



# BACK TO CIVVY STREET



## THE RETURN OF WWII SOLDIERS TO LONDON

PRESENTED BY UWO GRA-  
DUATE STUDIES DIGITAL  
HISTORY CLASS OF 2019-  
2020

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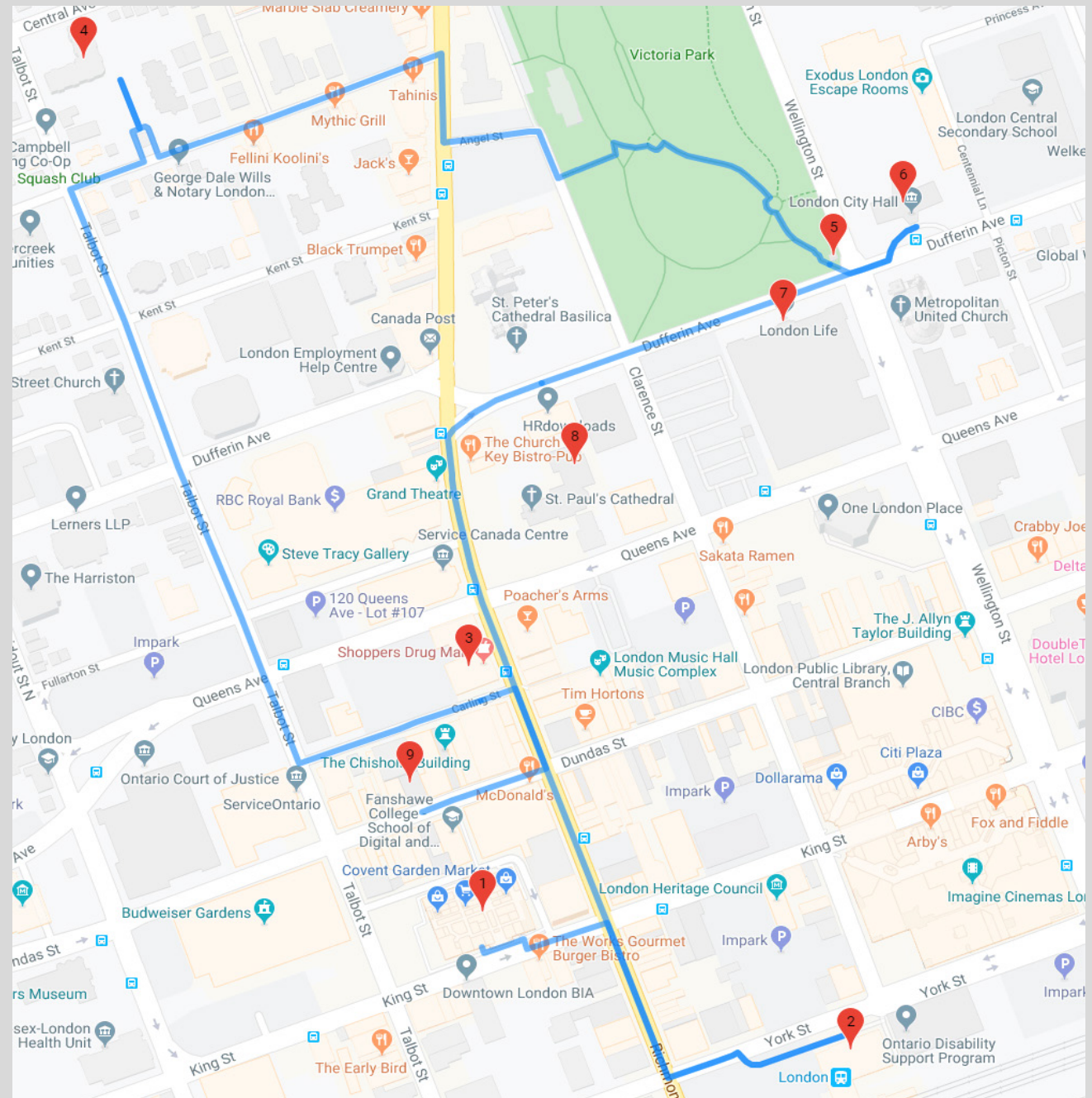
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# THE MAP

**THIS MAP OUTLINES THE  
ROUTE AND STOPS FOR  
THE WALKING TOUR**



## INTRODUCTION

# INTRODUCTION

On May 7th, 1945, the streets of London, Ontario erupted in celebration upon hearing the news of Germany's surrender to the Allies. With the celebrations, however, came a new hurdle: how would the estimated 80,000 men and women enlisted reintegrate back into their daily lives outside of service, or as they referred to it: "Civvy Street"?

The following tour was created by the University of Western Ontario's Digital Public History class of 2019 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe day. As you make your way around the streets of London, imagine you're standing shoulder to shoulder with countless Londoners as you watch troops pour out from the train station to celebrate reuniting with their loved ones. The streets are flooded with people celebrating under storefronts decorated in flags and buntings and the cheering only grows louder as each train filled with returning servicemen and women arrive.

A note on navigation: please pay attention to traffic signals when crossing the street and be careful around construction. As of October 2019, the road in front of the train station is under construction. To avoid accident and injury, remain outside of the fenced area and safely admire the site.

A note on audio: if the audio does not match the current stop, either refresh the page or close and reopen the headphone icon on the page to reset the audio.



130 KING ST.

1.1

# MARKET SQUARE



On May 7, 1945, "the greatest unplanned celebration in local history" swept through downtown London in the wake of the news of victory in Europe. The London Free Press reported that "London threw away its inhibitions ... and everyone joined in the carnival spirit ...". For a day and a half, Londoners gathered along the downtown blocks of Dundas and Richmond to cheer and celebrate. Schools across the city were closed, while the "hello girls" working at local Bell switchboards were swamped with callers phoning to confirm that the good news was true.

Although the defeat of Nazi Germany was a joyous time, a significant hurdle remained. More than one million Canadians were serving in all branches of the armed forces, including an estimated 80,000 from London and Western Ontario. How would these men and women return and reintegrate back into civilian life – to "civvy street"?

With memories of disgruntled World War One veterans lingering in Canadian national memory, the Liberal Government of Prime Minister Mackenzie King sought a better outcome. As early as October 1940 the Federal Government established a General Advisory Committee on Demobilization and Rehabilitation to "give full consideration to and report upon ... the problems which will arise from ... demobilization and discharge."

A soldier's place in the queue to go home was established using a points system: two points for each month of service in Canada and three points for each month overseas, increased by 20% if the soldier was married. In theory this would ensure "first in, first out" – but many waiting to return questioned the fairness of the process, and only two months after Victory-in-Europe Day, the repatriation scheme was already running a month behind schedule. By the end of 1945 roughly 125,000 Canadians still remained stranded in Europe. Fortunately Japan's surrender in August 1945 freed up additional transport ships, so by March 1946, fewer than 25,000 Canadian troops remained overseas.

# TRAIN STATION



On June 22nd, 1945, London mayor W.J. Heaman announced the City's plans to welcome returning overseas troops. With trains of soldiers arriving that afternoon and the following morning, Heaman urged London business owners to decorate their buildings to "show fine appreciation of what these men have done." London's Rehabilitation Committee, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon Ingram, planned for the mayor and band-playing members of the Canadian Legion to greet all arriving troop trains. With the City Hall and York Street station decorated in flags in anticipation of the arriving soldiers, Heaman announced that London would be prepared to give "any unit coming back the biggest welcome it could imagine."

The Grand Western Railway originally built this hub in 1853, and it was taken over by the Grand Trunk Railway in 1882. When the Grand Trunk declared bankruptcy in 1919, the Federal Government placed its lines under the management of Canadian National Railways. The original station was replaced in 1935 with an Art Deco structure that was again replaced in the early 1960s. Following victory in Europe, this station was the final stop for many soldiers returning to London and the surrounding area.

The London Free Press informed Londoners on the scheduled arrivals of Canadian soldiers at the York Street station. Thousands would frequently crowd the train station to welcome each veteran home and to celebrate family reunifications. Photographs of the day show London's downtown streets overflowing with people passionately cheering the returning troops. The scheduled time of the troop arrivals was of little consequence: in one instance, hundreds of Londoners turned out to "give a jubilant welcome" at 7 am to the "300 fighting sons of the city and district, vanguard of the victorious Canadian armies that smashed the Hun in Europe."



# HMCS PREVOST



From 1939 to 1957, the Carling Block, located where this drug store is now, was the site of HMCS Prevost, the London Division of the Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve. During World War II, 4480 officers, men and wrens were enrolled here into the Canadian Navy. Navy veterans were likely demobilized, or "rehabilitated" at the end of the war here too. An individual up for discharge was given a complete medical examination, and then interviewed to discuss employment, education and other options. Local army veterans attended the rehabilitation program at No. 1 District Depot, at Wolseley Barracks on Oxford Street, or at the Armouries at Dundas and Waterloo.

All World War II veterans were promised rehabilitation assistance, post-discharge cash payouts, a guarantee of resuming one's previous employment or finding a comparable job, vocational re-training or free university education up to a period equal to the time spent in uniform, the right to claim the newly implemented unemployment benefits for a year and subsidized loans to start a business. While the numbers assisted nationally seem impressive, so only roughly 3.3% obtained land for farming through the Veterans' Land Act, 8% received vocational training, and 5.4% went on to university. The Department of Veterans Affairs was established in March 1944 to coordinate and implement these programs, and it quickly ballooned to over 12,000 employees by the end of 1946.

Once back in Canada, each soldier received 30 days leave, followed by discharge from the military. Each veteran received \$100 to buy civilian clothing, and a war service gratuity of \$7.50 for each 30 days' service, an additional 25 cents for each day overseas, and a weeks pay for each six months of service outside Canada. At the time a two-storey four-bedroom home, constructed for servicemen and their families, rented for \$30/month.

# 600 TALBOT ST. 3 TALBOT STREET SCHOOL



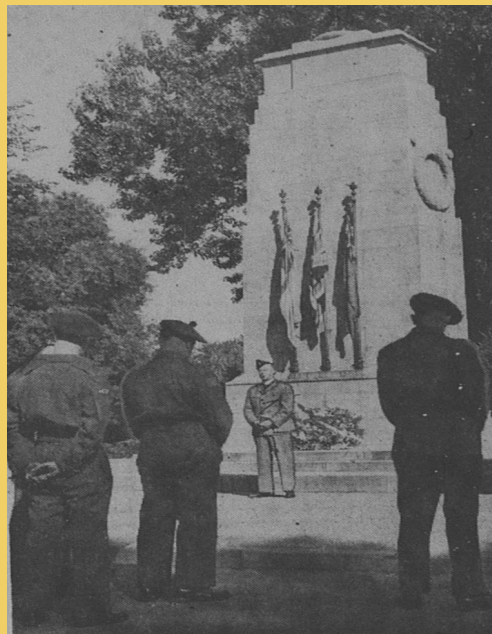
This high-rise condominium at the corner of Talbot and Central is the site of the former Talbot Street School. Initially constructed in 1858, it was upgraded in 1882 by a new two-storey brick building with four large classrooms. In 1892 it burned to the ground, but thankfully all 500 students present escaped with their lives and the school was again rebuilt. This school served a number of students from well-known London families and was home to London's first kindergarten program, and London's first Mothers' Club. Many Talbot Street School students enlisted during both world wars while still in high school. To ease the problems of veterans readjusting to "civvy street", the government arranged special classes for veterans and grants for paid vocational training.

A number of World War Two veterans returned to London who had enlisted before completing their high school studies. In response, Talbot Street School and London Central Collegiate together formed the London Tutorial School for ex-servicemen and women. To engage these students, classes were taught by former high-school teachers who were veterans themselves, and the programs emphasized individual instruction to make the returns to studies seamless. The goal of the London Tutorial School was to prepare students for post-secondary education.

Concurrently, the Canadian Vocational Training program was created to help World War Two veterans, who had been away for potentially years, return to "civvy street" with job training. The program offered paid on-the-job training, classroom training in trades, and apprenticeships related to each veteran's war experience. These training programs typically lasted between one month and one year. Each veteran enrolled in the program received a monthly grant of \$60 to \$130, depending on marital status and the number of children in the family. Although only a third of veterans accepted the offer of free vocational training, the program was expensive. By March 1951, the Canadian Vocational Training program had paid over \$75 million to over 81 thousand veterans across Canada. "About 90 percent of those who started CVT courses completed them successfully. By late 1946 their unemployment rate was about half that of veterans in general."



# VICTORIA PARK CENOTAPH



Although many servicemen and women returned home to their homes, families, and lives in London after the Second World War, it is important to remember that many did not. The Victoria Park Cenotaph is where Londoners gather to honour those who gave their lives in service to Canadians during times of war. In 1920, a cenotaph was unveiled at Whitehall, in London, England to honour the dead of the First World War. Its design was the inspiration for numerous cenotaphs across the globe, including the one in Victoria Park, which was originally a smaller replica of the monument in London, England. The Victoria Park Cenotaph retained the same design as the original cenotaph, including inscriptions, until the 1950s when it began to be modified.

The Victoria Park Cenotaph was first unveiled on November 10th, 1934, after a campaign by the London chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (or IODE) to build a monument to those who died overseas during the First World War. The IODE is a charitable organization that was formed to encourage both Canadian patriotism, and loyalty to the British Empire. They actively supported Canada's troops during the two World Wars by raising money for medical and personal supplies among other contributions. Following both wars, they turned their attention to supporting veterans, as well as their families, and commemorating those who died in defense of Canada and the British Empire.

Londoners gather around the cenotaph every year on November 11th to observe Remembrance Day. In 1946, it was decided that an inscription for the Second World War would be added to the monument so it would also recognize those who fell during that war. The British did the same with the original cenotaph in England, so the exact inscription was replicated here. Even before the war ended, veterans' groups in London, including those that represented both men and women, began to take part in Remembrance Day ceremonies at the cenotaph, and they continued to do so after the war was over.

300 DUFFERIN AVE.

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# LONDON CITY HALL



Located in the lobby of London City Hall, the two volumes of the Book of Remembrance honour Londoners who died in the Second World War. The two books were created decades apart, but both include the names, and sometimes photographs, of the fallen. On April 27th, 1945, the "Memorial Cross Mothers, London, Ontario", met for the first time, in order to discuss the preparation of a Book of Remembrance. These mothers had lost sons during the war and wanted to commemorate the fallen by placing wreaths each week, creating a garden in the summer, and preparing a Book of Remembrance. The book was completed in 1949, and listed 513 names of men from the London area. The Memorial Cross Mothers chose to use a portion of Laurence Binyon's poem, "For the Fallen", as their motto, and it is included on the page. Their motto reads: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old; Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn. At the going down of the sun, and in the morning, We will remember them." The book mainly consists of individual entries, of which families were the primary authors. This made each individual entry different, and incredibly moving to read.

The second volume of the Book of Remembrance wasn't published until much later and was created in order to include "Londoners who were omitted, and Portrait memorials of Londoners entered by name only, in the first book. [As well as] Londoners who paid the supreme sacrifice in the Korean War". This volume was assembled in 1998 by Vimy Branch 145, Royal Canadian Legion, and was unveiled and presented on November 11th, 1999. In total, there are 280 individuals listed in this volume, with 49 who were not included in the first volume. Unfortunately, the addition of those who lost their lives in the Korean War did come about and were not included.

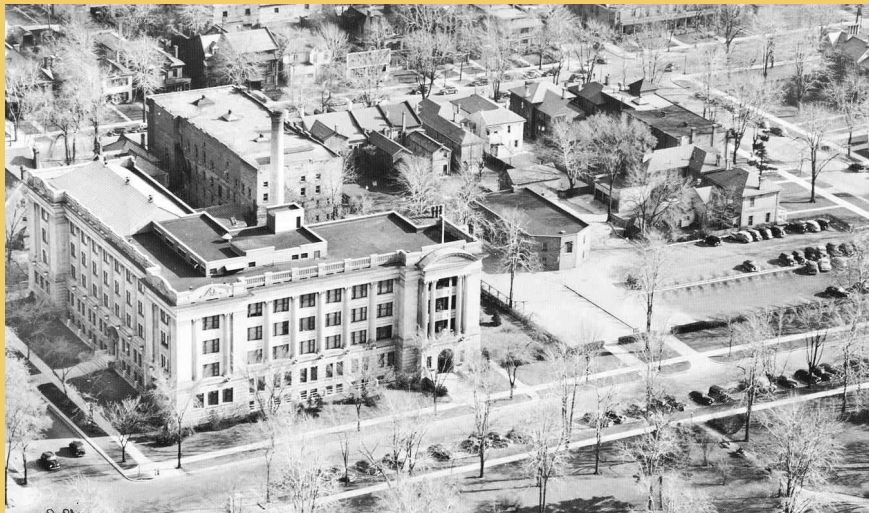
The two volumes of the Book of Remembrance which sit in London City Hall have a special place in the minds of Londoners today, as these books represent an important piece of local Second World War history. At the dedication in 1950, Mrs. W. H. Jacobs, the national president of the Silver Cross Women of Canada at the time, stated that the book was "a work of devotion and love by the mothers of the boys named in its pages, these boys' names must not be forgotten under any circumstances".



**WELLINGTON & DUFFERIN**

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# LONDON LIFE

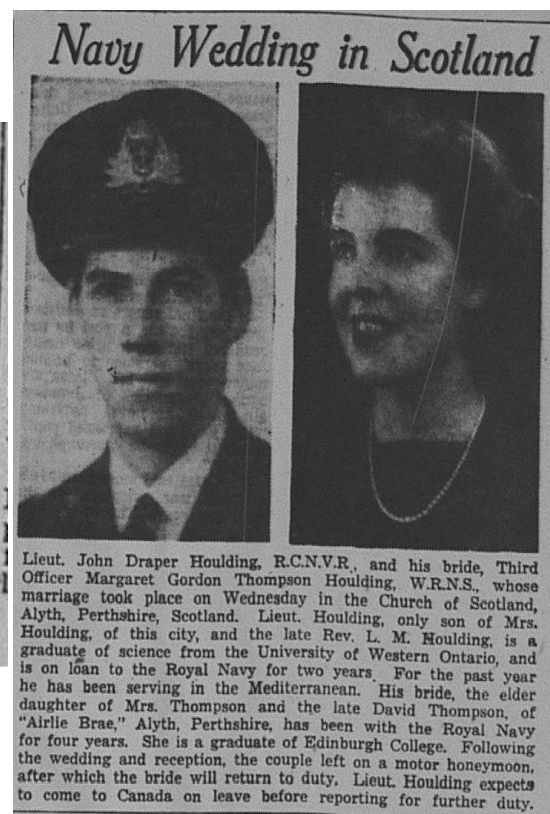


London Life Insurance Company was founded in 1874 in London, Ontario, then a thriving town of 20,000 people. A leader in the Canadian insurance industry, and today a part of the trio of insurance companies that includes Great West Life and Canada Life, London Life grew rapidly in the first decades of the 20th century, moving into its grand and iconic Neoclassical head office on Dufferin Avenue in 1927 - a London landmark ever since. During WWII London Life was a major supporter of Canada's war effort, purchasing \$11 million in Victory Bonds. Like many towns and cities in Canada during the war years, London formed a Citizens' Auxiliary War Services Committee, and within London Life the company's Active Services Committee engaged its employees at home in continuous support of the 427 enlisted service men and women from London Life (of whom 11 died in service).

During the Second World War, London Life's Head Office staff contributed to the war effort in a creative way, forming the much-loved musical revue, London Life Troupers, to entertain troops in active service throughout the province. The largely female troupe maintained a gruelling schedule of 85 travelling performances across Ontario during 1940-44, featuring song and dance, music and costume. After the war the London Life Players Club continued the Troupers' tradition by mounting musical revues at Christmas from 1945-47. London Life women also served widely as wartime volunteers in the Women's Voluntary Service Corps, Voluntary Auxilliary Drivers Corps, Red Cross Society, St John's Ambulance Brigade and London Women's Club Committee. A number of Head Office men served in the reserve army.

Under the Reinstatement in Civil Employment Act, London Life committed to re-employ all returning service personnel who were on staff on or before 3 September 1939, and to offer continuous service credit for enlisted employees as well as Certificates of War Service staff life insurance. After the war pension benefits for employees who enlisted for overseas service included a special grant to compensate for the fact that no contributions had been made during the war period. London Life bore a heavy responsibility in processing death claims arising from the war. London Life's wartime insurance losses totalled \$3,749,271 including all deaths in the armed forces overseas and in the air forces in Canada, and other deaths attributable to enemy action. Following the end of the war London Life expanded its Head Office, opening a seven-storey extension in 1948 that housed a staff of 847. By the time construction was completed on the Head Office building in 1953, London Life was a major employer with 1,083 men and women on staff. The building today bears the sign Canada Life Insurance Company.

# ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL



St. Paul's Cathedral may be magnificent, but it shares something in common with countless churches: it conducted many weddings during and after the Second World War. When soldiers returned home, many reunited with sweethearts and married. However, many more returned with their significant others rather than to them: with the troops came over 60,000 new Canadians, 47,768 wives they had married while overseas, and 21,950 children resulting from these marriages. The majority came from Great Britain. As such, the denomination of this cathedral, the Anglican Church, or as these brides would know it, the Church of England, took a special interest in the new arrivals. They, and other charitable groups and government agencies were so concerned with the welfare and transition of these women into Canadian society because they were not "coming home again"; they were coming home for the first time.

During their tours of duty overseas, many Canadian servicemen married women from, in order of frequency: Great Britain, The Netherlands, Belgium, France, the Caribbean, and other regions. On both sides of the Atlantic, "war brides," as they would come to be known, were accepted or vilified. Many women, who were waiting for the men's return, felt dejected when they arrived home with brides from abroad. Throughout their journeys, the new wives of Canadian servicemen had to deal with the hurt caused by the separation of time and space. Numerous women had been married for years when the war ended but had only spent a short time with their husbands during their leave. Another group had only dated their husbands briefly during the war. These couples made the decision to marry when the man was leaving, knowing it was the only way the woman would be accepted into Canada. The process to go with their husbands was extensive and involved permission from military authorities and parents (if either of them was under 21). Most war brides came after VE day, during 1945 and 1946.

Did these marriages last? It is hard to know since they were included under the national divorce statistics with other couples. This period is often seen as one of triumph, but also of hardship. Husbands who suffered ill mental health from their wartime experiences had difficulty creating a happy home. Some turned to alcoholism or committed acts of domestic abuse. Some women "stuck it out", while others divorced or returned to their homelands. Those who stayed integrated into their community. For example, they formed their own club where they could have the foods of home and discuss the issues which were unique to them. Most of the war brides who have been interviewed over the years now consider Canada their home and cannot imagine living anywhere else.



130 DUNDAS ST.

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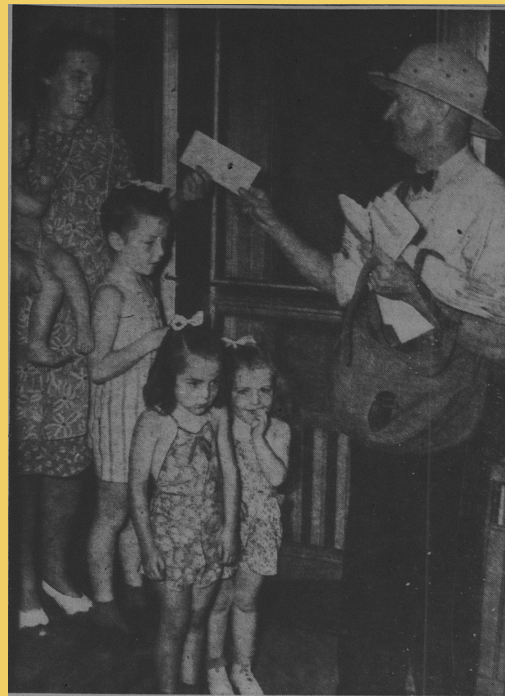
# KINGSMILL'S DEPARTMENT STORE



In 1865, Thomas Frazer Kingsmill opened a dry goods store on the main street of London, Ontario. From this same location at 130 Dundas Street, over the next 148 years, this store was a staple in downtown London. This includes during the Second World War, when wartime production and industries had to change due to the demand of the war effort.

Long gone were the days of department stores like the Kingsmill's selling bicycles, domestic washing machines, and other common household items. Manufacturing and production across Canada had to switch focus during the war. Similarly, when the war ended, the focus had to be brought back to that of ordinary daily life. In August of 1945, manufacturers of London were speedily switching gears into peacetime production. They sought to satisfy the growing market for appliances and furniture, and other items. Furnaces, stoves, refrigerators, and radios were planned to be on the market by Christmas, 1945, and as of August 25th, appliances were already running along the assembly lines at the local General Steel Wares plant in London.

Another transition that had to be made was for those returning from service. However, the adjustment back to normality was made easier by efforts of the Canadian government. With the proposal of linking Canada via a cross country highway reaching local government in London on July 16th, 1945, it gave those returning home something to look forward to. An additional postwar reconstructive method came to fruition a month after VE Day. In July of 1945 the first "Family Allowance" cheques were being given out to families with children under the age of 16. On July 19th, 1945 the first cheques were delivered in London, Ontario. These cheques were being given out to provide support for families, and the first issuing of these cheques could not have come at a better time.



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**THIS TOUR WAS  
ASSEMBLED BY THE UWO  
GRADUATE STUDIES DI-  
GITAL HISTORY CLASS  
OF 2019-2020**

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