



From the Archives

EMPIRE CLUB FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

November 2023

WELCOME TO A LITTLE BIT OF CANADIAN HISTORY...

Welcome to the first newsletter of the Empire Club Foundation. One of the foundation's primary missions is to advance education through our extensive digital library, which contains speeches delivered at the Empire Club of Canada since 1903. You can access the digital library [here](#), and we encourage you to explore its content to your heart's content.

In each newsletter, we will showcase the Foundation's ongoing projects and delve into our archives to uncover historical perspectives and insights from Canadians. The Empire Club has evolved over the years, striving to ensure diversity in its choice of topics, speakers, and governance structures. It's important to acknowledge that during its 120-year history, some speakers at the Empire Club expressed colonial attitudes and perpetuated oppression. However, these views do not align with the Club's commitment to equity, inclusion, and reconciliation.

This inaugural newsletter coincides with the Empire Club event on November 8th, commemorating Canada's Remembrance Day. You'll also find information about the historical contributions of other Canadians to wartime efforts and the speeches delivered at the Empire Club of Canada concerning these efforts.

November 8, 2023: Honouring Indigenous Veterans

Join the Empire Club of Canada on November 8th to honor First Nations Veterans, as we pay tribute to the contributions of Indigenous veterans in Canada's military history. This event will feature two distinguished speakers who will illuminate the remarkable journeys of First Nations veterans and their enduring impact on our nation.

One of our speakers, **Tim O'Loan**, is a Sahtu Dene from the NWT and a proud veteran who served for 10 years in the military before embarking on his undergraduate degree in Political Science and his professional career. From 1998 to 2006, Tim worked as a Land Claims and Self-Government Negotiator for the Government of the NWT. In 2010, he was asked to join the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) as an Advisor to the TRC Chair, Hon. Murray Sinclair. Tim recently founded the first and only national-level Speakers Bureau

Register to attend this event [here](#). A recording of the event is available after November 8 on the Empire Club of Canada [website](#).

Tim recently founded the first and only national-level Speakers Bureau solely dedicated to Reconciliation, known as the Reconciliation Speakers Bureau. As a Knowledge Keeper and a nationally recognized inspiring speaker, Tim has been presenting to Canadians for over a decade. A proud veteran, intergenerational, and '60s Scoop survivor, Tim continues to share this unique perspective across Canada.



Tim O'Loan

John Moses is a Delaware and Upper Mohawk band member from the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory near Brantford, Ontario,



John Moses

Canada. He is the son, grandson, and great-grandson of residential school survivors. Currently, he serves as the Director for Repatriation and Indigenous Relations at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, QC. John holds a diploma in applied arts in museum technology, a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies, a master's degree in Canadian studies, and has completed some PhD work (ABD) in cultural mediation. He is also a Canadian Armed Forces veteran, having served as a Communicator Research Operator 291. He was awarded the Special Service Medal for operations at Canadian Forces Station Alert on Ellesmere Island, Nunavut Territory

Indigenous Veterans Day

Mackenzie MacDonald

On November 8th, we are honoured to celebrate the Indigenous Veterans who have served in missions across Canada and worldwide. While not often enough acknowledged, the military service of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada has deep roots. We must continue to recognize, commemorate, and remember their sacrifices.

The exact statistics are difficult to determine; however, the service of Indigenous Peoples in times of conflict goes back generations. During the First World War, from 1914 to 1918, more than 4,000 Indigenous people served in uniform. The enlistment of Indigenous peoples across Canada was among the highest in the country, making it a remarkable and noteworthy response. In some communities, such as the Head of the Lake Band in British Columbia, every man between the ages of 20 and 35 enlisted. Indigenous recruits had joined the Canadian military for a variety of reasons. From seeking employment and adventure to upholding tradition by following the footsteps of their ancestors, the contributions of Indigenous veterans must be examined.



[Unidentified North American Indian serving with the Canadian Forestry Corps in Britain. Taken 1915-1918.]
<http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3194319&lang=eng>

Indigenous Peoples served as snipers and scouts but also contributed to the war effort on the home front. They donated large amounts of food, clothing, and money to worthy causes. They also granted the use of their reserve lands to construct new airports, rifle ranges and defence installations.

When the Second World War erupted in September 1939, numerous Indigenous men and women answered the call of duty once again and stood on the front lines. By the end of the conflict in 1945, over 3,000 First Nations members and an unknown number of Métis, Inuit, and other Indigenous recruits had served in the Canadian uniform.

Indigenous soldiers took on interesting new roles during this conflict, including the "code talker." Charles "Checker" Tomkins of Alberta was known for translating sensitive radio messages into Cree so they could not be understood if the enemy intercepted them. Another Cree-speaking "code talker" would then translate the received messages back into English so the intended recipients could understand them.

The history of Indigenous veterans in Canada is filled with numerous stories of heroism and leadership. In 1950, several hundred Indigenous peoples served during the Korean War. Tommy



(L-R): Cpl. W.A. Chergwin, Sgt. Tommy Prince receiving Military Medals at Buckingham Palace <https://shorturl.at/IIP27>

Prince, an Ojibwa soldier from Manitoba, served with Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Korea. Using his extensive infantry experience from the Second World War, Prince was the second-in-command of a rifle platoon. He notably led a group of men into an enemy camp, where they captured two machine guns. In April 1951, Prince also participated in the bitter Battle of Kapyong. His battalion was subsequently awarded the United States Presidential Unit Citation for its distinguished service—a rare honour for a non-American force.

During these many conflicts, Indigenous soldiers were often forced to overcome many challenges while serving our country. From learning a new language and adapting to cultural differences to travelling great distances from their remote communities to enlist. The challenges they faced often extended to their

post-service life. Many Indigenous war veterans did not receive equal treatment compared to other Canadian veterans. Indigenous veterans returned home to face discrimination, hardship and, on occasion, racism. In addition, the denial of land benefits to Indigenous veterans merely repeated the denials of their land rights upon the settlement of Canada and has left many Indigenous veterans disillusioned and hurt.

Indigenous Peoples continue to proudly serve Canada in operations at home and overseas, as they have bravely done for over 200 years. Today, more than 2,700 Indigenous members continue to serve in Canada's military forces. As we continue to take steps on this shared journey of reconciliation, we remember all the Indigenous Peoples who have served and protected

Canada. We are grateful for their sacrifices and cannot allow their contributions to Canada's history and security to go unnoticed.

On Indigenous Veterans' Day, Remembrance Day, and every day, we honour all veterans' service, courage, and sacrifice. Indigenous Peoples have fought beside our Allies in the First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. Today, they also serve in the Canadian Armed Forces efforts worldwide—from NATO duties in Europe to serving with United Nations peace operations.



Lest we forget.



Portrait of Major Bert S. Wemp, Courtesy Toronto Archives <https://shorturl.at/agjEI>

Battlefield Conditions in WWII

Silas LeBlanc

In 1942, Major Bert S. Wemp, a former Toronto mayor, journalist, and a member of the Orange Order of Canada gave a speech to the Empire Club of Canada [On Active Service with the Fighting Forces.](#)

In it, he shared his experiences working as a correspondent in the Second World War, and his visit with the young Canadian troops fighting in the war. Wemp was a veteran and squadron leader in the First World War and gave a harrowing account of what he saw in Europe. 1942 was a turning point in the war, with Wemp's speech coming right in the heat of it. Pearl Harbour had been attacked less than a year prior, and Allied forces were fighting the Germans and Italians in Northern Africa. On the Eastern Front, the Soviets were fighting in the Battle of Stalingrad, which would end up turning the tide of the war.

One of these accounts was on the Dieppe Raid, an Allied attack on the German-occupied port of Dieppe in Northern France involving the Canadian 2nd Infantry Division. Although some intelligence was gathered, the Allies were forced to retreat after only six hours. "Our overseas forces are a grand body of men, toughened, hard and Commandos all," Wemp recalled. "We saw them on the English Channel returning from Dieppe. Our boys, that is the boys from Central Ontario and Toronto, including the Royals, the Essex Scottish, and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, went in on the east. As you know, they met a German convoy and E-boats, one hour out

and two to go, which gave the enemy plenty of warning. They had to go on and finish the undertaking.”

When asking the general why they had gone through with the raid despite the Germans having been warned long in advance, he simply said that it was too late. “The others had gone in on the right and centre and the operation had to be completed. Our boys went in under murderous fire



Infantrymen of Le Régiment de la Chaudière, Normandy beachhead, France. ca. 8-9 June

and that is why the casualties were so heavy.” Wemp’s account provides an interesting look into the human element of the war and highlights just how young some of these soldiers were. He recalls speaking with some of them only to find out they were mostly in their late teens and early twenties. “There was a boy in the Battle of Britain at seventeen years of age, and doing a magnificent job, and when those boys went out after the Huns, they got them.”

His speech also described the devastation in Great Britain, and the resilience of the soldiers to push through and win the war. While the German blitz had ended by the time Wemp gave his speech, the war was still raging on, and people had no idea which way it would go. Even the possibility of Canada being attacked was not out of the question at this time, with

Wemp acknowledging this and mentioning that it is something its citizens should be prepared for. “If ever we have a raid in the City of Toronto, we want to be prepared for it and not caught napping,” Wemp stated. He described the resilience and spirit of the British people, even as their cities were being blitzed. “Yes, they have devastation, and they have food rationing, and they have clothing rationing, and they have sweets rationing,” he remembers. “They have fire watchers-both men and women-and there is no gasoline for pleasure driving. They have all these things and perhaps half the family, in many cases, in a community cemetery. They are experiencing the toil, sweat, blood and tears, but the spirit of the people of Great Britain has never been and is not broken. They are stronger today than ever and there is only one thought in their minds, and that is Victory.”

Links to Some Other Wartime speeches to the Empire Club of Canada

[*The War and Commerce*](#), Hon.Sir George Foster, 26 March 1915

[*Maple Leaf Up or Maple Leaf Down?*](#), Major General D. C. Spry, 11 November 1948

[*Democracy in War*](#), Rev. Dr. Arthur Guttery, 15 November 1919

[*The End of the Beginning*](#), Percy James Philip, 19 November 1942

[*The Puzzling Years Ahead*](#), Roy H. Thomson, 12 April 1945

[*Denmark Under the Nazi Heel*](#), His Excellency Henrik Kauffman, 10 February 1944

[*Canada’s Place in World Politics*](#), Charles Aubry Eaton, 1 March 1917

[*War Impressions*](#), Captain J. B Paulin, 23 May 1918

EMMELINE PANKHURST, SUFFRAGETTE, SPEAKS TO THE EMPIRE CLUB

Silas LeBlanc

As The Great War raged on in Europe, Women in Canada, Great Britain and the United States were fighting at home and taking direct action to earn the right to vote. World War I helped the



Emmeline Pankhurst, 1 January 1910. <http://www.loc.gov/>

suffragette movement gain a lot of momentum, as women filled jobs that were vacated by men fighting in the war, shifting public attitudes on women's roles in society. Emmeline Pankhurst was a British suffragette whose political activism and militant tactics helped British women earn the right to vote. In 1918, towards the end of the First World War, Pankhurst gave a [speech](#) to the Empire Club of Canada highlighting the importance of the suffragette movement, and what Britain and Canada had to gain by allowing women the right to vote.

In her speech, she talked about the women who took up the burden of maintaining the British Empire, and their dedication to their country. She used this as evidence that women deserve to have an equal say in the affairs of the British Empire, both abroad and at home. Pankhurst's speech gives a firsthand look into the foundations of the feminist movement, and the historical context that preceded it, carrying on a tradition that still lives on more than a century later. "We women hope that our contribution to politics will be one based upon sound political economy, a policy which will lead to the development of the vast natural resources of our Empire, because in that alone can the wealth of the masses be found," Pankhurst remarked. "If there are any men

here who have doubted the coming of women into citizenship, I tell you to put away your doubts forever. You will find in women a force which is conservative of all that is best in national life and at the same time a



Canadian suffragists march in Washington Suffrage Parade, public domain

force, from the practical experience of being the administrators and the dispensers of the national money through household arrangements, that will accept every intelligent and progressive method of increasing the means with which the necessities of life are bought.”

Pankhurst also suggested extending democratic institutions to India, a British colony at the time. Her primary concern was the well-being of women in India and saw the British Empire as responsible for ensuring it. “Let us be sure that it does mean a strengthening of liberty to women—not for a handful of people who will get power, but for the vast numbers of those races in India for whom we people of British origin are responsible,” Pankhurst stated. Despite the success of the suffragette movement, and the foundations of the feminist tradition it helped set, Pankhurst did have some views that many today would consider problematic. When speaking about the responsibilities of the British Empire, she said “We are responsible for the good government of the Empire. We are responsible also for the well-being of those races not so advanced as ourselves in modern civilization and in democratic institutions.”

However, Pankhurst’s speech still provides an important look into the history of the suffragette movement, and how the First World War served as a catalyst for women earning the right to vote. It gives the modern reader the tools to learn from the past, while also looking at how early feminist ideals can be improved upon in the present and future.



In 1917 Parliament passed the Wartime Elections Act, which extended suffrage to women of British origin who had male relatives serving in the War. The right was also given to 2,845 Nursing Sisters who were members of the Canadian Army Medical Corps seen voting in the field in the photograph courtesy of the Canadian Archives.

<https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=3194224>

Links to other speeches to the Empire Club of Canada About the Role Women During Wartime

[*The Part We Play*](#), Hon. Iva Campbell Fallis, 9 November 1939

[*Some of the War Work of Canadian Women*](#), Mrs. Arthur Van Koughnet,
26 April 1917

[*Remembrance Day Reflection: Canadian Women in War*](#), Dr. Wendy M.
Cecil, CM, HCapt(N), Dr. Melanie Morin-Pelletier, Hari Panday,
10 November 2022 [Video Link](#)

[*The Canadian Veterna: No Ordinary Hero*](#), Ted Barris, 17 November 2005

[*British Women's Work During the War*](#), Cyril Maude, 20 February 1919



The Canadian Red Cross in Times of Conflict

Mackenzie Macdonald

The Canadian Red Cross has played a significant role in Canadian society for over a century. Recognized as one of the largest humanitarian relief organizations in the world, the non-profit's history goes back much further than recent events. Founded in 1896, the Canadian Red Cross delivers crucial aid to those in need by providing humanitarian relief and services to civilians affected by disasters and conflict.

The Canadian Red Cross in World War I

The First World War broke out in August 1914, marking a significant turning point for the Canadian Red Cross Society (CRCS). Across the country, Canadians were keen and enthusiastic supporters of Red Cross work and financial donations from citizens, clubs, and church groups began pouring in. While Canadians fundraised and produced comforts and medical supplies back home, the CRCS set up overseas headquarters in London, England, to coordinate its work in Britain and France.

The work of the CRCS encompassed the establishment and support of rest homes and hospitals in England, as well as supplementary medical supplies to Canadian, British, French, and other allied hospitals. The Society offered a variety of concrete means of helping sick, wounded, and captured soldiers. Volunteers visited convalescing soldiers in Britain, attempted to trace missing soldiers, maintained files on all Canadian Prisoners of War, and corresponded with family members in Canada about the status of their loved ones. Although women were not allowed to participate in the military at this time, they played significant roles in supporting the Red Cross. Active roles included distributing medical supplies, making knitted "comforts" such as socks, scarves, and sweaters, producing jam and other canned foods for soldiers overseas, and packing food parcels for Prisoners of War.

The Canadian Red Cross in World War II

Following World War I, the Canadian Red Cross had significantly grown, making great strides internationally and domestically. When the Second World War began in September 1939, the Canadian Red Cross Society returned to the front, prepared and more capable than ever.



Red Cross man dressing Canadian. September 1916
<https://shorturl.at/aeQX1>

The Canadian Red Cross continued providing public health services at home in Canada; however, most volunteers worked overseas with the sick and wounded. Meanwhile, Canadians donated millions of dollars and put in hour after hour of voluntary labour for fundraising efforts. The results were not just supplemental medical supplies and food parcels for prisoners of war overseas

but small items of comfort for soldiers and the displaced.

Women of the Red Cross

On April 26, 1917, Red Cross volunteer and president of the Toronto Women's Conservative Club, Mrs. Gertrude van Koughnet, [addressed](#) the Empire Club of Canada. Examining Women's work during the war, Mrs. van Koughnet stated, "Some people have called these years women's years. And so, they are for those mothers whose sons are fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Allies in the conflict of nations. We know what they have borne and what their sacrifice, and what their gift to the Empire has been. Therefore, in that respect, these years probably are women's years." Extending her gratitude to the churches, clubs, large societies, and political associations who had worked hard on patriotic lines since the beginning of the war, the progression of women is outstanding. During the war, women busied themselves with distributing comforts to soldiers. Notably, the Daughters of the Empire added thousands of members to an already efficient organization and, during this time, donated \$2,500,000 as their money contribution.



Gertrude van Koughnet,
public domain

On April 17, 1918, an [address](#) was made to the Empire Club of Canada by Mrs. Eleanor Robson Belmont regarding her time serving for the Red Cross overseas. Mrs. Eleanor Robson Belmont, a legendary figure in society and the arts, was known for being one of the leading ladies of American theatre. Mrs. Belmont was born in Wigan, Lancashire, England, on December 13, 1879, the third generation of a theatrical family. Audiences knew her from various roles and her repeated appearances on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera. Having been commissioned by the American Red Cross Society

to investigate the needs and advise methods for Red Cross activities, she contributed her efforts in war work during her five-month visit to France, Belgium, and England.

Mrs. Belmont shared her three foremost impressions, stating, “I tried to sum up for myself what I had seen in the five months, and I was especially impressed by three facts that stood out more prominently than the rest. One was the spirit of the French soldier, for which it is impossible not to have the deepest admiration. A second was the work of the American Red Cross. They seem to have performed wonders. And thirdly, the women of England and what they are doing.” While many of her observations speak to the horrors of war, Mrs. Belmont kept her comments positive:

I went into the canteens and the hospitals for the blind and the mutilated, and all that I could possibly see in gone to their work with the usual magnificent spirit and it did not matter what they did or where they were put, they were there to be useful. That was the spirit I found all through the British zone when I got there. Then the little "Waacs",--the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps--which, in the war zone are usually running around in twos and threes looking rather frightened until they have been nicknamed the "Women's arm-in-arm corps," cannot fail to excite the very highest admiration when you see them "doing their bit," which, let me assure you, is a very big "bit" indeed.



Mrs. Belmont, Library of Congress, Public domain

She mentions the sacrifices and shortages, “I found as I went into various places the lack of tea and jam and bacon and meat. I found black bread everywhere. But when I got over to the British war zone I found all the things I have mentioned in enormous quantities and I realized they were doing without the things at home in order that the boys in the trenches might have them.” And then continues to talk about how everything is being conserved:

In one base, there were 42,000 beds and what they were doing to economize in every possible way was a revelation to me and the last word in efficiency. For instance, in the early days bandages that had been used for the dressing of bad wounds were always burnt, but now they are sterilizing that horrible stuff and when it comes out it is used for gun cotton, and millions of pounds of cotton will probably be saved in that way. The disposal of waste products too, was wonderful. These waste products are put into an incinerator which burns day and night and through which water pipes run which are connected with baths and thus hot water baths are provided for the men by the consumption of the waste. In the quartermaster's department everything is being done to economize material. Old uniforms are being renewed and old shoe nails are being made new again, everything from an old shoe nail to a Howitzer gun is carefully restored.

Clearly, Mrs. Belmont was balancing the realities of war with an optimism of spirit as she addressed the Empire Club of Canada. The poster on the next page, from the Empire Club Foundation Archives, highlights the excitement of having a speaker of Mrs. Belmont’s celebrity at the Empire Club. Note that in 1918 women were not generally invited to events at the Empire Club hence the special invitation to women.



Empire Club of Canada

NORMAN SOMMERVILLE,
President

SPECIAL LUNCHEON LADIES INVITED

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17th, 1918, at 12.45

AT

St. James' Cathedral Parish House
ADELAIDE and CHURCH STS.

GUEST

MRS. AUGUST BELMONT
(Eleanor Robson)

Our distinguished guest has just returned from France, having been commissioned by the American Red Cross Society to investigate the needs and advise methods for Red Cross activities planned by the United States.

Mrs. Belmont is an excellent speaker and her charming personality and stage presence will be recalled by all who remember the delightful way in which, as Eleanor Robson, she endeared herself to the public of America. It is but natural that a woman of her splendid talents, devoted to our common cause, should thrill her audiences

On this unique occasion, the members are requested to invite their wives and the members of their families to join us at Luncheon in the upstairs room at the Parish Hall. Please note change of date and get tickets early TUESDAY to prevent disappointment.

ALBERT H. ABBOTT, Sec -Treas.,
(M. 1908) Sun Life Bldgs, Toronto

Tickets 50c.: **MOODEY'S**, 33 King Street West

More information about the Empire Club Foundation can be found [here](#).



EMPIRE CLUB FOUNDATION

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Meet our Authors

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