

## *Sister Soldiers of the Great War: The Nurses of the Canadian Army Medical Corps* by Cynthia Toman

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two instances of providing misspelled or incorrect scholars' names (6,22).

*The Iconic North* is a timely contribution to northern studies as the North has received media attention recently with the ongoing Protect the Peel campaign in the Yukon, increased mineral and oil exploration and extraction across the territorial North, and discovery narratives around the Franklin shipwreck. This work is a thought-provoking and exciting contribution to the fields of colonial studies, Indigenous history, and northern studies offering new knowledge and perspectives. The one flaw of this work is the absence of views from Indigenous northerners themselves which leaves the reader wondering how the colonized experienced the impacts of this

cultural imagination—however, Sangster makes clear this was not her goal and she calls for historians to take on this task in future work. Furthermore, she includes three brief examples in the conclusion of Indigenous-produced sources that challenge the images discussed in the book. I would recommend *The Iconic North* to any social science scholars of the Arctic (and the North generally), Indigenous studies, and gender history. Though some of the chapters are theory-heavy, *The Iconic North* is also a great read for anyone who is interested in the history of the Canadian North.

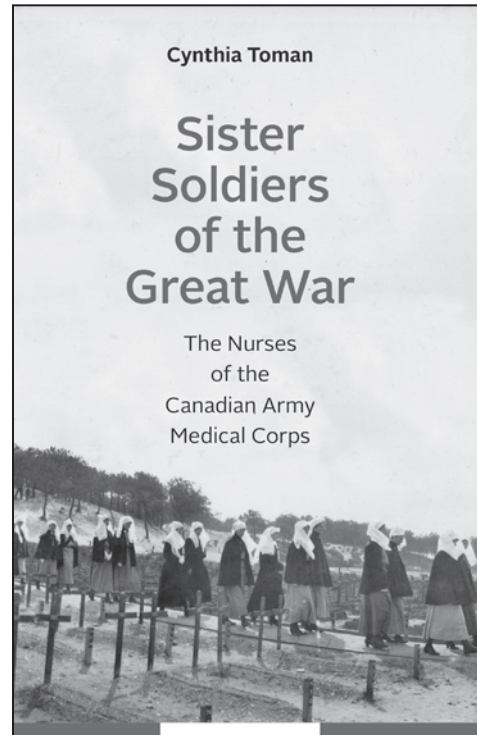
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***Sister Soldiers of the Great War***  
***The Nurses of the Canadian Army***  
***Medical Corps***

by Cynthia Toman

Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2016. 312 pages. \$95.00 hardcover. \$39.95 paperback. ISBN 9780774832144 <ubcpress.ca>

Cynthia Toman's *Nursing Sisters* explores the experiences of the 2,845 nursing sisters who served with the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC) during the First World War. They were leaders within a complex and dynamic medical military organization that administered care to wounded soldiers under difficult and dangerous conditions. There were two times more nursing sisters than there were doctors at the front; every one of the 761,635 wounded soldiers in the C.E.F passed through the hands of a CAMC nursing sister.



This book is the first full-length study about nursing sisters and a critically important contribution to the literature about Canada and the Great War. It reclaims the voices of these female veterans and challenges our cultural obsession with militarism and masculinity in the study of war and society. These were not women on the sidelines; instead they took charge of entire wards of patients and supervised more junior colleagues. Theirs are stories not often told, especially as the literature is shaped mostly by experiences of Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses rather than the professionally trained nurses of the CAMC.

Toman situates nursing sisters as agents in shaping their own stories. It was they who framed their wartime experiences through post war publications and organizations. Nursing sisters were active in both remembering—and forgetting—parts of their collective experience. Doing so reminds us that these veterans were both part of the masculine military organization and its ideals as well as separate from them. For the first time women served as fully integrated members of the Canadian Army. However, there was unease with the association of nursing with soldiering. Nurses were fully enlisted officers and filled a “semi-separate” rank within the military. They had authority over other nursing sisters, hospital unit assistants, and patients but this did not disrupt the gendered hierarchy of the military. Their position within the military medical system ensured no women could have authority over a man outside of the hospital ward.

The book presents nursing sisters as professionals and officers that held significant leadership roles in military medical organization. Toman concludes that the experiences of CAMC nursing sisters challenges portrayals of military nurses and heroines and angels while also complicating

the idea that the war was a great equalizer of gender, class, and imperial colonial differences. Many sisters questioned the broader objectives of the war and their place within it; 58 nurses died during the war, 21 from enemy fire. Nursing sisters were witness to suffering and subject to danger but, like soldiers, had little context for how these experiences related to the broader war effort and outcomes. However, war service also presented opportunities for travel and adventure, professional development, and social and romantic intimacies outside the confines of civilian life.

A variety of archival and published sources help to build Toman’s analysis. These include published accounts from nursing sisters, letters, diaries, memoirs, oral histories, articles in professional journals, and photograph “snap shots” taken by portable cameras and stored in albums. Archival sources include attestation papers, personnel files, medical reports, pay records, and discharge notes. Toman explains that in historical accounts and photographs we do not often see a nurse at work—instead she is carefully posed and often smiling. This is not the nurse of Toman’s narrative. Nurses are no longer relegated to the margins of medical military history; instead they are placed at the centre of the story.

This narrative works so well because Toman brilliantly brings together her expertise both in nursing and the historiography of the Great War. She presents a detailed overview of military medical organization and care both at the front and within the professional history of nursing. This situates nursing sisters as an essential part of the treatment of wounded soldiers at the front and within the Canadian military more broadly. Nursing sisters supervised wards, organized military hospital units, and managed more junior orderlies. Toman also conducted the first de-

tailed study of all Canadian nursing sisters through their attestation and enlistment papers. Through this analysis she found that nursing sisters were older on average than often portrayed, almost exclusively white, and often circumvented eligibility requirements like marriage restrictions and waiting lists. Other chapters explore themes like conditions endured at the front, the effects of disruption and travel through various theatres of war, the suffering nurses witnessed and treated including shock, relationships between nurses, patients, and other soldiers, and the civilian administrative careers many women led after the war, particularly in the new field of public health. This research sets a foundation for further explorations of relationships between the CAMC nursing sisters and women's movements, including

suffrage, ideas of friendship and intimacy both between nurses and with other military personnel, and exclusions or tensions based around ideas about race and class.

*Nursing Sisters* is a must-read. It presents a thoughtful and detailed account that fills in the many silences left behind by the nursing sisters themselves. Toman reinforces the idea that war experiences were at once both similar and different, both individual and collective. There was, Toman argues, no one universal war experience or story. Instead, the stories of nursing sisters "reveal that war's impact on individuals, families, communities, and societies was much more complex and diverse than is often portrayed" (10).

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***Making a Scene***  
***Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84***

by Liz Millward

Vancouver, British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press, 2015. 316 pages. \$32.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-7748-3067-6 <ubcpress.ca>

“Outside the club they might be closeted or apologists, but inside they were *free* to be themselves, to be proud, and to take up space” (103). This was true of a generation of Canadian lesbians who proudly made a space for themselves, whether in the club, the community centre, the café, or the home, as Liz Millward demonstrates in *Making a Scene: Lesbians and Community Across Canada, 1964-84*. An exciting book which traces the formation and development of lesbian experiences in Canada, *Making a Scene* explores how lesbianism flourished within varying cultural geographies, urban and rural alike. As a cultural history and historical

archive of lesbianism, *Making a Scene* examines the relationships among sexuality, gender, and class within a geographic and spatial framework. Millward argues that, “[w]omen produced the spaces, sometimes alone, sometimes with gay men, and sometimes with straight women, in order to make possible ‘lesbian identity’” (24). In doing so, Millward demonstrates that space (including both private and public space) has been fundamental to how lesbians politically and socially came together, fostered nurturing relationships, and celebrated themselves in a stigmatizing social climate around homosexuality.

*Making a Scene* emphasizes the ten-