

ENGLAND - ROSE

UNITED STATES - GOLDEN ROD

FRANCE - FLEUR-DE-LYS

Allies' Flags & Flowers

SCOTLAND - THISTLE

AUSTRALIA - WATTLE

BELGIUM - FORGET-ME-NOT PORTUGAL - DAFFODIL

ITALY - LAUREL

CANADA - MAPLE LEAF

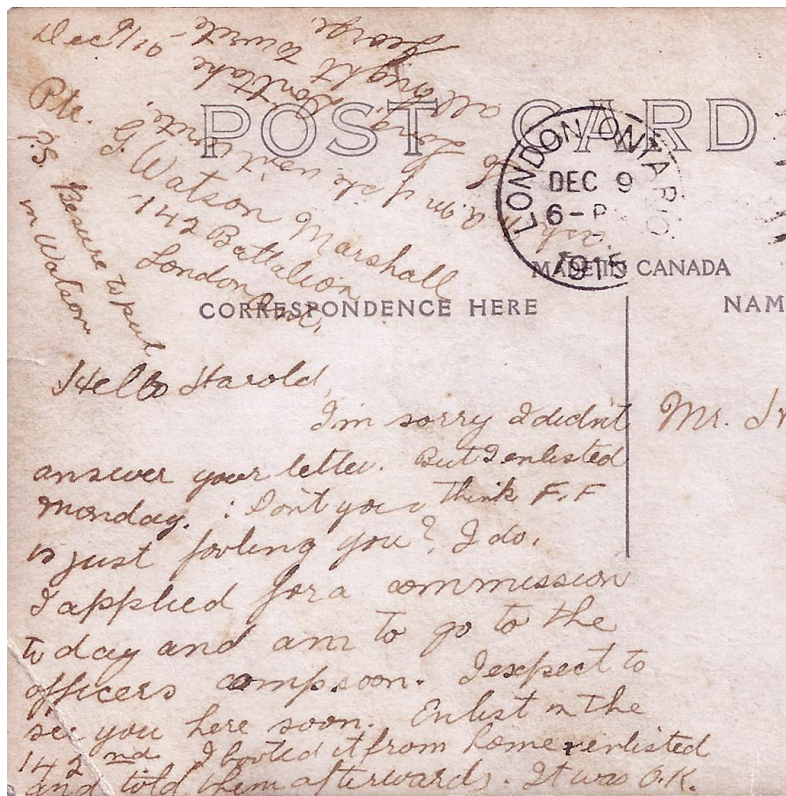
IRELAND - SHAMROCK

CUBA - JASMINE

JAPAN - CHRYSANTHEMUM

When Great Britain and Germany went to war on 2 August 1914, Canada (like the rest of the British Empire) was automatically at war too. Our politicians had no chance to debate the situation or come to their own decision. Not that it really mattered. Canadians from all parts of society – churches, labour unions, industry, teachers, Indigenous groups, recent immigrants, French-Canadian nationalists – came together behind the war. Nor did Canadians think about its long-term causes: industrial competition between the great powers, disputes over imperial expansion, an arms race, struggles with ethnic separatist groups, extreme forms of nationalism. Most Canadians focused on one thing: Germany had invaded neutral Belgium, and the civilized nations had to come to its aid or risk being conquered themselves. It was about preserving freedom and democracy from the barbarism and militarism of Germany and its allies.

Canada immediately began to build an army, with recruiting in full swing before the war was a week old; by November 1918, over 620,000 Canadian men and women had served in uniform. Young men had to be at least eighteen years old to enlist without parental consent. Many who were too young when the war began eagerly awaited their opportunity to travel overseas, as was likely the case for Chatham resident George Marshall. When the war began, Marshall was a sixteen-year-old student living with his parents at 139 William Street. On 6 December 1916, less than two months after he turned eighteen, he enlisted in the 142nd Battalion. In this postcard, he recounts his seemingly casual, snap decision to enlist to a friend, and urges him to do the same. Less than a year into his service, he was discharged as medically unfit following an injury that caused a partial loss of function to one of his lungs.



Pte. G. Watson Marshall
142 Battalion
London, Ont

Hello Harold,

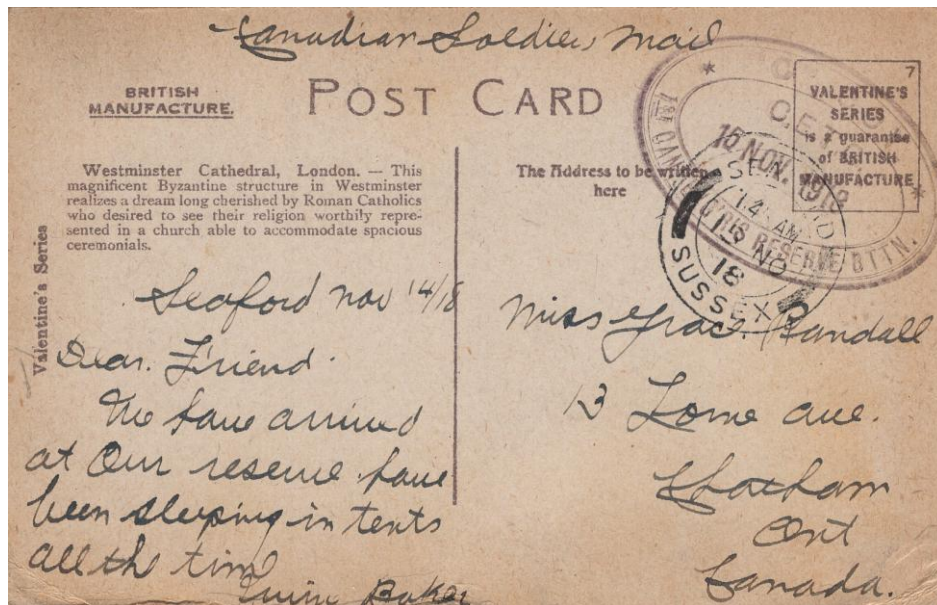
I'm sorry I didn't answer your letter. But I enlisted Monday. Don't you think F.F. is just fooling you? I do. I applied for a commission to day and am to go to the officers camp soon. I expect to see you here soon. Enlist in the 142nd. I booted it from home enlisted and told them afterwards. It was O.K.

Ask M.a.m if she wont write. So Long. Don't take all night to write. George.

P.S. be sure to put m. Watson



As volunteers became more difficult to find, conscription became a reality for many Canadian men through the Military Service Act of 1917. This postcard was sent by Irvine Baker of 11 Lorne Avenue, Chatham, to a neighbour, Grace Randall. On 18 June 1918 at twenty-one years of age, Baker was drafted into the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). He served for five months before sending this postcard on 14 November 1918, three days after the armistice that halted the fighting of the war was signed. He was discharged on 6 July 1919 as a part of general demobilization.



Seaford Nov 14/18

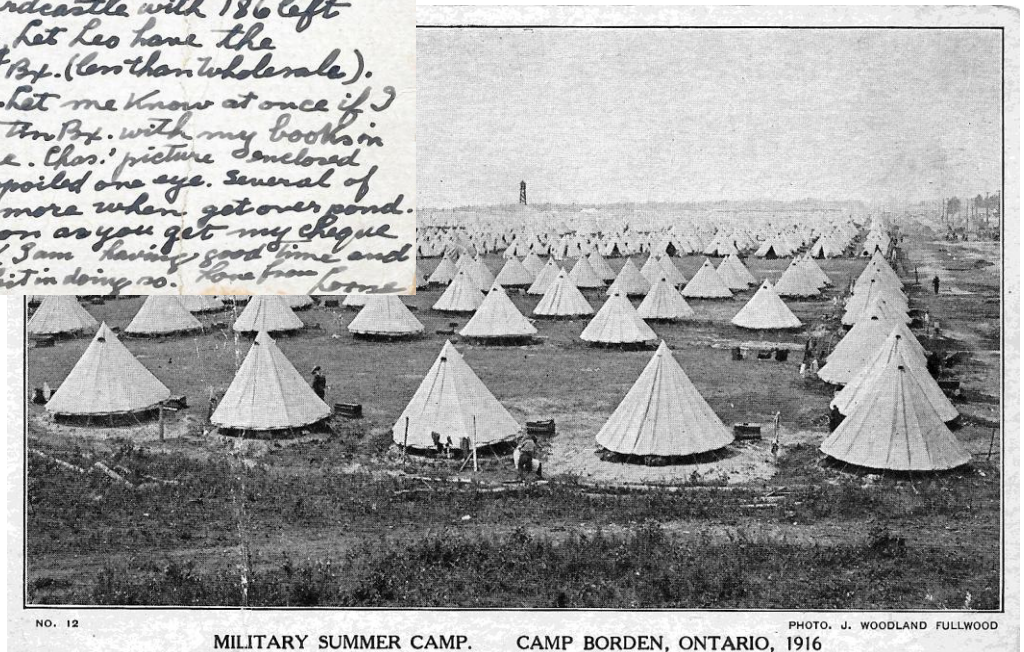
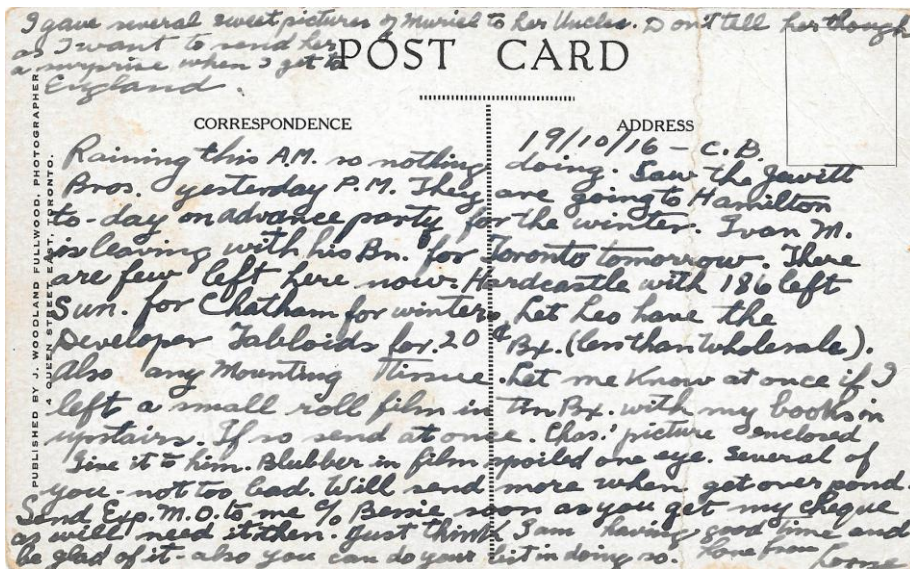
Dear Friend,

We have arrived at our reserve have been sleeping in tents all the time
Irvine Baker

After enlisting, Canadian soldiers were sent to training camps to prepare for the conditions they would soon experience at the front. Often, the first part of getting to any training camp was a journey by train. This is a photograph of an unknown group of soldiers at the Chatham railway station, which remains today and is located at 360 Queen Street. The Chatham railway station proved useful in the transportation of goods from the United States to Canada where they could be shipped across the ocean (especially in the time before the United States was involved in the First World War), as well as in the transportation of soldiers either to training camps within Canada, or to the coast from which point they were sent to train in England.



Canadian soldiers would spend an average of four to six months in training camps before being sent to the front, during which time they experienced a variety of circumstances. This postcard (the sender and recipient are unknown) includes mention of several soldiers who had attended and left Camp Borden, a training camp near Barrie, Ontario due to the Winter conditions. One of the soldiers mentioned is Arthur Hardcastle of 18 Florence Street, Chatham, who enlisted in the 186th Battalion of the CEF on 3 April 1916 at just seventeen years of age. He trained at Camp Borden before travelling overseas, where he arrived at Bramshott Camp in England on 7 April 1917. On 28 August 1918, Hardcastle suffered from a gunshot wound that led to his right leg being amputated. After extensive hospitalization, he was discharged from the CEF on 26 January 1920 due to medical unfitness.



19/20/16 - C.B.

MILITARY SUMMER CAMP. CAMP BORDEN, ONTARIO, 1916

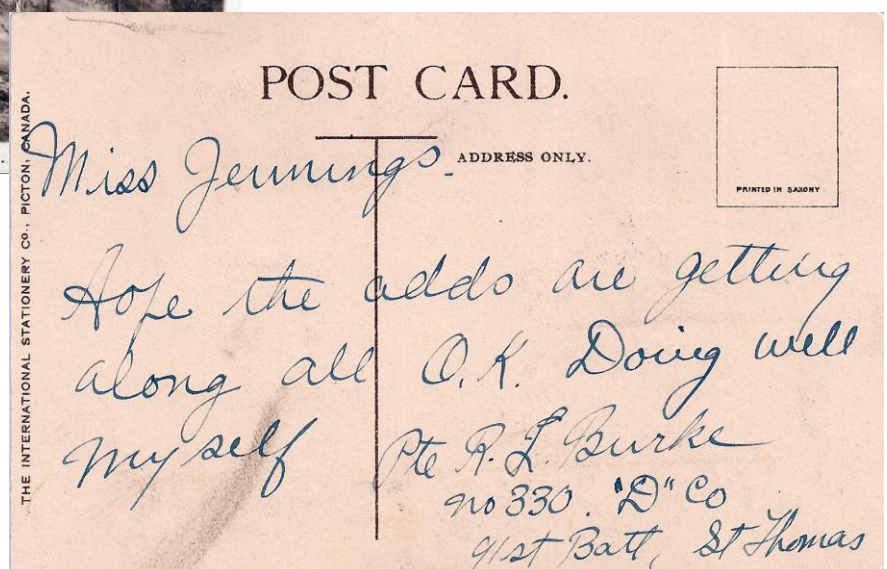
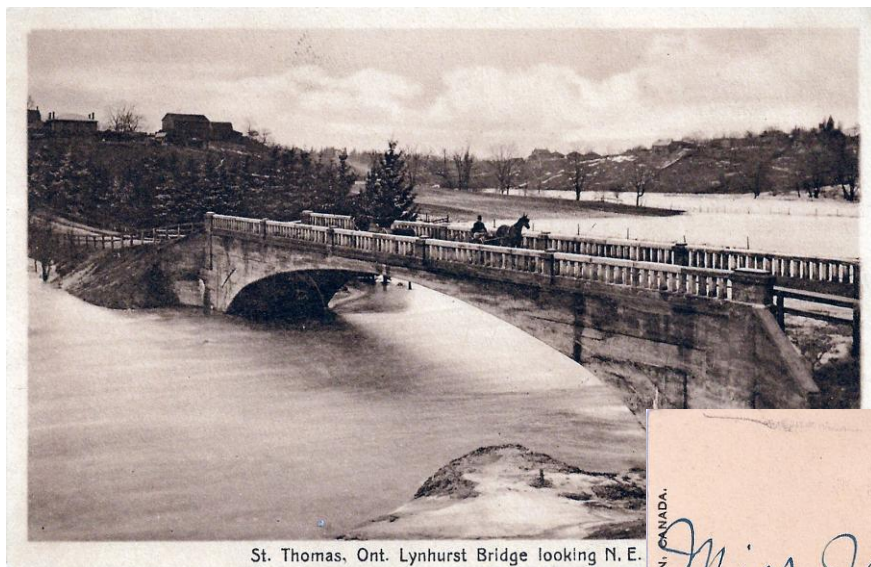
Raining this A.M. so nothing doing. Saw the Jewett Bros. yesterday P.M. They are going to Hamilton to-day on advance party for the winter. Ivan M. is leaving with his Bn. for Toronto tomorrow. There are few left here now. Hardcastle with the 186 left Sun. for Chatham for winter. Let Leo have the Developer Tabloids for 20¢ Bx (less than wholesale). Also any Mounting Tissue. Let me know at once if I left a small roll film in Tin Box with my books in upstairs. If so send at once. Chas' picture enclosed, give it to him. Blubber in film spoiled one eye. Several of you - not too bad. Will send more when get over pond. Send Exp. M.O. to me c/o Bessie soon as you get my cheque as will need it then. Just think I am having good time and be glad of it - also you can do your bit in doing so. Love from Lorne

I sent several sweet pictures of Muriel to her Uncles. Don't tell her though as I want to send her a surprise when I get to England.

Once overseas, Canadian soldiers might be transferred to any branch of the Canadian Corps. This photograph is of three men belonging to the Canadian Trench Mortars, including Chatham resident Reginald Dean (left). In August 1915, Dean was commissioned in the Canadian Field Artillery where he remained until he sustained an injury on 27 March 1916. Following his return, he was transferred to a trench mortar battery, which provided very close artillery support for infantry units.



The war wounded began to return to Canada in late 1915, and the federal government began organizing a string of military hospitals to provide both short- and long-term care for ex-soldiers. However, some Canadian soldiers were in such a condition that they required immediate treatment overseas, which was often carried out in English military hospitals. This postcard was sent by one soldier who required these services: Robert Burke of Chatham. Burke was a twenty-five-year-old printer living with his wife at 101 Adelaide North Street, Chatham when he enlisted in the 186th Battalion of the CEF on 15 November 1915. In early 1918, Burke was hospitalized due to Trench Fever and during this stay doctors found evidence of bronchitis and possibly tuberculosis, all of which were very serious diseases at the time. On 23 October 1918, he was admitted to a hospital to be treated for shell gas poisoning. Burke survived these afflictions and was discharged as a part of general demobilization on 27 March 1919.



Miss Jennings

Hope the adds are getting along all O.K. Doing well myself

Pte R.L. Burke

No 330. "D" Co

91st Batt, St. Thomas

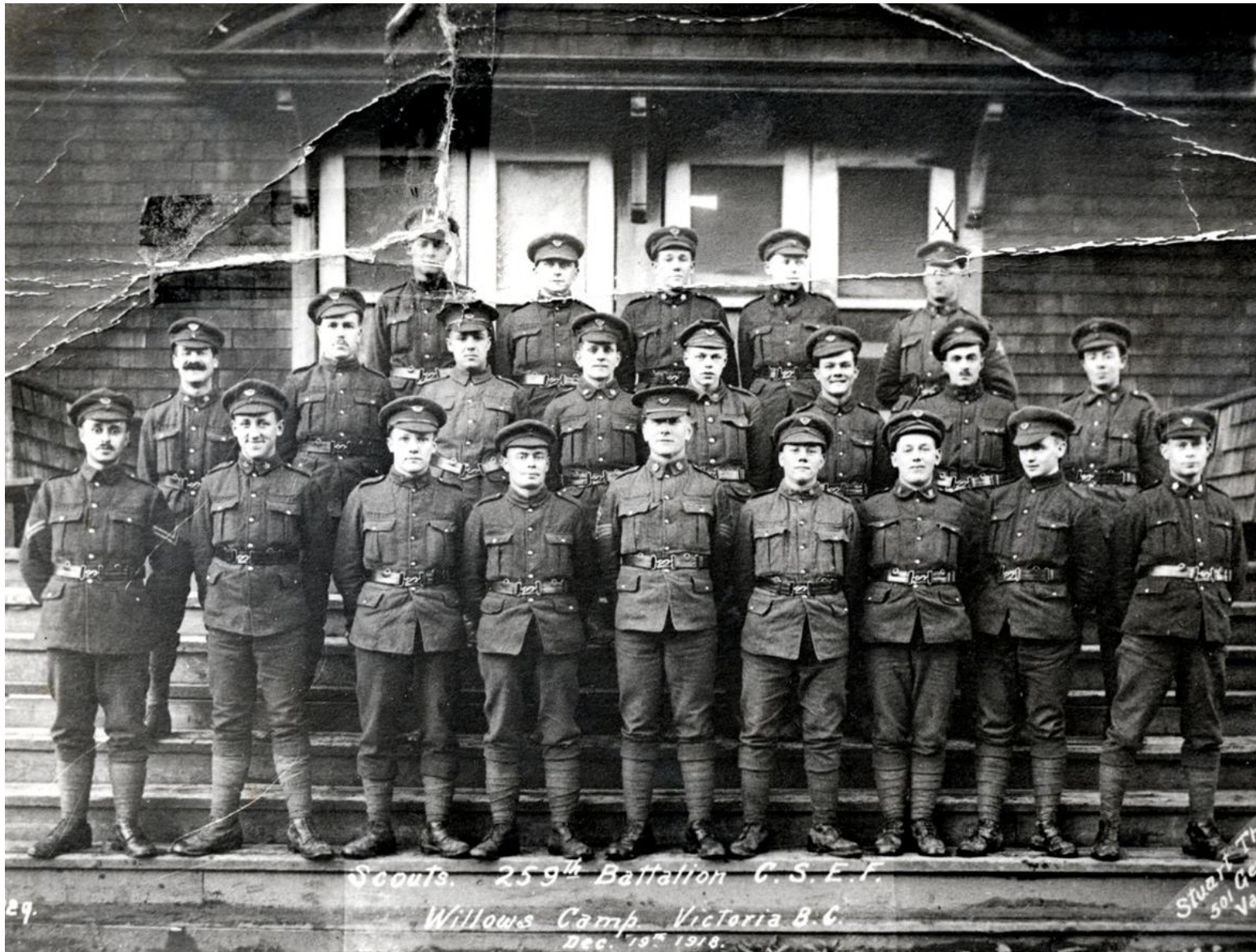
Over 2,800 Canadian women served as nurses in some capacity between 1914 and 1919. This postcard was sent from an individual identified only as Fred to Beatrice Ida May McKnight in Chatham. At the time that this postcard was sent, McKnight was a twenty-four-year-old nurse living in Chatham, likely with her father. She enlisted in the Canadian Army Medical Corps on 17 January 1918 and was transferred overseas in August 1918. McKnight was discharged on 10 December 1918 as a part of general demobilization.



Dear Bee

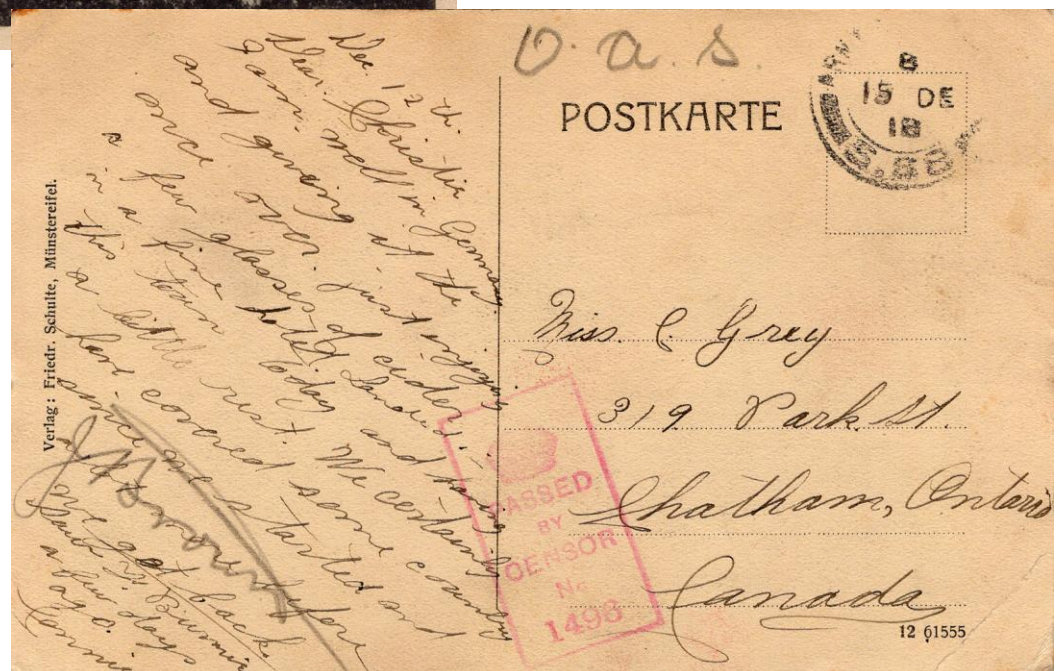
Toronto 10.20 Had ale by stiff – was in bed by midnight. Am feeling better today...just my luck, hope all are well. Will write letter later please excuse pipe picture was taken during morning recess one day Best of luck Yours Fred

Even as the war wound down to a close, there remained certain duties for Canadian soldiers. This is a photo of part of the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force, a group formed in late 1918 and sent to Russia intended to help imperial Russia extinguish the Bolshevik Revolution that began in 1917. This picture, taken at Camp Willows in Victoria, British Columbia, captures the men of the 259th Battalion, which included Chatham resident Clifford Moore (back row, left).



When Moore first enlisted in the CEF on 7 February 1916, he falsified his age to make himself twenty years old when in reality he was seventeen. He served on the Western Front, but was discharged on 26 August 1916 after being deemed medically unfit due to fallen arches. In 1918, he was drafted back into the CEF under the MSA, eventually being transferred to the Siberian Contingent. He was discharged for a second time on 6 June 1919, when Canada officially withdrew from Russia.

After the signing of the armistice, Canadian soldiers were released back into civilian life in waves as a part of general demobilization. This postcard was sent from a sender identified only as Connie to Christie Grey, who lived at 319 Park Street in Chatham. In the message, the sender makes reference to Fred Burnie, a Chatham resident who lived at 173 Adelaide Street. While many soldiers travelled back to Canada in early 1919, Burnie remained overseas longer, being discharged on 24 May 1919. Canadian soldiers could have remained overseas after the armistice was signed for a variety of reasons. The majority of soldiers remained because they were essentially stranded by logistical issues facing Canada in attempting to return hundreds of thousands of men from England all at once. This was the case for Burnie, who spent the end of his time overseas at Witley Military Camp, and could have been the case for the unknown sender of the postcard as well.

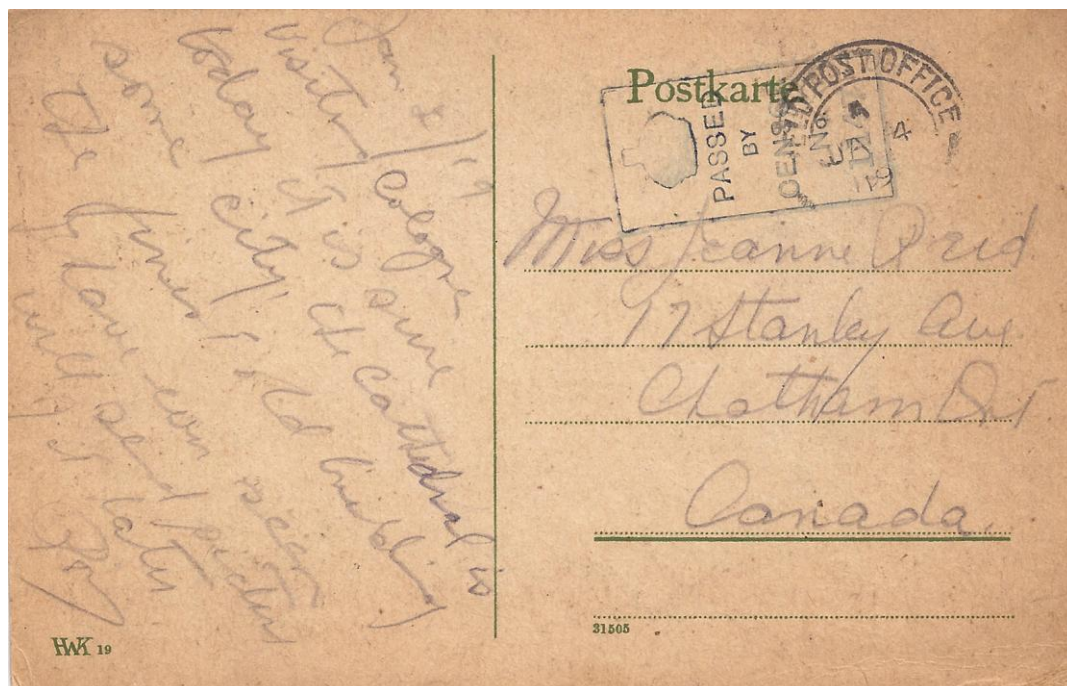


Dec. 12th

Dear Christie

I am well in Germany and giving it the once over just enjoying a few glasses of cider in a fine hotel. Landed in this town today and having a little rest. We certainly have covered some country since we started and a lot more before we got back. Saw F. Burnie a few days ago.
Connie

To avoid the further clogging of Britain with soldiers waiting for ships to take them home, the Canadian government decided that two divisions would stay in Belgium and two would move into Germany to serve as occupation forces. This postcard was sent by Oliver Reid of Chatham to a relative in January 1919, after the armistice had been signed. He took advantage of his time in Germany to take in some of the tourist attractions, including the Cologne Cathedral, and to tell his friends about what he had seen.



Jan 2/19

Visited Cologne today it is sure some city, the Cathedral is the finest old building I have ever seen will send pictures of it later Roy

Credits:

This exhibition was curated for you by Kaitlin Murray at the Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory, and Popular Culture Research Collection in the History Department at the University of Western Ontario in London.

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We welcome feedback from anyone who enjoys this exhibition or has more information or images to add. Please contact us at: jvance@uwo.ca