

**We Hear the Whistle Call: The Second World War in Glace Bay,
Cape Breton**

By

Shannon MacGillivray

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History Department
University of Ottawa
Ottawa

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ABSTRACT

Many historians have presented the narrative of Canada's Second World War experience as a "good" war. Individuals and communities came together in patriotism and a common purpose to furnish the national war effort with military manpower, labour, financial contributions, and voluntary efforts. As the dark years of the Great Depression gave way to unprecedented levels of industrial and economic growth, falling unemployment rates, increased urbanization, and a wealth of social programs, Canada's future was bright.

However, this optimistic picture is not representative of Canada as a whole. Some regions fared better than others, and industrial Cape Breton was one of those that benefited the least from the opportunities presented by the war. Glace Bay, Cape Breton's largest mining town and long-time hotbed of industrial strife and labour radicalism, serves as an ideal case study of the region's largely unprofitable and unchanging wartime experience. Long plagued by poverty, poor living conditions, and underdeveloped industry, and desperately seeking to break free of its destitution, Glace Bay tried and failed to take advantage of wartime opportunities for industrial diversification and local improvement.

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TABLE OF ACRONYMS

ARP.....	Air Raid Precautions
BCATP.....	British Commonwealth Air Training Plan
BESCO.....	British Empire Steel Company
CMN.....	Canadian Merchant Navy
CWAC.....	Canadian Women’s Army Corps
DFC.....	Distinguished Flying Cross
DOSCO.....	Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation
DSO.....	Distinguished Service Order
HMCS.....	Her Majesty’s Canadian Ship
IODE.....	Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire
OBE.....	Order of the British Empire
NRMA.....	National Resources Mobilization Act
NSS.....	National Selective Service
NWFC.....	National War Finance Committee
PWA.....	Provincial Workmen’s Association
RAF.....	Royal Air Force
RCA.....	Royal Canadian Artillery
RCAF.....	Royal Canadian Air Force
RCAF (WD).....	Royal Canadian Air Force (Women’s Division)
RCE.....	Royal Canadian Engineers
RCEME.....	Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
RCMP.....	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
RCN.....	Royal Canadian Navy
RCNVR.....	Royal Canadian Naval Volunteer Reserve
RN.....	Royal Navy
UMWA.....	United Mine Workers of America
USN.....	United States Navy
WRCNS.....	Women’s Royal Canadian Naval Service

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Introduction

The traditional discourse on Canada's Second World War experience is that of the "good war." Not only did Canada contribute to the defeat of the Axis powers, it also experienced a wartime renaissance at the national, regional, and local levels. Industrial and economic growth reached unprecedented levels as the demand for resources and manufactured goods skyrocketed, and unemployment rates plummeted as the country left the crushing poverty of the Great Depression behind. Canada's future prospects were bright as the war years ushered in a new era of prosperity, employment opportunities, population growth, urbanization, and social programs. Individual towns and cities also prospered as communities and individuals came together in patriotism and new purpose to support the war effort with military manpower, labour, financial contributions, and voluntary work.

These ideas are prevalent throughout the historiography of Canada's Second World War experience. Jack Granatstein, one of Canada's pre-eminent historians, dubs the conflict "the last good war" as Canada and its allies fought against the threat of fascism and militarism.¹ However, this idea of the "good war" goes beyond military heroics and just causes; it also embraces the social and economic transformation of a nation. Another noted Canadian historian, Desmond Morton, describes a "remarkable wartime expansion" and argues that a "booming" Canada had "rediscovered its youth and vigour." He describes some of the tangible signs of Canadian wartime prosperity: steady wages, full employment,

¹ J.L. Granatstein, *The Last Good War: An Illustrated History of Canada in the Second World War* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004).

and bearable hardships compared to the suffering in Europe.² Historian Peter Neary, in his work on Canada's rehabilitation program for veterans, described Canada's postwar period as "the golden future time" and a period of "truly remarkable economic growth and public policy achievement."³

There have, regrettably, been very few academic studies of Canada's war at the local level, but those that have been written reflect similar trends. Serge Durlinger's study of Verdun, Quebec, shows how the war stimulated the city's physical and industrial growth, enhanced its reputation, and increased its citizens' self-confidence.⁴ Jody Perrun's examination of Winnipeg, Manitoba, while showcasing some negative aspects of wartime such as the treatment of the city's enemy aliens, also demonstrates how the war generated a period of renewal after the industrial decline brought about by the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 and the Great Depression. He also explores the high level of wartime social cohesion and "patriotic consensus" in the city.⁵

What have not been sufficiently explored are the experiences of those communities that do not fit into this optimistic narrative. As a case study of a less favourable wartime community experience, this work will serve as a useful contribution to an alternative narrative. The economic prosperity and industrial rejuvenation that has come to be identified with Canada's war was not a nation-wide phenomenon. While experiences such as those of Verdun and Winnipeg might serve as a microcosm of the typical Canadian wartime experience, certain communities did not conform to this trend, notably those

² Desmond Morton, *A Short History of Canada* (Edmonton, Hurtig Publishers, 2001), 132.

³ Peter Neary, *On to Civvy Street: Canada's Rehabilitation Program for Veterans of the Second World War* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 178.

⁴ Serge Durlinger, *Fighting from Home: The Second World War in Verdun, Quebec* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006).

⁵ Jody Perrun, "The Patriotic Consensus: Winnipeg, 1939-1945," (PhD dissertation, University of Manitoba, 2008).

located in the underdeveloped and geographically isolated Maritime provinces. While noted Atlantic Canadian historian Ernest Forbes has made a study of how the Maritimes did not receive a proportionate share of the federal government's wartime industrial investment, he examines the problem at the regional level rather than the local one.⁶ Likewise, Brian Tennyson's and Roger Sarty's analysis of Sydney, Cape Breton's wartime role focuses largely on the defence of Sydney Harbour as opposed to home front experiences.⁷

There is an historiographical gap concerning the stagnant and unprofitable nature of the war years for many Maritime communities. Halifax's Second World War experience has received the most attention. According to Jay White's dissertation on the subject, though Halifax did experience a "war boom" of sorts, various factors prevented its citizens from capitalizing on the industrial opportunities presented by the war. While Halifax's restaurants, hotels, laundry facilities, dance halls, and retail stores benefitted from the influx of servicemen, the city's isolation from central Canada, its lack of prewar industrial infrastructure, and important defence responsibilities prohibited any great industrial expansion.⁸ Haligonians also had to contend with a serious housing crisis, deep social dislocation, and tension between citizens and servicemen. Journalist Stephen Kimber has also written an account of the less savoury aspects of Halifax's war, including the V-E Day riots, poor housing, and exploitation of servicemen.⁹ While these works provide a welcome glimpse into this alternative war experience, there is still much to explore.

⁶ Ernest R. Forbes, "Consolidating Disparity Forbes," *Consolidating Disparity: The Maritimes and the Industrialization of Canada During the Second World War*, *Acadiensis* 15, no. 2 (April 1986), 3-27.

⁷ Brian Tennyson and Roger Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf: Sydney, Cape Breton, and the Atlantic Wars* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

⁸ Jay White, "Conscripted City: Halifax and the Second World War," (PhD dissertation, McMaster University, 1994), 1.

⁹ Stephen Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers, and Blind Pigs: Halifax at War* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2002).

This thesis intends to add to the fledgling field of wartime Canadian community studies and to further explore the unequal distribution of wartime prosperity by examining Glace Bay, a coal town in the heart of industrial Cape Breton. As Cape Breton's largest mining town and main source of labour unrest and industrial conflict, Glace Bay is an ideal choice for such a study. By the outbreak of war, Glace Bay's golden years were long in the past as shifting markets, industrial consolidation in central Canada, mine closures, and constant labour conflict pitting the unionized miners against the various incarnations of the coal company had taken their toll. Long plagued by poverty, poor living conditions, and underdeveloped industry, Glace Bay had everything to gain from the new demand for resources and the various wartime social reforms.

However, the war did little to alleviate Glace Bay's longstanding problems of unemployment and labour radicalism. The opportunity seemed ripe for industrial renewal and diversification, full employment, and various local improvements. Instead, the six war years made up one more unfortunate interlude in a broader era of difficulty, which meant that the transition from peace to war and then back to peace was fairly fluid. There were some positive outcomes, such as the town's proud record of enlistment, great success in wartime fundraising, and civilian participation in wartime service organizations. But the town experienced no industrial renaissance or community rejuvenation despite the best efforts of the townspeople to make something of the war.

Ultimately, Glace Bay's citizens were largely united through disappointment in their own unrealized ambitions and frustration at the coal company rather than through patriotic fervour. The townspeople stood together to fight for concessions from the government and the coal company, but this sense of community only extended so far.

Interneine conflicts based in class and ethnicity became evident when individual interests were threatened. One example was the clash between foreign-born and Canadian-born miners over job security against the backdrop of the enemy alien crisis.

This thesis is in part a municipal biography and in part a means of presenting Canada's Second World War experience with surprising results. Communities across Canada suffered discomfort and grief during the war, but these misfortunes were often tempered by economic renewal and social change. For communities such as Verdun and Winnipeg, the positive facets of wartime life – exemplary military and civilian service, increased demands for local industry, improvements to social welfare, and optimistic future prospects – outweighed the negative. For Glace Bay, the opposite proved true. All Canadian communities made sacrifices and experienced hardships, but only some were able to enjoy the benefits of a new prosperous nation. Glace Bay's war was not a "good war," as the town remained economically and industrially stagnant and saw little positive change.

There is little scholarly work focusing exclusively on Glace Bay. Neil Hooper and Pauline Barber have conducted very specific studies concerning the town's celebrated rugby-football club and fish processing industry, respectively.¹⁰ Carole MacDonald has published a non-academic account of the town's history as told through a series of vignettes and anecdotal lore, covering topics such as local sports teams, prominent public figures, and the various mines. The war years are barely mentioned, which is perhaps

¹⁰ Neil Hooper, "The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia," MPE thesis (University College of Cape Breton, 1983); Pauline Barber, "Resignation and Resistance: The Cultural Context of Fish Processing Work in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia," PhD dissertation (Mount Saint Vincent University, 1990).

unsurprising given her work's largely upbeat tone.¹¹ Amy Siegel has written a psychology thesis concerning Glace Bay, but it is largely a collection of family history interspersed with poetry and personal reminiscences and contains little historical content.¹²

Glace Bay's storied and often violent history of labour radicalism and union militancy has attracted some scholarly attention within this broader context of Maritime labour history. These works, however, rarely look beyond the tumultuous years of the 1920s. The seminal work on Glace Bay's plight as a one-company mining town is John Mellor's *The Company Store: James Bryson Mclachlan and the Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1900-1925*. Mellor depicts the town's history in the early 20th century as a sad tale of exploitation, oppression, and persecution by the Dominion Coal and Steel Company (Dosco) whose executives cared more for their own greed and swollen profits than the suffering of the miners. However, Mellor's work only covers the period up until 1925.¹³ Michael Earle, David Frank, and John Manley have similarly written on the region's mining politics in the interwar period, in which the Glace Bay miners were heavily involved.¹⁴ Paul MacEwan's *Miners and Steelworkers*, another important work, provides an overview of labour politics in industrial Cape Breton, including union elections and strike action during the war years.¹⁵ William John White covers the period from 1930 to 1940 in his thesis on left-wing politics and community in Glace Bay, though the war itself

¹¹ Carole MacDonald, *Historic Glace Bay* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2009).

¹² Amy Siegel, "Imagining Glace Bay: An Exploration of Family, History and Place," MA thesis (University of Toronto, 2011)

¹³ John Mellor, *The Company Store: James Bryson Mclachlan and the Cape Breton Coal Miners, 1900-1925* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1983).

¹⁴ See Michael Earle, "The Coalminers and Their 'Red' Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932-1936," *Labour / Le Travail* 22 (Fall, 1988), 99-137; David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," *Acadiensis* 7 no. 1 (Autumn 1977), 3-34; and John Manley, "Preaching the Red Stuff: J.B. McLachlan, Communism, and the Cape Breton Miners, 1922- 1935," *Labour / Le Travail* 30 (Fall, 1992), 65-114.

¹⁵ Paul MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers: Labour in Cape Breton* (Toronto: S. Stevens, 1976).

is not featured to any great extent. His study focuses mainly on tracing the various political movements and ideologies that came and went as the townspeople constantly struggled against depressed economic conditions and the unyielding oppression of Dosco policy.¹⁶

Michael Stevenson has covered the regulation of Canada's coal industry during the war,¹⁷ but little attention has been given to the impact of industrial relations on the population, way of life, and social structure of the mining communities themselves. Michael Earle has analyzed the slowdown strike of 1941, where the region's miners, including those in Glace Bay, curtailed coal production in a bid for better wages and working conditions. This incident was an important event in the ongoing saga of industrial relations in the Cape Breton coal mines, but is only one small component of the region's overall wartime experience.¹⁸ There is, therefore a deficiency in the historical record concerning wartime Cape Breton communities, and a study of Glace Bay's experience will shed light on the struggles experienced by so many of the region's single-industry towns and how these experiences deviated from the Canadian norm.

Although the primary material used in this work has been gathered from a wide range of sources, the story of wartime Glace Bay remains fragmentary and incomplete. The town council minutes for 1939-1945 from Glace Bay and other nearby towns such as New Waterford have been lost; neither the Glace Bay Historical Society nor the staff at Cape Breton University's Beaton Institute were able to shed any light on their whereabouts. As a

¹⁶ William John White, "Left Wing Politics and Community: A Study of Glace Bay, 1930-1940" (MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 1978).

¹⁷ See Michael D. Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle: National Selective Service and the Mobilization of Human Resources During World War II* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001) and Michael D. Stevenson, "Conscripting Coal: The Regulation of the Coal Labour Force in Nova Scotia during the Second World War," *Acadiensis* 39, no.2 (Spring 2000), 58-88.

¹⁸ See Michael Earle, "Down with Hitler and Silby Barrett: The Cape Breton Miners' Slowdown Strike of 1941," *Acadiensis* 18, no. 1 (1988), 57-90.

result, the local newspaper, *The Gazette*, has provided the bulk of the material, supplemented with annual town reports, pamphlets and other primary material from the Beaton Institute and the Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia. A range of Canadian newspapers was used to provide a broader national perspective on various wartime events that unfolded in Glace Bay, and these papers were obtained through various online databases including the Canadian War Museum's online archives and Google's digitized newspaper archives. Despite the limited resources, the utmost has been done to weave together an in-depth narrative of the town's wartime experiences. For example, there was a surprising lack of information about Dan Willie Morrison, the man who served both as mayor of Glace Bay and president of District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) during the war. The story of his sometimes-controversial dual career has been woefully neglected by historians and has thus been pieced together to the best extent possible.

Chapter One examines Glace Bay's history from its founding to the outbreak of war. Examining the origins of the community's earliest coal mines, the impact of the First World War on industrial production, and the subsequent decades of labour strife and union radicalism will provide some vertical context for an analysis of wartime development, or lack thereof. Chapter Two will analyze Glace Bay's military response to the Second World War, examining motivations for enlistment, the sense of regional and industrial identity embodied in local military units, and the impact of local war heroes on community identity. It is following this chapter that Glace Bay's narrative begins to diverge from the received national norm.

Chapter Three explores the conflict at the heart of Glace Bay's wartime experience, that of patriotism versus self-preservation. The town struggled with competing interests as the citizens and municipal government were caught between the desire to serve the greater war effort and to ensure their own survival. An analysis of the 1941 slowdown strike and the mine stoppages over the enemy alien issue reveals how the miners ultimately chose self-interest over their national duty. Chapter Four discusses the civilian response to the war and how the town attempted, with varying degrees of success, to capitalize on the wartime opportunities of profit and self-promotion. Patriotic civilian initiatives were used both as a means of supporting family and friends serving overseas and as devices for self-improvement.

Chapter Five studies the longstanding social problems in Glace Bay and how town authorities hoped that the war would serve as a vehicle for improvement. However, this desire to benefit from a wartime social revolution, via a series of ambitious initiatives, such as co-operative housing and medicine, based in the philosophies of the Antigonish Movement, was met mostly with disappointment. Finally Chapter Six explores the problems stemming from the coal town's reliance on an unstable and dwindling single industry. The town's inability to capitalize on wartime opportunities to diversify industrially meant that its citizens and its returning servicemen faced a bleak future. The opportunities engendered by the war, which seemed so prevalent in much of Canada, passed Glace Bay by.

Chapter One: A Legacy of Conflict

Mining communities, by their very nature, have a distinct identity and character. Isolation from larger urban areas, dependence on a non-renewable resource, the ever-present spectre of death or injury, and frequent struggles between the working men and their employers together foster a unique environment in which community bonds are created. Located in Canada's hinterland and reliant on the bounty of its coal mines, Glace Bay was one such town. The character of its mining population had been shaped by many turbulent decades of strife and hardship, as the men engaged in a constant battle for wages and working conditions with mine management. The men toiled together in the deep underground mine tunnels, filling their lungs with coal dust and risking death by poisonous gas, explosions, falling rocks, runaway mine carts, and the myriad other hazards of the pits. When they came out of the mines, they returned to squalid homes and impoverished families. Dangerous working conditions and low wages led the men to embrace the growing industrial union movement and to engage in strikes and other forms of labour radicalism. This struggle for survival brought the men together to fight for a better life, for themselves and their families, but it also created a complex web of loyalties: loyalty to the town, to one's fellow miners and the union, and, ultimately, to individual interest and self-preservation. This would be highlighted by the challenges of the Second World War.

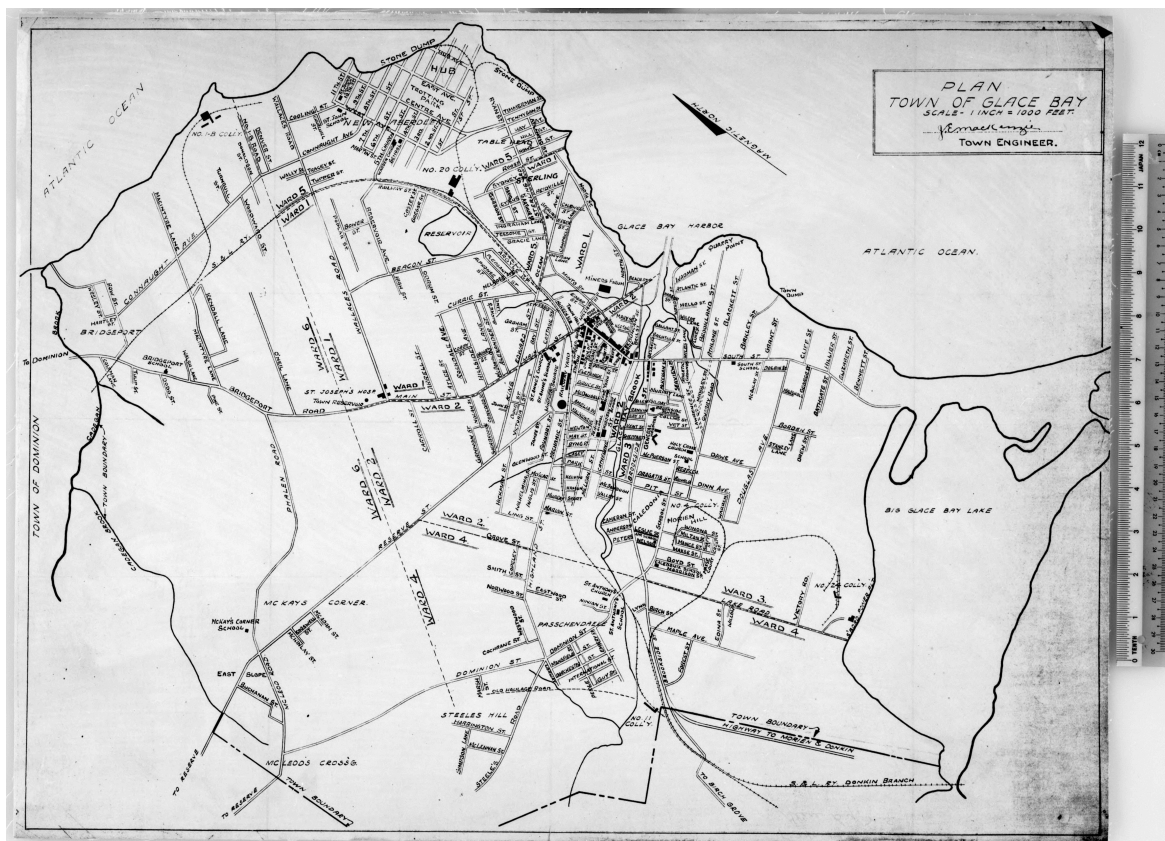


Figure 1.1 LAC, Plan Town of Glace Bay. J.E. MacKenzie, Town Engineer, n.d.

Origins of a Coal Community

Cape Breton Island, located in the easternmost part of Nova Scotia, originally drew the attention of European settlers on account of its great wealth of natural resources. The French retained control of the region through the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht and, for nearly the next five decades, exploited the region's abundance of fish and minerals. Coal was especially vital as the French required great quantities to fuel their fortress at Louisbourg. It was the French who first occupied the area that would become Glace Bay, drawn by the rich coal deposits, and it was the French who gave Glace Bay its name, derived from the

French word for the drifting ice that formed in the town's harbour each winter.¹⁹ The French lost control of Louisbourg to Britain in 1758, and, in 1784, the mineral rights to the colony of Cape Breton were given over to the British Crown.

Mining in the Glace Bay area gradually increased and, by the 1860s, four mines operated and a group of small settlements evolved in lockstep with the mines' progress. Everything changed, however, when the Dominion Coal Company, formed in 1893, received a provincial charter for exclusive mining rights in 1894. Under the Company's direction, the industry and, subsequently, the region, reached new levels of production. Glace Bay, which had been incorporated as a town in 1901, quickly became the most important mining center in Cape Breton. The town's vast quantities of coal were needed for the domestic use of the growing regional population as well as to fuel the rapidly expanding Sydney steel industry which was thriving due to the region's rich mineral deposits. The creation of the Dominion Iron and Steel Company, chartered by the provincial government in 1898, created a huge market for the Dominion Coal Company, and profits soared even higher.²⁰

This unprecedented boom led to a demand for more workers, and the town's population increased quickly as immigrants flooded in, primarily from Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales, but the local industry also attracted smaller numbers of Belgians, Bulgarians, Greeks, Poles, and Italians. Between 1901 and 1911, the population increased from 6,945 to 16,562 - an astonishing 240 per cent.²¹ As the population grew, so did the necessity for infrastructural development; houses, schools, businesses, churches, sewage

¹⁹ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 228, File 3, Pamphlet titled "Commissioning of HMCS Glace Bay, Sydney, NS, 1996."

²⁰ White, "Left Wing Politics and Community," 18.

²¹ Canada, *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911, Volume I* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912), 64.

systems, and water facilities were all put into place so that the community could continue to grow and thrive. The first mayor of the town, D.M. Burchell, declared in 1901 that “[w]hile coal is king and the basis of industrial prosperity of this country and the world, we have every reason to feel that at no distant date Glace Bay will take a place among the leading cities of Canada.”²² However, he would eventually be proven quite wrong in this regard.

The Rise of Labour Radicalism

This newfound vision of lasting prosperity was not to be shared by all. The Dominion Coal Company paid the town’s workers subsistence wages and forced them into debt to the company store. Known locally as the “pluck-me”, this establishment sold groceries, clothing, domestic products, and every other sort of merchandise, all on credit. This monopoly on goods eliminated the need for a middle class to provide retail services to the working-class citizens, which meant that the company exerted a powerful influence over Glace Bay’s economy.²³ The miners were forced to live in squalid company-owned housing where sanitation was poor and disease rampant. Frustrated by their low wages, interminable debt, impoverished living conditions and the company’s lack of interest in their welfare, Glace Bay’s miners struck twenty times between 1901 and 1914. Similar events were taking place in other parts of Nova Scotia as well; there were nineteen strikes in Springhill and eighteen in the Joggins area from 1901 to 1914. Coal miners were responsible for 75 per cent of days lost through striking in the province during this period,

²² Beaton Institute, PAM 2019, “Glace Bay, N.S., Museum Notes No. 1,” June 1977.

²³ Mellor, *The Company Store*, 11.

as single-industry communities across the region expressed their dismay at their working and living conditions.²⁴



Figure 1.2 LAC PA-032633. Albortype Company. Commercial Street, early Glace Bay, n.d.

Spearheading the struggle in the Glace Bay area was James Bryson McLachlan, a Scottish immigrant who arrived in Cape Breton in 1902 after being blacklisted from his native coalfields for his radical labour activities. McLachlan, who found work in the nearby town of Sydney Mines, discovered that Glace Bay resembled his native Scotland: widespread suffering and poverty beneath a veneer of prosperity as company officials fattened their purses while the miners continued to work for subsistence wages. McLachlan challenged the more conservative attitudes of the existing labour organization, the

²⁴ John DeMont, *Coal Black Heart: The Story of Coal and Lives It Ruled* (Toronto: Doubleday, 2009), 161.

Provincial Workmen's Association (PWA.), and fought tirelessly, though largely unsuccessfully, for shorter workdays and safer workplaces. In 1909, District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) was formed with eleven locals, five of which were in Glace Bay. McLachlan was elected Secretary-Treasurer for the District and moved to Glace Bay, by that time one of the main hubs of labour radicalization. McLachlan and the miners hoped that by unionizing, they would gain greater bargaining power with the company.²⁵

Following the District 26 election in 1909, McLachlan and many others became embroiled in a bitter strike that would last into 1910. The company had fired over a thousand miners in April as the market for coal slackened, and, as emotions ran high, police were called in to keep an eye on the increasingly volatile situation. When the miners went on strike to protest the loss of jobs, the company made good on its threat to import "scab" labour from Europe. The miners rallied at the pithead in a show of solidarity, and the provincial government sent in 500 troops to support the company police. A giant parade of miners marched from Glace Bay to Dominion in support of the union, but soldiers wielding a machine gun brought their march to a halt. They turned back and bloodshed was avoided, though the union president was arrested and the miners were forbidden from congregating in public.²⁶

This strike was a hard-fought struggle that would leave a lasting impact on Glace Bay's mining community. Union members experienced discrimination at the hands of company officials and were harassed by company police. The mainstream media denounced the striking miners as thugs who were willing to commit any number of heinous

²⁵ White, "Left Wing Politics and Community," 18.

²⁶ Robert J. Morgan, *Rise Again: The Story of Cape Breton Island from 1900 to Today* (Wreck Cove, N.S.: Breton Books, 2009), 42.

acts to achieve their goals. As the strike wore on, the company evicted miners and their families from their homes, forcing many townspeople to spend the winter in tents or in church basements.²⁷ Harassed and vilified, out of work, homeless, on the brink of starvation, and oppressed by a company bent on suppressing union activity, the Glace Bay miners were very much a community in distress. In April 1910, the union executive finally voted to end the strike in order to spare the miners and their families further suffering, and the miners went back to work with heavy hearts.²⁸



Figure 1.3 Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University E-78-735-2485 Army officers stationed at Glace Bay during 1909 coal strike, 12 July 1909

²⁷ G. Gerald Harrop, *Clarie: Clarence Gillis, M.P., 1940-1957* (Hantsport, Nova Scotia: Lancelot Press, 1987), 18.

²⁸ Mellor, *The Company Store*, 70.

The First World War

Glace Bay contributed to both military manpower and industrial production during the First World War. Out of a population of approximately 16,562 (based on the 1911 census),²⁹ 191 townsmen enlisted, whether out of patriotism, the desire to escape a harsh life, or loyalty to Britain. This force constituted approximately 1 per cent of the town's population. By the end of the war, 29 of these men were killed and 49 wounded.³⁰

As coal was in great demand for the war effort, government policy governing the industry perhaps explains the relatively low percentage of enlistments from Glace Bay. By August 1915, 1,751 of the province's 13,500 miners had volunteered for active service.³¹ The number of coal miners joining up was so great that enlistments eventually had to be curtailed in order to ensure the continued efficiency and quality of coal production. By 1916, 3,070 employees of the Dominion Coal Company had joined the army, and more followed the next year. In 1917, the government forbade employees of the Dominion Coal Company and the Dominion Iron and Steel Company from enlisting on the grounds that coal and steel production was so vital to the war effort.³²

The 85th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (C.E.F.), Nova Scotia Highlanders, which drew its "B" Company from Glace Bay, was recruited over-strength in twenty-two days.³³ With their Gaelic motto *Sìol na Fear Fearail*, which translates as "The Breed of Manly Men," the men of the 85th served with distinction at Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, Amiens, and during the Hundred Days' offensive. The town also produced

²⁹ Canada, *Fifth Census of Canada, 1911, Volume I* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912), 64.

³⁰ Joan Hapeman Somers, *Catholics of the Diocese of Antigonish, Nova Scotia, and The Great War, 1914-1919* (Antigonish: St. Francis Xavier University Press, 1920), 6.

³¹ Ian McKay, "The Stillborn Triumph of Progressive Reform," in E.R. Forbes and D.A. Muise, *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 209.

³² *The Gazette* [Glace Bay], 23 June 1940, 2.

³³ Joseph Hayes, *The Eighty-Fifth in France and Flanders* (Halifax: Royal Print & Litho Limited, 1920), 27.

a wartime hero, Pte. John Bernard Croak, who posthumously received the Victoria Cross. In August 1918, Croak singlehandedly attacked an enemy machine gun nest at Amiens and, despite receiving a serious wound, led a daring charge that captured several artillery pieces and several enemy soldiers. Unfortunately, he received another wound in the charge and died minutes later. Croak's story was an inspiration to the town, as he was a very relatable figure. He had dropped out of school at age 15 to work in the mines just as many other Glace Bay youth had done, but he had become something more and received, albeit posthumously, the highest possible honour serving his country. His actions demonstrated that even the humblest coal miner could achieve greatness. His name was immortalized in various ways in the town; the local branch of the Canadian Legion, a school, and a park were named for him, and a memorial was erected in his honour.³⁴

The war brought a certain degree of prosperity to the Maritime provinces. The port cities of Halifax and Sydney saw the development of shipyards, oil refineries and other war-related industrial initiatives. The region's manufacturers, farmers, lumbermen, and fishermen also profited from Canada's war effort and the Allies' need for food and supplies. Unemployment decreased significantly, especially in industries such as coal and steel that were directly involved in war production. Glace Bay's mines produced large quantities of coal for the British war effort and for use in postwar Europe until the French and Belgian industries recovered and resumed production.³⁵ In this prosperous climate, labour groups across Canada were emboldened to once more take up the fight for wages

³⁴ Beaton Institute, MG20, Vol. 9, Commemorative booklet from the Canadian Legion, John Bernard Croak, V.C. Branch, "Glace Bay, Nova Scotia celebrates the 70th anniversary of dedicated services to veterans and the community."

³⁵ *The Gazette*, 13 June 1940, 4.

and working conditions. In Glace Bay, between 1901 and 1914, there were 20 strikes lasting 363,302 strikes days.³⁶

Decade	Number of Strikes	Workers Involved	Duration (days)
1891-1900	511	78	1,742
1901-10	1,548	230	5,492
1911-20	2,349	521	10,821

Figure 1.4 National strike activity by decade.³⁷

As the war dragged on, the rising cost of living, inflation, war weariness, and the physical demands of increased coal production on the miners also began to take their toll. The number of strikes in the Maritimes rose from eleven in 1917 to twenty-seven in 1918.³⁸ When the war concluded, the labour groups continued to agitate, this time for an expedient discharge process, jobs for returning soldier-miners, and compensation for war widows. There was great hope that the industrial growth would continue. However, the region experienced what was to become a familiar story in the postwar period: elevated freight rates, central Canadian competition, and other setbacks led to a decline in local industry and a postwar recession. During the war, Maritime coal production had risen to over 6.3 million tons a year, keeping the mines busy, but this number dropped 4.5 million tons by 1919 resulting in a decreased demand for labour.³⁹

The Turbulent Twenties

The 1920s in Cape Breton saw continuing economic depression and industrial unrest. Proponents of the Maritime Rights movements agitated for subsidies and better

³⁶ Ian McKay, "Strikes in the Maritimes, 1901-1914" *Acadiensis* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1983), 14.

³⁷ Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 346.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 218.

³⁹ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 55.

transportation infrastructure to improve the region's prospects.⁴⁰ Wartime demand for coal had tapered off, and the Ontario market was increasingly turning to American suppliers. Production was erratic, and wages were reduced. In 1921, Glace Bay's No. 24 colliery was not in operation at all. Families were forced to raise their own livestock and tend their own gardens in order to feed their children.⁴¹

While the people suffered, the mining company continued to grow in power. By this point, it not only owned and controlled the local coal and steel industries but also the Sydney and Louisbourg Railway, the Black Diamond Steamship Company, and the Sydney and Louisbourg Piers. Its influence even extended to coal discharging towers in Montreal and iron ore tracts in Newfoundland.⁴² In 1921, the Dominion Coal Company and the Dominion Iron and Steel Company merged with the British Empire Steel Corporation and several other British steel and shipbuilding interests to become the British Empire Steel Corporation (Besco). The Province of Nova Scotia granted Besco a charter that gave the new entity almost complete control over Nova Scotia's mineral and steel resources.⁴³

In 1925, the Glace Bay miners, rallying together in their discontent, reached their breaking point. Incensed that Besco was purposefully keeping them in debt, they engaged in a violent confrontation with company guards and local police, raiding and burning local stores. One miner, William Davis, was shot and killed.⁴⁴ The miners mounted another strike the same year but failed to gain concessions from the coal company. In 1928, crippled by the debt accrued in amalgamation, Besco went bankrupt and reorganized as the

⁴⁰ Robert Bothwell and J.L. Granatstein, *Our Century: The Canadian Journey in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: McArthur & Company, 2000), 73.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴² "A Social Worker Visits Cape Breton, 1925," *Cape Breton's Magazine* (January 1985), 24.

⁴³ Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Industry and the Rise and Fall of the British Empire Steel Corporation," 18.

⁴⁴ David MacDonald, "A Coal Town Fights for Its Life," *Maclean's Magazine* 67, no. 6 (15 March 1954), 58.

Dominion Steel and Coal Company (Dosco), but this change had little impact on the lives of the miners. As the 1930s approached, they turned to increasingly radical politics as a vehicle for their grievances.

The Depression Years

When the New York Stock Exchange crashed in 1929, the effects were felt all across North America. As companies filed for bankruptcy and factories closed down, unemployment rates soared, and families faced lean times. In the Prairies, the soil dried up and the wheat crops failed. By 1932, Winnipeg had the second highest unemployment rate in Canada.⁴⁵ By 1934, 28 per cent of Montreal's population were dependent on relief.⁴⁶ The Maritime region had not recovered well from the recession that followed the First World War and had received limited funding from the government for social programs. Quebec's coal market had been lost to Pennsylvania during the war, and mines in the Maritimes faced stiff competition in regaining markets. It was also proving increasingly difficult for the region to participate in the new branches of the Canadian steel industry, which were largely consolidated in Central Canada. Increased competition in fishing and agriculture as well as a depressed British lumber market further crippled the Maritime economy.⁴⁷

In Glace Bay, the situation remained grim. In 1930, the average miner was only able to work two shifts per week, though the wages from five weekly shifts were necessary to provide the bare necessities for one's family. As he received just \$3.40 for one eight-hour shift, a miner had a paltry total of just \$6.80 weekly with which to feed his family.

⁴⁵ Perrun, "The Patriotic Consensus," 6.

⁴⁶ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 13.

⁴⁷ Government of Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationary, 1954), 13.

There were also rent expenses to take into account; Glace Bay miner Norman Lipshutz described paying 17 dollars per month to house his family in a decrepit and leaky apartment. There were similar problems in the surrounding towns. In Sydney Mines, for example, only 5 per cent of the town's miners got work in 1931.⁴⁸



Figure 1.5 LAC R231-1920-3-E. Extraction of coal, 1938.

The depressed economy, combined with the crises of the 1920s, created a culture that was critical of industrial capitalism and served as an ideal breeding ground for radical left-wing ideologies. Glace Bay, along with Halifax and Sydney, became especially known for its communist activity and, as such, was subjected to considerable scrutiny from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's (RCMP) Intelligence Section. A 1933 government

⁴⁸ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 66-7.

report condemned the town for harbouring an assortment of “labour agitators, reds, pinks, general spouters, etc.”⁴⁹

It would be misleading to argue that large numbers of miners were committed communists; however, many workers attended communist events or gave their political support to communist leaders. The miners’ interest in communism could be largely attributed to the influence and reputation of J.B. McLachlan, the region’s infamous left-wing labour leader. McLachlan joined the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) in 1922, in support of their mandate to build a united front rather than act as an elite group on behalf of the rank and file working class members, and the party actively supported McLachlan and the miners. At the individual level, many communist supporters in the community were trade unionists and followers of McLachlan recruited from the most militant miners, but these men were concerned with union democracy first and political ideology second. Communism was a convenient vehicle for the miners’ own local grievances, complete with a charismatic leader, rather than something the miners adhered to absolutely.

However, the importance of communism in Glace Bay dwindled with the resignation of McLachlan from the party in 1936 and his death soon thereafter, which signalled the end of a significant chapter of Cape Breton labour history. McLachlan left the CPC as the party followed Comintern in abandoning the tenets of union democracy, militancy, and autonomy in favour of the Popular Front and allying themselves with any political party willing to stand in opposition to the fascists. The loss of McLachlan combined with the growing popularity of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and the Soviet Union’s entry into the war and subsequent policies against disruption

⁴⁹ Jacob Remes, “In Search of “Saner Minds: Bishop James Morrison and the Origins of the Antigonish Movement,” *Acadiensis* 39, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2010), 81.

of wartime production meant that communism lost much of its relevance in the lives of the miners.⁵⁰

On the Brink of War

In 1939, Glace Bay boasted a population of around 25,000.⁵¹ Despite having a comparable population to the nearby city of Sydney, the town refused to become a city itself, taking pride in the fact that it was the “biggest town in Canada.”⁵² The town encompassed a collection of districts built up around the various mine entrances; the central section of the town was designated “Glace Bay” while the various colliery districts were named New Aberdeen for No. 2, Bridgeport for No. 1B, Caledonia for No. 4 and Passchendaele for No. 11, named in honour of the First World War battle in which a number of Glace Bay men fought. While various mines had opened and closed over the years, these four were the only ones that remained active at this time. Unemployment continued to be a serious problem as the coal industry could no longer offer employment opportunities to young people as it once had. An “abnormal increase” in population also played a role; Mayor Dan Willie Morrison described how fewer young people were leaving to seek work elsewhere, and those that had left had returned home after feeling the “pinch of hard times,” Glace Bay was not alone in feeling the effects of the Depression.⁵³

⁵⁰ David Frank and John Manley, “The Sad March to the Right: J.B. McLachlan’s Resignation from the Communist Party of Canada, 1936.” *Labour/Le Travail* 30 (1992), 118-9.

⁵¹ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Volume II* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 9.

⁵² Library and Archives Canada, MG28 I10 Vol 134, “Problems in Social Welfare in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia: A Preliminary Study made by The Canadian Welfare Council at the request of The Town Council Of Glace Bay, Oct-Nov 1940,” 1.

⁵³ *The Gazette*, 6 January 1939, 4.



Figure 1.6 NSARM NSIS 7033. No. 2 mine, 1940s.

In January of 1939, *The Gazette* reported that Glace Bay was home to some 1500 unemployed youth between the ages of 15 and 25. There was also the constant threat of No. 11 colliery closing. In the early 1930s, an official mines investigator had recommended abandoning No. 11 due to increasing production costs and declining quality of coal, and the mine continued to survive only through federal government intervention.⁵⁴ As 55 per cent of the town's gainfully employed men, not including those serving in the military, worked in the mining industry, this was an ongoing concern.⁵⁵

The long years of struggle had taken their toll on the town. In August 1939, the *Gazette* reported that Glace Bay was “dead...not only from the shoulders up but dead all

⁵⁴ *The Gazette*, 20 April 1942, 3.

⁵⁵ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. II* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 244.

over...all that is needed is an undertaker.”⁵⁶ The town had also earned a rather unenviable reputation both for being a hotbed of violence and “the dirtiest town in Canada,”⁵⁷ where the unemployed lay drunk in the streets and open drains polluted the air.⁵⁸ These streets were allegedly lined with bars and stained with blood from drunken brawls. Indeed, local writer Dawn Fraser was once asked to confirm rumours that “people were commonly killed every pay night at Senator's Corner [the triangular intersection of three of Glace Bay’s most important streets] and the bodies thrown off the cliff at Table Head.”⁵⁹

Therefore, when Canada went to war in 1939, the hardship and sacrifice that characterized the following six years of conflict were nothing new to Glace Bay’s citizens. As hey had already been at war for years, fighting for their very survival and self-worth, the privations of the war years were hardly a serious deviation from normal circumstances. The town’s miserable history had united its citizens together in anger, frustration, sorrow, and the hope for something better, but unity based in such unhappiness was bound to be fragile, especially when these loyalties were put to the test. All those years of deprivation and humiliation meant that the townspeople were prepared to do whatever it would take to improve their lot, even if that meant trading in their mining picks for uniforms and rifles, going on strike in the midst of a national crisis, defying union authority, or turning on their neighbours to secure employment.

⁵⁶ *The Gazette*, 31 August 1939, 4.

⁵⁷ *The Gazette*, 5 February 1943, 3.

⁵⁸ MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, 153.

⁵⁹ Dawn Fraser, *Echoes from Labor's Wars* (Wreck Cove, Cape Breton Island: Breton Books, 1992), xviii.

Chapter Two: Call to Arms

In 1939, Canadians were unable to muster the same level of enthusiasm that had marked the beginning of the First World War. The horrors of 1914 to 1918 had not been forgotten as Canada had lost over 60,000 men during the conflict, while tens of thousands of others had experienced severe physical or emotional trauma.⁶⁰ The country was still struggling to pull itself out of the Great Depression, and the possibility of conscription increased tension between French and English. In addition, massive demobilization after the First World War, combined with significant cuts to the country's defence budget, meant that Canada was ill prepared to go to war. Also, with a friendly neighbour to the south, vast oceans on either side, and a frozen wasteland in the north, there seemed little need to make large defence expenditures. In 1939, the permanent army numbered a paltry 4,261 men, and the 50,000 reservists in the militia had little serious combat training. The army had few resources, the air force had largely obsolete aircraft, and the navy could boast only a handful of destroyers and minesweepers.⁶¹ However, despite these initial obstacles, Canadians rose magnificently to the challenge through massive recruiting campaigns, wartime financing initiatives and unprecedented industrial production over the course of the war, contributing an amount of manpower and military equipment that seemed impossible in 1939. Over 1.1 million men and women from all across the nation eventually served in the Canadian forces.⁶²

As the threat of war became a reality, the federal government began rapidly consolidating Nova Scotia's defences. As in the First World War, measures were taken to

⁶⁰ C.P. Stacey, *Six Years of War: The Army in Canada, Britain and the Pacific* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1955), 4.

⁶¹ J.L. Granatstein and Peter Neary, *The Good Fight: Canadians and World War II* (Toronto: Copp Clark Ltd., 1995), 2-3.

⁶² *Ibid*, 6.

protect the Atlantic coast from the threat of a seaborne enemy attack; there was always a risk of German submarines infiltrating Canadian waters. Troops were immediately dispatched to stand guard at the various fortifications surrounding Sydney Harbour, while Halifax prepared for a massive influx of servicemen and industrial workers. Local militia units were placed on active service, military engineers were sent to fortify coastal defences, and large numbers of would-be recruits hastened to enlist for active duty; of the 123,000 men between ages the ages of 18 and 45 living in Nova Scotia, 48 per cent, or 59,355 men served during the Second World War. This was a rate comparable to the other provinces of Canada and second only to British Columbia which had a 50 per cent enlistment rate.⁶³

In Glace Bay, there were scenes reminiscent of 1914 as troops marched through the town and carried out drill at the nearby airfield.⁶⁴ The remnants of the town's interwar company of the Cape Breton Highlanders, "D" Company, turned out in their threadbare kilts and ill-fitting trousers to perform guard duty at Marconi Tower. The Tower, the site from which Guglielmo Marconi made his first transatlantic radio transmission in 1902, was now part of the chain of defence stations protecting Sydney Harbour.⁶⁵ Also reminiscent of the previous war was the immediate rush to enlist; crowds of local men eagerly lined up outside the Armouries on Union Street to volunteer. By 1941, Glace Bay had 937 men listing "active service" as their occupation on the census.⁶⁶ Over the course of the war, approximately 2,900 men and women would serve in the military from a wartime population of 25,147.⁶⁷ This large number of enlistments led the town to claim volunteer

⁶³ CP. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1970), 590.

⁶⁴ Alex Morrison and Ted Slaney, *The Breed of Manly Men : The History of the Cape Breton Highlanders* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies, 1994), 4-5.

⁶⁵ Beaton Institute, MG 20, Vol. 5, File G 1-11, Clipping from the *Sydney Post Record*, 28 August 1939.

⁶⁶ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. V* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 244.

⁶⁷ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. II* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 9.

enlistments far greater in proportion to the size of the town than any other place in Canada,⁶⁸ though this was a claim made by many other towns and cities during the war; for example, Verdun, a city of more than 60,000 inhabitants, was already claiming to have the highest enlistment rate in Canada one week into conflict.⁶⁹ Towns and cities across Canada had similarly impressive responses; in Winnipeg, more than 1000 men had joined up before Canada had officially declared war.⁷⁰

From Miners to Soldiers

As in the previous war, the citizens of Glace Bay joined the military for any number of reasons ranging from a sense of patriotic duty to the desperate need to support their families. A combination of patriotism, family tradition, and the appeal of the comradeship that came with belonging to a close-knit unit encouraged Bill Metcalfe to join the Cape Breton Highlanders. His father, originally from Newfoundland, had served as an infantryman at Gallipoli during the First World War and had been wounded at Beaumont Hamel. Every year, Metcalfe and his siblings had watched with pride as their father marched in the Armistice Day parade; he recalled later: “I was determined to serve my country as a front-line infantry soldier as my father had.” Having been in the Boy Scouts, the idea of being part of a similarly patriotic brotherhood was also appealing.⁷¹ Ted Slaney, another Highlander, had similar motivations for enlisting: “I joined the Army because I thought it was my duty to do so. All my friends were enlisting, that included my father, a

⁶⁸ C. S. MacDonald, *50 Years: Town of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia* (Glace Bay, N.S., 1951), 4.

⁶⁹ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 21.

⁷⁰ Perrun, “The Patriotic Consensus,” 55.

⁷¹ Morrison and Slaney, *The Breed of Manly Men*, 7.

veteran of the First World War, who joined the Veterans' Guard of Canada. So I knew it was my turn.”⁷²

Not everyone shared this particular patriotic vision; some men from Glace Bay had a more realistic opinion on the town's high enlistment rate. Local man Austin Roberts, reflecting on his wartime experience, declared:

You know people who tell you they were patriotic, and they joined up because they wanted to save the country – you know, that's mostly BS, to tell you the truth. Most people joined up because they were so damned poor. At that time – 1939 – I know that, watching them come into the recruiting station, there were more came in with a pair of overalls with the seat worn out of them, and maybe a pair of sneakers on, or an old pair of something on their feet. That's everything they owned, you know. And that's why they joined up. I guess maybe there might have been a bit of feeling into it, too, but most of it was practical.⁷³

Subsistence wages and the hardships and uncertainties of living and working in a mining community certainly played a significant role in motivating the region's coal miners to enlist. Unemployment continued to be a problem; in 1935, the unemployment rate in the Maritimes was 19 per cent compared to 16.6 in Ontario and 16.9 in Quebec.⁷⁴ An unidentified miner from the town of Inverness, Nova Scotia, once spoke of the realities of working in the mines: “We don't go into the pits because we like the pits. We go into the pits because that's the only place, because there's money there, because that's where you earn you living. Because there's no alternative.”⁷⁵ Now there was an alternative. Fighting in a war was certainly dangerous, but so was working in a coal mine, and there were indisputable benefits to putting on the uniform.

⁷² Morrison and Slaney, *The Breed of Manly Men*, 37.

⁷³ “Austin Roberts' Second World War,” *Cape Breton's Magazine* (Issue 47, 1988), 21.

⁷⁴ E.R. Forbes, “Cutting the Pie into Smaller Pieces: Matching Grants and Relief in the Maritime Provinces during the 1930s” *Acadiensis* 17, no. 1 (Autumn 1987), 38.

⁷⁵ Douglas F. Campbell, *Banking on Coal: Perspectives on a Cape Breton Community Within an International Context* (Sydney: UCCB Press, 2001), 10.

These advantages were highlighted in the opinion column of *The Gazette* which made frequent comparisons between the private's and the miner's rates of pay. The newspaper described how "the private soldier with his pay, allowances and subsistence, makes more than the average worker."⁷⁶ While a private in the army only made \$1.30 per day, he did not have to pay income taxes, contribute to the unemployment insurance program established in 1941, or purchase clothes and food. The majority of Glace Bay men working in the mining industry were employed as labourers and miners while very few held more lucrative managerial or overseer positions.⁷⁷ Workers were paid very little for their hard labour. In a town where the average annual income was \$1153, mine managers earned an average of \$3165, and overseers and foremen earned an average of \$1421. By comparison, the miners earned just \$631 per year while an unskilled labourer earned only \$569.⁷⁸

Work in the mines also tended to be erratic at best, whether because of low demand or prolonged periods of striking, which meant that the miners did not have a reliable source of income. These continued periods of unemployment and uncertainty provided additional motivation for men to serve their country in wartime. One local youth, identified only as "Frank", had worked in a bootleg mine⁷⁹ while trying repeatedly and unsuccessfully to find work with the coal company: "I tried several times to get on at the mine...but with three brothers and a father in the mine, I think they thought that was enough from one family."

⁷⁶ *The Gazette*, 20 May 1942, 1.

⁷⁷ Canada. *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. V* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950) 652.

⁷⁸ Canada. *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. V* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 652.

⁷⁹ An unauthorized mine, the entrance to which was usually dug into the side of a cliff or hidden in a backyard shed. Company officials blew up the entrances on occasion, but it was not worth the effort when it would take the bootleggers very little time to clear away the debris and begin again.

For lack of any other option, Frank ended up joining the navy.⁸⁰ There were many men like Frank, unable to find work or suffering from strikes and layoffs. Of the 4982 men aged 20 and older identifying themselves as wage earners on the 1941 census, 18 per cent reported losing time because of unemployment, and 51 per cent reported losing time due to temporary layoffs. A total of 85019 employee weeks were lost from June 1940 to June 1941 for these two factors alone. An additional 1707 weeks were lost due to accidents.⁸¹ The infamous slowdown strikes of 1941 by Dosco's workers, which will be discussed later, over wages and working conditions, resulted in endless weeks of idle time and crippled coal production. In addition to seeking a new source of income, some miners enlisted to escape the increasingly radical politics of the District 26 locals.⁸²

As in the Great War, ethnicity may have played a factor in the high levels of enlistments as well. The town's ethnic makeup had not changed greatly since the First World War; immigration rates had steadily fallen since the early industrial boom, and the population had become fairly static. According to the 1941 census, 85 per cent of the townspeople were of British descent, with more than half of that number identifying as Scottish.⁸³ This demographic trend was present throughout Nova Scotia. Since 1931's Statute of Westminster, Canada was no longer automatically at war when Britain was, yet many Canadians felt a moral obligation to Britain, especially those with close ethnic ties to their ancestral home. However, it later became evident that class solidarity trumped any loyalty to Britain as the men in the Glace Bay mines walked off the job on a number of occasions during the war to protest their wages and working conditions.

⁸⁰ Craig Prichard and Paul Trowler, eds, *Realizing Qualitative Research Into Higher Education* (London: Ashgate Press Inc., 2003), 7.

⁸¹ Canada. *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. VI* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 1282.

⁸² Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle*, 99.

⁸³ Canada. *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. II* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 510.

The Breed of Manly Men

The vast majority of Glace Bay men who enlisted served in the army - with smaller numbers serving in the navy as many did not have the minimum educational requirements for service in the air force. The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) had very strict selection criteria for aircrew, especially early in the war. Intelligence was considered an essential quality in a potential candidate, and one's level of education was deemed the best means of assessing intelligence.⁸⁴ Therefore, the most desirable recruits were admitted to the initially limited ranks of the air force while the rest ended up in the army. In Glace Bay, many boys dropped out of school at an early age to work in the mines; in 1941, seventy percent of the town's male population had less than a grade eight education.⁸⁵ The town's Supervisor of Schools reported in the Annual Town Report for 1940 that the war had thrown into sharp relief the need for "an educated and well trained population," especially in light of the air force standards. He noted that those who stayed in high school through to their senior year were more likely to possess the knowledge and skills required to fill these posts and stressed the need to devise ways with which to keep the town's young people from dropping out of school.⁸⁶ However, the strict educational requirements were relaxed as the war progressed, and more Glace Bay men were able to enlist. Several Glace Bay airmen went on to distinguish themselves in combat later on in the war.

⁸⁴ Allan D. English, *The Cream of the Crop: Canadian Aircrew 1939-1945* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 28.

⁸⁵ Canada. *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. II* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 798.

⁸⁶ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Town of Glace Bay Annual Report for the Year Ending 1940," 83.

	ARMY							AIR FORCE		NAVY				OTHER ALLIED			
	Unspecified Army	Cape Breton Highlanders	R.C.A.	R.C.E.	R.C.E.M.E.	C.W.A.C.	Misc. ⁸⁷	R.C.A.F.	R.C.A.F. (W.D.)	R.C.N.	R.C.V.N.R.	W.R.C.N.S.	C.M.N.	R.A.F.	R.N.	U.S. Army	U.S.N.
	714	281	263	206	43	72	721	365	99	57	63	6	38	4	3	2	5
Subtotals	2300							464		164				14			
Total	2942																

⁸⁸ **2.1 Breakdown of Glace Bay's men and women in uniform by service.**

The army unit with the largest concentration of local men was the Cape Breton Highlanders. The Highlanders had their battalion headquarters in Sydney with companies scattered in Glace Bay, New Waterford, Inverness and Isle Madame, North Sydney, Sydney Mines, and Baddeck. Glace Bay's company included men from the town proper as well as Dominion, Reserve, Donkin, Port Morien and Birch Grove.⁸⁹ As the vast majority of men in the Cape Breton Highlanders were from industrial Cape Breton and had a common Scottish or British background, the unit was a very closely bonded group. A number of these men would later be transferred to the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, which had a similar ethnic makeup.⁹⁰

The Cape Breton Highlanders were the Second World War incarnation of the 85th Battalion, Nova Scotia Highlanders that had served in the First World War, and a similar

⁸⁷ Other army units not otherwise mentioned

⁸⁸ These figures are taken from a database of Cape Bretoners who served in the Second World War which was compiled by amateur historian Wayne Macvicar in conjunction with the Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association. These numbers have been collected from the *Sydney Post-Record* and the Royal Canadian Legion. They should not be considered as absolute totals but rather as best estimates.

<<http://www.ww2.cb-ns.org>>

⁸⁹ *The Gazette*, 18 February 1942, 3.

⁹⁰ Morrison and Slaney, *The Breed of Manly Men*, 15.

spirit prevailed. The regiment served as a link to a shared past and cultural and geographical identity. Its Gaelic motto, regimental songs, and traditional highland dress all helped bind the unit together through a sense of distinctiveness. Piper Dan Gillis recalled how he was “very fortunate to have served with the Cape Breton Highlanders. Four years was a long time to be away from home and loved ones... The Cape Breton music, the Gaelic language, the humour – all helped to make life in general easier to contend with.”⁹¹

At both the regimental and company level, the Cape Breton Highlanders exemplified a sense of regional and community pride that translated to the battlefield. A shared Cape Breton identity based on a relatively homogenous culture and a history of hardship and collective struggle brought the unit closer together and created a distinct identity separate even from that of mainland Nova Scotia. Duncan Fraser of Grand Pré recalled coming aboard a troopship and asking if there were any Nova Scotians aboard; the answer he received was “[n]a’ah bye, we’re from the Bay. This is The Cape Breton Highlanders.”⁹² As one Glace Bay man explained, “Cape Breton is Cape Breton and Nova Scotia is Nova Scotia... Halifax is Nova Scotia and Glace Bay is Cape Breton. There is a difference.”⁹³ The large number of Glace Bay men serving together also imbued “D” Company with a sense of local pride. Sapper Roy Roney, a Glace Bay man serving in the Royal Canadian Engineers in England, declared that upon visiting the Cape Breton Highlanders’ encampment he “saw more people he knew in a couple of days than he would while standing on Senator’s Corner on Saturday night.”⁹⁴ It was not uncommon to hear local slogans such as “Senator’s Corner!” and “Are you from the Bay, bye?” shouted in

⁹¹ Morrison and Slaney, *The Breed of Manly Men*, 358.

⁹² Ibid, 115.

⁹³ Siegel, “Imagining Glace Bay,” 29.

⁹⁴ *The Gazette*, 16 March 1942, 2.

foreign towns and villages where Glace Bay men were stationed.⁹⁵ This fraternal feeling was characteristic of smaller communities, especially those with a relatively homogenous ethnic and occupational makeup, and would be less likely to manifest in units drawn from large cities.

This sense of pride in local identity was exemplified in *The Gazette*'s tribute to fallen Glace Bay soldier "Bowser" McLean, a notorious local boy with a criminal record who had joined the Cape Breton Highlanders in 1939. When Bowser was killed by an exploding shell in Italy in 1944, *The Gazette* mourned the loss of "a personality and a character in the battalion of men who let neither military caste nor years of soldiering destroy them as personalities and characters, who had their own CB interpretation of independence and justice." Described as "the soul of those things that made a Cape Bretoner a Cape Bretoner and not quite anything else," Bowser, full of island pride, had often been found arguing with his officers and causing trouble.⁹⁶ Outspoken and unruly but at the same time both generous and friendly, this private exemplified the independence and fighting spirit that were so valued in the community's civilian life.

This sense of identity was also linked to common occupation; as many of the soldiers had been miners in their civilian lives, the comradeship that developed in the pits and through union activity became part of their military experience. Coal mining was a very dangerous occupation, and, as on the field of battle, the men depended on each other's judgment and skill for their collective safety. The men looked out for each other. Private McNeill from Glace Bay, who was hit twice while landing at Dieppe Beach in 1942, recalled in colourful language how his fellow soldiers rescued him:

⁹⁵ MacDonald, *50 Years: Town of Glace Bay*, 4.

⁹⁶ *The Gazette*, 3 July 1944, 8.

When I was coming up towards the beach suddenly something yanks me around and throws me down. I'm telling you, boy, I didn't know what was happening, but all of a sudden, there's me lying in the water and a buddy from Glace Bay, my home town, behind me and he grabs me by the scruff of the neck and says to get going... the crew of our landing boat waded out and dragged back a bunch of us who was wounded. They was brave buggers.⁹⁷

In 1943, *The Globe and Mail* made a comparison between the qualities that made the miners such good trade unionists and those that made them good soldiers. Determination, work ethic, and loyalty were all very desirable qualities in a soldier, and the newspaper declared, "in the searching ordeal of a war such as this, all the nation should be doing its work in the spirit of these miner soldiers."⁹⁸

Some men made a more direct link between their profession and military service; a significant number of Glace Bay men joined the Royal Canadian Engineers (R.C.E.) or the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (R.C.E.M.E.), established in 1944. The skillset of the miners made them ideal candidates for these units, and they were used to hard labour and dangerous conditions. These men first set to work building coastal fortifications at places like McNabb's Island in Halifax and then went overseas. Two local men serving in the R.C.E., C.A. McIntyre and S.B. O'Handley, were honoured in England for their exemplary work in fortifying Gibraltar's defences and were presented with special watch fobs by the commander of the Canadian Army overseas, Lieutenant-General A.G.L. McNaughton.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Barry Broadfoot, *Six War Years: 1939-1945: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad* (Toronto: Doubleday, 1974),135.

⁹⁸ *The Globe and Mail*, 21 April 1943 [via The Canadian War Museum's "Democracy at War: Canadian Newspapers and the Second World War."]

⁹⁹ LAC, MG 26, J1 Vol 310 J263779, Mackenzie King Papers, "Glace Bay Engineers honored in England."

Women and Youth

Glace Bay women were also represented in the ranks of the various women's divisions, though not in large numbers. Many of the town's working class women were responsible for raising large families while their husbands worked in the mines, so they were unable to enlist in the armed forces. At this time only 2.5 per cent of Nova Scotia's women worked outside the home, but some young women took the chance offered by the war to see a world outside of Glace Bay.¹⁰⁰ The Women's Division of the R.C.A.F. was the most popular among the locals with almost 100 serving in that branch.¹⁰¹ A recruitment officer who visited the town in January 1943, declared that "[t]he girls of Glace Bay responded wonderfully." She received applications from twenty-six women that day; these women then took their medical exams later in the week to determine the trades for which they were best suited.¹⁰² The Canadian Women's Army Corps (CWAC.) was a close second, but very few women from the town served in the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (WRCNS)¹⁰³ because it was a much smaller, specialized and exclusive. The initial enlistment requirements dictated that applicants had to be Caucasian British subjects between 18 and 45 years of age without any dependent children younger than 16. Officers were required to be at least 21 years of age and to have university training or a suitable equivalent.¹⁰⁴ However, few women had the necessary vocational backgrounds required to serve with the WRCNS.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 115.

¹⁰¹ Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association, *Cape Bretoners in World War II Database* <<http://www.ww2.cb-ns.org>>

¹⁰² *The Gazette*, 19 January 1943, 4.

¹⁰³ Cape Breton Genealogy and Historical Association, *Cape Bretoners in World War II Database* <<http://www.ww2.cb-ns.org>>

¹⁰⁴ Emilie Anne Plows, "Serving Their Country: The Story of the Wrens, 1942-1946," *Canadian Military Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009), 85.

The youth of Glace Bay were able to join one of the several cadet corps. Doing so had its incentives: the Department of Education granted credit for cadet work of a certain calibre towards a Grade 11 or 12 school subject. Later, the authorities made provision for a number of subjects related to cadet work to be taught in the schools under the name of Defence Course. The cadet program, which had languished in peacetime, received much more attention with the outbreak of hostilities. All three branches were represented in the town. The Army Cadets were sponsored by the local schools, the Air Cadets were sponsored by the Rotary Club, and the Sea Cadets were sponsored by the Navy League.¹⁰⁵ Their mandate was to build a generation of “physically, mentally, morally and socially strong” youth, to nurture patriotism, and to bring discipline and cooperation to the unruly boys of the town.¹⁰⁶ The training also gave the young men skills to help them succeed in the future. Though the cadets eventually faded away and disbanded in the years following the war, they provided valuable opportunities for the youth of Glace Bay while they were active. The cadet programs also provided an opportunity for local authorities to impose moral standards on the town’s youth in the face of wartime concerns regarding juvenile delinquency. The fear that lax discipline and parental supervision would produce a wave of crime and immoral behaviour increased interest in extracurricular activities that promoted wholesome values.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, “Annual Report, 1947,” 55.

¹⁰⁶ *The Gazette*, 24 October 1941, 2.

¹⁰⁷ See Jeff Keshen, “Wartime Jitters over Juveniles: Canada’s Delinquency Scare and its Consequences, 1939-1945” in Jeffrey Keshen, ed. *Age of Contention: Readings in Canadian Social History, 1900-1945* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company, Canada, 1997), 364-386.

Symbols of Success

Some Cape Bretoners distinguished themselves in the line of duty. Over the course of the war, men from the Island won three Distinguished Service Orders (DSO), one officer and two members of the Order of the British Empire (OBE), nine Military Crosses, four Distinguished Conduct Medals (DCM), and thirteen Military Medals.¹⁰⁸ A number of airmen were also decorated with medals. Several Glace Bay men were represented in the ranks of the decorated soldiers, and these men served as symbols of the town's deep-rooted ambition: to rise above humble origins and the stigma of poverty and neglect and become something worthy of acknowledgement and respect. Held up as examples to emulate, these men became symbols of community pride, though sometimes posthumously.

Pilot Officer Hubert Bishop received the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) for completing “numerous operations against the enemy in the course of which he has displayed the utmost fortitude, courage and devotion to duty.” His father, a coal miner, had served in the First World War and later as part of the home guard back in Glace Bay. Perhaps Bishop had been inspired to enlist by this family military tradition. Or perhaps he was driven to enlist by the fact that it was difficult to hold down a steady job; over the previous ten years he had held a number of different occupations including a farmer, a clerk at Eaton's, a meat cutter, and a tool shop worker. Bishop enlisted in 1943 and became popular with his fellow pilots. He was one of 431 Squadron's “ace” air gunners, having conducted 32 operational sorties and clocked 186 hours flying over enemy territory. Unfortunately, on 11 March 1945, Bishop and his crew never returned from an operation over Essen.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 125.

¹⁰⁹ LAC, RG 24 Vol. 24861, Personnel file for Bishop, Hubert.

Another local man who achieved distinction was Sgt. Nolan Butts, who was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal for his “great skill and courage” while serving as a rear gunner on a sortie over Hannheim in September 1943. Butts, the son of a British-born coal miner, had left school after the eighth grade and, after a period of unemployment, worked as a self-employed truck driver. The recruiting officer who interviewed Butts described him as “Husky, robust, rather stocky chap. Certainly not a bantam, but possessed of a cool, steady, determined courage which should compensate.” When his aircraft came under attack during the sortie, his guns failed to fire. While clearing the guns of their stoppages, Butts simultaneously directed his pilot in further attacks on the enemy fighters which led to the destruction of one of the German aircraft. Like Bishop, Butts did not survive the war; his crew was lost during a test flight a month later.¹¹⁰ As these men died in the line of duty, they were not as lionized as these war heroes who came home alive and whose fame could be put to use selling war bonds or raising enlistments. However, they served as inspirational figures to citizens who sometimes felt trapped in the drudgery and inertia of their industrial community.

Perhaps the town’s greatest wartime success story was that of Harold “Gus” Edwards, who rose from the role of trapper boy in Glace Bay’s New Aberdeen colliery to Air Marshal in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Edwards had immigrated to Glace Bay from Britain with his family in 1903 at age 11 and left school at age 14 to go down into the mines where he spent his days in dark and cramped conditions opening ventilation doors for the pit ponies. However, his mother was determined that he should escape the mining life, so she ensured that he studied each night when he returned home from the pits. He eventually worked his way up to become Besco’s chief electrician in Glace Bay and then

¹¹⁰ LAC, RG 24 Vol. 24979, Personnel file for Butts, Nolan.

served as a naval pilot during the First World War. In the interwar period, he steadily worked his way up the ranks to become one of the highest-ranking Canadian airmen of the Second World War.¹¹¹

In 1943, Edwards was made a companion of the Order of the Bath, and Mayor Daniel W. Morrison cabled him on behalf of the townspeople, extending “the congratulations of the citizens of Glace Bay to the former Glace Bay man who has attained high honours with Canada's air fleet.”¹¹² The town also named their Air Cadet unit the “Harold Edwards Squadron” in honour of the Air Marshall. Edwards was very proud of his namesake unit. When addressing the young men after witnessing the unit drill at the end of the war, Edwards declared that “your work today on the parade ground I thank you for as something I will be able to take elsewhere and flaunt in the faces of other people.”¹¹³ Edwards was not only a figure of whom the townspeople could be proud; he also represented the ultimate success story for someone from an industrial town. Through hard work and determination, he had raised himself from the poverty and hardships of a mining community to a high-ranking military post where he was helping shape the course of great events. However, as he was so heavily involved in running the war, he was not available to involve himself in various fundraising or morale-boosting events in Glace Bay as was the case in other places. In Verdun, for example, local war hero and glamorous Spitfire ace George “Buzz” Beurling served as a promotional figure for selling Victory Bonds and lent his fame to a variety of civic events.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Suzanne K. Edwards, *Gus: From Trapper Boy to Air Marshal* (Renfrew: General Store Publishing House, 2007), 8.

¹¹² *The Gazette*, 5 January 1943, 3.

¹¹³ *The Gazette*, 31 May 1945, 3.

¹¹⁴ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 43.

In many ways, Glace Bay's response to the challenges presented by the war in Europe was comparable to that of other parts of the country. There was a positive response in terms of enlistments, and the reasons for which locals joined the military were common motivating factors across the nation. The Great Depression had left its mark everywhere from the drought-stricken prairie provinces to the lumbering communities of British Columbia, though in some regions, such as the Maritimes, poverty and hardship were felt to a greater extent. Many Canadians felt a moral obligation to help Britain in its time of need, and patriotism also played a role. Like other regional units that were composed of a largely homogenous demographic, the Cape Breton Highlanders and the North Nova Scotia Highlanders served as examples of how community and regional loyalties could translate to comradeship in a military setting. On the surface, Glace Bay's responses were in keeping with the notion of the "good war", of Canadians rallying together to support the national war effort and harnessing community spirit and pride to achieve great things. Yet, the town perhaps was not progressing down the same wartime path as most of the country, and, as the war continued, unique challenges and problems presented themselves.

Chapter Three: Patriotism and Profit?

While large numbers of Glace Bay men and women served in the various branches of the Canadian military, the citizens left behind on the homefront threw their efforts behind a wide variety of causes and organizations. In 1941, M.M. McOdrum, a representative from the Dominion Coal Company, proudly declared that the townspeople had “participated in every campaign of every type and...never failed either with their pockets, their time or their energy.”¹¹⁵ Through participation in a wide range of initiatives ranging from the Air Raid Precaution (ARP) Committee to the Red Cross, the men, women, and children of Glace Bay were able to feel that they were doing their part to support their loved ones overseas and to sustain the Canadian war effort. However, these patriotic initiatives often served a double purpose; Glace Bay’s mayor and town council saw the war as a device for local improvement and took every opportunity to mix patriotism and profit. Selflessness and self-interest went hand in hand as the town officials sought to enhance Glace Bay’s reputation, which was suffering due to wartime labour militancy and to improve local services and keep the townspeople engaged and out of trouble.

Battlefront and Homefront

With their loved ones away fighting overseas, Glace Bay’s citizens worked hard to maintain a tangible link between the community and those deployed overseas. At the individual level, families sustained the link through a steady stream of gifts and letters. Letters were always especially valued, and newspapers sometimes even offered advice on

¹¹⁵ *The Gazette*, 20 June 1941, 2.

how to write a proper cheery letter.¹¹⁶ Local news was always appreciated, and, to this end, a feature column in *The Gazette* titled “Dear Mac” was created to provide a summary of Glace Bay and wider Cape Breton events. The column could be clipped out of the paper and tucked inside a letter heading overseas. These news snippets were the means by which soldiers could still feel in touch with their home community and included a wide range of information that would be of interest to them. From more weighty matters such as union decisions, political news, updates on local crime, casualty lists to more light-hearted fare such as sports scores and visiting entertainers, “Dear Mac” provided a glimpse into the lives that the men had left behind. An extract from a November 1942 column read:

Greetings, soldier boy. Once more we meet as my pen roves over and you to circle this district in which you are so vitally interested... Bill Williams, a miner, who has been gradually losing his eyesight for the past number of months, returned yesterday from the Victoria General Hospital at Halifax, after having undergone a period of treatment there. Mr. Williams was aided financially in his trip by public subscription and the local unions in New Waterford.¹¹⁷

Each “Dear Mac” missive concluded with a few upbeat parting words such as “Thumbs Up, Cheerio and Carry On Mac. Remember, Nothing Matters Now But Victory.”¹¹⁸ Encouragement from home and a means of keeping in touch with local affairs was key to maintaining morale.

Small gifts and comforts also travelled across the ocean, one of the most popular being cigarettes. Often difficult to obtain and expensive to buy overseas, cigarettes were a highly valued commodity. The Canadian Red Cross sent 25 million cigarettes overseas from 1939 to 1941 while the national Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire despatched

¹¹⁶ Perrun, “The Patriotic Consensus,” 320.

¹¹⁷ *The Gazette*, 24 November 1942, 3.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

6.7 million.¹¹⁹ The citizens of Verdun, Quebec, supported the “Mayor’s Cigarette Fund,” an initiative which had provided 2.8 million cigarettes to 2,400 local men and women by the summer of 1944.¹²⁰ While it was not as large or inclusive as Verdun’s effort, Glace Bay’s Miners’ Tobacco Fund served a similar purpose. With the motto “smokes for every union man in uniform,” the Fund provided cigarettes to men from the town’s various District 26 locals who were serving overseas.¹²¹ Sanctioned by the union executive, each local implemented a five-cent weekly check-off to contribute towards the fund. With 6,500 members paying dues in District 26, these donations were sufficient to furnish regular shipments of tobacco their fellow union men.

As of March 1940, the various tobacco companies and the federal government worked together to make the shipping process easier and more affordable. In addition to waiving duty fees, they offered a one-dollar shipping rate for a carton of 300 cigarettes sent to Canadian military personnel overseas.¹²² The Imperial Tobacco Company, which received Glace Bay’s supply contract, guaranteed that the cigarettes would reach the troops and the company would compensate for any cigarettes lost in transit.¹²³ The Miners’ Tobacco Fund was organized by a volunteer group consisting of appointed representatives from each local who would meet every Tuesday night to organize the logistics of the Fund. Each member had the responsibility of keeping the names and addresses of the servicemen from their local up-to-date, dealing with any complaints, and attending to the myriad of small administrative tasks that such an endeavour entailed. Thanks to the efforts of these

¹¹⁹ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 59.

¹²⁰ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 63.

¹²¹ *The Gazette*, 4 September 1943, 10.

¹²² Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 60.

¹²³ *The Gazette*, 2 May 1942, 3.

volunteers, monthly boxes of cigarettes went overseas to the union men on active service.¹²⁴

The shipments were enthusiastically received by the troops. Cigarettes could be smoked for pleasure or to calm frayed nerves, or they could be bartered for other goods or favours. Letters and cards sent to family members or directly to the union local often included sincere thanks for the packages, and *The Gazette* regularly printed messages from local men acknowledging receipt of their cigarettes. One such message from Phillip Turnbull to his union local read: “Received cigarettes, and wish to convey my thanks and appreciation for your kindness. I really need them now as cigarettes are very scarce in Italy. Cheerio for now and thanks a lot.”¹²⁵ Another soldier wrote: “I was very grateful for your kindness as you no doubt have heard many times from boys who have written to you. Cigarettes are very hard to get over here, and we just can't afford to buy English cigarettes. Most boys I've met over here from Glace Bay think very highly of your gifts of cigarettes. Thank you very much.”¹²⁶

This initiative was indicative of the strong labour-based identity in Glace Bay. A longstanding tradition of mutual aid and union solidarity was equally applicable in wartime, and the miners on the homefront were willing to make sacrifices to ensure the comfort of their fellow workingmen overseas, especially those whose families were too poor to send gifts on their own. The Miners' Tobacco Fund reminded the men that they were still valued as part of the community. One soldier wrote home regarding the

¹²⁴ *The Gazette*, 4 September 1943, 10.

¹²⁵ *The Gazette*, 15 January 1944, 3.

¹²⁶ *The Gazette*, 30 December 1942, 3.

cigarettes: “It's nice...to know that we're not forgotten over here.”¹²⁷ Glace Bay's strong sense of collective community spirit was evident in projects like this.

Air Raid Precaution (ARP) Committee

In August 1939, all of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, the coastal parts of New Brunswick, the banks of the St. Lawrence up to Montreal, and the entire British Columbia coast were designated “definite risk areas” by the Canadian military. To safeguard against the possibility of enemy incursion into Canadian territory, the federal ARP Executive Committee gave the Premiers of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and British Columbia the authority to organize civil defence measures in their provinces.¹²⁸ On 3 September 1939, municipal authorities in Saint John, New Brunswick, organized a partial blackout and appointed special air raid wardens to orchestrate the exercise. Within the week, a number of Cape Breton communities, including Sydney, Glace Bay, and New Waterford, implemented similar procedures.¹²⁹

Despite these developments, many Maritimers downplayed any real danger of a direct attack. In Halifax, shipyards operated all through the night with their floodlights blazing, and lights from the Sydney Steel Plant were clearly visible across the harbour, which made blackout exercises seem pointless. Nevertheless, in Glace Bay, Mayor Morrison stated that while there was no immediate danger from enemy bombers, the townspeople should cooperate fully with any air raid precautions since the situation might change at any time.¹³⁰ *The Gazette* advised its readership that Cape Breton's coal mines

¹²⁷ *The Gazette*, 4 September 1943, 10.

¹²⁸ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 2 April 1942, 22. [Google news archives]

¹²⁹ Kimber, *Sailors, Slackers, and Blind Pigs*, 9.

¹³⁰ *The Gazette*, 5 September 1939, 1.

and steel plants would be prime targets since they provided such vital materials to the Allied war effort.¹³¹

As the war progressed and Halifax and Sydney became hubs of Canadian naval activity, a need for greater security arose. These Maritime ports, now centres of Allied shipping and assembly points for convoys, were increasingly desirable targets; though these ports were out of range of German bombers, submarines were always a potential threat. The Canadian government financed a network of eight fortifications built around Sydney Harbour, running from Glace Bay to Alder Point. Armed with coastal defence artillery and operated by hundreds of soldiers, these fortifications were intended to protect the region's mines and steelworks as well as the increasing convoy activity.¹³²

Glace Bay participated actively in civil defence. The town's ARP Committee worked in close conjunction with Mayor Morrison as well as T.L. McCall and M.M. McOdrum, representatives from Dosco, as the mines were integral to the blackout process. Dosco's electric light superintendent would give the order to extinguish all streetlights connected to the coal company. In addition, the whistles at No. 1B, No. 2, No. 11 and Caledonia collieries would give three blasts to signal citizens to shut off their lights and otherwise observe blackout protocol. At the request of Deputy Mayor Cecil Cudhea, the ARP Committee also instated a curfew whistle at 8 o'clock at night to warn the town's children to go indoors. According to Cudhea, the town streets were "infested with children...making a general nuisance of themselves,"¹³³ which was not conducive to timely and efficient exercises. Town authorities had been making ongoing efforts to keep the local

¹³¹ *The Gazette*, 5 September 1939, 1.

¹³² Brian Douglas Tennyson, "Sydney Harbour's Contribution to Atlantic Canada's Coastal Defence: An Introduction," *The Northern Mariner / Le marin du nord* (Apr 1991), 29.

¹³³ *The Gazette*, 24 October 1941, 2.

youth off the streets and out of trouble, and the ARP regulations provided a convenient welcome opportunity to enforce a local curfew in the name of national interests.

One key component of ARP preparations was first-aid training and the establishment of medical stations throughout the town. On 8 October, first aid services were organized in cooperation with the ARP Committee at a mass meeting at Central School, led by Dr. B.C. Archibald, the officer in charge of first aid and ambulance services. Doctors, nurses, Dosco employees holding first-aid certificates, firemen, policemen, and members of organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the Red Cross, and the IODE were all on hand to offer their assistance.¹³⁴ Fourteen first-aid stations were established throughout the town, each station staffed by thirty-one people, including a doctor, several nurses and first-aid practitioners.¹³⁵ The ARP Committee offered first-aid classes during the day and at night, taught by experts who had gained experience doing mine rescue work. Under their instruction, the town's volunteers became quite efficient; the first-aid squads in Glace Bay, as well as Sydney, gained recognition for their skills.¹³⁶ The town's schoolteachers were also given first aid training which they, in turn, passed on to their students.¹³⁷

Another feature of ARP activity was the conducting of mock raids and other demonstrations. These initiatives were carried out across Canada with the intent to demonstrate the importance of emergency preparedness and drive home the idea that enemy attack was a very real possibility, which it certainly was in Cape Breton. There was always the danger of German submarines lurking off the coast. This reality was thrown into sharp relief when the rail ferry S.S. *Caribou* was torpedoed and sunk in the Cabot

¹³⁴ *The Gazette*, 6 October 1939, 1.

¹³⁵ *The Gazette*, 16 October 1939, 1.

¹³⁶ Tennyson and Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf*, 250.

¹³⁷ *The Gazette*, 13 December 1941, 2.

Strait by a German submarine in October 1942. Among the casualties were a number of women and children, which brought the horror of war home to Canada. The tragedy received a significant amount of publicity as devastated survivors spoke out about their experiences and reports and casualty lists began to appear in papers across the country. The navy also decided to lift censorship and allowed all information concerning the incident to be published, with the exception of tactical details. The extensive media coverage and the fact that many of the victims hailed from communities bordering the Gulf of St. Lawrence had a deep impact on public opinion.¹³⁸

In addition to raising awareness, these events also tied into the broader national fundraising campaign for the Victory Loan; a better understanding of the dangers at hand could be used as an incentive to invest in the war effort. In February 1942, Winnipeg staged “If Day,” which involved over a thousand soldiers in German uniforms occupying the city.¹³⁹ The same year, Verdun staged a mock air raid where a number of aircraft simulated bombing over the town’s city hall for fifteen minutes.¹⁴⁰ In keeping with this trend, Glace Bay staged a mock bombing of Senator’s Corner. Hundreds of citizens turned out to watch the town’s firemen and ARP workers, as well as soldiers stationed nearby, demonstrate their emergency preparedness.¹⁴¹ In 1943, the town staged another mock attack on Central School, which saw the ARP workers and rescue squads facing airplanes and delayed action bombs.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Michael L. Hadley, *U-Boats Against Canada: German Submarines in Canadian Waters* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1990), 138.

¹³⁹ Perrun, “The Patriotic Consensus,” 216

¹⁴⁰ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 86.

¹⁴¹ *The Gazette*, 2 May 1942, 2.

¹⁴² *The Gazette*, 26 April 1943, 2.

These events were designed to bring home the message that “it can happen here,” but they served multiple purposes. As interesting diversions for the crowds of onlookers, they helped relieve boredom, idleness and anxiety and gave the townspeople the chance to be involved in something exciting. Glace Bay’s citizens were afforded the opportunity of seeing what it was like to be overseas in the thick of the fighting and could participate in the collective security of their community. The town authorities also welcomed the chance to promote the sale of war bonds and to instil a sense of duty and purpose in the townspeople.

As the war continued, interest dwindled in the ARP for a number of reasons, including competition for manpower from the reserve army and various paramilitary groups, a growing belief that there was no longer any real danger of aerial attack, and general annoyance at the blackout protocol.¹⁴³ However, at the peak of local interest in ARP activities, the town was able to reap certain benefits offered by the focus on civil defence. Glace Bay profited from improved organization of medical services and emergency medical response as well as an increased number of citizens with medical training. This was a great advantage in a community that so often experienced accidents or death in the dangerous conditions of the mines. For example, in the first five months of 1943, there were six fatalities in Dosco mines, the most horrific taking place in Glace Bay: in May two miners drowned when water broke through an old mine working and flooded the shaft. The next day, two more men were killed by poisonous gas.¹⁴⁴ The town’s volunteer firefighting service also benefited from additional equipment and training. Fire damage was a serious problem in Glace Bay, owing to the large numbers of wooden

¹⁴³ Anne Fisher, “Civil Defence in Canada, 1939-1965: Garnering Public Support for War and Nuclear Weapons through the Myth of Protection,” MA thesis (Lakehead University, 1999), 31-32.

¹⁴⁴ *The Gazette*, 27 May 1943, 1.

dwellings, and many families over the years had lost their homes or even their lives in house fires.

Civilian Organizations

Charitable organizations such as the Red Cross and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) were active in Glace Bay during the war. These organizations provided a chance for the townspeople to come together as a community in aid of the war effort and also benefitted the town in other ways. Service clubs that had fallen into disuse during the interwar period were revitalized, and the wide variety of activities promoted by the organizations gave the townspeople something constructive to do and imposed a perceived sense of morality, especially on the town's youth.

Canada's most recognized war charity, the Canadian Red Cross Society was responsible for fundraising, gathering supplies and comforts for overseas soldiers, organizing blood donor clinics, and countless other vital tasks.¹⁴⁵ By January 1940, there were already more than 300 Red Cross branches and auxiliary units active in Nova Scotia, and these groups had raised more than \$139,000 in funds, which was several times the amount raised during 1914.¹⁴⁶ Volunteers knitted sweaters, socks, blankets, and other goods for the comfort of both soldiers and civilians, ran blood drives, sent comfort packages to prisoners of war, and carried out a range of other services.

In Glace Bay, prior to 1939, the town's Red Cross branch had become moribund. Chairwoman Mrs. John T. McPherson explained to *The Gazette* how the branch had fallen on hard times, both in terms of monetary resources and volunteers.¹⁴⁷ A social welfare

¹⁴⁵ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 109.

¹⁴⁶ *The Gazette*, 25 January 1940, 5.

¹⁴⁷ *The Gazette*, 13 September 1939, 1.

report conducted in 1940 came to similar conclusions, reporting that the organization in Glace Bay did not even have appointed officers prior to the war.¹⁴⁸ This was somewhat unusual, as its services would be essential in a high-needs community like Glace Bay due to the dangers associated with its principal industry. However, the welfare report indicated that organized local services were largely financed by the townspeople themselves as needed and that “privileged groups,” such as the Red Cross or the Y.M.C.A., provided only a small number of social services.¹⁴⁹ This self-reliance was no doubt a continuation of the long-standing pattern of community mutual aid.

However, the war created a much greater need for an organized effort, and the provincial Red Cross office in Halifax took matters in hand to revitalize Glace Bay’s foundering branch. In September 1939, three committees were appointed in Glace Bay: a war committee to investigate families in need of aid; a financial committee to handle funds and fundraising; and a works committee to oversee the making of bandages, clothing, and other goods.¹⁵⁰ There was no shortage of eager volunteers, and units were set up at New Aberdeen, Bridgeport, McKay’s Corner, No. 11 colliery and No. 6 colliery.¹⁵¹ The workrooms in the Masonic Building on Commercial Street were where the women of the community gathered to knit and sew clothing for troops stationed across Nova Scotia or members of the Allied navies who came through the Maritime ports. The townspeople donated items such as sewing machines, scissors, tables, and chairs from their own homes to outfit the workrooms.

¹⁴⁸ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, “Problems in Social Welfare,” 24.

¹⁴⁹ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, “Problems in Social Welfare,” 28.

¹⁵⁰ *The Gazette*, 13 September 1939, 1.

¹⁵¹ *The Gazette*, 6 October 1939, 5.

One of the initiatives organized by the local Red Cross was the dispatch of Christmas gift boxes, a tradition carried over from the First World War, with donations of candy bars and other treats, gum, toiletries, magazines, playing cards and stationery. The townspeople donated hand-knit socks and gloves while others made monetary contributions, which were used to purchase other comforts. These boxes were sent to Glace Bay men serving overseas as well as troops stationed locally. In 1939, a total of two hundred and eighty boxes were sent out.¹⁵² These boxes helped boost the soldiers' morale at a time of year when the separation from family members was felt most keenly. The gifts reassured the men that they had not been forgotten and that they were still connected to their friends and family through the bonds of community, which these organizations worked so hard to sustain. Letters of appreciation flooded in, and one grateful recipient wrote: "I cannot tell you how much I appreciate the parcels....The Red Cross supplies us with socks and other little things, and the Salvation Army and other societies are always ready to help a bit."¹⁵³

Glace Bay also had two small chapters of the IODE. The John Bernard Croak branch, named in honour of the town's First World War Victoria Cross winner, was composed of 60 women. Predominantly Protestant, its members carried out various kinds of war work, often in collaboration with the Red Cross. They also sponsored a local Girl Guide troupe. The Isle Royal branch, the town's junior chapter, had 40 members who were fairly evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics. The young women assisted the senior branch with their various wartime initiatives.¹⁵⁴ Across Canada, the IODE was largely made up of middle-class women who had the time and financial stability to take the

¹⁵² *The Gazette*, 11 January 1944, 4.

¹⁵³ *The Gazette*, 22 November 1939, 4.

¹⁵⁴ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 24.

lead in such voluntary endeavours.¹⁵⁵ As Glace Bay was a predominantly working-class community, it is unsurprising that its IODE chapters were small. Despite their modest memberships, local IODE members collected books and magazines for the use of the soldiers, knitted socks and sweaters, contributed to first-aid training, and assisted with entertainment organized for the troops manning the coastal defences.

Canadian soldiers stationed near Glace Bay responded very positively to the warm welcome they received from the town's civilian organizations. For example, the soldiers manning the nearby coastal station at Fort Lingan were mostly National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) troops from western Canada and could not afford to go home on their leave. However, they could use an evening's pass to travel to New Waterford or Glace Bay where there were frequent dances and other entertainment. The men of the Régiment de Châteauguay, a French-speaking unit stationed in the area, also raised under the National Resources Mobilization Act, were, according to their commanding officer, "astonished at the very friendly attitude of the civilian population, particularly at Glace Bay."¹⁵⁶

The Role of Children

During the Second World War, Canadian children were both praised for their contributions to the war effort and censured for their delinquent behaviour. While the country's young people were afforded the opportunity to serve the greater good in a variety of ways, whether it was the Junior Red Cross or a local cadet unit, these initiatives often serve a double purpose. Not only were these activities a means by which the children could

¹⁵⁵ Katie Pickles, *Female Imperialism and National Identity: Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire* (Oxford: Manchester University Press, 2002), 23.

¹⁵⁶ Tennyson and Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf*, 305.

be actively involved in the war, they also provided an outlet for energies that town authorities feared would otherwise be applied to unruly or immoral behaviour.

Concerns regarding youth delinquency were amplified by a nation-wide wartime panic over the state of the country's young people. This anxiety was linked to worries that family instability caused by the large numbers of absent fathers would produce a lack of discipline and loss of moral character on the part of the children. Left to their own devices, young people, it was feared, would engage in all manner of delinquent behaviour, from vandalism to transmitting venereal disease.¹⁵⁷ National media coverage of the impending crisis added fuel to the flames, and the public began to cry out for enforced curfews and educational reform to keep young people in the classroom and off the streets. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics reported that the period 1940 to 1943 had experienced a significant growth in the number of juvenile delinquents across the country; delinquency rates rose by approximately 45 per cent, though press coverage of the problem increased by over one hundred per cent.¹⁵⁸ This apparent upsurge of youth crime, as historian Jeffrey Keshen has observed, was perhaps influenced by the absence of much of the 18 to 30-year-old demographic. While large numbers of men were away serving overseas, greater attention was given to the youth, and statistics were inflated with non-indictable transgressions such as breaking curfew or violating traffic regulations.¹⁵⁹

While much of the delinquency panic was rooted in hysteria and overblown reforming zeal, communities like Glace Bay faced very real problems concerning their youth population. In his annual report for 1940, Glace Bay's Chief of Police lamented,

¹⁵⁷ Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*, 141.

¹⁵⁸ Mona Gleason, Tamara Myers, Leslie Paris, and Veronica Strong-Boag, *Lost Kids: Vulnerable Children and Youth in Twentieth-Century Canada and the United States* (Vancouver: University of Vancouver Press, 2009), 105.

¹⁵⁹ Keshen, "Wartime Jitters over Juveniles," 372.

“There are droves of children and young men roaming around in all sections of the town looking for a chance to steal. They have no respect for law and order, or the rights of others.” He further elaborated that this disorderly conduct stemmed from the lack of employment in the town as well as a lack of supervision and discipline on the part of the parents.¹⁶⁰ *The Gazette* reported, in January 1939, that there were some 1500 unemployed youth between the ages of 15 and 25 in Glace Bay.¹⁶¹ Though the wartime demand for coal increased employment opportunities, it was skilled labour that was desperately needed as more experienced miners joined the military.

Those who did manage to secure employment were frequently frustrated by the strikes brought on by labour unrest that plagued the 1940s while the often sporadic nature of mining work, in general, led to further idleness. In turn, this idleness often led to vandalism and thievery; gangs of young boys roamed the streets at night hurling stones through shop windows, breaking streetlights, or stealing automobiles.¹⁶² More serious criminal activity on the part of the town’s youth was uncommon, though there was one isolated incident in 1940 when two teenagers robbed and killed an elderly man for a tram fare.¹⁶³ By 1941, Mayor Morrison was complaining of an “epidemic of hoodlumism” in the town,¹⁶⁴ and, in 1943, the Chief of Police declared that without proper discipline these youth were “very likely to end up in the Penitentiary.”¹⁶⁵

The Town Council identified the root of these problems as high dropout rates and lack of employment opportunities, issues that were thrown into sharp relief during the war.

¹⁶⁰ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, “Annual Report, 1941,” 75.

¹⁶¹ *The Gazette*, 6 January 1939, 4.

¹⁶² Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, “Annual Report, 1942,” 75.

¹⁶³ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, “Problems in Social Welfare,” 18.

¹⁶⁴ *The Gazette*, 24 October 1941, 2.

¹⁶⁵ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, “Annual Report, 1940,” 75.

Those who had not gone through senior high school were less able to participate in wartime opportunities that could help improve their employability outside the mines. The local cadet organization sponsored a Youth Training Program, but many candidates were rejected because they had received insufficient schooling. Specialized jobs in the military, especially the air force, were also closed to large numbers of applicants from Glace Bay.¹⁶⁶ Town authorities acknowledged this to be a serious problem and encouraged the pursuit of any means of keeping students in school. This viewpoint was endorsed by Jane Wisdom's report. She described the town's attempts at educational reform through an apprenticeship program as "only scratching the surface of a big problem." Out of 50 students enrolled, only four secured a placement with Dosco, the main employer in the town.¹⁶⁷ While wartime programs like the Junior Red Cross and the cadets could serve as a temporary solution to problems of misbehaviour and idleness, they were not addressing the main issues at the root of the problem.

It was hoped that keeping the town's youth busy with war-related work and recreation would keep them from causing mischief. One such venue was the Junior Red Cross which carried out similar work to the main branch. Girls at the two high schools knitted and sewed a variety of items including clothing for babies, handkerchiefs, towels, sheets and hospital garments. They also raised funds for a number of wartime charities through selling fudge, putting on concerts, and organizing afternoon teas.¹⁶⁸ The students also received instruction in first aid in conjunction with local ARP initiatives. One team comprised of youth from Glace Bay even won the Senior Provincial championship in First

¹⁶⁶ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1941," 83.

¹⁶⁷ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 18.

¹⁶⁸ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1941," 87.

Aid.¹⁶⁹ Many of the young girls in the town also joined the newly organized Junior Chapter of the IODE, assisting in various forms of war work.¹⁷⁰

Local schools gave the children an opportunity to engage in fundraising for a number of causes. 1941, in particular, was a very profitable year in this regard. The students raised \$600 for the Canadian War Services Fund, \$456 for the Navy League of Canada, and nearly \$150 for the Canadian Legion Poppy Fund. Several of the schools' woodworking classes constructed knife holders to sell for the Red Cross and also repaired wooden and metal toys for the Boy Scouts to distribute as Christmas gifts for needy families. They also collected small change in milk bottles, which purchased 1849 quarts for the Milk for Britain Fund, a campaign dedicated to providing Britain with powdered milk.¹⁷¹ Children also went canvassing for contributions to the Victory Loan and participated in various wartime civic events like parades and rallies.

This ongoing push for youth participation was supported by an aggressive propaganda campaign. One Canadian who had been a child during the war recalled: "I guess we were all terribly patriotic, sewing bandages and Red Cross classes and all that. Of course, we were steeped in propaganda up to here. They seemed to direct an awful lot of it at the kids, but I'm sure it worked both ways."¹⁷² In the schools, teachers put a huge emphasis on patriotic activity, encouraging their pupils to participate in the youth branches of the town's service organizations, save scrap metal for salvage drives, buy war bonds and war savings stamps, and write letters to men serving overseas. It was not only at school that the children were inundated with wartime messages; similar themes were proclaimed

¹⁶⁹ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1939," 78.

¹⁷⁰ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 24.

¹⁷¹ *The Gazette*, 27 June 1942, 2.

¹⁷² Broadfoot, *Six War Years*, 124.

over the radio, on the streets, in the post office, and a myriad of other places.¹⁷³ For Glace Bay, the war provided an excuse to keep the town's young people under control in a series of structured activities that promoted patriotic and wholesome values.

Victory Loans

To help fund the increasingly expensive Canadian war effort, the federal government solicited public support through a series of fundraising campaigns. When ongoing sales of bonds, savings stamps, and certificates did not yield sufficient funds, the government organized a series of Victory Loan drives. Nine Victory Loan campaigns from June 1941 to November 1945 raised a total of \$12 billion across Canada.¹⁷⁴ The success of this endeavour was due in part to the marketing strategies carried out by the National War Finance Committee (NWFC); advertisements in every form of media, canvassing both at home and in the workplace, elaborate ceremonies and events, and other forms of propaganda appealed to Canadians' sense of patriotism

Glace Bay had a proud record in supporting the Victory Loan, surpassing its quota in each drive and, for the second and eighth Victory Loan campaigns, it raised the highest percentage of funds over its quota of all the towns and cities in the country with a population greater than 10,000 people. A grand celebration was held at the town's Savoy Theater in 1945, which featured the presentation of the sterling silver Rose Bowl trophy and an address by the president of Dalhousie University. Another Cape Breton coal town, New Waterford, took the prize for the seventh Victory Loan.¹⁷⁵ Over the course of eight

¹⁷³ Broadfoot, *Six War Years*, 125.

¹⁷⁴ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 94.

¹⁷⁵ *The Gazette*, 26 June 1945, 3.

loans, Glace Bay bought \$10,105,400 worth of bonds whereas the cumulative quota had been \$7,406,100.¹⁷⁶

Loan	Date	Objective	Results	Percent of Objective
1st	Jun 41	500,000	893,250	173
2nd	Feb/Mar 42	575,000	1,206,950	209.90
3rd	Oct/Nov 42	750,000	924,600	123.80
4th	Apr/May 43	1,085,000	1,333,600	122.93
5th	Oct/Nov 43	1,311,000	1,485,500	109.50
6th	Apr/May 44	1,198,320	1,421,150	118.60

Figure 3.1 Glace Bay's first six Victory Loans.¹⁷⁷

Local lawyer Johnston Chew was the organizer and general manager of Glace Bay's Victory Loan initiatives. He played a very active role in the community, serving as secretary of the local Rotary Club and as an executive member of the Maritime Board of Trade. He was heavily involved in many of the town's wartime initiatives. *The Gazette* extolled his virtues, declaring: "There is really only one reason that any of Glace Bay's Victory Loan campaigns have gone off so well, and that one reason again is Johnston Chew."¹⁷⁸ A team of dedicated volunteers, managed by Chew, went through the town collecting funds. The town's children were also given the opportunity to participate in the Victory Loan campaign through a school essay contest. The first-prize winner from the junior grades received an \$8 war savings certificate, while the winner from the senior grades obtained a certificate for \$12.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ *The Gazette*, 2 October 1945, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *The Gazette*, 23 October, 1944, 7.

¹⁷⁸ *The Gazette*, 30 June 1941, 1.

¹⁷⁹ *The Gazette*, 30 May 1941, 2.

Those who invested money in the Victory Loan campaign had their names published in *The Gazette*, along with the amount of money given, on the Victory Loan Honour Roll. The same applied for businesses that contributed, and this served as an incentive to invest, as everyone would know who was or was not participating in the patriotic endeavour. Despite the troubling financial and political times, Glace Bay's miners notably stepped up to the plate, making voluntary pledges each week through the check-off system; payroll deductions had been set up by the NWFC as a means to encourage investment from working-class Canadians.¹⁸⁰ Caledonia colliery led the way with almost 100 per cent of its members each giving slightly more than one dollar per week. *The Gazette* attributed the campaign's success to the patriotism of the "\$20 and \$30-a-week miners," many of whom were going "to the limit of their means to aid in the all out effort."¹⁸¹ In addition to the individual miners, District 26 of the UMWA made contributions to the National War Loan. In 1940, President Morrison and Secretary-Treasurer Alexander McKay signed for \$1000 worth of bonds on behalf of the District 26 membership.¹⁸² The International U.M.W.A. invested \$20,000.¹⁸³

Town authorities used a variety of incentives to encourage Glace Bay's citizens to contribute. In addition to the desire to aid the war effort, the local government sought the prestige that came with achieving the greatest percentage of funds over quota. Anything that could help enhance the town's reputation, especially given the bad publicity Glace Bay received on account of disruptive labour militancy, was eagerly sought after. It is doubtful

¹⁸⁰ Wendy Cuthbertson, "Pockets and Patriotism : The "Financial Miracle" of Canada's World War II Victory Bond Program" in Yves Tremblay, ed *Canadian Military History Since the 17th Century: Proceedings of the Canadian Military History Conference, Ottawa, 5-9 May 2000* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 2001), 179.

¹⁸¹ *The Gazette*, 6 January 1943, 12.

¹⁸² *The Gazette*, 16 January 1940, 1.

¹⁸³ *The Gazette*, 18 January 1940, 1.

that all the individual miners and other citizens who supported the Victory Loan were motivated by the desire to promote Glace Bay's interests. Investing in the Victory Loan, in addition to one's patriotic duty, was also marketed as a good investment in the future which, for the miners, was never certain. Organizers also appealed to the town's legacy from the First World War, where they had "gone over the top" and won the Devonshire Flag for their contributions. Organizers also appealed to the appealing to the townspeople's sympathy for the victims of the *Caribou* tragedy, adopting the slogan "Remember the Caribou."¹⁸⁴

Other exciting events designed to stir up support for the Victory Loan campaign included visits from celebrated servicemen and other special activities. In October 1942, Spitfire ace Buck McNair, originally from Springfield, Nova Scotia, came to Glace Bay to participate in a Victory Loan ceremony.¹⁸⁵ It was hoped that his celebrity status would help sell war bonds, a common practice during the war. McNair had been decorated with the Distinguished Service Order and the Distinguished Flying Cross and, like other Canadian war heroes, was doing his time on the fundraising circuit.¹⁸⁶ As he was not from Glace Bay, his visit did not create the same levels of excitement and celebration as George "Buzz" Beurling in Verdun, but it was a chance for the townspeople to rub shoulders with a real live war hero.

Another fundraising initiative was the Torch of Victory, a popular wartime symbol that was flown across the country on a bomber accompanied by a retinue of servicemen representing the three branches of the military. Over five feet tall and covered in gold leaf, the Torch, designed to stir up patriotic fervour and public support for the Victory Loan,

¹⁸⁴ *The Gazette*, 17 October 1942, 1.

¹⁸⁵ *The Gazette*, 24 October 1942, 2.

¹⁸⁶ Norman Franks, *Buck McNair: Spitfire Ace* (London: Grub Street, 2001), 88.

made a tour of cities from Victoria to Halifax.¹⁸⁷ At each place it stopped, the citizens staged an elaborate ceremony in welcome. The Torch arrived in Glace Bay in June 1941, accompanied by 25 military vehicles carrying a guard of honour, members of the militia, the R.C.A.F., and the R.C.N. Thousands of citizens lined the streets to watch the parade.¹⁸⁸

One particular event that received a great deal of publicity was a football game between the 6th Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers, hailing from Vancouver but stationed at Camp Debert, and Glace Bay's Caledonia Rugby Football Club, the dominating force in Eastern Canada. Glace Bay had fielded a number of teams over the years, but the Caledonia Club was the most successful and was made up largely of working-class coal miners. Founded in 1906, the Club had built an impressive dynasty: between 1920 and 1939 Caledonia won the Cape Breton championship every year as well as eight Maritime and ten Eastern Canadian titles.¹⁸⁹ Such great success was not only a source of pride for the miners but also for the wider community. It put Glace Bay on the map and gave the town recognition in the press for something other than labour strife or being the "dirtiest town in Canada."¹⁹⁰ Glace Bay Judge L.D. Currie described the impact of the team's successes on the community:

It was really a great thing though for a bunch of boys from the oldest producing colliery of the British Empire Steel to go to Montreal, the heart of the coal market, and there beat the cream of Upper Canada's rugby players. The boys from the mines had no advantages to train like large city or college teams. The win to the Caledonians would inspire the youths of the coal mining communities for generations to come.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Perrun, "The Patriotic Consensus," 190.

¹⁸⁸ *The Gazette*, 20 June 2, 1941.

¹⁸⁹ Hooper, "The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club," 31.

¹⁹⁰ *The Gazette*, 5 February 1943, 3.

¹⁹¹ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 110.

This sense of wider community support was not limited to the miners and their families; the coal company also took an active interest in the sport. To the Dosco bosses, the players were also representatives of the mining industry and of their company. Consequently, they gave the miner-players special consideration on game days such as allowing them a lighter workload up on the surface.¹⁹² Appreciation for the sport transcended class divisions and any workplace animosity.

Tom Connors NSARM accession 1987-218 no. 583 www.gov.ns.ca/nsarm/ c 2012



Figure 3.2 NSARM, 1987-218 no. 583. Caledonia Football Club, 1919-1920

Therefore, the game between Caledonia and the 6th Field Company in June 1941, in support of the Victory Loan, was a chance to rekindle enthusiasm for the game and prove, once again, Glace Bay's supremacy. Touted in *The Gazette* as "the largest football game

¹⁹² Hooper, "The History of the Caledonia Amateur Athletic Club," 31.

ever held in this town,” the game was preceded by a “monster” rally featuring patriotic songs by a mass choir, a live band, and speeches by Mayor Morrison and other dignitaries. The engineers, accompanied by a contingent of town officials and the local high school trumpet band, marched to the Miners’ Forum in grand style. The largest parade ever seen in Glace Bay featured the town’s largest fire engine bedecked with Victory Loan slogans and attachments of soldiers, sailors, and airmen, cadets, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and Army and Navy veterans. Citizens with cars were encouraged to festoon their vehicles with patriotic decorations and join the parade,¹⁹³ though only 21 per cent of households in Glace Bay had an automobile compared to 37 per cent of Canadian households and 28 per cent of Nova Scotian households.¹⁹⁴

In his opening address prior to the big game, Mayor Morrison bid the visiting soldiers welcome but also took the opportunity to promote Glace Bay as “one of the largest industrial centers in Canada” and “the largest town in the Dominion.” He further elaborated: “what the town lacks in beauty and other things the people make up for in hospitality.”¹⁹⁵ He gave the engineers the key to the city and encouraged them to come back to visit. Stuart McCawley, one of the event’s organizers, told the assembled crowds that “many former Caledonia players went overseas in the First Great War and didn’t come back,” and he hoped that the visitors going overseas would “all come back.”¹⁹⁶ Caledonia emerged victorious from the match, and the festivities surrounding the game no doubt succeeded in entertaining the spectators and creating interest in the Victory Loan.

¹⁹³ *The Gazette*, 7 June 1941, 2.

¹⁹⁴ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Volume IX* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 81, 156.

¹⁹⁵ *The Gazette*, 7 June 1941, 2.

¹⁹⁶ *The Gazette*, 7 June 1941, 2.

In addition to drumming up support for the Victory Loan, the big game served another purpose. Glace Bay's success in rugby football was one of the few things that gave the town distinction in the eyes of the rest of the country, and, as interest in the sport waned, so did the town's prestige. By the time Second World War broke out, the Cape Breton Football League consisted of only two teams: Caledonia and Sydney. Caledonia's immense success, constantly promoted by the press, the coal company, and even the union, had led to a decline in interest amongst the other teams. The other communities had little interest in turning out to see their players get repeatedly trounced by the fifteen from Caledonia. It would take a visiting team from away to create any excitement.

As the war progressed, league play took on a controversial tone, as some were of the opinion that these healthy young men belonged in the military. It seemed frivolous to be indulging in sports while the war raged. When Caledonia played a team from Mt. Allison University in 1939, for a crowd of hundreds of servicemen, the *Sydney Post Record* published a photograph of the players with the caption "Ignoring the Call to Arms."¹⁹⁷ These critics, however, were forgetting that the team members, who were not full-time football players, were carrying out valuable work in the mines. The League was suspended after the 1940 season for the rest of the war. Therefore, the 1941 game provided an opportunity to revive flagging interest in local sport in the name of the war effort, both promoting the local sports scene and dispelling the notion of the game as unpatriotic. It would seem less frivolous if it were considered a part of a wider patriotic fundraising endeavour. Despite the success of the occasion, Glace Bay's rugby football

¹⁹⁷ Daniel MacDonald, "Gridiron and Coal: The Making of Rugby Football in Industrial Cape Breton 1900-1960," MA thesis (St Mary's University, 2001), 77.

never regained the prestige and renown of the twenties and thirties. The war took its toll on the sport, and it was eventually eclipsed by hockey as a regional pastime.

HMCS *Glace Bay*

Glance Bay's praiseworthy record in the Victory Loan was also used as leverage to achieve further honours for the town. A common practice during the Second World War was for the Navy to bestow the names of Canadian towns and cities upon certain classes of warships. Not only did this tradition provide a means for the citizens to feel like they were playing a part, however small, in aiding their country's cause, it served as incentive; communities that contributed actively to the war effort were rewarded by recognition of their efforts through the ship-naming process. This was such a sought-after distinction that cities would sometimes be offended if other seemingly less worthy communities were chosen ahead of them. For example, the Mayor of Edmonton, John Fry, was indignant that the smaller cities of Edmunston and Calgary had been chosen over Alberta's capital.¹⁹⁸

Glance Bay was similarly eager to be one of the communities chosen for this honour. In June 1942, *The Gazette* reprinted a letter written by local resident Thomas Hussey to the Minister for Naval Services, Angus L. MacDonald, previously the Premier of Nova Scotia, in which he entreated the Minister to consider naming one of the Royal Canadian Navy's newest corvettes after the town. Hussey cited Glance Bay's reputation as "the largest town in Canada" as well as its high number of enlistments and generous donations to the Victory Loan campaigns, declaring, "the amount subscribed here was sufficient to pay for two

¹⁹⁸ Bruce Ibsen, "A Name If Necessary, But Not Necessarily a Name: Why There Was No H.M.C.S. Edmonton" in Kenneth W. Tingley, ed., *For King and Country: Alberta in the Second World War* (Edmonton: Provincial Museum of Alberta, 1995), 139.

corvettes.”¹⁹⁹ MacDonald replied to Hussey’s letter in November, congratulating the townspeople on their “splendid response” to the nation’s fundraising initiatives and informing them that the town would have its ship. This announcement was met with great excitement and pride, and Hussey encouraged the townspeople to begin thinking of ways in which Glace Bay could be of service to the crew, as was the custom.²⁰⁰

In August 1944, after two years of waiting, the town received word that its namesake ship would be launched in the coming weeks. A River-class frigate, HMCS *Glace Bay* would carry both the town’s name and heritage into battle. Its crest featured a thistle on a black and white background. The thistle, taken from the town’s coat of arms, represented the Gaelic-speaking Scots who originally settled the area; the white represented the ice that formed in the waters of the Bay and from which the town’s name was derived; and the black symbolized the coal on which the community was based.²⁰¹ HMCS *Glace Bay* was commissioned on 2 September 1944, and while Mayor Morrison and his wife attended the official ceremony in Quebec City, Hussey, by then chairman of the Glace Bay Comfort Committee, sent a telegram on behalf of all the townspeople to the vessel’s commanding officer, Lieutenant-Commander H.S. MacDonald. It read: "Please feel that the people of Glace Bay will always be mindful of the best interests of yourself, your ship, and your crew.”²⁰² He was as good as his word.

Mr. Hussey and Mayor Morrison immediately made plans for the arrival of the ship and its crew. A special meeting was called to determine the viability of HMCS *Glace Bay*

¹⁹⁹ *The Gazette*, 18 June 1942, 2.

²⁰⁰ *The Gazette*, 28 November 1942, 3-4.

²⁰¹ Directorate of History and Heritage, AHR 1326-3352, HMCS *Glace Bay* Annual Historical Report 1997.

²⁰² *The Gazette*, 7 September 1944, 3.

making a stop in the town harbour, which was badly in need of dredging.²⁰³

Representatives from veterans associations, service clubs, church groups, labour unions and other town organizations were called together to arrange a reception and discuss the means by which the town could provide comforts to the crew.²⁰⁴ While the ship was unable to sail directly into Glace Bay Harbour, enthusiastic crowds of men, women, and children made the trip into Sydney in late September for the chance to go aboard the town's namesake ship. The crew and officers of HMCS *Glace Bay* were also treated to a dinner and dance at the Glace Bay Hotel by the townspeople. In his address at the banquet, Chairman Hussey expressed his hope that no matter where they went, "the boys of the ship [would] keep in touch with the people here."²⁰⁵ The town also presented the crew with a bulldog to serve as their mascot on board.²⁰⁶



Figure 3.3 Library and Archives Canada, PA-145881. Ship's Company of the frigate H.M.C.S. **GLACE BAY**, St. John's, Newfoundland, 19 June 1945.

²⁰³ *The Gazette*, 4 August 1944, 2.

²⁰⁴ *The Gazette*, 6 September 1944, 1.

²⁰⁵ *The Gazette*, 21 September 1944, 3.

²⁰⁶ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 228, File 3, Pamphlet titled "Commissioning of HMCS Glace Bay Sydney, NS, 1996."

Crew member Victor Cormier, the only Cape Bretoner serving aboard *Glace Bay*, reflected decades later on how his relationship with the town during the war years truly exemplified what he called the “human weld,” an expression of that connection between home front and battle front and of which he became an ambassador. Owing to his status as the lone Cape Bretoner among the crew, he was afforded the honour of escorting Mayor Morrison’s daughters to the evening entertainment²⁰⁷. He described the experience as “like coming home. Although I was not from the town of Glace Bay, I was from Cape Breton and I felt really proud.”²⁰⁸ This “human weld” was a common phenomenon amongst RCN ships and their adoptive communities. In Red Deer, Alberta, for example, a relationship developed between the townspeople and the minesweeper named in its honour. Despite the fact that only two central Albertans ever served on board the ship, a steady stream of letters and gifts travelled between the ship and the town, and the ship’s progress was lovingly documented in the local paper.²⁰⁹

Originally based out of Western Approaches Command, Londonderry, *Glace Bay* served on convoy duty in the Atlantic until the end of the war in Europe. In June 1945, the frigate spent a short time carrying out various duties off Canada’s east coast and, in July, was reassigned to Atlantic Coast Command. After making a round trip to Bermuda, she was paid off on 17 November at Sydney.²¹⁰ Upon her decommissioning, Captain F.M. Slade presented the ship’s bell and paying-off pennant to the town and gifted the ship’s piano, which had been donated to the ship’s crew by Glace Bay’s students, back to the schoolchildren. At a banquet held in honour of the ship and her crew on 8 November at the

²⁰⁷ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 228, File 6, “Speech by Victor Cormier, Belle Cote, 26 Oct, 1996.”

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibsen, “A Name If Necessary,” 126.

²¹⁰ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 228, File 3, Pamphlet titled “Commissioning of HMCS *Glace Bay* Sydney, NS, 1996.”

Glance Bay Hotel, Mayor Morrison accepted the bell and pennant on behalf of the town's citizens. Supervisor of Schools W.R. Crowell accepted the piano on behalf of his students, expressing his hope that it had "provided many happy hours for the officers and crew."²¹¹

The citizens of Glance Bay participated actively in many home front initiatives in aid of the national war effort. Whether they were volunteering with organizations like the Red Cross and the ARP Committee or donating money to the Victory Loan, the townspeople were generous with their time and resources, notwithstanding the impoverished state of many in the town. Glance Bay's deep-rooted sense of community pride and mutual aid that had shaped the town's identity over the decades was important during the war years as the townspeople banded together to help protect each other and give what comfort they could to their loved ones overseas. This sense of community also extended to the officers and crew of the HMCS *Glance Bay* as the townspeople forged new links with their adopted ship through ongoing generosity and support. However, the town authorities also took every opportunity to use the various home front initiatives to Glance Bay's advantage. ARP regulations helped improve local services and keep troublesome children indoors, while the war gave new life and resources to important town groups like the Red Cross. Finally, the town's success in the Victory Loan was used as a means of increasing local prestige and obtaining other wartime benefits.

²¹¹ *The Gazette*, 9 November 1945, 3.

Chapter Four: The War and Social Welfare

Wartime conditions exacerbated a number of social difficulties for Canadians and also drew attention to various deficiencies, creating an impetus for reform. Overcrowded cities and wartime restrictions on building materials created housing shortages, and data from recruiting centres and social surveys drew attention to certain shortcomings in the country's health care system. For many parts of Canada, the war served, to varying degrees, as a catalyst for social change. However, this was far less true in Glace Bay. While the war certainly drew attention to the myriad social problems in the town, such as housing and public health, there was no social revolution. As the town embarked on various schemes such as co-operative housing and co-operative medicine, local authorities and social workers believed Glace Bay could take a place at the forefront of social innovation and would prove to be a model to inspire other communities. But such views were wildly optimistic, and conditions in Glace Bay continued to be very difficult during and following the war.

Jane Wisdom and the Canadian Welfare Council

In 1940, alarmed by the state of the town's social services, the Glace Bay Town Council commissioned Jane Wisdom, a field worker for the Canadian Welfare Council, to make a preliminary assessment of community problems and welfare services.²¹² One of Nova Scotia's first professional social workers, Ms. Wisdom had headed the Bureau of Social Services in Halifax and had been district supervisor for the Halifax Relief Commission in the wake of the 1917 Halifax Explosion. In this capacity, she had been responsible for organizing temporary housing facilities and compensation for families

²¹² LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare."

affected by the disaster and supporting the victims in a variety of other ways. In 1939, after working for some time in Montreal, she returned to Nova Scotia to conduct research on social problems in small rural communities, including Glace Bay.²¹³

Wisdom found the administration of social services in Glace Bay to be deficient for several reasons. Firstly, the town's population was spread out over a large area, its various districts built up around the different mine entrances. This made it very difficult to coordinate administrative efforts between the different districts.²¹⁴ Another problem was that the town's mining community had a history of contributing to its own welfare services, which could, in some cases, conflict with government efforts to provide similar or improved services on a broader scale. The miners paid for a range of services through the check-off apart from their union dues. Hospitals and doctors received 45 and 40 cents per week, respectively, and 30 cents per week went into the Dominion Coal Workers Relief Association, which provided sickness, death, and dependant's allowances. Miners could also use the check-off to pay into co-operative housing projects, credit union memberships, co-operatives stores and the Company Workers Relief Association.²¹⁵ The check-off was not without its flaws as some miners felt exploited by the endless number of deductions which would continue even when the men were idle for whatever reason.²¹⁶

However, despite a number of deficiencies in the administration of the town's social services, an examination of the town's check-off system led Wisdom to report that "no better example could be found than Glace Bay of a town development carried out in

²¹³ Suzanne Morton, "Faire le saut: la biographie peut-elle être de l'histoire sociale?" *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 54, no. 1, (2000), 105.

²¹⁴ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 3.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 19.

the spirit of self-determination.”²¹⁷ The war years demonstrated the great capacity of Glace Bay’s citizens to organize their own affairs as they threw their efforts into initiatives like the Miners’ Tobacco Fund or the Victory Loans. They were also historically self-sufficient when it came to social services. Charlotte Whitton, the Executive Director of the Canadian Welfare Council, summed up Glace Bay’s situation in a letter written to a colleague in April 1941:

As you look at our communities organizing themselves for the war effort, you will come to the conclusion that a great deal of the citizen discussion and certainly energetic organization of campaign and finance, can be carried admirably within citizen effort, and with tremendous enthusiasm. However, the technical organization and administration of the various social services cannot be so administered or developed.²¹⁸

Wisdom recommended that Glace Bay create a board of public welfare to administer municipal services, drawing representatives from the provincial and municipal governments, the coal company, various community groups, and concerned citizens. In this fashion the town could centralize what she described as “well-intentioned but uncorrelated efforts.”²¹⁹ Whitton hoped that by following these recommendations, “Glace Bay might well embark on a demonstration of community organization beyond its own municipal boundaries...[with] wider application through the mining country and interest beyond Cape Breton and Nova Scotia.”²²⁰ However, despite best efforts, social services continued to prove deficient during the war.

²¹⁷ LAC, MG28 I10, Vol. 134, “Glace Bay Looks Ahead: Some Notes and Suggestions,” 3.

²¹⁸ LAC, MG28 I10, Vol. 134, Letter from Charlotte Whitton to Stewart Sutton, 5 April 1941.

²¹⁹ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, “Problems in Social Welfare,” 19.

²²⁰ LAC, MG28 I10, Vol. 134, Letter from Charlotte Whitton to D.K. MacDonald, 5 April 1941.

Housing

Housing proved to be one of the great challenges facing the Canadian home front as communities across the country experienced rapid industrial and urban expansion. As farmers and labourers left their rural homes en masse for the burgeoning war industries of cities like Montreal, and servicemen and workers flooded into growing ports like Halifax, an acute shortage of affordable housing developed. Rents skyrocketed as vacancy rates plummeted, and many Canadians ended up paying exorbitant amounts of money to live in run-down and overcrowded conditions. Despite government-imposed rent controls, the price of lodgings in Verdun increased to such an extent that many families faced evictions.²²¹ In Winnipeg, 19 per cent of households were crowded, and the city's authorities became seriously concerned with the connection between overcrowding and poverty.²²² Towns hosting British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) bases, such as Yorkton, Saskatchewan, also experienced these problems as hundreds of air force families moved into the area.²²³ Such conditions were not conducive to public morale; overcrowded, often unsanitary conditions, lack of privacy, and a heavy financial burden made life difficult for many Canadians.

During the war, government housing policy placed an emphasis on private enterprise rather than government-funded housing programs. The federal government was generally disinclined to invest in low-income housing developments; Minister of Finance J.L. Ilsley, viewing government-funded housing as a step down the slippery slope of socialism, was quick to scupper any plans for low-income housing, believing such schemes

²²¹ Durflinger, *Fighting from Home*, 141.

²²² Perrun, "The Patriotic Consensus," 328.

²²³ Brereton Greenhous and Norman Hillmer, *The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Western Canada: Some Saskatchewan Case Studies* (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1981), 200.

would have a detrimental effect on the economy as well as private industry.²²⁴ The fact that the Canadian Government's resources were heavily taxed by the war placed an even greater emphasis on individual enterprise; Minister of Munitions and Supply C.D. Howe was vocally adamant in his belief that the bulk of new housing projects should be constructed by private initiative.²²⁵ However, wartime federal restrictions on building materials made this difficult; the construction of new homes or the refurbishment of existing buildings was not considered a priority in a time when supplies were being diverted to the war effort.

Government policies also catered largely to the middle-class, proving unaffordable to working-class families. Houses built under the 1938 National Housing Act had an average value of \$4000, which was beyond the budget of low-income households.²²⁶ The mortgage-assisted plans provided under the 1944 National Housing Act similarly targeted middle-class homeowners, which did little for the working-class families in need of more affordable housing options.²²⁷ In addition, as housing fell under the jurisdiction of the provincial governments, the federal government was able to limit its financial responsibility in that regard. It was left to provincial and municipal authorities, then, to find a solution.

In Nova Scotia, "company houses" had long characterized single-industry communities. Built between 1850 and 1920, in "company towns" like Glace Bay, North Sydney, New Waterford, and Dominion, these drab, grey, company-owned houses were a

²²⁴ Perrun, "The Patriotic Consensus," 348.

²²⁵ John Sewell, "Where the Suburbs Came From" in James Lorimer and Evelyn Ross, *The Second City Book: Studies of Urban and Suburban Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Co., 1977), 11.

²²⁶ Perrun, "The Patriotic Consensus," 349.

²²⁷ John Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Kingston-Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1993), 119.

distinct feature of the Cape Breton industrial landscape. These dwellings were relics of the days when the coal company dominated every facet of the townspeople's lives and where rent was deducted from their weekly pay through the check-off. These buildings were largely ramshackle structures with poorly constructed windows and doors, rotting wooden exteriors and dubious sanitation, as the coal company was disinclined to spend large sums of its money on quality accommodations for the workers.²²⁸ By the 1920s, *The Financial Post* described the housing situation in Glace Bay, as well as other large centres like Sydney, Halifax, Moncton, St. John, and Charlottetown as “acute.”²²⁹



Figure 4.1 NSARM CB-403 Miners' cottages, Glace Bay, 1930s

At the outbreak of the Second World War, housing in Glace Bay was still a source of concern. While some new dwellings had been erected alongside the miners' rows and a number of miners owned the homes for which they had once paid rent to the Dominion

²²⁸ Richard MacKinnon, “Tompkinsville, Cape Breton Island: Co-operativism and Vernacular Architecture” *Material History Review* 44 (Fall 1996), 47.

²²⁹ *The Financial Post*, 25 May 1923, 2.[Google news archive]

Coal Company, many of the buildings were in poor physical condition. Badly constructed to begin with, the houses had not stood up well to the test of time. Overcrowding was also a problem; 45 per cent of families living in dwellings containing one to five rooms had more occupants than rooms.²³⁰ The average number of occupants per dwelling in 1941 was 5.5, compared with a Canadian average of 4.3 and a provincial average of 4.5. In addition, 22 per cent of the town's dwellings were in need of external repairs.²³¹

However, Glace Bay's citizens lacked the capital necessary to finance needed renovations or new construction. The aforementioned government-assisted housing schemes were beyond most of the miners' means, and the municipal government was unable to find a cost-effective means of making improvements due to the town's sprawling, underdeveloped nature. These difficult circumstances led to an increased interest in co-operative housing. Pioneered by the priests and educators of St. Francis Xavier University's Extension Department, co-operative housing was part of the broader "Antigonish Movement." This movement promoted improvements in rural community development, continuing education, and a variety of co-operative initiatives with the aim of improving social and economic conditions in Atlantic Canada. Two of the Movement's principle founders, Father James Tompkins and Father Moses Coady, believed that ordinary labourers could overcome their economic circumstances through moral and spiritual development, education, and a co-operative community spirit. They championed community libraries, study clubs, credit unions, and co-operative stores and housing

²³⁰ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. 2* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 169. Households with 6 or more rooms could not be measured as they were grouped in a way that made analysis impossible.

²³¹ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. 9* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 156.

among other things.²³² Glace Bay had not always been very receptive to co-operative initiatives as those spearheading them also promoted peaceful resolution of labour grievances; this did not sit very well with the town's more radical element as was demonstrated when a group of miners destroyed a co-operative office in 1926.²³³

However, some of the town's labour leaders were eventually converted to the cause, and the Extension Department established an industrial branch office in Glace Bay in 1932.²³⁴

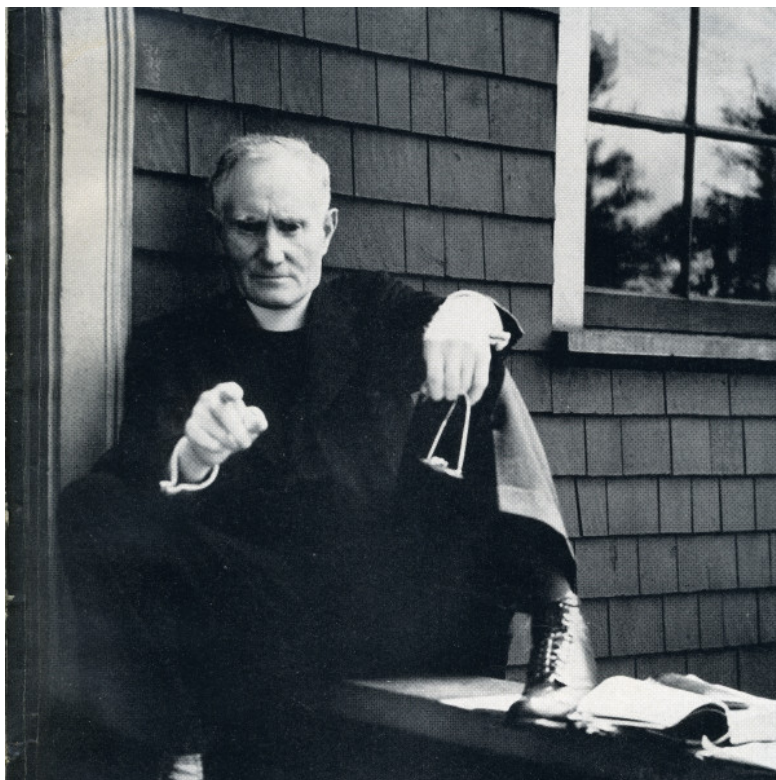


Figure 4.2 St. Francis Xavier University Archives; Extension Dept. Collection. No catalogue reference. **Father Jimmy Tompkins.**

Co-operative housing involved groups of citizens pooling their labour to build homes with a common mortgage. Assisted by 3 per cent loans from the Nova Scotia government, workers collaborated with each other to construct affordable housing. The

²³² Remes, "In Search of "Saner Minds," 58-9.

²³³ James Sacouman, "Underdevelopment and the Structural Origins of Antigonish Movement Co-operatives in Eastern Nova Scotia," *Acadiensis* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1977), 70.

²³⁴ Ian MacPherson, "Patterns in The Maritime Co-operative Movement 1900 – 1945," *Acadiensis* 5, no. 1 (Fall 1975), 71.

project operated under the supervision of the Nova Scotia Housing Commission, which extended the would-be owners a long-term loan and, in addition, provided architectural guidance, legal aid, and bookkeeping instruction. Interested parties were required to participate in a six-month study group to prepare themselves for the tasks at hand.²³⁵

Glace Bay's co-operative housing project, named "Reidville," built under the Stirling Co-operative Housing Association, was completed in 1940 and consisted of 12 homes. The project had been preceded by similar developments in the nearby communities of Dominion and Reserve Mines.²³⁶ By 1941, the Nova Scotia Housing Commission was actively promoting the co-operative housing method as an effective means of alleviating the housing situation in the province's depressed rural areas. A total of 71 co-operative homes were built in industrial Cape Breton by 1946: 12 in Glace Bay, 11 in Reserve Mines, 12 in Stellarton, 14 in Dominion, 12 in Sydney, and 10 in New Aberdeen.²³⁷ The project was considered successful, though it was never emulated to any great degree outside of Nova Scotia.²³⁸

While the Reidville development provided good quality, affordable homes for twelve households and served as an example of the merits of co-operative housing, it was a small victory in a much bigger battle. Overall conditions in the town did not improve greatly: Wisdom's 1940 report had predicted that without "extensive expansion," the majority of the townspeople would continue to live in "unfavourable conditions,"²³⁹ which proved accurate. In 1947, the Glace Bay Town Planning Board conducted a housing survey

²³⁵ *The Manitoba Ensign*, 20 November 1948, 3. [Google news archives]

²³⁶ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 9.

²³⁷ Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, *Public Affairs, Vol. 10-11* (Halifax: Dalhousie University's Institute of Public Affairs, 1946), 241.

²³⁸ See Richard Harris, "Flattered But Not Imitated: Co-operative Self-Help and the Nova Scotia Housing Commission, 1936-1973," *Acadiensis* 31, no. 1 (Fall 2001), 103-128.

²³⁹ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 8.

that revealed continuing problems. Forty per cent of homes were deemed overcrowded; in some cases, families with eight or more children had only two bedrooms to share. The survey also indicated that 19 homes had no bathroom and some lacked hot water.²⁴⁰ Pat Conroy, the secretary-treasurer of the Canadian Congress of Labour, declared that he had never seen housing conditions “as bad as in the Glace Bay area” and that the Dominion Steel and Coal Corporation should “hang their heads in shame for such conditions.”



Figure 4.3 St. Francis Xavier University Archives; Extension Dept. Collection, 89-244-309. Co-operative Housing in Glace Bay, 1940s.

He also noted that the town had only two paved streets and that one third of the homes had no indoor toilets.²⁴¹ In addition, despite the best intentions of the Antigonish Movement pioneers, co-operative homes built by the Nova Scotia Housing Commission eventually

²⁴⁰ *The Gazette*, 24 November 1945, 3.

²⁴¹ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 26 April 1947, 1. [Google news archive]

became too expensive for the vast majority of the townspeople; it became increasingly common for participants to require a second mortgage.²⁴² Rising costs contributed to the decline of co-operative housing in the region.

Health Care

The Second World War created a greater awareness of the shortcomings of Canada's medical services. Reports from recruiting centers concerning the health of would-be soldiers provided data on the health levels of that specific demographic, and a government inquiry into national health care in 1943 provided further insight into the state of the general population.²⁴³ In 1941, Canada was suffering from a nation-wide shortage of 4,679 doctors and 6,323 dentists. Quebec and the Maritime Provinces, in particular, were forced to cope with a lack of hospital beds for tuberculosis patients and those being treated for mental illness. Resources were spread too thin, public health organizations were understaffed and underfunded, and infant mortality rates continued to be higher than desired.²⁴⁴

While provincial governments had the authority to regulate health services prior to the Second World War, they viewed this responsibility as resting with the municipal governments, hospital boards, local charitable organizations, or private enterprise.²⁴⁵ In Nova Scotia, which had been ranked last in public health spending of all the Canadian provinces in 1929, health services were largely funded and managed at the local level.²⁴⁶

²⁴² Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 221.

²⁴³ Anne Crichton, *Health Care: A Community Concern? Developments in the Organization of Canadian Health Services* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1997), 13.

²⁴⁴ Kay Thompson, *Medical Services in Glace Bay* (Antigonish, NS: Nova Scotia Cooperative Educational Council, 1941), 16.

²⁴⁵ Crichton, *Health Care: A Community Concern*, 13.

²⁴⁶ Sasha Mullally, "Between Community and State: Practicing Public Health in Cape Breton, 1938-1948," *Acadiensis* 38, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2009), 101.

However, as the region had limited numbers of health workers for such a large territory, the focus tended to be on curing disease rather than developing means to prevent it, which was a palliative rather than a lasting solution.²⁴⁷

Glace Bay, like other Cape Breton mining towns, had always had to deal with a large number of mining-related injuries and medical conditions, from broken bones to respiratory problems. The rapid local industrial growth at the turn of the century created a great need for the establishment of hospitals; spearheaded by the efforts of the clergy, prominent citizens and labour leaders, St. Joseph's Hospital opened in 1902 and was followed by the Glace Bay General Hospital in 1914.²⁴⁸ However, by 1939, Glace Bay was suffering from serious health care concerns. Poor sanitation and housing conditions as well as inadequate public nursing services meant that the town had a very high infant mortality rate.²⁴⁹ Glace Bay had only one public health nurse whose work was limited to diphtheria immunization and care of tuberculosis patients; prenatal care and child welfare received little support.²⁵⁰ The Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) was at one time a presence in the town, but the town's hospitals had withdrawn their financial support from the organization due to insufficient funds.

In 1940, Glace Bay had eighteen doctors, which meant that there was approximately one doctor for every 2,000 citizens, compared to a national average of one doctor per 1,034 inhabitants.²⁵¹ Nearby Sydney, with a population of 28,000 had an average of one doctor per 1,100 patients.²⁵² Due to this shortage of doctors, there was also

²⁴⁷ Thompson, *Medical Services in Glace Bay*, 17.

²⁴⁸ Dorothy Rose Bennett, "From Miners' Hospitals and Company Doctors to a Public Health Care System in Industrial Cape Breton, 1900-1969," MA thesis (University of New Brunswick, 2003), 11.

²⁴⁹ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 18.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 25

²⁵¹ Thompson, *Medical Services in Glace Bay*, 6-11.

²⁵² Bennett, "From Miners' Hospitals and Company Doctors to a Public Health Care System," 69.

a greater focus on treating illness than on developing preventative measures and promoting public health. The shortage also meant that doctors had less time to study newer and more advanced medical techniques; one citizen complained that the town's medical practitioners, had "never taken post-graduate courses anywhere since they came to Glace Bay!"²⁵³ In order for a physician to be listed on the company payroll, he was required to apply as a general practitioner. In doing so, though, his time was taken up solely with general medical duties, and there was no time for the physician to pursue a specialization. In a town where most of the workforce was employed in coal mining, having decent quality medical services was of paramount importance.

The miners paid for medical services through the check-off, and the men and their dependants were entitled to unlimited treatment by general practitioners, hospital care, operations, drugs, and dressings. Specialist and dental care were not included, and the miners would usually take up a collection to fund treatment for their ailing colleagues.²⁵⁴ The check-off method was often a source of contention between the coal miners and the doctors. The miners believed that the coal company hired inexperienced practitioners to whom they could pay cheap wages, as the company was rarely inclined to loosen its purse strings for the benefit of its workforce.²⁵⁵ However, as medical fees were two dollars per office visit and three dollars per house call outside of the mining community, it was difficult for the miners to finance adequate medical care outside the check-off.

In 1940, in keeping with the national wartime trend of increased medical awareness, the UMWA asked the Nova Scotia Co-operative Educational Council, part of

²⁵³ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 27.

²⁵⁴ L. Richter, "The Effect of Health Insurance on the Demand for Health Services," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 10, no.2 (May 1944), 184.

²⁵⁵ Bennett, "From Miners' Hospitals and Company Doctors to a Public Health Care System, 23.

the St. Francis Xavier Extension Department, to conduct a study of the existing medical services in Glace Bay. In 1941, the Council released a report entitled “Medical Services in Glace Bay.” The report, funded by District 26, described in detail the various problems facing the town, which included overworked doctors, lack of specialized medical services, poor public health and preventative medicine, and unethical medical practices. As a solution, the report recommended a co-operative medical scheme as an alternative to the long-standing check-off.²⁵⁶ Such an arrangement would allow the miners to have democratic control over their medical needs through employing doctors and a board of directors, which would not interfere with their medical practice. This system would not cover all of the town’s needs as it was primarily geared towards serving the miners, it would be necessary to follow Jane Wisdom’s suggestions regarding the integration of community and governmental initiatives.²⁵⁷ The Nova Scotia Co-operative Educational Council declared in its report that “if the Glace Bay colliery workers change their medical set-up they should be conscious of the fact when doing so, that they will be showing the way for the rest of Canada. It is important that they make no mistakes when reorganizing their medical system.”²⁵⁸

During the war, a significant number of the town’s doctors joined the military, perhaps preferring it to their overburdened medical practices in Glace Bay. A 1944 study by Dalhousie University’s Institute of Public Affairs comparing the caseloads of doctors employed under the check-off in Glace Bay and the fee-for-service model in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, discovered that Glace Bay’s doctors attended to three times as many cases per year as their counterparts in Yarmouth. Doctors in Glace Bay were required to attend to

²⁵⁶ See Thompson, *Medical Services in Glace Bay*.

²⁵⁷ Bennett, “From Miners’ Hospitals and Company Doctors to a Public Health Care System,” 22.

²⁵⁸ Thompson, *Medical Services in Glace Bay*, 15.

any of their patients at any time and were not sufficiently compensated under the check-off for their long hours, earning approximately the same as the Yarmouth doctors.²⁵⁹

On 7 May 1943, *The Gazette* reported that a “wave of agitation” had risen up amongst the townspeople with the news that two more doctors had left for the army, leaving Glace Bay with only seven doctors, a dangerous and unacceptable situation. The local collieries were adamant that Glace Bay be allowed to keep its present medical staff, since the town would otherwise be unable to cope with a serious accident or outbreak of disease.²⁶⁰ In August, the miners at No. 11 colliery walked off the job because most of the workers, hailing from the Birch Grove area, were without a doctor. The miners believed that the men who were working hard on the industrial front to provide raw materials for the Canadian war effort were just as entitled to proper medical care as those men fighting on the battlefield. At the same time, miners from Caledonia colliery also lodged a protest against the unsanitary conditions in their washhouse.²⁶¹

As medical needs remained unattended, the men of Caledonia and No. 11 collieries continued their refusal to go down into the mines. One miner declared, “We want our families protected.” An appeal was made to the Health Minister, but in the meantime, Mayor Morrison appealed to the idle miners to return to work and continue aiding the war effort.²⁶² The situation was worsened by reports that the families living near No. 25 colliery were without water as their well had run dry.²⁶³ On 19 August, the people of Glace Bay received assurances from town authorities that they would be able to retain their

²⁵⁹ Chryssa McAlister and Peter Twohig, “The Check-Off: A Precursor of Medicare in Canada?” *The Canadian Medical Association Journal* 173, no. 12 (December 2005), 1505.

²⁶⁰ *The Gazette*, 7 May 1943, 3.

²⁶¹ *The Gazette*, 3 August 1943, 3.

²⁶² *The Gazette*, 4 August, 1943, 3.

²⁶³ *The Gazette*, 10 August 1943, 3.

current staff of doctors and, should the situation not stabilize within a period of six months, all doctors eligible for active service would be deferred.²⁶⁴

The community had hoped for the opportunity to reorganize and improve the town's health services. However, the town's doctors and the local hospital refused to endorse the proposed co-operative plan, which would give them less control over the system.²⁶⁵ In 1947, District 26 President Freeman Jenkins complained that there was still a "medical monopoly" in Glace Bay, and, as the town moved into the 1950s, the miners had less and less influence over their medical services.²⁶⁶ Medical specialization grew in the postwar period but specialists bypassed Glace Bay for Halifax and Sydney as the check-off did not fund specialist treatment. The check-off was not designed to accommodate the evolution of health services and, in the early 1960s, was finally replaced with private insurance plans and eventually the provincial Medical Services plan.²⁶⁷ While Glace Bay did not meet with success in its pursuit of co-operative medicine, the war at least enabled the town to bring attention to the various deficiencies from which the people were suffering.

Crime

Canadian towns and cities that either housed large numbers of servicemen or were popular destinations for troops on leave sometimes experienced elevated levels of violence and misconduct. In towns that supported a BCATP base, such as Moose Jaw, members of the RAF and local men who felt threatened over the preference the town's women held for

²⁶⁴ *The Gazette*, 19 August 1943, 3.

²⁶⁵ Bennett, "From Miners' Hospitals and Company Doctors to a Public Health Care System," 10.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

²⁶⁷ Bennett, "From Miners' Hospitals and Company Doctors to a Public Health Care System," 10.

men in uniform, engaged in brawls.²⁶⁸ Boredom and unhappiness also played a role. Troops stationed at Nova Scotia's coastal fortifications, for example, were often men who desperately wanted to go overseas but were deemed to be either too old, not in good enough health, or too skilled at their jobs to be spared.²⁶⁹ These frustrations could easily lead to outbursts of violent behaviour.

Glace Bay was a fairly popular destination for servicemen on leave, as the town often held dances and other social events. As soldiers stationed along the coast often did not have sufficient leave time to go far afield, they often sought entertainment in nearby towns such as Glace Bay and New Waterford. This influx of servicemen led to a corresponding elevation in drunk and disorderly conduct, which was already a problem amongst the disaffected miners. Each year the police department reported increasing numbers of arrests for drunkenness; in 1940, 335 people were charged with being drunk,²⁷⁰ and that number rose to 514 in 1945.²⁷¹ The Town Council was sometimes forced to close the liquor store due to the increasing amount of alcohol-related offenses,²⁷² and the Chief of Police noted that an increasing percentage of those arrested were from out of town.²⁷³

Common assault and vandalism also became increasingly common, activities in which servicemen also participated. The Police Department's report in 1943 revealed that "the conduct of some of those in the armed services [was] anything but satisfactory, and during the year a number of plate-glass windows [had] been broken by servicemen."²⁷⁴ In 1944, the police reported that windows continued to be broken by "groups of disorderly

²⁶⁸ Greenhouse and Hillmer, *The Impact of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan on Western Canada*, 206.

²⁶⁹ Tennyson and Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf*, 303.

²⁷⁰ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1940," 75.

²⁷¹ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1945," 62.

²⁷² Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1940," 75.

²⁷³ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1944," 60.

²⁷⁴ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, "Annual Report, 1943," 65.

naval ratings” who had “absolutely no regard for law and order or common civility.”²⁷⁵

Situations involving members of Canada’s armed forces were difficult to handle and required tact and careful judgement on behalf of the police involved. On the one hand, the men involved were serving their country in a time of war, which demanded respect; but, on the other hand, it was unacceptable for them to be breaking the law.

Despite this disappointing record, Glace Bay did not experience any rioting or looting, and its citizens were quite cooperative with the police to ensure nothing of the sort happened.²⁷⁶ This is noteworthy given the town’s historically volatile relationship with members of the military, who had, on a number of occasions, been sent into the town to subdue industrial unrest. In 1922, for example, a troop train en route to Glace Bay carrying some 200 members of the Royal Canadian Artillery (RCA), several Lewis light machine gun detachments, and five 18-pounder field guns was halted twice by groups of striking miners wielding rocks.²⁷⁷ However, as Steven Penfold argues in his analysis of gender and class in Cape Breton coal towns during the 1920s, there was a perceived difference between these men, fighting in the name of capitalist greed, and the town’s First World War veterans who had fought for their country on the battlefields of Europe. The former were not “real” men.²⁷⁸ Some soldiers returning to Glace Bay from overseas during the Second World War took a similar view of the conscripted troops serving in the coastal batteries. While the townspeople largely treated the conscripts well, the returning troops were often disdainful of the ‘zombies’ who were not manly enough to go on active duty.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁵ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, “Annual Report, 1944,” 60.

²⁷⁶ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, “Annual Report, 1945,” 62.

²⁷⁷ Don MacGillivray, “Military Aid to the Civil Power: the Cape Breton Experience in the 1920’s,” *Acadiensis* 3, no.2 (Spring 1974), 50.

²⁷⁸ Steven Penfold, “Have You No Manhood In You?: Gender and Class in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1920-1926,” *Acadiensis* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1994), 21.

²⁷⁹ Tennyson and Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf*, 305.

Despite ambitious plans for wartime social development, the town's ideas for affordable housing, community-driven health care, and improved education proved difficult to implement, and the town was left facing circumstances similar to those of the prewar period. Housing initiatives continued to remain out of reach for the vast majority of the population, hospitals and the coal company were unwilling to relinquish any control over Glace Bay's health care into the hands of the miners, and youth unemployment and its often-destructive ramifications continued to plague the town. In this regard, Glace Bay did not have a good wartime experience and was left wanting once again.

Chapter Five: Ideology Versus Patriotism

Single-industry communities with resource-based economies have long been a distinct feature of the Canadian social and economic landscape: the fortunes of these communities have been shaped by their dependence on an external factor – the market demand for their product. Cape Breton was home to many of these single-industry towns many of which, including Glace Bay, relied on coal for their livelihood and sustainability. A study of the war's impact on the Maritime provinces, conducted in 1942, estimated that one quarter of Nova Scotia's gainfully employed were directly or indirectly dependent on Dosco for their livelihood. By this point Dosco owned the Sydney and Acadia coal fields, the Wabana ore mines, steel plants at Sydney, New Glasgow, and Trenton, the Halifax Shipyards, steel wire plants, as well as a fleet of ships, railways, and electrical distribution companies.²⁸⁰ Each part of this complex industrial web was reliant on coal, as were the citizens of the communities that supplied the resources and manpower.

From 1939 to 1945, coal fuelled the nation's wartime industries and was a key ingredient in the manufacturing of steel, which was used in all manner of military equipment from warships to firearms. Coal was also needed to keep Canadians from freezing during the country's winters. The country's coal consumption increased from 29.4 million short tons in 1939 to 43.8 million short tons in 1944. Canadian mines struggled to keep up with the demand; at peak production in 1941, Canada was producing 18 million short tons.²⁸¹ Of this total, Nova Scotia produced 7.4 million short tons, or 41 per cent.²⁸² The remaining coal needed to meet domestic needs was imported from the United States.

²⁸⁰ B.S. Keirstead, *The Economic Effects of the War on the Maritime Provinces of Canada* (Halifax: Dalhousie Institute of Public Affairs, 1943), 132.

²⁸¹ Stevenson, *Canada's Greatest Wartime Muddle*, 90.

²⁸² Stevenson, "Conscripting Coal," 58.

In the 1943 Labour Day edition of *The Gazette*, T.L. McCall, General Manager of the Dominion Coal Company, passionately declared:

No man can do more for his country than the coal miner... Without coal our fighting men would be without food, weaponless, unable to move to defend our country, either at home or overseas... The miner who digs coal and his womenkind at home who fill his 'piece-can' are both soldiers in Canada's armies just as truly as those young men and young women from miners' homes who carry our flag into actual battle.²⁸³

Cape Breton's mining communities were vital to the nation's industrial war, and Glace Bay was an important cog in the wheel.

Wartime coal production in Glace Bay created an ideological dilemma for the local mining population. On the one hand, as loyal Canadian citizens, they were responsible for maintaining the high levels of coal output that were important to the Allied causes. On the other hand, as union members and labour leaders, the miners felt the need to take the opportunity presented by the war to bring attention to their grievances concerning job security, wages, and working conditions. The time to act was when the miners' services were in the highest demand. A belief in the right to a decent living, rooted in a long-standing tradition of unionism and class struggle, formed the core of their ideology. Political vehicles for these beliefs came and went, but their convictions and desires remained the same.

These conflicting interests were embodied in the town's mayor, Daniel W. Morrison, who was also President of District 26 of the UMWA. Over the course of the war as the miners promoted their own interests over the needs of the greater Canadian war effort, even when claiming that these were one and the same, Morrison came to represent the town's failure to find a middle ground between ideological conviction and patriotism.

²⁸³ *The Gazette*, 4 September 1943, 10.

The Glace Bay miners embarked on a series of strikes and curtailment policies, holding out for higher wages and even taking advantage of the national ‘enemy alien’ scare despite the fact that their services were of paramount importance for the war effort. These acts harmed Glace Bay’s reputation at a time when patriotism was highly valued, and, in the end, would accomplish very little in the way of industrial reform.

Daniel Morrison: The Man with Many Hats

Loyal to both his country and to his mining community, Morrison personified the dilemma faced by the Glace Bay miners. Mayor since 1922, with a brief respite from 1931 to 1933, and district president since 1928, Morrison was not only the head of their local government but also one of the leaders in the miners’ struggle for industrial rights. He also served in the provincial legislature from 1920 to 1935. In 1942, *The Calgary Daily Herald* described him as having participated in “more elections, federal, provincial, union, and municipal, than any man in the province.”²⁸⁴ These multiple leadership roles created a difficult situation for Morrison during the war, because, on the one hand, he wanted to secure the well-being and livelihood of his union’s membership; yet, he also needed to work with the coal company to negotiate a compromise between his townsfolk’s needs and the needs of the greater Canadian war effort.

As Mayor

Born in Marion Bridge, Cape Breton, in 1881, Morrison had moved to Glace Bay as a young man to work in the mines. In the years that followed, he assumed leadership roles as a miner, a soldier, and as a community representative at more than one level of government. While in the mines, his fellow miners elected him to the position of

²⁸⁴ *The Calgary Daily Herald*, 16 August 1938, np. [Google news archives]

checkweighman, the person responsible for ensuring that the mine owners' estimates of tonnage produced were accurate. This was important since wages were often directly related to production.²⁸⁵ When the First World War broke out, he enlisted in the Canadian Field Artillery, rising to the rank of acting sergeant by the end of the war. He was discharged upon demobilization, in good health, despite having received a gunshot wound to the right thigh in 1917.²⁸⁶ Morrison's wartime service and ability to lead made him an ideal candidate for town councillor, and, while serving in this capacity in 1920, he was nominated by the Great War Veterans' Association of Glace Bay as a candidate for the provincial legislature as part of a Farmer-Labour-Soldier ticket. Although the Liberals were once again returned to power in the 1920 election, the newly formed coalition carried Cape Breton County and Morrison was elected to the provincial legislature.²⁸⁷ In this role, Morrison fought for the rights of his constituents, despite receiving little attention from Premier George Murray's Liberal government. His proposed Act to Regulate the Hours of Labour never made it past a first formal reading, but his efforts won him goodwill in Glace Bay.²⁸⁸ He continued in his role as representative to the provincial legislature until J.B. McLachlan defeated him in the 1935 election.²⁸⁹

As a veteran of the mines and of the Great War and a champion of the worker at the provincial level, Morrison came to embody Glace Bay's fundamental values and aspirations. He became so popular that the townspeople elected him mayor in 1922. The town had come a long way as its first mayor, David Burchell, had been the superintendent

²⁸⁵ LAC, RG 150, Box 6402-24, Military Personnel, attestation papers for Morrison, Daniel William.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Mellor, *The Company Store*, 116.

²⁸⁸ MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, 72.

²⁸⁹ Michael Earle, "The Coalminers and Their "Red" Union: The Amalgamated Mine Workers of Nova Scotia, 1932- 1936," *Labour / Le Travail* 22 (Fall, 1988), 104.

of the Dominion Coal Company's stores and had filled Glace Bay's executive council with company officials.²⁹⁰ Morrison was a man of the people, and he took up the cause of his working-class citizens in earnest. During the violent and unsuccessful strike over proposed wage cuts in 1925, Morrison encouraged Glace Bay's citizens to hold fast, proclaiming at a rally, "Go to it, boys, I'm with you to the finish."²⁹¹ He also marched down Commercial Street at the head of a great May Day procession of hundreds of men representing the District 26 locals and bearing banners emblazoned with slogans such as "Down With Capitalism" and "Workers of the World, Unite."²⁹² Morrison continued to lead the town until his defeat in the 1933 mayoral election where he lost to Charles MacVicar. This loss of faith on the part of the townspeople coincided with an incident within the union, which will be discussed below.

MacVicar, his replacement, had been a local rugby football star in the 1920s with the Caledonia Rugby Football Club, described in the press as "one of the finest rugger exponents in these parts."²⁹³ Faced with the unenviable task of leading the town through the years of the Great Depression, however, MacVicar apparently failed to impress at Town Hall. Morrison was voted back in after two years.

After five more years with Morrison as mayor, a social welfare survey, conducted in the town by the Canadian Welfare Council in the autumn of 1940, indicated that the townspeople were still satisfied with Morrison's performance on the municipal front. As Jane Wisdom, the welfare officer who conducted the survey, reported, "Possibly the greatest asset of Glace Bay is the confidence of the people in the leadership of their mayor

²⁹⁰ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 37.

²⁹¹ Mellor, *The Company Store*, 194.

²⁹² MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, 144.

²⁹³ *The Vancouver Sun*, 3 January 1936, 17. [Google news archives]

and elected representatives, as well as the integrity of the Town Hall's permanent officials." She further elaborated that "the relation between the town authorities and townspeople, as far as short observation made possible to say, is also favourable" and that Morrison's "competency and principles are generally recognized by the public as well as his own constituency."²⁹⁴ However, his two roles as mayor and labour leader would become increasingly intertwined as the war progressed.

As Union Leader

In 1928, the District 26 miners, still struggling to regain lost wages and seeking other concessions, were growing ever more dissatisfied with the union leadership. The executive, led by President John W. MacLeod, had become increasingly conservative, siding with the coal company to blacklist those involved with militant labour activities. In addition, MacLeod had infuriated the left-wing element within the union by expelling two allies of militant labour organizer J.B. McLachlan who had been attempting to form a breakaway Progressive Miner's Union. MacLeod's actions in this matter led to his defeat by Morrison in the 1928 union elections for the new District 26 president.²⁹⁵ A new era of union leadership had begun, and the miners hoped that the new executive would better promote their interests.

District 26 of the U.M.W.A. was split into roughly two camps. Those in the McLachlan camp, who favoured more aggressive, revolutionary methods of dealing with the mining companies, represented the "left"; the "right," led by International Board Member Silby Barrett, favoured a more conciliatory approach, preferring to cultivate good

²⁹⁴ LAC, MG28 I10 Vol 134, "Problems in Social Welfare," 28.

²⁹⁵ MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, 153.

relations with management and avoid strikes when other avenues were available.²⁹⁶

Morrison originally headed a more moderate element within the union, but became increasingly conservative as he tried to balance his many union and civic responsibilities and find a middle ground between the warring factions.

In 1930, believing that he was acting in the best interests of the union membership, Morrison settled with Dosco. With the threat of mine closures looming and no financial support available from the international union, Morrison felt a strike to be far too risky. With the nation languishing in dire economic straits, any paying work, he believed, was better than none, and he agreed to pay cuts for the union membership. John L. Lewis, international president of the U.M.W.A., also endorsed this position.²⁹⁷ But after McLachlan and the union left denounced Morrison and the executive as sell-outs and “labour fakers,” an overwhelming majority rejected the wage cuts when the issue was put to a vote.²⁹⁸ This was the beginning of the breakdown in relations between the union members and their executive, and this growing animosity bled over into the municipal sphere, probably costing Morrison the 1931 election. The relationship would become even more strained as a series of labour disputes engulfed the town in the 1940s.

The Slowdown Strikes of 1941

The war years were characterized by an increase in labour militancy, not just in industrial Cape Breton but also across the country. While the Maritimes was one of Canada’s more strike-prone regions, it did not hold a monopoly on industrial grievances; there were other communities whose workers were seeking to improve their conditions,

²⁹⁶ MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, 153.

²⁹⁷ Mellor, *The Company Store*, 323.

²⁹⁸ Manley, “Preaching the Red Stuff,” 103.

and many chose to strike despite wartime demands. In the summer of 1941, workers in a smelting plant at Arvida, Quebec, went on strike. The army was sent in, but the workers held their ground and emerged from the dispute with increased wages and the right to speak French in the factory.²⁹⁹ In Kirkland Lake in 1942, 4000 gold miners went on strike when they were denied union recognition. The strike lasted three months, but it ended in humiliation and defeat.³⁰⁰ In Windsor, Ontario, unionized workers at the local Ford auto plant, emboldened by wartime labour shortages and high production quotas, demanded a wage increase and a union presence in the plants in 1942. The government was forced to make some concessions to further the war effort. This victory was not perfect, as the company continued to make decisions without considering the needs of the workers, but it demonstrated the power given to unionized workers by the circumstances of the war.³⁰¹ In Inverness, on the Nova Scotia mainland, miners went on strike in July 1942 when mine management decided to cease providing transportation to and from the mine face. The management retaliated with threats to flood the mine when the men would not to return to work, but the miners refused to give in to intimidation. By the end of August, both parties were forced to make minor concessions to keep production going.³⁰² This balancing act between the needs of the workers and the needs of the nation would continue to be a problem throughout the war as Morrison knew only too well.

²⁹⁹ Confederation of National Trade Unions, *The History of the Labour Movement in Québec* (Montréal : Black Rose Books, 1987), 135.

³⁰⁰ Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *Remember Kirkland Lake: The Gold Miners' Strike of 1941-42* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2001), 10.

³⁰¹ Irving M. Abella, *On Strike: Six Key Labour Struggles in Canada, 1919-1949* (Toronto: James Lewis & Samuel Publishers, 1974), 132.

³⁰² Campbell, *Banking on Coal*, 41.

Decade	Number of Strikes	Workers Involved	Duration (days)
1921-30	989	261	6,626
1931-40	1,760	376	3,444
1941-50	2,537	1,133	14,142

Figure 5.1 National strike activity by decade.³⁰³

Similar incidents were also taking place south of the border in the United States. Approximately 6,774,00 workers took part in 14,471 strikes during the war, most of them illegal. John L. Lewis, leader of the international United Mine Workers, defied the wartime no-strike pledge and led 53,000 miners in the Pennsylvania coal fields on strike three times in 1943. In response to this, Roosevelt ordered government seizure of the mines, and the miners were ordered back to work as employees of the government.³⁰⁴

In Glace Bay, the miners were still working without a contract at the outbreak of war; the union membership had voted down all the contracts negotiated by Morrison and his colleagues. With the cost of living rising an estimated 11 per cent following the outbreak of war, the miners felt more keenly than ever the need for a fair settlement that would take this increase into account.³⁰⁵ It was Mayor Morrison who was put in the unenviable position of having to find a solution that would simultaneously appease the miners and Dosco while ensuring that coal production continued at the levels required to help sustain the Canadian war effort.

In 1941, a special tribunal, headed by Ontario Supreme Court Justice C.P. McTague, was ordered to investigate and rule on the coal miners' demands for a wage increase. Conciliation boards for labour disputes under the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act were in high demand in Canada during the war. From 1935 to 1939, there

³⁰³ Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), 346.

³⁰⁴ Mel Van Elteren, *Labour and the American Left: An Analytical History* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company Inc., 2011), 87.

³⁰⁵ *The Gazette*, 22 February 1940, 5.

had been only 30 applications and 10 boards appointed, while in 1940 alone, there were 66 applications and 33 boards. In the first half of 1941, there were 89 applications and 41 boards established.³⁰⁶ In March of that year, the board ruled that the miners working for Dosco and the Cumberland Coal Company should receive a 10 per cent wage increase and a bonus of fifteen cents per shift. In addition, arrears of rent and coal owed to the companies should be written off.³⁰⁷ However, as the miners viewed this offer as paltry compensation, when they received an unofficial report that the union executive had accepted the findings of the tribunal without the customary referendum, they became incensed. The executive, headed by Morrison, tried to explain that a 30-day time clause had left no time for a referendum and that all requests for an extension had been denied. The leaders further argued that they had consulted the international union office in this matter and had received its approval and that the alternative to signing the contract, which was striking for higher pay, would not have been in the best interests of the union.³⁰⁸

However, the miners thought that striking would be in their best interests as working men and decided to act outside union authority. On 11 May 1941, the Glace Bay men and their fellow District 26 members in New Waterford and Sydney Mines walked off the job for four days and then proceeded with a policy of curtailment in the mines, only producing a bare minimum of coal.³⁰⁹ This “slowdown” strike would last until 28 September and involved 7,500 miners from the Glace Bay and New Waterford area. Coal production was reduced to two thirds of the normal output, some 600,000 tons less than the

³⁰⁶ *The Financial Post*, 19 July 1941, np. [Google news archive]

³⁰⁷ *The Montreal Gazette*, 17 April 1941, 1. [Google news archive]

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *The Gazette*, 16 April 1941, 1.

previous year.³¹⁰ There had been several minor strikes earlier in the war, but this was by far the most serious. An estimated total of \$500,000 in wages had been lost by July, and some men were even driven to join the military to survive.³¹¹

These actions prompted an immediate response from the union leadership, which appealed to the miners' sense of duty to their union and to their country. Morrison warned the men that the "curtailment of production is not in accordance with the laws of our Organization" and that they should not expect protection from the union for such actions.³¹² The UMWA constitution forbade "outlaw" strikes that did not receive the endorsement of the union executive.³¹³ International Board Member Silby Barrett, allied with Morrison and the rest of the District 26 executive, appealed to the townspeople "as loyal Canadian citizens to do your part at this time on behalf of the Empire to furnish our troops who are in the different units of the armed forces with the best tools available to defend themselves on the field of battle."³¹⁴

Canadian government officials were similarly displeased with the ongoing curtailment in Cape Breton. Labour Minister Norman McLarty denounced the striking miners as "very subversive"³¹⁵ and as "denying to Mr. Churchill and our fighting men the tools of war so urgently needed."³¹⁶ He warned that this sort of behaviour would not encourage the government to continue its practice of offering subsidies to Nova Scotia's struggling coal mines, some of which had been kept running at a loss to keep the

³¹⁰ Earle, "Down with Hitler," 57.

³¹¹ *The Gazette*, 3 July 1941, 4.

³¹² *The Gazette*, 13 May 1941, 1.

³¹³ *The Montreal Gazette*, 17 April 1941, 1.[Google news archive]

³¹⁴ *The Gazette*, 10 July 1941, 2.

³¹⁵ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 15 August, 1941, 2. [Google news archive]

³¹⁶ MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, 231.

communities from collapse.³¹⁷ Ontario Premier Mitchell Hepburn also criticized the miners and the federal government for its inability to subdue them, declaring, “The Canadian people are outraged by the strikes. They don’t like to see the defence program held up by an apathetic government while their sons are serving overseas, many of them defying death in bombers over Germany.”³¹⁸ Concerns ran deeper than just the war effort as Nova Scotia Premier Angus L. MacDonald warned that the labour conflict would prevent industrial capital from coming to the province. He declared, “No one is going to risk his money if he is in constant fear of strikes and disturbances. There must be some stability.”³¹⁹

The slowdown strike also generated a great deal of negative publicity for the towns involved. Local press, in covering Cape Breton’s industrial dispute, showed little sympathy for the miners who were disrupting the important business of wartime production. *The Sydney Post-Record* railed against “agitators” and “sabotage,”³²⁰ while editorials demanding that the government deal immediately with the unpatriotic miners abounded. Public opinion became so heated that Dosco felt obliged to run full-page spreads in various papers that placed the blame on intra-union conflict rather than any unpatriotic sentiment on the part of the coal company. *The Gazette*, which was controlled by the union, appealed to the miners through a printed advertisement featuring patriotic themes which declared: “We therefore join with the President and officers of District 26 of the United Mine Workers of America in requesting the immediate discontinuance of this policy of curtailment of coal production.”³²¹

³¹⁷ *The Montreal Gazette*, 29 August 1940, 8. [Google news archive]

³¹⁸ *The Ottawa Citizen*, 24 September 1941, 13. [Google news archive]

³¹⁹ *The Windsor Daily Star*, 8 March 1940, 7. [Google news archive]

³²⁰ MacEwan, *Miners and Steelworkers*, 231.

³²¹ Earle, “Down with Hitler,” 78.

However, as the miners felt, as union members, that it was their right to have a referendum on any proposed acceptance or rejection of a contract, they replied to the various accusations levied against them. Donald McDonald, a representative of the Cape Breton miners, stated that the men “have no intention of hampering Canada’s war effort in any way and it is not a matter of stubbornness.” He further argued that the miners had legitimate grievances that could be easily rectified if the government and the coal company were to adopt more conciliatory attitudes.³²² McDonald was not unaware that these events were casting the Cape Breton miners, and by extension their communities, in a negative light, but he stood firm, declaring: “we refuse to have our patriotism exploited for the profit of the Dominion Coal Company.”³²³

Feeling betrayed by those who had once stood up for and promoted their interests, the men called for the resignation of Morrison from the District 26 presidency and those of his fellow executive members. A number of drunken men from New Waterford even attempted to break into Silby Barrett’s home though they were driven away by the family.³²⁴ When a number of Glace Bay miners were brought up on charges of hindering the war effort, the men came together in the largest procession ever seen in the town to march with the accused on their way to the UMWA office before heading to the Miners Forum for a rally.³²⁵ This time, however, Morrison was not leading the charge.

The coal company responded to the curtailment in the mines by dismissing increasing numbers of miners from the various collieries with the promise of giving them their jobs back should they return to full coal production. By September, miners began

³²² *The Windsor Daily Star* 16 August 1941, 8. [Google news archive]

³²³ *The Leader-Post* [Regina], 29 August 1940, 19. [Google news archive]

³²⁴ *The Gazette*, 16 July 1941, 3.

³²⁵ *The Gazette*, 15 July 1941, 2.

gradually returning to work as the locals voted to abandon the policy of curtailment. The miners were to have their revenge in the following year's union election, though, when they ousted the Morrison executive from power, replacing them with a new group from the left-wing element led by 29-year-old Freeman Jenkins, the youngest president in District 26 history.³²⁶ However, the miners' triumph would be short-lived; Jenkins and his associates found it just as difficult to reconcile the conflicting interests that had plagued Morrison's administration, and the years that followed would continue in the same pattern of striking and discontent.

The fundamental dilemma represented in the slowdown strike of 1941 was that Mayor Morrison chose patriotism and employment for the union membership and the miners chose family needs and ideology. The miners obviously were not unwilling to contribute to the war effort, but it was difficult to put priority on broader national problems when one's children lacked proper clothes or enough to eat. Ultimately, the miners' choice would represent the self-interest that came to characterize the town's wartime experience and shape the country's perception of wartime Glace Bay. It would also impact the town's wartime legacy, as Glace Bay would be remembered not for its wartime sacrifice but its self-interest.

The Enemy Alien Issue

Glace Bay's wartime image would be further tarnished by its response to the enemy alien crisis, an experience that reflected poorly on the town's wartime work ethic and revealed cracks in the community's sense of collective identity. In 1940, the town's miners also had walked off the job, refusing to work with the "enemy aliens" employed in

³²⁶ *The Leader-Post*, 15 October 1942, np. [Google news archive]

the mines. Enemy aliens were those whose mother countries were at war with Canada; in the case of Glace Bay, it was the Italians and German miners who were subjected to persecution at the hands of their Canadian- or British-born colleagues. While Glace Bay's mining community could show remarkable solidarity when fighting for a common cause, its members were not above finding an internal scapegoat if it meant that they could better feed their families and improve their chances of steady employment. Self-interest was certainly at work in the case of the enemy aliens, and the miners' actions demonstrated their willingness to prioritize their own welfare over national interests or community solidarity.

During the war, in the interests of national security, the Canadian government targeted specific racial, ethnic, and political groups as potential internal threats. Upon the outbreak of war, the RCMP immediately interned approximately 200 known Nazi sympathizers. However, following the German conquest of western Europe in 1940, anxiety over the loyalty of foreign-born Canadians increased. Rumours of enemy agents and fifth columnists abounded, and the already overtaxed RCMP was inundated with reports of suspicious behaviour.³²⁷ The panic intensified when Italy joined the war in June 1940. The federal government then began to impose greater restrictions under the Defence of Canada Regulations, detaining and interning certain groups of foreign-born Canadians. Canadians across the country were vocal in their concerns about enemy aliens; citizens from Vancouver to Toronto attended rallies in support of interning foreigners. Ukrainian

³²⁷ William R. Young, "Chauvinism and Canadianism: Canadian Ethnic Groups and the Failure of Wartime Information" in Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan and Lubomyr Luciuk, *On Guard for Three: War, Ethnicity, and the Canadian State, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1988), 33-4.

Canadians from Manitoba, Japanese Canadians from British Columbia, and Italian Canadians from Montreal were all suspected of disloyalty and subversive actions.³²⁸

In Glace Bay, it was the Italian and German miners who felt the brunt of the enemy alien hysteria. Tension between ethnic groups in industrial Cape Breton was not a new phenomenon; the largely homogenous region had a history of hostility towards immigrants, especially Italians. The Maritimes was home to a number of Italian immigrants who had either come directly from northern Italy or had been brought from the United States by contractors seeking labour for the mines in the early days of the industry. Company agents had traveled to New York and Italy to recruit hundreds of impoverished Italian immigrants with the promise of six months' work. The most popular destinations for these newcomers were Whitney Pier or the Dominion-New Waterford area.³²⁹

The Italians did not always receive a very warm welcome, especially in Whitney Pier where they lived in squalid conditions and were often victims of ethnic violence and other abuse. In Sydney, the Italians were harassed to the point where they often had to travel in groups for fear of being robbed and beaten by the locals.³³⁰ The local press also helped fuel the anti-Italian sentiment. In 1901, the *Sydney Post* complained that the area had become "flooded with foreigners" and accused the Italians of various crimes, including theft and assault.³³¹ When locals in the town of Inverness drove off a group of Italians sent to work in the mines, the local paper published a letter defending their actions. The writer

³²⁸ It is difficult to compare Glace Bay with larger cities regarding the treatment of enemy aliens, as these places had much larger and diverse populations with much higher percentages of immigrants. The Italians of Montreal, for example, had their own established cultural institutions, often with strong political associations, and dynamic cultural leaders. Glace Bay did not have any of this cultural infrastructure nor the population base to justify its creation. See Bruno Ramirez, "Ethnicity on Trial: The Italians of Montreal and the Second World War" in Norman Hillmer, Bohdan Kordan and Lubomyr Luciuk, *On Guard for Thee: War, Ethnicity and the Canadian State, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Minister of Supplies and Services, 1988).

³²⁹ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 29.

³³⁰ DeMont, *Coal Black Heart*, 162.

³³¹ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 29.

praised the “brave boys of Inverness” for having “the wisdom and pluck to drive from their shores the most undesirable class of people known.” He further labelled the Italians as “mafia of the coke ovens” and “unholy terrors.”³³²

In the 18th century, large numbers of Germans had settled in Lunenburg. From there, the Germans had spread across Nova Scotia, some coming to work in the mines of industrial Cape Breton. While they were not persecuted to the same extent as the Italians, they experienced the effects of an enemy alien panic during the First World War. More than eight hundred unnaturalized foreigners in Cape Breton were registered and given parole, required to check in regularly, and forbidden from possessing firearms.³³³ There were several incidents of paroled Germans engaging in “target practice” in the woods around Glace Bay, and the *Sydney Post* felt obliged to dispel rumours that a German military officer had been spotted riding a tram car in the town.³³⁴

Glace Bay did not have a large population of either ethnic group.³³⁵ According to the 1941 census, just 145 citizens of Glace Bay identified Italian as their racial origin, less than 1 per cent of the population. The German group was even smaller, just 91 citizens.³³⁶ The foreign-born miners received a mixed reception from their native-born colleagues. Due to the high-risk environment in which the miners worked, the men generally put aside their differences in the spirit of cooperation and mutual support while in the pits. The ever-present danger of mining accidents fostered a sense of dependability and duty amongst the miners. This working-class solidarity meant that there was a real sense of community

³³² Morgan, *Rise Again*, 22.

³³³ Tennyson and Sarty, *Guardian of the Gulf*, 128.

³³⁴ Morgan, *Rise Again*, 50.

³³⁵ Beaton Institute, MG 7G, Vol. 1, “Glace Bay Community Fabric Report, 1982: A Study of Glace Bay's Ethnic Identities.”

³³⁶ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941, Vol. II* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 510.

underground, and the fact that the coal company was often lax in putting in place various necessary safety measures meant that the men as a group looked after provisioning their workplace with things like support beams to protect against falling rocks. Important decisions were made at pithead meetings, and the common causes of safety and security largely transcended any cultural, religious, or ethnic differences.³³⁷ One Canadian-born miner from Glace Bay spoke favourably of his experience working with the Italian miners in the 1920s, declaring, “Italians were the best imported labour. They were strong and hardy, all great workers for some reason. They would want to do better, produce more coal....”³³⁸

On the other hand, the Italians sometimes found themselves on the receiving end of ethnic slurs and other crude jests which was often written off by the miners as part of the culture of good-natured teasing that existed in the mines. One miner, reflecting on his career in the pits in the interwar period, blamed ignorance, arguing that “nobody meant to hurt anybody. But they'd say ‘c'moe here, bohunk’ no matter what nationality he was. And nobody thought nothing of that. Nobody knowed each other's names.”³³⁹ Some opinions were more hostile; one miner declared, “you couldn't trust lot of them fellas, you know. Italians are queer men, dangerous men,” although “they're nice people...if you just stay on the good side of them.”³⁴⁰ While the workers seemed to mostly respect each other, there was always some dissension amongst them.

The outbreak of war with Germany, and later Italy, added a new dimension to the relationship between the Canadian-born and the foreign-born workers. With tension

³³⁷ White, “Left Wing Politics and Community,” 12.

³³⁸ Franca Iacovetta, Roberto Perin, and Angelo Principe, *Enemies Within: Italian and Other Internees in Canada and Abroad* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 76.

³³⁹ Sam Migilore and Evo Dipierro, *Italian Lives, Cape Breton Memories* (Sydney: UCCB Press, 1999), 74.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

already high due to the still unsatisfactory contract situation with Dosco, and unemployment continuing to be a critical issue, the situation turned ugly, and the Glace Bay miners aggressively sought to remove the aliens from the mines for their own benefit. Trouble first began on mainland Nova Scotia. On 5 September 1939, *The Gazette* reported that miners at the Cumberland Coal and Railway Company's collieries in Springhill had refused to go down into the mines with the "foreign element" until "suitable precautions" were taken for the miners' safety. The paper also reported that tensions were running high in the neighbouring town of New Waterford.³⁴¹ New Waterford was cited as the initial source of agitation when the German miners had been ordered out of the collieries, which caused a fight to break out between a German and a Polish miner at the town's No. 24 colliery. One of the town's German miners, who had been working in New Waterford for 24 years, went to the U.M.W.A. offices to protest being removed from the pits despite having clocked over two decades of loyal service to the company.³⁴² Seeking to quell the uproar, Assistant Commissioner Frederick J. Mead of the RCMP assured the membership of the U.M.W.A. that all Germans working in Cape Breton, whether they were naturalized or not, would be investigated.³⁴³ Despite these assurances, miners at Glace Bay's No. 11 colliery continued to refuse to go down into the pits with the enemy aliens into January 1940. Their continued belligerence in this matter served as a means of securing larger numbers of shifts and, consequently, less competition and greater profits.

The focus of the enemy alien controversy shifted to the Italian-born workers as Canada declared war on Italy on June 10th. The same day, the 1B local held a special meeting with the goal of obtaining a list from the RCMP or the mine management of all the

³⁴¹ *The Gazette*, 5 September 1939, 1.

³⁴² *The Gazette*, 5 September 1939, 1.

³⁴³ *The Gazette*, 14 September 1939, 5.

Italians working in the colliery. These foreign-born workers would then be asked to stay out of the mine. Mayor Morrison spoke at the meeting as well, urging the executive to “use plenty of common sense and good judgment before taking any action.” He pointed out that there was no constitutional or legislative precedent for a situation like this and that they must proceed with caution.³⁴⁴ He also declared that it was not up to the union to decide who should be allowed to work but that this issue should rest in the hands of the federal government.³⁴⁵



Figure 5.2 NSARM NSIS 9503. No. 1B mine, 1940s

At the end of June, Mead advised the protesting miners to return to work alongside their foreign-born colleagues. However, conceding that it would be unfair to ask native-born miners who had taken up the positions of the foreign-born miners to relinquish their jobs, he therefore proposed that the foreigners should be considered for any new positions

³⁴⁴ *The Gazette*, 12 June 1940, 2.

³⁴⁵ *The Gazette*, 17 June 1940, 2.

that might become available.³⁴⁶ Mayor Morrison urged the union membership to adopt Meade's recommendations. He argued that any aliens who had "made disloyal utterances and other disloyal acts" had been apprehended and that the men should now follow the law in regards to the foreign-born element who had been allowed to return to work. Board Member Bob Stewart addressed the 1B local, asking its members to uphold the executive decision and to go "back to work with the aliens in accordance with the laws of Canada and in the best interests of the prosecution of the war." He appealed to the fact that they had lived side by side with the foreigners for the past forty years and that some of them were married to Canadian women.³⁴⁷ However, the miners only went back to work when the coal company promised to hire an unemployed Canadian-born worker for every naturalized Italian who was allowed to return to the mines.³⁴⁸

No. 11 colliery continued to be idle into July when workers once again refused to enter the mines with the aliens, an action that directly opposed to the recommendations of both the authorities and the U.M.W.A. executive. At 1B colliery, more aliens were unemployed than in the whole of the rest of the district. Over the next several months, the 1B local held two referenda on the alien question, both of which resulted in a majority voting against working with the aliens despite the continued opposing stand of the union executive. The members accused the local Italian workers of sending jewellery and money to support Italy's war effort.³⁴⁹ In September, the District 26 executive once again mandated that the foreign-born men should be permitted to return to work in the Nova

³⁴⁶ *The Gazette*, 28 June 1940, 2.

³⁴⁷ *The Gazette*, 28 June 1940, 2.

³⁴⁸ Iacovetta, Perin, and Principe, *Enemies Within*, 95.

³⁴⁹ *The Gazette*, 2 September 1940, 2.

Scotia collieries,³⁵⁰ and in November, the executive ordered the foreign-born miners back to the pits. However, when the men in the local collieries once again refused to work alongside them, the aliens agreed to stay away from the collieries until the question was decided definitely.

The Glace Bay miners' response to the enemy alien situation seemed disproportionate to the number of German and Italian Canadians living in their midst. The townspeople certainly could have been susceptible to the general national atmosphere of anxiety fuelled by wartime propaganda and reports of suspicious behaviour. Rumours of fascist 'squadra d'azione' or action squads, ready and able to sabotage Canada's vital industries, abounded, and stories of ammunition being discovered hidden in the pump at No. 2 colliery were spread around town.³⁵¹ Patriotic zeal could have also been a factor; Glace Bay's Army and Navy Veterans branch, composed of "veterans of the Great War and loyal subjects of his majesty," relentlessly petitioned all levels of government to "immediately intern all enemy aliens, irrespective of their being in possession of naturalization credentials or otherwise."³⁵²

However, it seemed that the rampant unemployment in the town was the main source of animosity against the enemy aliens. John Morrison, a Glace Bay miner, was quoted as saying that it was "not a question of loyalty but of the preference given foreigners... foreigners have been buying their places in the 1B colliery. They have been getting the cream of the work for 25 years." This seems unlikely, but it is indicative of the Canadian-born miners' viewpoint. To them, it seemed unjust that these workers from hostile nations and of "questionable loyalty" should have gainful employment while the

³⁵⁰ *The Gazette*, 2 September 1940, 2.

³⁵¹ Iacovetta, Perin, and Principe, *Enemies Within*, 37.

³⁵² *The Gazette*, 19 July 1940, 3.

Canadian-born were out of work. The local politicians were aware of this attitude. As Councillor A. McDonald advised, “Let the foreigners stay out and this would avoid trouble.”³⁵³ It seemed that, in this case, ethnic prejudice and self-interest had trumped union solidarity and the needs of wartime production.

These industrial disturbances, combined with the slowdown strike of 1941, did nothing to improve the reputation of Glace Bay. The time spent away from the mines meant that coal production dropped below the desired wartime levels. The *Sydney Post-Record* complained that “a small, trouble-making minority” were holding up production in defiance of the union’s wishes, causing a 5,000-ton decrease in output.³⁵⁴ In 1941, an article in Montreal’s *Financial Times* described the Nova Scotia miners as preferring binge drinking and carousing to helping the country’s war effort, declaring that “[w]hoopie comes before war work down in Nova Scotia’s coal mine.” The *Financial Times* further argued that Nova Scotia’s miners were the “bad boys” of the war and the Department of Labour’s “problem children” who were hindering the war effort and costing the country a fortune.³⁵⁵

The propensity of Glace Bay miners to embark on a prolonged series of strikes during the war demonstrated their willingness to look out for their own interests in defiance of the wishes of the government and even their union. The miners had been fighting their own protracted battle for decades, and, by this point, they were war weary. While they were willing to support the national war effort to a point, they saw the wartime circumstances as an ideal opportunity to leverage their vital role in national resource production to achieve better wages and job security. As an industrial community, the

³⁵³ *The Gazette*, 28 June 1940, 2.

³⁵⁴ Migilore and Dipierro, *Italian Lives, Cape Breton Memories*, 97.

³⁵⁵ *The Gazette*, 11 January 1941, 2.

miners showed remarkable solidarity in their struggle for a common cause, but they were also not above turning against members of their community if it meant that they could secure their own well-being. However, the miners perhaps lost more than they gained, as the time they spent idle and the damage to their reputation as a community were far from beneficial.

Chapter Six: The Problem of Coal

For many Canadian communities, the war ended the hardship and unemployment of the Depression years. As the country prepared for the massive industrial effort required to fuel the Allied war effort, new industries were developed and existing ones revitalized. Ranging from munitions plants to shipbuilding infrastructure, these developments created jobs and renewed local economies. Minister of Munitions and Supply C.D. Howe ordered new defence plants built and existing facilities modernized, and, by 1943, the Department owned or managed hundreds of plants.³⁵⁶ Communities also benefitted from the military bases that sprang up across Canada as troops patronized local establishments and helped stimulate the economy.

On the Nova Scotia mainland, Halifax experienced both a building and a population boom as military personnel and their families as well as workers bound for the shipyards and the factories flooded into the area. Army and air bases as well as armament depots were built in nearby Dartmouth, creating employment opportunities and demand for services. Agricultural communities such as Cole Harbour found new markets for their produce and farm goods in this influx of soldiers and labourers, and were able to earn additional revenue through taking on boarders to help alleviate the housing shortage in Halifax.³⁵⁷ In industrial Cape Breton, there was a great demand for coal and steel.

However, despite wartime demand for their resources, Glace Bay and its neighbouring communities did not share in the industrial renewal and economic prosperity

³⁵⁶ See John de Navarre Kennedy, *History of the Department of Munitions and Supply* (Ottawa: King's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1950).

³⁵⁷ Harry Chapman, *Along the Cole Harbour Road: A Journey Through 1765-2003* (Dartmouth: Cole Harbour Rural Heritage Society, 2003), 202-3.

that characterized much of the rest of the country. The mining industry continued to be plagued by difficulties during the war and was not well equipped to function into the postwar era. Attempts by the town authorities to diversify Glace Bay's industrial base during the war and thus decrease its reliance on the flagging coal mines also failed. Therefore, when Glace Bay's fighting men returned home from serving overseas, they faced a familiar situation; unemployment and industrial decline continued to plague the community, and no solution was forthcoming.

Wartime Industry

Despite the fact that coal was essential to the Canadian war effort, Cape Breton communities such as Glace Bay did not live up to their potential for production. Ongoing industrial strife, as detailed in the previous chapter, resulted in many lost workdays and disruptions in coal output. A shortage of skilled labour also developed as many miners enlisted and were sent overseas. By the time Canada's National Selective Service (NSS) system, responsible for mobilizing and managing the nation's human resources, was created in 1942, nearly two thousand skilled miners had already left the Maritime coal industry for military service.³⁵⁸ In early 1943, there was desperate need for several hundred skilled miners to help with the late winter rush on coal, and the government offered three months of leave to soldiers who had worked in the mines before the war if they would spend their leave helping boost coal production. However, this plan was largely unsuccessful, as the logistical difficulties of organizing the return of miners spread out across Canada and Europe were too great.³⁵⁹ Another problem caused by the exodus of so many young men from the mines was that older or unfit men were being called upon to do

³⁵⁸ Stevenson, "Conscripting Coal," 77.

³⁵⁹ *The Gazette*, 11 February 1943, 8.

work for which they were not physically suited. One elderly Glace Bay man had been told by a number of doctors that he could no longer load coal without risking serious health problems. He had originally been assigned less strenuous work, but he was later told that he must return to his previous job of loading coal or be left without any work at all.³⁶⁰

In addition to these difficulties, Dosco was largely passed over for government investment during the war, which could have helped to develop or modernize its struggling coal mines. Each of Dosco's Central Canadian competitors, Algoma and Stelco, were granted \$4 million each, and, as Dosco's president Arthur Cross protested, the company was "the only primary steel producer in this country which [was] receiving no government assistance."³⁶¹ Minister Howe did not view the Nova Scotia mining industry as an integral part of his postwar plans, preferring instead to integrate further with the United States. As historian Ernest Forbes points out, Howe also harboured a personal dislike for Dosco. Nova Scotia's Premier, Alexander MacMillan, had ordered an investigation into Howe's attempts to divert Dosco's traditional industrial base to central Canada. Howe resented this affront to his integrity, and he was quoted as vowing to use Dosco "to the minimum extent possible."³⁶²

The future did not look bright for Cape Breton coal. In 1943, Dr. E. W. Gray, Dosco's assistant general manager, gave a report to the Special Committee on Reconstruction and Rehabilitation in Ottawa in which he described a bleak future for the industry's workers. He calculated that while there was enough coal in the region to last the next two hundred years, it was extremely unlikely that there would be enough work to go around for the estimated two thousand men that had left the mines since the outbreak of

³⁶⁰ *The Gazette*, 30 June 1944, 3.

³⁶¹ Forbes, "Consolidating Disparity," 7.

³⁶² *Ibid*, 23.

war as well as the men who had replaced them.³⁶³ Glace Bay's sub-oceanic mines were also becoming increasingly costly to maintain. It could take an hour or more to travel from the pithead to the mine face as the mine workings extended farther under the ocean, and more complex ventilation and structural support systems were required. These high operational costs meant that there were fewer funds to commit towards modernizing the mines to a more competitive level.³⁶⁴ In addition, Glace Bay's bituminous deposits were of an inferior grade compared to the abundance of high-quality anthracite from Pennsylvania. In addition to being cheaper to obtain, the American coal, being of a better quality, resulted in less environmental contamination. Since the main market for coal was located in central Canada, the high costs of transporting the coal from Cape Breton were also fast becoming prohibitive.³⁶⁵

In the face of these threats to Glace Bay's main source of income, it was more important than ever to diversify the town's industrial base, and town authorities sought to capitalize on wartime opportunities to develop new industries. In 1941, town authorities from Glace Bay, Sydney, New Waterford, North Sydney, Sydney Mines, Louisbourg, Dominion, and Donkin jointly submitted a petition to the federal government in the hopes of alleviating their dependence on a single industry. The petition explained how diversification was of paramount importance for the sustainability of the region, which had relied for so long solely on the coal and steel industries. While the representatives from these communities acknowledged that it might be unwise to establish critical wartime industries in the region due to its exposed geographic position on the Atlantic coast, they

³⁶³ *The Gazette*, 30 March 1943, 8.

³⁶⁴ Allan Tupper, "Public Enterprise as Social Welfare: The Case of the Cape Breton Development," *Canadian Public Policy* 4, no. 4 (Fall 1978), 533.

³⁶⁵ Beaton Institute, PAM 487, J. Smith MacIvor, *Glace Bay Forum* (Glace Bay: Brodie Printing, 1935), 12.

argued that there were other opportunities for industrial growth that did not have to be classified as war industries. The area's abundance of natural resources and deep natural harbour were put forward as ideal for the establishment of cheap electrical energy production, shipbuilding, dry dock facilities, and marine repairs.³⁶⁶ They further appealed to "the glorious record of our people...contributing so freely and proudly towards the defence of our Empire" to demand "the right to expect equal consideration with the rest of Canada."³⁶⁷

However, the federal government did not view Cape Breton, with its depressed economy and great distance from the ever-growing hub of central Canada, as a sound investment. Long on the periphery of Canada's economic development, the region's geographic isolation and underdeveloped infrastructure were not attractive prospects for investment. The federal government envisioned instead a centralized postwar industrial structure integrated closely with that of the United States. In addition, high placed government officials hailing from the Maritimes, such as Minister of Finance James Ilesley and Minister of Defence for Naval Services and former Nova Scotia premier Angus L. MacDonald, were too preoccupied with managing the country's war effort to advocate for their region's interests.

Glace Bay also hoped to revitalize its lacklustre fishing industry during the war. The town's harbour hosted lobster boats, which sent their catch on to Boston or Port Morien and Bras d'Or, cod fishermen from Newfoundland, plus lumber and produce vessels.³⁶⁸ Swordfishing had been a fairly lucrative enterprise until it was halted due to

³⁶⁶ LAC, MG 26 J1 Vol 310, File J263779, Mackenzie King Papers, 13 March 1941.

³⁶⁷ LAC, MG 26 J1 Vol 310, File J263779, Mackenzie King Papers, 13 March 1941.

³⁶⁸ Frederick Edwards, "Farthest East," *Maclean's Magazine* (1 November 1941), 18.

high levels of mercury in the fish.³⁶⁹ Since the European fishing markets were disrupted by the war, town authorities argued that if their local industries were given a boost, it would be possible for Glace Bay to step into the gap. This was an overly ambitious prospect, however, as Glace Bay required improved wharfing facilities, bait-freezers, and other equipment, plus an effective marketing plan.³⁷⁰ The channel leading into the harbour was also in desperate need of dredging; it had a depth of less than 9 feet at low tide, and clearing the muck from the bottom to deepen the channel would be costly and time consuming³⁷¹

The Member of Parliament for Cape Breton South, Clarie Gillis, spoke to the House of Commons, encouraging the government to consider investing in the harbour's refurbishment. He argued that many of the townspeople were already on relief for the whole year and that if the necessary improvements were not made, the harbour would have to close down and more people would be out of work.³⁷² However, the decrepit state of Glace Bay's harbour and the fact that just 47 people had listed their occupation as fishing and hunting on the 1941 census meant that there was no great incentive to finance further development.³⁷³ In addition, the town did not have any wholesale fish dealers or cold storage plants and imported most of the fish consumed by its inhabitants.³⁷⁴

The town also endeavoured to bring in increased profit for their local businesses, as many towns and cities in Canada benefitted economically from the presence of large numbers of servicemen stationed in or visiting their communities. Local industries tended

³⁶⁹ MacDonal, *Historic Glace Bay*, 102.

³⁷⁰ Beaton Institute, PAM 487, J. Smith MacIvor, *Glace Bay Forum* (Glace Bay: Brodie Printing, 1935), 8.

³⁷¹ *The Gazette*, 2 July 1940, 2.

³⁷² *The Gazette*, 2 July 1940, 2.

³⁷³ Canada, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1941* (Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1950), 224.

³⁷⁴ Beaton Institute, PAM 487, J. Smith MacIvor, *Glace Bay Forum* (Glace Bay: Brodie Printing, 1935), 17.

to thrive, particularly hotels and restaurants. In 1940, the town's Army and Navy Veterans' Association petitioned Defence Minister Ralston to establish a recruiting station in the town. Large numbers of Glace Bay men were traveling to Sydney to enlist and taking their business to Sydney establishments. Glace Bay entrepreneurs were resentful and wanted similar opportunities for increased revenue. The Association further requested the proposed recruiting station to be equipped and staffed for medical and other examinations so as to increase traffic through the town.³⁷⁵ As early as October 1939, a committee had been formed by members of the Glace Bay Board of Trade which appealed to local M.P. D.J. Hartigan to have more military units stationed in the town. They argued that the town was afforded very little military protection and, since Sydney was already so crowded with troops, it made sense to billet some of the men in Glace Bay. The enlisted men would have the advantage of training near their homes, the town's defenses would be improved, and local businesses could enjoy the patronage of the soldiers stationed in the town.³⁷⁶ However, none of these requests were seen as justifiable by the federal government, and Sydney remained the main center for troop activity.

Coming Home

When the war ended in 1945, Canadians from coast to coast celebrated in grand fashion with parades, street parties, speeches, and other expressions of jubilation. People wandered through the streets drinking, singing, and embracing strangers while municipal officials gave rousing patriotic tributes to those who had made sacrifices, both at home and abroad, to help achieve this great victory. In some places the festivities spiralled out of control as servicemen and civilians alike smashed windows, looted stores, destroyed

³⁷⁵ *The Gazette*, 9 July 1940, 2.

³⁷⁶ *The Gazette*, 21 October 1939, 1.

streetcars, and carried out other acts of vandalism. Halifax, in particular, experienced some of the worst rioting Canada had ever seen.³⁷⁷ Glace Bay had observed the end of hostilities in Europe in a fairly subdued fashion, perhaps due to the closure of the liquor stores in anticipation of the celebrations. One anonymous citizen wrote to *The Gazette* expressing his displeasure at the lack of visible jubilation: “Cape Breton, the island of the Scots and Irish, must hang her head in shame when they remember V-E Day... I understand that a few of the towns had a little celebrating but not Glace Bay. Glace Bay, the largest town in Canada, was like a ghost town.”³⁷⁸ Perhaps the townspeople were disinclined to celebrate the successful conclusion of something they viewed as a lost opportunity. However, when the nation celebrated the victory in Japan, the townspeople observed the occasion like the rest of the country, with a parade, a street dance, and a party at the Miners’ Forum.³⁷⁹

As veterans began returning home in great numbers, communities across the country staged elaborate welcoming ceremonies to honour their citizens that had served their country in combat. When a contingent of Cape Breton Highlanders arrived in Halifax on 28 January 1946, along with troops from Prince Edward Island, more than 5,000 people from all across Cape Breton County crowded the railway station to receive the troop train as it pulled in. Touted as the “biggest, most enthusiastic reception ever staged for returning veterans in the Maritimes,” an estimated 8,000 citizens from the two provinces celebrated for hours with the fourteen hundred returned soldiers, overflowing out of the Halifax Armouries into the city streets. One soldier described how the festivities “made us feel that

³⁷⁷ Ted Barris, *Days of Victory: Canadians Remember, 1939 – 1945* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2005), 26.

³⁷⁸ *The Gazette*, 22 May 1945, 4.

³⁷⁹ *The Gazette*, 13 August 1945, 3.

the folks back home did appreciate the sacrifices that we had to make to lick the Jerries. It made me glow all over.”³⁸⁰

However, as a government-published pamphlet concerning veteran reintegration declared, the welcoming process involved “much more than the station ceremony.” It would continue “until [the veteran] is again a citizen of his home town or city and until his adjustment into the home life and the economic life of his country is complete.”³⁸¹ To this end, Citizens’ Rehabilitation Committees were also formed to facilitate veterans’ reintegration into the fabric of community life. Glace Bay’s Committee, like those across the country, organized car pools to bring returning veterans home from the station and organized a gala in the town for the veterans and their families, which was greatly appreciated.³⁸² However, economic reintegration would prove much more challenging.

According to federal policy, the successful reestablishment of veterans was a crucial component of national economic reconstruction. Under the Veterans Charter, returning servicemen were offered a wide range of benefits, including unemployment insurance, allowances for vocational and technical training or university education, pensions, and the opportunity to put gratuities and re-establishment credits towards purchasing land or a home.³⁸³ In terms of employment, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King defined the government’s goal as finding “jobs for the fit and fitting the unfit for jobs.”³⁸⁴ However, this optimistic objective was more applicable to the country’s industrially diverse and economically stable communities than the beleaguered coal towns of Cape Breton.

³⁸⁰ *The Sydney Post Record*, 28 January 1946, 1.

³⁸¹ Perrun, “The Patriotic Consensus,” 172.

³⁸² *The Gazette*, 31 July 1945, 3.

³⁸³ Neary, *On to Civvy Street*, 129.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 117.

Glace Bay was in no position to reintegrate large numbers of returning veterans into its workforce. In an address to the townspeople at the end of 1945, Mayor Morrison declared:

It is regrettable to note...that upon their return to civilian life these brave boys, some of whom never had gainful employment prior to hostilities, are faced with the task of seeking employment in a field now near a saturation point, with much fewer jobs than applicants for employment, and we sincerely hope that before another year rolls around this situation will be somewhat relieved.³⁸⁵

The future of the town was inextricably linked to the vitality and sustainability of the local coal industry; not only did the mines provide the workers with their livelihood, they also helped support the town's hospitals, medical staff, and churches through the check-off system.³⁸⁶ With no new industries or plans for government-assisted rehabilitation of the local mining industry forthcoming, there was very little to work with.

Also causing problems for some returning veterans was the way in which unemployment insurance applications were processed. Sydney was the central office for the distribution of benefits, while Glace Bay, North Sydney, Sydney Mines and New Waterford served as secondary offices. As everything had to go through the Sydney office, there were often delays. These delays in processing unemployment insurance applications sometimes left the veterans in serious financial difficulty. One veteran miner lamented that they would still be “looking for their rights while their children will be fighting in World War III.”³⁸⁷

Those left without work were left with few options. They could leave Glace Bay and attempt to find work elsewhere, but many of the unemployed workers had families or

³⁸⁵ Beaton Institute, MG 14, Vol. 140, File 3, “Annual Report, 1945,” 4-5.

³⁸⁶ *The Leader-Post*, 20 February 1947, 1. [Google news archive]

³⁸⁷ *The Gazette*, 1 March 1945, 4.

deep-rooted cultural ties to the community. It was not an easy thing to simply pick up and leave. Veterans had the option of expanding their skillset and making themselves more marketable through the education benefits available to them, but these opportunities came with limitations. A number of returning Glace Bay men were interested in taking courses in different trades such as photography or refrigeration, but, with neither the equipment nor the infrastructure set up to accommodate such courses, interested parties were required to leave town or miss out on the opportunity.

From 1946 onwards, Canada entered an economic golden age. Huge American investment and a dramatic increase in consumption injected the national economy with new life. The discovery of oil in Alberta in 1947 gave birth to a new modern energy industry and a variety of industrial offshoots. The benefits of the wartime industrial boom, however, were not felt to such a great extent in some regions. Cape Breton communities such as Glace Bay, which had been unable to diversify their industrial bases and had not been afforded the same opportunities for industrial expansion and modernization, found themselves in much the same position as before the war, perhaps worse in a comparative context with the rest of the country.

The local coal industry, the driving force behind the town's economy, was still unable to provide employment for all those who sought it. This problem was compounded by the large numbers of veterans returning home from the war and seeking work as well as the decreasing demand for Cape Breton coal. Instead of the prosperity and industrial rejuvenation experienced in other parts of the country, Glace Bay continued to experience the same problems that had plagued the town for many years. The Second World War

might have been a necessary war, but its legacy was fleeting in GB, unlike much of the rest of the country.

Conclusion

According to sociologist Rex Lucas, single-industry communities progress through a series of stages. The first stage is the construction of the community. Next comes the recruitment of citizens which is followed by a transitional period where responsibility shifts from the company to the townspeople. The fourth stage sees the town reach maturity as families focus on community building and youth are forced to emigrate.³⁸⁸ However, historian Douglas Campbell has indicated the necessity for an additional stage when dealing with single-industry communities dependent on a non-renewable resource and vulnerable to shifting markets. This stage is representative of the loss of a community's single industry which Campbell argues will result in one of three outcomes: the community becomes a ghost town; the industrial base is replaced or diversified; or the community finds new purpose as a dormitory-service center.³⁸⁹

Glace Bay was constructed around the abundant coal reserves that held the promise of a prosperous industrial future. Once the mines were established, workers were recruited from across Cape Breton, the Nova Scotia mainland, various parts of Europe, and the United States. A community was formed, complete with institutions, services, and a growing sense of working-class identity. This distinctive character, created through collective struggle, manifested itself as the miners sought to break free from company oppression through union activism and labour militancy. As the town's population grew and the coal reserves diminished, increasing numbers of citizens were forced to find work

³⁸⁸ See Rex Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Communities of Single Industry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

³⁸⁹ Campbell, *Banking on Coal*, 83-4.

elsewhere. Glace Bay then experienced a prolonged period of industrial decline that does not fit fully in any of the three categories proposed by Campbell.

From a regional perspective, Cape Breton and the Maritimes were not well equipped to prosper in peacetime. While Canada as a whole experienced a drop-off in industrial production after the war, with many wartime manufacturing plants in places like Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Hamilton closing down, the federal Department of Reconstruction had plans in place to ensure that this brief economic disruption would be followed by long-term stability.³⁹⁰ However, the federal government identified Nova Scotia as one of three Canadian provinces with the “heaviest representation of unconvertible industries,” which included shipbuilding and aircraft production. These projects were very much dependent on defence spending, which was drastically cut after the war.³⁹¹ Furthermore, according to the 1944 Report of the Nova Scotia Royal Commission on Provincial Development and Rehabilitation, of the \$714 million the federal government had invested in expanding Canadian industry, the Maritimes had received only 2.46 per cent, the majority of which was invested in temporary facilities and projects.³⁹²

At the local level, Glace Bay’s miners continued to experience life much as they had before the war as the community moved into the later stages of decline. Despite vows to continue the fight for a better life, time had rendered their words empty rhetoric.

³⁹⁰ Peter McInnis, *Harnessing Labour Confrontation: Shaping the Postwar Settlement in Canada, 1943-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 89.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹² James Bickerton, *Nova Scotia, Ottawa, and the Politics of Regional Development* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 97.

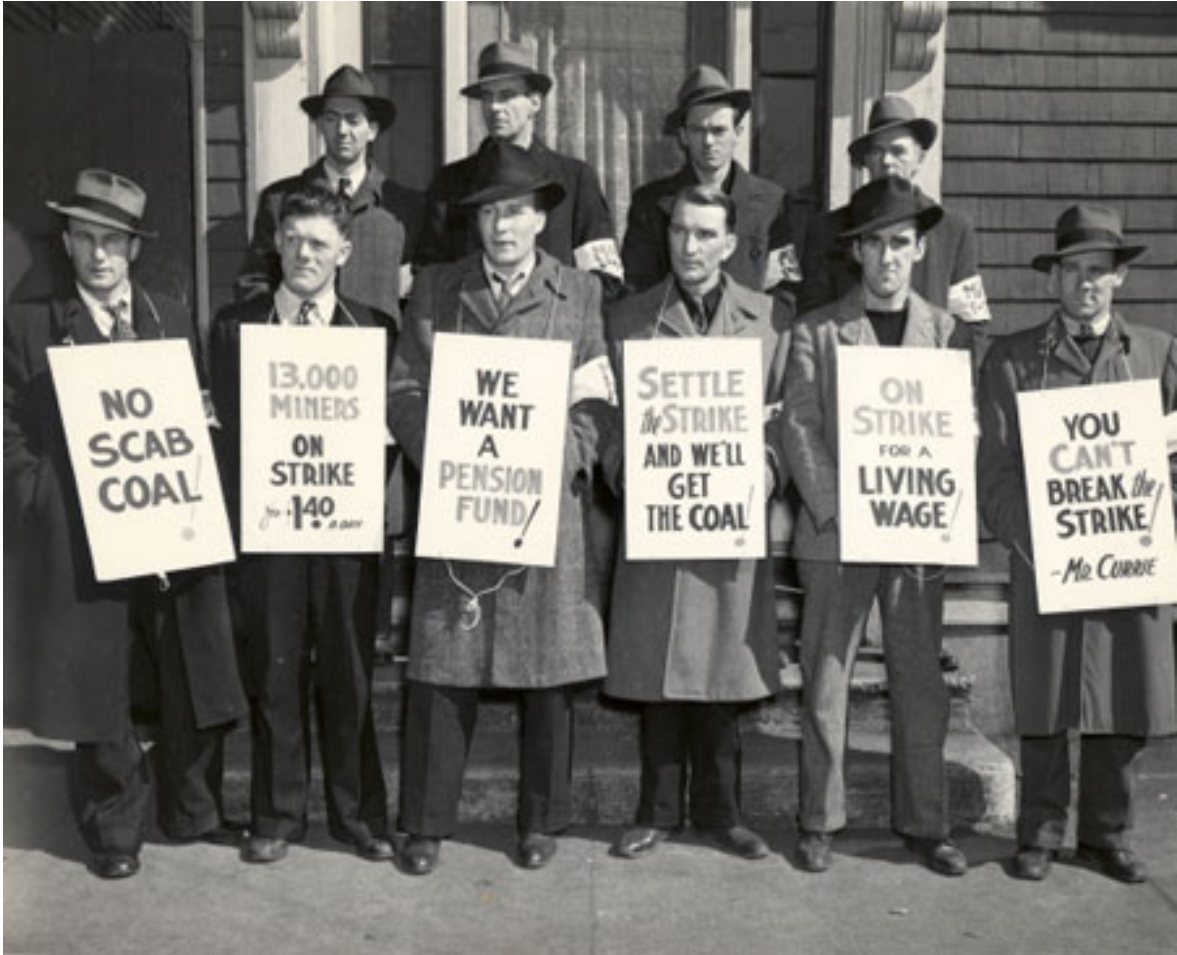


Figure 7.1 Beaton Institute, Cape Breton University. Allan Foley Photographic #44. 96-1036-27724 (a) Group of strikers with placards, c. 1945.

In 1947, the miners once more went on strike over wages and benefits, but the provincial and federal governments backed the coal company; the former announced that the province would import American coal as long as the strike lasted, and the latter agreed to subsidize the coal company's losses for two years. The strike ended three months later, and the miners had gained nothing from it save for the realization that they would never be able to defeat the power of private ownership.³⁹³

³⁹³ Urwick, Currie Limited, *The Royal Commission on Canada's Economic Prospects: The Nova Scotia Coal Industry* (Ottawa: The Commission, 1957), 45.

In the 1950s, the Nova Scotia coal industry was churning out coal for a non-existent market. Approximately 1,200,000 tons of surplus coal with a total value of \$13,000,000, enough to fill a train twenty miles long, was simply piled on the ground, and Dosco's coal chief declared that the mines should have been closed a long time before in order to prevent such gross overproduction.³⁹⁴ The region's coal industry was fighting a losing battle. Dependent on subventions and losing business to markets in Ontario and Quebec, Dosco was incapable of functioning without government assistance. Growing competition from new sources of energy such as oil and natural gas and the completion of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959 also contributed to the decreasing demand for coal.³⁹⁵

In July 1961, the closing of Glace Bay's Caledonia colliery delivered a major blow to any hopes of revitalizing the town's coal industry. Nearly twice as old as the town itself, the colliery had employed four generations of Glace Bay men and produced nearly 30,000,000 tons of coal. Nicknamed "the sponge," Caledonia was more than a mine; it was a symbol of hope. When other mines closed down, men went to "the sponge" to find a new job. It was also a symbol of the community's history; miner Michael MacNeil, a fifty-year veteran of the pits, described how his father had worked in Caledonia for 65 years and his father before him had been the first man to dig coal in the mine. It was like saying goodbye to an old friend. But, as union president William Marsh woefully declared, "the sponge is gone." It felt like the end of an era as a string of coal cars emerged from the depths of the mine, carrying machinery parts, wire, and rails, all that remained of nearly a century's

³⁹⁴ *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 February 1959, 15. [Google news archive]

³⁹⁵ Margaret Conrad, "The 'Atlantic Revolution' of the 1950s" in Ed Berkeley Fleming, *Beyond Anger and Longing: Community and Development in Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1988), 59.

worth of hard labour.³⁹⁶ Glace Bay had only two mines remaining from the original five, and the workforce had been reduced by over half since the heyday of the region's coal production in the early twentieth century.³⁹⁷

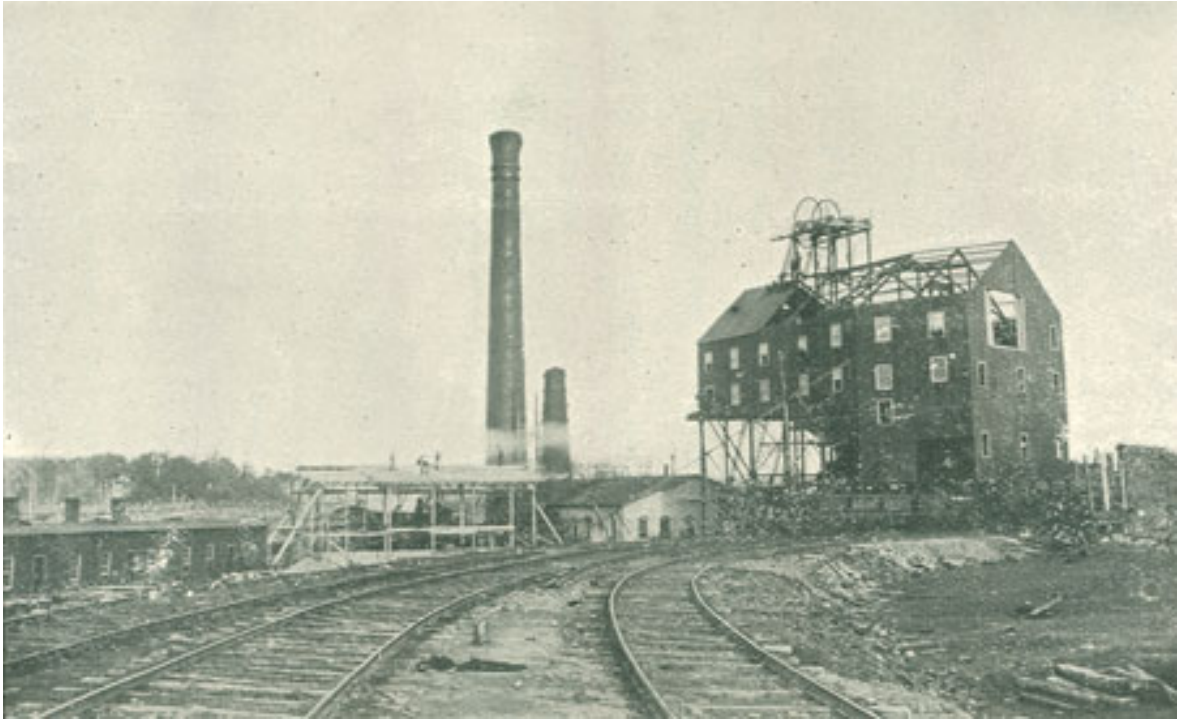


Figure 7.2 NSARM TN B41 1895 Caledonia Colliery, 1895

Glace Bay was not able to capitalize on wartime opportunities to diversify its industrial base, but neither did it become a ghost town. Though all the mines eventually closed and the main source of livelihood for the community vanished, the town lived on. While many left, citizens commuted to other areas to work, and various local retailers and institutions continued to provide the townspeople with goods and services. This was not a large-scale service industry, such as Port Hawkesbury's conversion to a dormitory-service

³⁹⁶ *The Edmonton Journal*, 21 July 1961, 7. [Google news archive]

³⁹⁷ *The Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 26 August 1966, 19. [Google news archive]

center for migratory labour working on the Canso Causeway, but it met the needs of the town's citizens.³⁹⁸ Glace Bay continued to linger on, in a state of ongoing decline.

K. Scott Verge's and Harold Wood's 1966 study of social conditions in the industrial Cape Breton towns of Dominion and New Waterford present an interesting interpretation of the idea of "decline", arguing that the term erroneously suggests these coal mining communities had "fallen from a golden period." While coal production in the region peaked in 1913, the authors maintain that these coal communities and their neighbours, including Glace Bay, from their founding days, have always had significant problems. These towns had long been characterized by manifestations of decline such as population outmigration, little or no economic growth, poor housing and inadequate social services.³⁹⁹ The period from 1947 to 1966 is perhaps more widely seen as the period of visible decline, as those years was marked by nine mine closures in the region.⁴⁰⁰

What is unique about Glace Bay's history is that very little ever changed; the town seemed perpetually suspended in a state of decline similar to that outlined by Wood and Verge. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the town was characterized by poor living conditions, an impoverished workforce, and industrial unrest. The war years, lauded by historians as a catalyst for social change in Canada, merely saw more of the same. As the miners were already veterans of a war that they had been waging since their grandfather's day, the hardships and lost opportunities of the war years were simply part of an ongoing pattern of disappointment and decline. Coming out on the other side, the miners were still poor and dissatisfied, the town's basic services were still lacking, and

³⁹⁸ Campbell, *Banking on Coal*, 83-4.

³⁹⁹ K. Scott Wood and Harold F. Verge, *Study of the Problems of Certain Cape Breton Communities* (Halifax: Dalhousie Institute of Public Affairs, 1966), 12.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

labour militancy was still an ongoing problem. Glace Bay was still plagued with derelict homes, deficient social services, and its geographic isolation did not make it a tempting investment for new industry. While historians often describe the 1939-1945 period as the “good war”, six years that ushered in a new era of prosperity and social progress, this framework is not representative of the country as a whole. As demonstrated by Glace Bay’s story, there are divergent narratives that need to be explored.

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