club for Navy Men" by Cyril Robinson.

⁸⁴ White, *Ajax Affair*, 44.

or shine windows.⁸⁵ This was their way of showing appreciation for the club's efforts. On top of donated work, corporations in the beer business were especially happy to help the club. This generosity may have been related to the club's motto, "beer in decent surroundings." Due to the potential good image that the club would give their brands, business opportunity, and simple wartime generosity, large donations were received. These included a station wagon from Labatt's, and furniture amounting to a \$30,000 value from National Breweries, while Oland's Brewery provided the club with a bar.⁸⁶ In addition to donations, Janet McEuen secured a rent-free lease of the Odell property from the estate holders for the duration of the war.⁸⁷

The first guests arrived a month before the club was finished. Still with interior construction and designing left to do, the club was called on by Bonham-Carter to host the fifty surviving crew members from the HMS *Jervis Bay*, which had recently been sunk while escorting a transatlantic convoy. Accompanying them were their Swedish rescuers.⁸⁸ Though the house was still unfinished, McEuen agreed to host the sailors, who arrived at the club on November 15, 1940.⁸⁹ These sailors started a tradition at the Ajax Club. A kitten at the Ajax Club was christened by its first visitors with beer and named "Spitfire" after the cat who had been lost on the HMS *Jervis Bay*.⁹⁰ This ritual continued with most of its guests rechristening the cat on their first night at the Ajax Club.⁹¹

⁸⁵ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article "Club for Navy Men" by Cyril Robinson.

⁸⁶ White, *Ajax Affair*, 45.

⁸⁷ White, *Ajax Affair*, 44.

⁸⁸ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 164.

⁸⁹ White, *Ajax Affair*, 47.

⁹⁰ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article "Club for Navy Men" by Cyril Robinson.

⁹¹ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article "Ajax Club is Open at Halifax", undated newspaper clipping.

McEuen's club opened officially on December 14, 1940, with high ranking officials such as the United Kingdom High Commissioner Sir Gerald Campbell, in attendance. The event also featured a benediction by Anglican Archbishop John Hackenley.⁹² Also in attendance were Rear Admiral Bonham-Carter, Rear Admiral J.C. Hamilton, Captain Archer of the Royal Navy, and Commodore G.C. Jones of the Royal Canadian Navy. Sir Gerald Campbell was quoted at the opening as stating that "a great deal of trouble starts with loneliness" and that "the sailor should feel he is somebody's darling."⁹³

The Ajax Club served enlisted men by providing a house full of amenities. All guests were first offered free coat check. While staying at the Ajax Club, visitors had access to a library, with chairs and desks at which to read and write. The library opened with a collection of 1,500 new volumes, which had been gifts from private donors and publishers. Six months after the opening, the library had gained 500 more books, bringing the total book count to 2,000.⁹⁴ Card and ping pong rooms were available for entertainment. The club served hot, homemade meals priced at twenty-five cents and had a limit of five beer per evening, priced at ten cents each.⁹⁵ There were also spaces available for those who did not want to drink. Spirits were forbidden. For those looking for a quick meal or snack, there was a Pop Shop, which sold sandwiches for five cents each, and a Soft Drink Booth.⁹⁶ Behind the house was a garden, where service personnel could enjoy fresh air.⁹⁷ The club was reported to have been working on a golf course to be set

⁹² Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 164.

⁹³ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article "Ajax Club is Open at Halifax", undated newspaper clipping.

⁹⁴ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article "Ajax Club is Open at Halifax", undated newspaper clipping.

⁹⁵ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article "'Club for Navy Men" by Cyril Robinson.

⁹⁶ White, *Ajax Affair*, 55.

⁹⁷ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 165.

behind the house by the summer of 1941, with a capacity of 400-500 people.⁹⁸ Equipment had been bought with donated funds. The club provided a lavish atmosphere for sailors who otherwise might not have had a place to drink. As members of the Royal Canadian Navy typically made about a dollar a day, these prices were tailored to the income of a sailor. Men of all ranks were welcome.⁹⁹ The Ajax Club was described as “a place where a man could have his little nip and maintain his self respect.”¹⁰⁰

Work at the Ajax Club was long and strenuous, involving provision of meals, a bar, entertainment, and a garden. Isabel Macneill estimated that she spent from 10am to 10pm at the club most days after its opening.¹⁰¹ The tiredness of the volunteers was also due to the lack of volunteers available. Initially volunteers were scouted from the North End Canteen. Many who were able to volunteer their time in the city were already committed to different organizations or had other responsibilities to attend to. The club in total had 70 full time and part time volunteers contributing to its operation.¹⁰² Despite the shortage of volunteers, the club had become a popular option for entertainment and hospitality.

Though all seemed well with the Ajax Club, its existence would soon come under threat. The first cause of tension was when the Royal Canadian Navy wanted to have a permanent staff member placed at the Ajax Club, which McEuen found to be a threat to the independence of the club. The navy also wanted McEuen to open the club to merchant seamen, to which McEuen

⁹⁸ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, magazine clipping of article “Club for Navy Men” by Cyril Robinson.

⁹⁹ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article “Ajax Club is Open at Halifax”, undated newspaper clipping.

¹⁰⁰ Metson, *East Coast Port*, 111.

¹⁰¹ Isabel Macneill Fonds, 1939-46 writing.

¹⁰² NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, Speech Made by Janet McEuen on March 13th, 1942, to the Members of the House of Assembly, the Members of the Congregation of the Fort Massey Church and Subscribers of the Ajax Club and Voluntary Workers, 3.

argued that the building of the Merchant Seaman Club in Halifax was almost done, and would provide a space for merchant seamen, whereas many naval seamen would still need the Ajax Club. McEuen, who was well connected through managing the Ajax Club and her connections through her husband, eventually gained full jurisdiction over all activities involving the Ajax Club, but the tensions would linger and would weaken the club's relationship with the navy.¹⁰³

In an effort to heal the bruised relationship, McEuen proposed to buy the Odell Estate and gift it to the Royal Canadian Navy. She did insert clauses in order to gift the estate which included keeping the name "Ajax Club", that it should continue to be enjoyed by all ranks of the Navy, and that the Royal Canadian Navy headquarters had to be kept in Halifax or else the house would be sold.¹⁰⁴ Angus L. Macdonald, who had been the MLA for Halifax South during the Second World War and served as the federal Minister of Defence for Naval Services, agreed to the donation with McEuen's terms, and so McEuen sent multiple cheques to Ottawa for the purchase of the Odell house.¹⁰⁵ The total amount was \$16,000, yet the cheques were never cashed. As McEuen had not cancelled the cheques, this left her wondering why her cheques were returned until she received a telegram from D.K. MacTavish, Assistant Judge Advocate General, indicating that the Ajax Club's liquor license was in jeopardy.¹⁰⁶

In 1941, the Fort Massey United Church, which had originally supported the Ajax Club, had received a new minister, Reverend Gerald Rogers.¹⁰⁷ Subsequently, the church petitioned the

¹⁰³ White, *Ajax Affair*, 59.

¹⁰⁴ White, *Ajax Affair*, 60.

NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, letter from Janet McEuen to Captain W. Creery of the Royal Canadian Navy, November 30, 1941.

¹⁰⁵ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, "Acceptance" letter from A.L. MacDonald, newspaper clipping, December 15, 1941.

¹⁰⁶ White, *Ajax Affair*, 61-62.

¹⁰⁷ White, *Ajax Affair*, 63. Also note: Rev Anderson was replaced by Rev Rogers at the Fort Massey United Church in 1941.

Liquor Commission to cancel the Club's license, claiming that the club had become a public nuisance. It is unclear if there was another reason behind his petition to close the club, which was not public, such as a personal or political motivation.¹⁰⁸ It was also initially unclear who in the church was behind the petition, though it was suspected that members of the Kirk Session (church elders) must have been in opposition to the club for the petition to move forward.¹⁰⁹ The Treasurer of the Ajax Club was a member of the congregation and had no knowledge of the decision to contest the club's license.¹¹⁰ As the club relied on its liquor sales to stay afloat, the loss of its liquor license would likely mean closure.

Though labelled by Fort Massey United Church as being a nuisance, the Ajax Club had only had one incident. This involved sex workers who had approached the building upset, stating that they did not "have access to their clientele" due to their staying at the Ajax Club.¹¹¹ Some had climbed the fence in the back to get into the garden. In response, the Ajax Club put barbed wire on the top of the fence, which ended the fence jumping. Still, it was said, "evening courtesans" often frequented the streets around the house.¹¹² The Halifax Chief of Police noted that the Ajax Club was one of only two clubs in the city that had never called for police services, the other being the Halifax Club. The *Montreal Gazette* wrote, "At no time has it been alleged, by anyone, that the privilege was abused by the Ajax Club. Drunkenness has been unknown there, according to unanimous report."¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Raddall, *Warden of the North*, 296.

¹⁰⁹ White, *Ajax Affair*, 63.

¹¹⁰ NSARM, Isabel Macneill Fonds, MG1 vol 3648, "Halifax In Wartime, 1939-1946" notes by Isabel Macneill, 7.

¹¹¹ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 165.

¹¹² White, *Ajax Affair*, 57.

¹¹³ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article "The Ajax Club: Storm in a Beer Mug", *The Gazette (Montreal)*, March 13, 1942.

McEuen and the club attempted to compromise with the church. Realizing that the claim that the club was a nuisance could be due to the large number of service members walking by the church, the Ajax Club proposed to put up a high board fence on the Tobin Street side of the building. The entrance would be moved to Kent Street to redirect traffic to the club. It would also ban their Navy guests from the Tobin side of the street. McEuen proposed these changes in a meeting on March 13, 1942 at the Ajax Club. The Board of the club was surprised by the complaint from Fort Massey, the last minister of which had approved of its presence. Had the board members known of the concerns before, they claimed that they would have made changes to help rectify the situation. McEuen, in a newspaper article announcing the proposed compromise, said that if the compromise was not accepted that one of two possibilities would occur. The first possibility was that the club would continue to fight to stay open. The second possibility was its closure.¹¹⁴ Either one would aggravate the situation between the two organizations. Despite efforts from the Ajax Club, the Fort Massey United Church did not agree to any alternatives proposed and continued to call for the closure of the club. The Ajax Club filed an appeal to the cancellation of its liquor license on February 2, 1942. Yet Premier A.S. MacMillan was quoted as stating, “the Ajax Club would never get a beer license.”¹¹⁵

While an argument existed that the Ajax Club was helping to manage the overflow of service personnel in Halifax and the city’s lack of private spaces for sailors to consume alcohol, others disagreed with the principle of service personnel having easy access to alcohol. Some of those who agreed with Fort Massey’s views linked liquor with losing the war. They argued that removing liquor would help secure victory for the Allied forces. This argument was backed by

¹¹⁴ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article “Compromise Proposed in Ajax Club Matter”, newspaper clipping, date and publication unknown.

¹¹⁵ White, *Ajax Affair*, 62.

examples of places which allowed heavy alcohol use and had been defeated, as supposedly in the case of France, leading to equating an absence of alcohol with a greater likelihood of winning the war.¹¹⁶ Other community organizations such as the West End Baptist Church, Capital City Lodge, and the Dartmouth United Church Ministerial Association sided with the Fort Massey United Church.¹¹⁷

Though many believed that temperance was a benefit for the war effort, others disagreed. Letters protesting the cancellation of Ajax's liquor license were sent to the Liquor Commissioner, who decided the fate of the Ajax Club's liquor license, as well as local newspapers. Citizens noted that an obvious need was being met and advocated for the liquor license to be maintained. In view of the controversy, the Ajax Club issued newspaper advertisements stating that, "The citizens of Halifax are invited to inspect the Ajax Club and see for themselves how the sailors have respected this national tribute to them from the people of Canada. Open daily: 2p.m. -9p.m."¹¹⁸ With the potential cancellation of the Ajax liquor license, people of the city flocked to either side of the argument. The matter was reported nationally, with both criticism and support emerging. There was much public support for the club. Local newspapers such as the *Halifax Herald* were flooded with articles with analysis and updates about the closure. Even papers from out of province and other countries made comments. McEuen was quoted in *Time* magazine, thanking those who had stood up for the club, and

¹¹⁶ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 165.

¹¹⁷ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article "Compromise Proposed in Ajax Club Matter", newspaper clipping, date and publication unknown.

¹¹⁸ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, newspaper clipping, title, date and publication unknown.

stating, “God bless you – and give us strength to carry on the fight for the glass of beer for the sailor in surroundings worthy of you.”¹¹⁹

Despite public outcry and a petition signed by 36,000 sailors to save the club, the Liquor Commission decided not to renew the Ajax Club’s liquor license. The Mayor, high ranking Naval Officers, and the Chief of Police had written letters pleading for the license to be renewed.¹²⁰ The decision was announced on February 19, 1942, by the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission, stating that the license would not be renewed in the current location, and that the existing temporary license would expire on February 23, 1942.¹²¹ This led to the closure of the Ajax Club on that date.¹²² The club’s assets were frozen by the Department of War Services on March 21, and on April 8 its charter for the Interallied Hospitality and Food Fund was revoked. In early April, McEuen was asked to de-register the club from the War Charities Act. This meant that not only was the Ajax Club closed, but that McEuen was not registered to be able to organize any entertainment activities for personnel using her previous fund. On May 1, she made an announcement to the public with this news¹²³.

Though offers were made to move the location of the Ajax Club, this ultimately did not work out, partly due to the mistrust of the government that McEuen had gained from the closure of the Ajax Club. The Navy offered to switch locations of the Ajax Club with the Canadian Legion which was in Keith Hall on Hollis Street. This came with a promise that her Fund would be re-registered with the War Charities Act. When she inquired, the War Charities Act would not

¹¹⁹ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, article in “Foreign News” Section, Time Magazine, March 9, 1942, unknown title and page number.

¹²⁰ White, *Ajax Affair*, 64.

¹²¹ White, *Ajax Affair*, 63.

¹²² Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 165.

¹²³ White, *Ajax Affair*, 76.

be granted until she signed over ownership of the house. The Navy had expected to take over the house on Tobin after the closure of the club, but McEuen still owned the home as the cheques she had previously sent for the donation had not been cashed. She ended up selling the house to the Norwegian Government in exile, which was also announced on May 1.¹²⁴ Eventually the new owners also used the house as a club and served liquor. No protest of their liquor license was made¹²⁵.

The Ajax Club was not the only club that had had a license near public grounds, with the Navy League opening its own club, the Navy League Recreation Centre, on the Wanderers' Grounds.¹²⁶ It opened on August 1, 1942. The club had both a wet and dry canteen. Surrounded by open land and near the Halifax Public Gardens, the new club was by no means secluded. Though the Navy League Club helped fill the void left by the Ajax Club, questions arose to why its liquor license, or the liquor license of the Norwegian-run club in the Odell house had not been criticized in the same way.¹²⁷ This seemed hypocritical to many. As the NSLC was selling beer with a "Beer for V" on them, indicating victory, members of the public also criticized using the war effort to sell beer while not letting the Ajax Club sell beer to those who were fighting in the war.¹²⁸

McEuen instead moved her efforts to a new, though related project. She opened the Ajax Hospitality Headquarters, which helped sailors find accommodations a short distance outside of the Halifax core.¹²⁹ McEuen was restricted from helping any Royal Canadian Navy member find

¹²⁴ White, *Ajax Affair*, 77.

¹²⁵ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 165.

¹²⁶ White, *Ajax Affair*, 87.

¹²⁷ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 166-167.

¹²⁸ NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, MFM 14653, newspaper clipping, title, date and publication unknown.

¹²⁹ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 166.

accommodations, as they were now being taken care of by the Navy League's new Recreational Centre.¹³⁰ Instead, McEuen focused her efforts on the British Navy. Most of the accommodations with which the Ajax Hospitality Headquarters helped sailors connect were private homes outside of the city centre, providing a less busy atmosphere where they could relax away from constant reminders of the war. She continued to use her connections in Halifax to help provide entertainment for sailors. One example comes from correspondence between McEuen and Hugh O. Mills, who ran the Halifax Concert Party Guild.¹³¹ The Halifax Concert Party had recently performed at the Ajax Club, and Mills had offered to have a weekly performance set up at the Ajax Club for sailors. Sadly, McEuen had to decline his offer because she and her staff were already overworked and may not have been able to work additionally each week to organize a performance and arrange for sailors to attend¹³². McEuen continued her volunteer efforts until the end of the war, when she eventually moved away from Halifax. She then established a scholarship with the money she had left over.¹³³ Years later, she was still known as "Mrs. Ajax"¹³⁴.

While the North End Canteen survived the war, the Ajax Club could not make it in a province still torn between the temperance movement and allowing drinking. The North End Canteen ran its services for almost five years, whereas the Ajax Club barely made it past its first birthday. While the North End Services Canteen closed quietly and peacefully, the Ajax Club put up a fight that was noticed across and outside of Canada. The North End Services Canteen

¹³⁰ White, *Ajax Affair*, 79.

¹³¹ See Chapter 1 of this thesis: "Banding Together: The Halifax Herald Concert Party Guild".

¹³² NSARM, Edith Isabel Girouard Fonds, Hugh O. Mills Papers, Letter to Hugh Mills, Chairman of the Halifax Concert Party Guild, from Janet McEuen (Mrs. Stuart McEuen), Chairman of Ajax Hospitality, December 30th, 1944.

¹³³ Naftel, *Halifax at War*, 163.

¹³⁴ NSARM, Isabel Macneill Fonds, MG1 vol 3648, "Janet Evelyn McEuen" Obituary.

provided a more affordable venue, whereas the Ajax Club offered luxury. The NESC was a dry canteen, whereas the only reason the Ajax Club was opened and met its closure was due to the desire to have an accessible wet canteen for sailors. Yet both became known nationally as good Canadian hosts. The two organizations saw thousands of sailors or other service personnel enter their doors, and both catered to improving the morale and comforts of those fighting with the Allies. Both were locally run. Founded by some of the same volunteers, both the Club and Canteen were successful in different ways, for different lengths of time.

Conclusion

Through trying times, many Haligonians, paid or unpaid, dedicated their time to ensuring that the city's transient population was well supported. Though there were branches of nationally known charities and other organizations that came to respond to the demand, new and unprecedented local charities and businesses would also do so. Four different organizations (in three categories) have served as case studies or examples of the lengths to which civilians – notably women – would go to help provide obvious necessities such as meals, as well as additional comforts such as music, movies and drinks. Though some may argue that the latter three were not necessities, their availability did aid in boosting the morale of service personnel, a necessity in order for Canada to persevere throughout the war.

This thesis has argued that unexpected avenues of aid, though not completely solving the issue of overcrowding or lack of entertainment in the city, did alleviate the demand for services and should be considered as wartime contributions in the same way other, more well-known organizations are recognized. The historiography of the Second World War on the Home Front in Canada has focused largely on efforts performed by women's sections of the military such as the WRENS, nursing or medical aid groups such as the Red Cross, or other efforts by larger groups like the YMCA. Volunteer efforts, largely performed by women, have tended to be grouped into these three categories by the earlier historiography of studies of the Home Front. Only recently has the historiography started to emerge from these restrictions. Though there has been research done to survey some of these efforts in larger, more overarching studies of Halifax's efforts during the Second World War, specific studies of the organizations concerned are rare. Indeed, more generally, the Home Front has been less of a focus for local historians than it deserves to be. As social history in relation to war, or alternative contributions to analyses of

wartime experience, have gradually increased as a topic of research, so this thesis has added to the growing historiography of Canada's efforts on the Home Front, while branching out to include infrequently or not deeply researched cases in the city of Halifax. Through analyzing the Halifax Concert Party, the Capitol theatre, the North End Services Canteen and the Ajax Club, a variety of related but different organizations have been covered in order to examine key aspects of the volunteerism and related work that existed in the city. Music, movies and meals, including a dry and wet canteen, have been analyzed so as to give a wider understanding of the different ways in which service personnel, primarily sailors, were hosted by Halifax. By taking an example of each type of hosting or entertainment in the city, a detailed but rounded approach has been taken.

Though each of the three previous chapters has used varying sources, one major type of source used for the topics of the Halifax Concert Party, North End Services Canteen and Ajax Club has been the personal records of those who were involved in running these organizations, including newspaper and magazine clippings, letters to and from government officials, personal letters, photographs, and personal accounts. Recognized throughout is the reality that these sources present a subjective view of the events which took place in Halifax during the Second World War. Yet these sources also provide revealing insights into the experiences of those closest to the organizations. Papers from organizations, such as the Women's Voluntary Services Fonds have also been used along with newspaper articles, advertisements, photographs and other contemporary materials to support critical scrutiny of any claims made in the personal papers.

The thesis has demonstrated that, contrary to some forms of popular belief and to what has been reflected in the older general historiography, a variety of activities can be considered as wartime work, including tasks that might have been overlooked as they provided everyday

essentials or comforts. These efforts not only provided physical necessities, but also emotional support and help with boosting morale. Before the Home Front can be better understood, historians must take into consideration the smaller organizations, started locally or independently, that contributed to the war effort and deserve sustained attention.

In conclusion, the overall purpose of this thesis has been to bring to light some of the overlooked organizations and businesses in Halifax, and the ways in which they contributed to Canada's efforts on the Home Front. Particular attention has been given to women's roles as volunteers and in the running of the organizations serving the service personnel, especially sailors, who made up a large portion of the transient population. The evidence shows that the organizations had both a short-term impact on morale in the Navy, Army, and Air Force, but also a longer-term impact exemplified by the sailors who sent Janet McEuen Christmas letters decades after the war's end. The generosity and kindness shown in welcoming service personnel to the province during the war was appreciated by thousands. More than half a century later, none of these organizations still exist, yet are not forgotten as being a vital part of Halifax's wartime history.

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Photo 2

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