



WW I and the Home Front

How did WW I affect the home life of Canadian children?

WW I changed the lives of thousands of Canadian children. Though most of them were not on the battlefields, their lives were greatly altered by the war:

- Thousands of children saw their fathers go off to war. In many cases men were away for two or more years. Children had to live with this uncertainty, not knowing when or if their fathers would return.
- In WW I connections were deliberately made between the home front and the battlefield. Everyone was expected to share in the responsibility to ensure victory for the British Empire.
While children were shielded from the horrors of warfare, they were expected to contribute and to help support the fighting men. War thus became a tangible reality for children.

In what ways were children expected to contribute?

Both boys and girls did all kinds of work to support the soldiers:

- Knitting socks
- Raising money for war bonds
- Conserving food
- Collecting scrap
- Making bandages
- Farm work

In what other ways did children participate?

Children were often used in war propaganda to spread messages about fundraising, recruitment and loyalty to Canadian's fighting men.

What about public attitudes to children in terms of their involvement and knowledge of war?

WWI also brought a shift in this. According to the Canadian War Museum, learning about war became an important part of home front life:

“Few Canadians had appreciated the risk of world war prior to its outbreak, and international affairs – aside from imperial history – played no role in school curricula. This changed almost immediately as newspapers, churches, and social groups immersed themselves in discussion of the war and its effects, and family conversations turned on all aspects of the war’s progress, often centering on men known to be serving overseas or friends whose lives had been affected by injury or death.

Children daily encountered the war in their homes and classrooms. The war and its causes appeared in some provincial curricula as early as 1914. Military readers like *The Children’s Story of the War* or *Canada in Flanders* apprised young Canadians of the fighting overseas, but gave little sense of the horrific nature of the fighting or the magnitude of the war’s human cost. Patriotic teachers sometimes encouraged their students to help convince adult males or older brothers to enlist.”

www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/life-at-home-during-the-war/the-home-front-thechildrens-war/ accessed on August 28, 2015.