

Curator's Statement

For the dead and the living, we must bear witness. – Elie Wiesel

In the first half of the last century, two world wars shook the world. The Nelson Cenotaph lists over 300 names of those who died while serving in the military in World War I and World War II, along with plaques commemorating the Boer and Korean Wars and UN Peacekeeping forces. This exhibit offers a glimpse at some of the ways that Nelson and the surrounding areas were involved in the two World Wars. It also looks (briefly) at the Boer War, which many Kootenay residents, still loyal to the British Crown, volunteered for.

Many lives were lost, and not only were the people who served in the military changed by their experiences, they often came home to friends, families or loved ones who had also changed as a result of their own wartime experiences. In both World Wars, many women were given the opportunity to work outside the home, usually on farms or in manufacturing, such as the production plant operated by Boeing Aircraft Company in the Civic Centre during World War II. During the Second World War many Japanese Canadians, some of whom were veterans of the First World War, were forcibly removed from coastal locations and placed in internment camps in our area, losing their homes, businesses and other belongings in the process.

The effects of these and countless other aspects of the World Wars resonate today in many ways, from the people who were directly involved to the social, economic and technological changes that resulted. And while this exhibit is by no means a complete picture of such a vast subject, hopefully it does give you a sense of this aspect of our community's history, and how the retelling of that history is shaped in large part by the artifacts and other material that have been donated or otherwise collected in our Archives and Collections. All the items on display are from the Touchstones Nelson Archives and Permanent Collection unless otherwise indicated.

Rod Taylor, Curator

Many thanks to

- Perry Hale and the Nelson branch of the Royal Canadian Legion for their support and generosity in lending us some of the artifacts you see here;
- Stan Sherstobitoff for loaning us the walking stick carved in the Edgewood WWI internment camp;
- Ron and Sheila Cox for telling me a bit about their experiences during World War II;
- Volunteers Teyana Neufeld, Harry Quesnel and Della Fenkner for their invaluable assistance;
- Archivist and Collections Manager Laura Fortier for her tireless and cheerful efforts in tracking down not only the objects, but also the information associated with them;
- Executive Director Leah Best for giving some much needed last minute assistance.

For more information

For those interested in learning more, there are countless resources depending on your area of interest. Here are a few of them:

Online, the Canadian War Museum and Canadian Veteran Affairs websites are both great sources of information. Also, the 54th Battalion website has many images and information relating to the regiment;

In print, the book *Homefront and Battlefront*, by author Sylvia Crooks gives a detailed account of Nelson and those who enlisted during WWII, and she is currently working on a follow-up book that deals similarly with WWI;

Locally, the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre is a museum and interpretive centre in nearby New Denver. Dedicated to the history of the Japanese Canadians that were relocated to internment camps, it is well worth a visit;

In person! With the average age of a World War II veteran now at 89, it's good to remember how much is lost when history passes out of living memory. If you were involved, or otherwise affected by these or other wars, please consider sharing your experience with others. If you are younger, ask someone who is older if they have war related memories.

