

Saanich Archives
WWI References in Oral History Interviews
1914-1919

Mary Winterburn (nee Miles)

- “The house wasn’t nearly finished when the war started, First World War. So he [dad] went off to the war. My mother had the four kids for about four years. And he came back in fairly good shape.”

John Woods

- “I had the rest of my schooling in Gordon Head but this stopped when the War was on because I became a SOS (Soldier of the Soil). Quite a few of us in Gordon Head did this, but we had a bit of night school. Two nights a week. W.T. Edwards formed the Gordon Head Sea Scouts and a lot of us young fellows joined. We wore the Navy type of uniforms.”

Isabel Mason (nee Taylor)

- Isabel: “Oh it was so many people it was pathetic. They were just dropping. They were here in the morning and they’d be gone at night. Oh it was terrible.”
 - Interviewer: “This was the 1918 flu epidemic? Was it pretty bad there?”
 - Isabel: “Very bad all over. Oh yeah it was very bad... And we were fortunate in a way you know, together all day.”
 - Interviewer: “You had it.”
 - Isabel: “In a way but not as bad as a lot of people, people dying.”
 - Interviewer: “Did you know people who died?”
 - Isabel: “Oh yeah. There was a lady came up from Pitt Meadows. She was a nurse. I can remember oh because I loved her, such a lovely person. And she came to her sister at Coutlee and they had a little kiddy and you know I can still look and look through the window and... take her about five o’clock... It was that suddenly she died oh yes. Oh it was maddening.”

Dorothy Ramsay (nee Fulton) and Ursula Jupp (nee Edwards)

- Ursula: “I remember the 1918 flu. Of course my mother was dead by this time, but I remember how very kind all the people were around were [sic], they were bringing all sorts of things.”
- Dorothy: “And during the First War you know, when she [my aunt] was convenor at Mount Tolmie and Gordon Head parts, you know Gordon Head and Cedar Hill extended so far. And of course, I used to drive her everywhere.”
 - Interviewer: “That was the Red Cross Station then. How did she initially get into that work?”
 - Dorothy: “Well she was very patriotic and she joined the Red Cross or seemed to know a lot of her friends were in there working hard, so we used to deliver every Tuesday to houses, just miles and miles of driving, pajamas that were already cut or wool for knitting. And then we’d pick on Friday, from whoever had something done. We were just on the go all the time.”
 - Interviewer: “Those were rolling bandages and making socks?”
 - Dorothy: “Yes, and we had the school children come over, maybe you were one of them, no I think you would be older than that, I mean we used to have the children come from the school to the hall just across the street and they would roll bandages by the hour. When you get a whole slew of children doing it you used to get quite a few bandages you know.”
 - Interviewer: “I was talking to Marjorie Watson and she said the war really disrupted their Sundays and it used to be that no one was allowed to do anything but go to Sunday School and walk on Sundays, but after the war they were allowed to roll bandages.”
 - Dorothy: “Oh yes, and during the war there were quite a few people, who like you say, before the war started wouldn’t do anything on Sunday, and the Parfitt family down there, they were very churchy people and the children couldn’t swim or anything, although they had a lovely summer home. Nothing on Sunday. But when the war broke out, people just knit on Sunday and, you know, just did everything. They were regular heathens as other folk. But we always figured soldiers were fighting on Sunday, so why shouldn’t we work for them.”
- Dorothy: “But I think when the war was on, that first war, I never knew of any group that worked so hard. I never heard of any. They just went into it whole heartedly.”

- Ursula: “It was the good leadership we had. But I think Mrs. Todd was such an excellent leader in the first war, and Mrs. Mitchell, in the second. She was very competent. And, like Mrs. Todd, was able to do it so quietly.”
- Dorothy: “Yes, and everybody seemed to like them too. There was no problems in trying to persuade anybody. When Mrs. Todd got the empty store for the Red Cross, everybody seemed to want to help.”
- Interviewer: “You still called the Saanich Welfare Society still under the auspices of the Red Cross then?”
- Dorothy: “No, it was called the Friendly Help.”
- Interviewer: “It was called the Friendly Help. Where did she get that idea?”
- Dorothy: “Well there’s been one in Victoria for years and years, you know, and I think she just spread it out to Saanich.”
- Interviewer: “And she knew about that. Did she get any help from Friendly Helpers in Victoria?”
- Dorothy: “No. We got volunteers from Saanich. There was plenty of them you know. People used to come and spend the whole day. Some only half a day.”
- Interviewer: “Did people think of that as their sort of duty?”
- Dorothy: “Seemed to. And they seemed to enjoy it. If you weren’t in there working at some patriotic thing you sort of felt left out yourself.”

Marjorie Goodwin (nee Watson)

- Marjorie: “The way we used to have pork and bean suppers up in the Hall [Gordon Head]. The whole community came and we used to have the most wonderful times. Then then [sic] had Five Hundred Parties. That’s the way they did a lot in the First World War. Now the First World War broke down our Sunday business. During the First World War on Sunday you weren’t allowed to do anything, but to go to Sunday School, go for a walk or something like that. But during the War we started rolling bandages. They had little machines that we used to attach to the table, so we were allowed to roll bandages. I was only a youngster, you see, in the First World War, but my mother had taught us all how to knit. And I knit socks. We were allowed to knit and roll bandages on Sundays.”

- Interviewer: “To help the fellows in the War. Did a lot of the young men around here leave? To go to War?”
- Marjorie: “Oh yes, quite a lot of them. Of course, there wasn’t a great many, but a lot of the Gordon Head boys did. Both wars.”

Madeline Howden (nee Bradshaw)

- “I was in highschool when the war... And I’ll never forget it, the boys from highschool went off as though they were going to a picnic. And of course my beau was killed. I came across a picture from the other day, you know, anyway. Our whole lives were ruined. All the boyfriends were killed. Day after day there were lists in the paper of deaths. Was nobody left. And then of course when the war was over there was a terrible slump in Victoria and there was no work and the boys that did come back from the war went off elsewhere to get an education or to get jobs. So it was very lean times.”
- “I stayed there [teaching] till Christmas and I came home for Christmas. And the news was bad. My brother’d been injured, my beau was dead, my two sisters were away at the war. It was a dreary time.”

Eileen Cox (nee Stubbs)

- “Well at first it was only a two-room school [McKenzie School] and then they eventually added on to it, you know. And at that time, the First World War, we had what they called a Victory Garden, and each of the pupils had a little patch and we all grew our own vegetables.”
- [Re: Madame Watt’s shop in Victoria] “[...] at that time, there was a troupe of men who used to entertain the troops in the First World War called the Dumbells. And “Marjorie” was the leading “girl” and he, every time they came to Victoria, he always came to Madame and had two or three gowns made up for his show. And I remember one time I was in the office, but the fitting room was next door to the office and Mrs. Main who was the head of the workroom had to come down and fit him. And you know she hated doing it. But anyway these men had a wonderful time. The wardrobe mistress or man came in to choose what they wanted and then they came in to be fitted. Marjorie the leading girl, man, came in to be fitted and I remember one time it was a beautiful thing, it was panne velvet, it was almost grey at the shoulder and it went down to midnight blue in the train. They were making this fitted thing and Mrs. Main was fitting him and he said to her, ‘now just stop it, you’re tickling my leg.’ And she was so embarrassed... And they were beautifully dressed. They were wonderful shows, they put them on at the Royal and all over Canada. It was fun.”

- “Well I remember the Armistice for the First World War. That was the most exciting that I felt. We didn’t have t.v. in those days you know. And I remember Dan Pearman was our paperboy and he was riding his bike the morning the news came out about the peace. And he was going around on his bicycle about six o’clock in the morning yelling ‘Peace, peace, peace!’ till he was so hoarse he couldn’t speak. I remember that more clearly.”
- “My mother had to have a special for the First World War because she had a heart condition. In those days they didn’t have the nitroglycerin for the heart, so she always had to carry one ounce of brandy in her purse.”

Violet Lohr

- Interviewer: “How old were you when the war broke out?”
 - Violet: “I was only 14.”
 - Interviewer: “Can you remember any of the feelings that you had when war was declared?”
 - Violet: “Well we thought my father would have to go. We didn’t realize that people with any property didn’t go. We didn’t suffer really with the war. We had cows and everything. Heal’s Range was full of soldiers billeted. At that time when we were picking strawberries they had all shacks out in Saanich and teachers and everybody would go out and stay in these shacks and the soldiers would come around from Heal’s Range too y’see – yes.”

S.H. Levings

- Interviewer: “What do you remember about the war years here in Victoria? I’m talking about the First World War. What was happening in Victoria and around Victoria?”
 - Mr. Levings: “There was quite a number of ships down where Princess Mary restaurant is was the foundation ship yard and there was 2 or 3 little ship yards around there. They built quite a number of ships, the ones I can remember, we built some, - I didn’t work on them but the company built some for the French government. They were wooden ships with boilers – steam driven – then I was there when they built the breakwater and they got quite a number – quite a lot of the rubble and the stone from the north side of Albert Head. There’s a quarry in there they got all that stuff from and they got quite a number from Texada Island the better type of sandstone they got it from there, I just forget the name of the company, I used to know them all, but it’s gone.

- “Yes, during the war there wasn’t a great deal of excitement here, because we are too far away from it. Of course there was a great number of our men went. I had a picture the other day of a hospital the 5th Field Hospital.
- “When we were living on the Gorge Road, around in the First World War time we had a doctor – a doctor Whillams, A.T. [H.A.?] Whillams, he used to live just on the city side of Harriet and Gorge Road and I had a picture the other day of - during the war he joined up with the 5th Field Hospital, went over to Greece and various places like that where the troops were fighting in Galipoli and it was a picture of Doctor Whillams, his wife and daughter Frances Whillams on the Princess Mary when she was a steamship and it’s a picture of the 5th Field Hospital. All the men and nurses all congregated on the afterdeck and the picture was taken off the wharf and I turned it in to the Victoria Medical Society for their archives about a month or so ago, they were very pleased with it, and this was an item that was written and a Nurse Collins was one of the nurses at that time.”
- Interviewer: “Oh yes, I see this was an article from the Islander – ‘Does anyone remember the excitement in 1915 when the No. 5 Canadian General Hospital was in Victoria and Doctor Hart as Colonel?’ Do you remember that?”
- Mr. Levings: “Oh yes quite well, I would be about 15 or 16 at that time.”
- Interviewer: “Was there a lot of excitement?”
- Mr. Levings: “There was, quite a lot of excitement.”
- Interviewer: “Did they station troops here?”
- Mr. Levings: “Oh yes, there was the Willows race tracks which was down at the foot of Fort Street down the Oak Bay end of Fort Street. There used to be exhibition grounds down there and during the war the stations bivouacked quite a number, oh thousands of new entries down there at that part. In 1916 we had a very heavy snowfall here in Victoria, It fell I think 2 or 3 days it fell up to a depth of 3 or 4 feet, the heaviest snowfall I think anybody remembers. The street cars were running in those days, well, the street cars would move up where the tracks were and clean the tracks and they ran the street cars through, but they turned in the militia, the army to clear the streets of Victoria and they all turned to manpower to clean the snow up and get the streets in order. Took about a week to get things really lined up again.”
- Interviewer: “What was the attitude in Victoria regarding the war?”

- Mr. Levings: “Well, quite a number of our people who were over there, they were naturally anxious about their wellbeing and all the rest of it. But life went on fairly moderately with the exceptions of like ship building and all this type of thing increased population to building ships and there were quite a number of industries started up, the V.M.D. was quite busy, Yarrows was quite busy, but we weren’t under fire, the only time that there was anything or scare on was when Sir Richard McBride bought two submarines from the Chilean Government. There was an armed German raider out in the Pacific here, nobody knew where she was because they had no great amount of wireless telegraph and no radar, no means of communication. She was drifting around and we found out later during the war that she didn’t come any farther north than Panama or north of South America. Anyway, Sir Richard McBride he heard of these 2 submarines that were being built for the Chilean Government and the Chilean Government had reneged on paying for them, so they were available. He bought them out of BC Government funds. They were taken to Esquimalt and they were the first 2 subs in the Canadian Navy. The other ships of course some of them, there was the old Rainbow and some of the other war ships they were around here. Of course they were not too far away from the change from sail to steam. The old Rainbow had one of those bows that used to come out, something like the freighters, the big freighters they have a big bulbous nose on them. Well the Rainbow and I think the sister ship back in Halifax, they had a sharp nosed ramming bow especially reinforced to hit somebody and poke a hole in them.”
- Interviewer: “There was a bit of a scare then.”
- Mr. Levings: Oh yes there was a bit of a scare, there was a scare here, I’m not quite sure whether it was before or after the First World War, but that was when they put the guns out at Fort Rodd to protect the straits – about some working chaps that were supposed to be coming in here, but I think it just worked out. The guns were set to face out towards Port Angeles and over that way.”

Ruth Chambers

- Ruth: “It [grandfather’s factory in Belgium] is still standing although in both WWI and WWII the little town of [Ekeren?] where the factory was was under German occupation. The funny thing is that in WWI we got no news of my Grandfather and the twin Aunts because they stayed on during the war – we got no word of them at all and in 1919 my parents, who were living in Victoria, went to England to see my Mother’s relatives who lived in England and to see my Father’s relatives who lived in Belgium. And it seemed to me most extraordinary that all the windows in the front of that great big house were boarded up. A bomb had

landed on the big front lawn and had broken every single window and Belgium had a very sensible arrangement after WWI. Belgian glass is very good and the government decreed that glass should go first to factories and businesses so as to get the economy of the country going again and after that it would go to residences. At the age of about 8, nearly 9, it seemed rather exciting and peculiar to have all one's meals in darkness with the electric light on.

- “I can also remember in those years that my father suddenly said that he thought that I, and my cousin, Margaret, who lived in another big house just next door, ought really to see the battlefields of WWI, that this was history and to have us there in [Ekeren?] so close to the battlefields and not see it would mean that we weren't getting to see something that we would remember all our lives; and so we went. Neither Margaret nor I wanted to go on that trip. We had arranged to do other things. We grumbled all the way to Ypres, which the Canadians always called “Y”– pres and somewhere, there probably exists in this house, a picture of Margaret and me standing on a tank on the battlefield which we sort of walked among the bomb places and looked down on these deep trenches filled with water by that time. [1919]. And I remember the chauffer picked up a boot and said ‘there's a foot in it!’ I don't suppose there'd be a foot in it, there might have been some bones. – I remember chiefly about that – and my father screamed and very severely said ‘You do not speak like that in front of the young girls!’
- Then we went right into Ypres. It had been a beautiful medieval town, lovely buildings, and not one was unharmed. Nowadays through TV and things like that we know what bombed cities look like, but in 1919 it was an absolute revelation. I had no idea that a city could be so devastated. These beautiful sort of arches from the old buildings' entrance and just sort of rubble streaming out of them and there was nothing in Ypres, apart from ruins, except for one wooden shack which had hastily been put up by some enterprising entrepreneur who thought he could provide lunches and things for any visitors or tourists who came so we went and had lunch there and Margaret and I were asked what we wanted to drink and we said lemonade. They had no lemonade. They brought either [gurzay?] or grenadine which was bright pink and very sweet so on the way home [...] we grumbled because we got [gurzay?] or grenadine and not lemonade. I think we were two perfectly, disgusting little girls. She was about my age. We were both about nine. But my father was right. I've never forgotten that place, I've never forgotten the look of those battlefields. Not a tree, not a tree. Maybe one or two with all the branches sort of torn off by shells. And in my Grandfather's place, in the manufacturing town of [Ekern?], where the factory was there were two pillboxes. Now these were the big concrete gun emplacements and I suppose they made a ring around the country. One at the back of my Grandfather's house was in a field and the top of it was covered with soil and grass so that from the air it was practically invisible and the one in the back of my Uncle Peter's house, the

father of my cousin Margaret, was in what we called the birchwood – it had been woven with birch branches and things so that it was completely camouflaged.”

- Interviewer: “That must have been quite something to you because there was nothing like that in Canada.”
- Ruth: “What there was in Canada during WWI in Victoria was the difficulty of growing up in Oak Bay and going to kindergarten a stolid, small girl with a German name, and Oak Bay is very, very British. To this day I can remember cries of ‘Don’t walk home with Ruth, her Daddy is a German spy’ and they didn’t walk home with Ruth because of being the daughter of a German spy except for the two Spurgeon children. Mrs. Spurgeon, who lived on Island Road, said she’d never heard such utter nonsense in her life. She said to her two children ‘you are to walk home with Ruth and if there’s time come in with her and we’ll all have a glass of milk and a cookie or something before she walks up the hill to her own house’ and I’ll always remember Mrs. Spurgeon with gratitude because she was the only person who really stood up and these were kids in kindergarten just repeating what their parents had said.”
- Interviewer: “How did that make you feel? What kind of feelings did you have over these kind of insinuations?”
 - Ruth: “I didn’t mind. I think it practically broke my Mother’s heart. And I do remember Mrs. Spurgeon with great affection.”
- Ruth: “[...] I would walk down Island Road down Longbranch Avenue to St. Christopher’s School. [...] It was filled with British children and of course all their mothers went out to tea parties in Oak Bay and they all talked about the danger of German spies. And one can understand it because I think nearly all of them had husbands, brothers, maybe sons fighting in the war. They would be bitter, they would be full of hatred.”
 - Interviewer: “Did you find your family becoming alienated at that time?”
 - Ruth: “No not really. [...] We kept close within ourselves [...]”
 - Interviewer: “[...] “You didn’t find that your Mother or Father were becoming ostracized within the community then?”
 - Ruth: “Mother was a bit I think. But the feeling in Victoria altogether was quite extraordinary because if you look up the Lusitania Riots [...] Victoria was the only place within the British Empire that had riots like the Lusitania Riots which we had here. And it’s pretty well impossible to get a complete account of the Lusitania Riots because most of the people are now dead but Bess Forbes remembered one thing where the children were hanging out of their windows somewhere near Christchurch

Cathedral because the centre of the riot was the Kaiserhoff Hotel which is now the Kent Apartments on the corner of [Johnson] and Blanshard, certainly not very far from the library nor very far from the synagogue. [...] The soldiers who were stationed at the Willows were summoned out to restore order. One of them was Maj-Gen Pearkes – young Pearkes, he was a lieutenant at that time.”