

Jennifer Shaw

**'I Do Think We Can Carry On':
The Women's War Efforts Committee of the
Canadian Jewish Congress, 1939-1946**

The Jewish community's involvement in the Canadian war effort during the Second World War has been a topic of scholarly interest for decades. However, this scholarship has largely focused on the activities of men, whether as soldiers or members of volunteer organizations, most notably the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC). When women's contributions are noted, it has generally been a mention of undefined volunteer work or their activities as soldiers' wives and mothers, thus ignoring the monumental efforts of Jewish women. In particular, the Women's War Efforts Committee (WWEC) of the CJC contributed thousands of hours of unpaid labour, fundraising, running a Next-of-Kin League for the wives, mothers, and children of enlisted men, and working with other women's organizations for the war effort. However, it was their work on massive projects such as the furnishing of recreation spaces on armed forces bases and the opening of Servicemen's Centres across Canada that would be most impactful. This paper will explore how the activities of the WWEC increased the visibility of the Jewish community in Canada and contributed to changing the public perception of Jews from that of an unwanted immigrant community to that of an accepted minority group. It will also examine the tensions between the men and women of the CJC and the shifting public roles of women within the Jewish community.

La participation de la communauté juive à l'effort de guerre du Canada pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale fait l'objet d'études académiques depuis des décennies. Toutefois, ces études ont généralement pris pour objet principal les participants de genre masculin, que ce soit à titre de soldats ou de membres d'organismes bénévoles, notamment le Congrès juif canadien (CJC). Dans la mesure où les contributions des femmes ont été soulignées, il s'est généralement agi de mentions symboliques évoquant un certain travail bénévole indéfini ou encore des activités poursuivies en tant qu'épouses ou en tant que mères de soldats, négligeant ainsi les efforts monumentaux des femmes juives. En particulier, le Comité de l'effort de guerre des femmes (Women's War Efforts Committee ou WWEC) du CJC a consacré des milliers d'heures non rémunérées à la collecte de fonds, à la gestion d'une ligue pour femmes, pour mères et pour enfants de soldats et au travail en commun avec d'autres organismes féminins visant à appuyer l'effort de guerre. Cependant, ce qui a eu le plus d'impact auprès de leurs concitoyens canadiens, c'est le travail du WWEC sur des projets de grande envergure tels que l'aménagement d'espaces de loisirs sur les bases des forces armées canadiennes et l'ouverture de centres pour soldats à travers le Canada. Cet article explorera comment les activités du WWEC ont accru la visibilité de la communauté juive et contribué à faire évoluer l'opinion public canadien à son sujet : d'un groupe d'immigrants indésirables, la communauté juive s'est transformée, aux yeux des Canadiens, en groupe minoritaire apprécié. En outre, il sera question, dans cet article, des tensions homme-femme au sein du CJC, ainsi que des rôles publics changeants des femmes au sein de la communauté juive.

In January 1943 the newspaper at Camp Borden, then the largest military base in Canada, published an editorial describing some of the Canadian Jewish Congress's (CJC) war work activities. These included the opening of soldier recruitment bureaus; promoting war savings certificates; and the activities of the Next-of-Kin League, a CJC group formed to support the wives, mothers, and families of Jewish servicemen. The editorial also included an in-depth description of the work done by the CJC to furnish recreation rooms on armed forces bases in Canada, which required thousands of hours of work. It also noted approvingly that the opening of another CJC Servicemen's Centre was "another example of the splendid work this organization is doing throughout the length and breadth of Canada for members of the Armed Forces."¹ Absent from the laudatory statements in the editorial, however, was the committee responsible for most of these projects: the CJC's Women's War Efforts Committee (WWEC).

Like most Canadian women, Jewish women volunteered for war-work on the home front in Canada.² These Jewish women were responsible for some of the CJC's most important war-efforts projects, such as running Servicemen's Centres, supplying comfort boxes for Jewish soldiers, and providing furnishings for armed forces bases.³ Despite this, Canadian Jewish historians and Canadian women's historians have ignored their work almost entirely. This paper contributes to the history of Jewish women in Canada by exploring the role and activities of the WWEC, its relation to the male-dominated CJC, the impact the WWEC had on the Jewish community and wider Canadian society, and how its legacy has been almost completely forgotten. The WWEC's activities, though almost completely unknown now, were central to the CJC's war-efforts strategy. They were among the most visible contributions of the Jewish community in Canada to the war effort and, as I argue, were the most successful of all the CJC's wartime endeavours. Through their projects, Jewish women's work not only played a large role in demonstrating the Jewish population's dedication to the war effort, Canada, and the British Empire, but also to supporting Jewish identity in Canada.

With the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the CJC was consumed by its efforts to lobby the Canadian government to admit more refugees and to combat the overt antisemitism that labeled Jews as an unwanted race in Canada.⁴ With its resources stretched, the CJC formally involved Jewish women in its war-effort activities. It adopted a resolution at its Central Division annual meeting on September 17, 1939 in Toronto, stating, "In order to co-ordinate women's activities in connection with the National emergency...a conference will be called shortly for this purpose."⁵ It also included a request that "no commitments be made by [women's] organizations until the conference is held." Less than four months later, at the annual meeting of the CJC's Central Division on January 7, 1940, the CJC passed another resolution calling for the creation of a WWEC to coordinate Jewish women across the country, acting as the voice of Jewish women in the same way that the CJC

was meant to be the voice of the Canadian Jewish community more generally.⁶ The WWEC worked with smaller groups to accomplish its aims, parceling out jobs to groups such as the Sinais, a small group of Jewish women dedicated to raising money for Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, and who took on war work once the Second World War had begun.⁷

Initially, the WWEC women were to undertake four projects: offer home hospitality to soldiers, particularly on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays; raise money to provide comfort boxes for soldiers overseas; organize groups of women to sew and knit needed garments; and “create sentiment that will stimulate enlistment of Jewish young men in His Majesty’s forces.”⁸ It was vitally important to the CJC that all Jews show their willingness to participate in the war effort to combat the widespread image of Jews as ‘shirkers,’ as well as to demonstrate Jewish dedication to the country.⁹

The first meetings of the nascent WWEC were held in the spring of 1940. Its first project was to create and send comfort boxes to Jewish soldiers overseas that included much needed and wanted items such as chocolate, socks, tooth powder, and cheese.¹⁰ These boxes were also designed to help keep Jewish soldiers connected to the Jewish community, a concern as men joined the army and were separated from their families and traditions. The first delivery, in early 1940, was 28 boxes; toward the end of the Second World War the WWEC was sending 1400 boxes per shipment.¹¹ The later shipments included Jewish papers and magazines at the suggestion of Rabbi Captain Isaac B. Rose who noted in a thank-you letter to the WWEC that “The men here are eager to know what is transpiring at home – and eager to maintain contact.”¹² Closer to the end of the War, the boxes also included toys for soldiers to pass around to children.¹³ Thank-you letters sent to the WWEC by Jewish soldiers show how much these packages were appreciated. One such letter included the statement, “I am the only Jewish man in my regiment. When I received my parcel, I felt I belonged to neither a neglected nor a forgotten race.”¹⁴

On the home front in Canada, the WWEC arranged home hospitality for soldiers on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. During Passover 1943, for instance, over one hundred soldiers and some of their wives were hosted in private homes in Vancouver for Passover seders.¹⁵ The WWEC worked hard to ensure that Jewish soldiers stayed connected to the Jewish community at a time of significant upheaval.

In April 1940, the WWEC held a follow-up meeting and accepted an additional objective: furnishing recreation rooms and other spaces on armed forces bases in Canada, including several at Camp Borden.¹⁶ The CJC was recognized as the “only organization supplying furniture under an agreement with the Department of National Defence.”¹⁷ Though some of the funding for this endeavour came from the CJC, the WWEC assumed responsibility for much of the fundraising, soliciting

donations of furniture and equipment, purchasing, allocating furniture to the various bases, and working with different branches of the armed forces to arrange for transporting the equipment and furniture. The WWEC also encouraged smaller women's groups such as sisterhood organizations to sponsor recreation rooms, and facilitated acquiring the necessary items.¹⁸ This required thousands of hours of work by the WWEC, and eventually resulted in furnishing over 1400 recreation spaces across the country.¹⁹ This initiative was so successful that in addition to WWEC being the only organization to provide furniture, much larger organizations such as the Citizen's Committee of Toronto and the Greater Toronto War Services Advisory Council began routing all their donations of radios and pianos through the WWEC.²⁰

The WWEC, now an established committee of the CJC, quickly spread beyond Toronto and Montreal. WWEC committees were established in each CJC division – West, Central, and East – and in some individual towns and cities such as Saskatoon, and meetings were generally held at CJC offices. For the Eastern Division these were at the CJC headquarters in Montreal; in the Central Division they were held at the CJC offices on Beverley Street in Toronto; and following the creation of the Western Division WWEC in Winnipeg, meetings were held at the CJC offices there. Eventually, the various divisional committees would establish sub-committees to oversee various projects such as the comfort boxes, the Servicemen's Centres, and the home hospitality program, among others. Regional and city committees were responsible for local organizing, collecting names and addresses of Jewish soldiers from their region, funding the comfort boxes sent to them, arranging home hospitality for soldiers on nearby bases, and other similar activities. The various regional WWEC committees were also responsible for contributing to the WWEC's larger projects, such as the Servicemen's Centres.²¹

The WWEC thus started with a mix of objectives that stressed simultaneously Jewish identity and dedication to Canada and the British Empire, as evidenced by its adoption of the furnishing program. The WWEC also worked to demonstrate its dedication to Canada and the British Empire by making connections with major non-Jewish women's organizations involved in the war effort, and by giving financial donations and supplies to groups such as the YWCA which sent its own comfort boxes, and by assisting the Red Cross with its sewing and knitting projects.²² It also supported women's organizations such as the Canadian Auxiliary Territorial Service (CATS) and the Canadian Women's Service Force (CWSF), and helped to furnish the offices of the Canadian Women's Voluntary Service (CWVS). The CWVS was an organization from Ontario responsible for keeping track of women's groups involved in war work, signing up volunteers to be "placed according to interest and ability" and serving as a "clearing house for information from the war departments of the federal government."²³ The WWEC provided it with office furnishings that the CWVS could not afford itself. A thank-you letter dated November 3, 1941 stated:

Up until this time some members of our Executive have had no spot in the office to call their own, and now that your desks have come, I know how sincere their gratitude is, in particular. Will you kindly convey to the Women's Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress our most grateful thanks. It means much to us to have your own personal interest and co-operation along with that of the Congress."²⁴

In projects such as these the WWEC began to make a name for itself beyond the Jewish community and forged strong connections with non-Jewish women and groups. Though it sought to maintain a Jewish identity, the WWEC also sought to demonstrate that Jewishness was not a barrier to being Canadian.

Similarly, by ensuring that Jewish women could join women's defense groups active on the home front, the WWEC ensured that Jewish women could be involved in all areas of war work. Prior to women being allowed to join the military in 1941, unofficial women's corps were formed across the country for women wanting to take on a more active role in serving the country, with volunteers learning skills such as Morse code signaling and map reading.²⁵ At a meeting of the Central Division WWEC on October 9, 1940, the committee discussed the barriers to Jewish women joining these groups: "Following discussion on the registration of women to the Canadian Auxiliary for [*sic*] Territorial Services it was learned that all members of the British Empire, of British parentage, were eligible for membership. Mrs. Pollock indicated that she had discussed this matter with the Canadian Women's Service Force indicating that there were not many Jewish women who could qualify if it was required that they be of British parentage."²⁶ The WWEC pushed to have Jewish women included in the self-defence effort: "Mrs. Pollock was advised after consideration had been given to this matter, that an exception would be made in the case of Jewish women who would be accepted if they themselves were British subjects."²⁷ Though these passages show that the WWEC conflated the CWSF and CATS organizations, and it is not entirely clear which organization the WWEC was referring to, this discussion enabled Jewish women to join either the CWSF or the CATS, thus giving Jewish women the opportunity to further demonstrate their loyalty to Canada.²⁸

These early activities of the WWEC suggest that the CJC, and by extension the women who were part of the WWEC, were aware of the Jewish community's unsettled place in Canada and the skepticism and derision with which many non-Jews still regarded Jews, and as a result, they realized the impact their work could have on how the Canadian Jewish community was seen. Speeches and minutes from the WWEC support the idea that the women involved in the organization were aware of the importance of their work. In a 1941 speech, Ethel Ostry, one of the WWEC's earliest leaders, declared, "The general response of our Jewish people to the struggle against facism [*sic*] is...as fervent as that of any loyal Canadian citizen...The Jewish people

desire to...keep race discrimination and persecution out of the Empire..."²⁹ Similarly, minutes from a meeting of the CJC's Central Division WWEC in July 1941 indicate that the women understood the necessity of showing their depth of commitment to Canada. The 1941 Canadian National Exhibition invited the Committee to participate in a showcase of Canadian women's work for the war effort. According to the minutes, the WWEC booth in the Women's Building of the Canadian National Exhibition was "designed to indicate the work of the Jewish women of Canada and particularly to emphasize the integration of Jewish women in the Canadian community." The women of the WWEC were committed to doing their part for the war effort, as well as to using their war-work as a visible marker of Canadian Jews' loyalty to improve their standing in the country, as Ostry's speech hints.

This desire to prove dedication and loyalty to Canada and the Empire was not limited to Jews. Pamela Sugiman argues that Japanese Canadians also tried to prove their loyalty, such as in the case of Japanese men who wanted to enlist in the armed forces, though this door was closed after Canada declared war on Japan following the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December 1941.³⁰ In the case of Black Canadian women, Dionne Brand suggests that the move from domestic servant employment to work in factories was seen by Black Canadian women as "a gain for the race" in terms of improving their own situation.³¹ Brand does not speak specifically to issues of loyalty and dedication to the country, however. The Jewish community was different for its degree of organization in Canada by the time of the Second World War, and the significant resources it could muster to support its work and by extension to support its claim to be seen as true Canadians. The general acceptance of the CJC as a national umbrella organization by most Jewish groups in Canada allowed the community to speak with a strong and unified voice. Moreover, as opposed to the Japanese community, Jews were not in danger of being interned, while Black Canadian women's work, though it was seen as a gain for that community as a whole, was more focused on improving individual Black women's circumstances rather than proving their dedication to Canada. Thus, the comparatively better-off position of Jewish women allowed them to devote time and raise funds to support their work and show their loyalty to Canada, more than any other minority group in Canada arguably.

This was nowhere more apparent than in the WWEC's biggest project: the operation of the sixteen CJC Servicemen's Centres that opened across Canada beginning in 1942. The WWEC was almost entirely responsible for the operation of these Centres which involved hundreds of women of all ages who organized, administered, and volunteered in the Servicemen's Centres.³² In large cities such as Toronto and Montreal, these centres were "operated entirely by the Women's Committees of the Congress," according to a 1943 CJC memo.³³ In some smaller cities and towns such as Brandon, Halifax, and Victoria, the Centres were run by the local CJC committee or a synagogue sisterhood.³⁴ The Centres offered services such as mending and sewing,

included letter-writing rooms stocked with stationery and writing implements, and provided canteens where soldiers could eat a full meal or snack. They also acted as social centres, with most containing a reading room, a games room, and a music room with a record player. Dances and other events were held regularly, all free of charge and open to all servicemen regardless of gender, race, or religion. The Centres were hugely popular, especially in Toronto and Montreal. In October 1943 alone, the Toronto Centre received over 28 000 visitors.³⁵ The Toronto Centre in particular provided another example of the WWEC's coordination with other women's groups, as the building in which it was located was the council house of the National Council of Jewish Women, which donated it for use as a Centre for the rest of the war.³⁶

Because of the centrality of the Servicemen's Centres to the CJC's war-efforts strategy, and because the CJC recognized that these Centres could be of significant public-relations value, there was considerable debate about how 'Jewish' they should be. If the Centres were too Jewish, they risked alienating non-Jewish soldiers and thus possibly also wider Canadian society. The minutes from a meeting in January 1943 between the Montreal Centre's executive board and the local CJC religious committee show a "considerable discussion" about whether the Centre should remain open on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. The religious committee argued that the Centres should be closed on those days so as to preserve the Jewish nature of the operation, while the Montreal Centre's administrators wanted to keep them open. The eventual recommendation was that the Centres would stay open but that "a Sabbath atmosphere [would] prevail" by lighting candles on Friday night, by prohibiting letter-writing, smoking, and dancing so as to comply with Jewish religious law. The canteen was also to be closed, and the only formal programming permitted was to be bible study or Jewish history classes led by rabbis. Soldiers would still be able to read, play certain games, and socialize.³⁷ While the women were keen to maintain the Centres' Jewish identity, they were also aware of the need to appeal to non-Jewish soldiers, and thus worked to find a balance between these two needs.

This issue also arose in Halifax. The Halifax Servicemen's Centre was considered by some to be the most important in the country due to the city's status as the main embarkation point for Europe. A memo written by H. R. Moscoe, the Executive Secretary of the CJC War Efforts Committee, dated March 12, 1943 noted that in contrast to the Montreal Servicemen Centre, the Halifax Centre was "not operated in consonant with Sabbath Observance. Smoking, dancing, letter-writing, programs, are all featured Friday night" all of which offended the more traditional members of the Halifax Jewish community.³⁸ However, the CJC also received a complaint that the Halifax Centre's canteen was "stocked mostly with Jewish Foods and delicacies" and that this deterred non-Jewish soldiers from coming.³⁹ Intermingling between Jewish women and non-Jewish men, a concern for many in the community, was also a point of contention. Young Jewish women were needed as volunteers for the Servicemen's

Centres to act as 'Junior Hostesses,' which required them to dance with visiting soldiers, play cards, and generally entertain servicemen whether or not they were Jewish.⁴⁰ Some of the hostesses refused to dance with non-Jewish soldiers, however. The young women's refusal was cited as another reason why non-Jewish soldiers stopped visiting the Centres. However, when the idea of recruiting non-Jewish women to volunteer as hostesses was proposed as a solution, the Halifax Jewish community objected because it went against the Jewish nature of the Centre.⁴¹

So contentious was the situation in Halifax that in November 1942, Saul Hayes, the Executive Director of the CJC, penned a confidential memo to David Kirsch, chairman of the War Efforts Committee, in which he laid out some of the issues at the Halifax Centre. The CJC was keenly aware of the importance of the Servicemen's Centres to the image of the Jewish community in Canada. He felt that a public debate of this magnitude could erupt into a huge public relations problem which the Jewish community could not afford. Positive publicity about Jews' efforts was crucial as evidenced by a letter from David Rome, the CJC's Press Office Director, to the acting director of the Halifax Centre, sent in November 1943:

We must bear in mind, frankly, that one of the prime purposes of undertaking our entire Servicemen's Centre programme is, in addition to its contribution to morale and therefore to victory, to win the good-will of the non-Jewish community. Primarily, this public relations job is done in the centre itself by the hospitality and the services given to our visitors but the beneficial value of this work can be multiplied by having many Canadians who do not visit our centres know of the work we are doing...to lay down a policy of no publicity for this work is to run counter to the very purpose of the entire programme.⁴²

Though I have found no indication as to how exactly the issues in Halifax were resolved, their resolution is clear from a letter received in June 1944 by Jennie Brownberg, the Centre's coordinator. It states, "Even overseas our chaplains have been in praise of the Halifax centre. This was conveyed to me by the chaplains themselves."⁴³ However, the ongoing disputes over the Jewish nature of the Centre points to the difficulties the WWEC faced as it attempted to find a balance between the Jewish and non-Jewish populations it served.

The ability to handle work and roles traditionally held to be male was an issue for all women involved in the war effort. Keshen notes that women factory workers were thought to be "forty percent less productive than men" because of their lesser physical strength.⁴⁴ Though the women of the WWEC were not involved in manual labour, the same sexism played a role in the WWEC's dealings with the exclusively male Executive Board of the CJC, which often challenged the women's decisions

and was skeptical of the women's ability to manage their own affairs. Though the WWECs in some regions were praised for their financial acumen – a 1943 year-end report submitted by the Winnipeg (Western Division) WWEC stated, “Our expenses have drawn forth favorable comments from the auditor on the exceptionally low percentage of expense” – nationally, the WWEC's efforts to fund its work became a source of tension.⁴⁵ A question from the federal government in 1943 about whether the WWEC was an independent charitable organization prompted a letter from Hayes to the registrar of the Department of National War Services that gives some insight into how the CJC felt about the women's independence: “They [the WWEC] are under the control of the Canadian Jewish Congress War Efforts Committee” and they “...do the functional work of the War Efforts Committee in certain specific areas...because women are better equipped to do these specific items of program, a Women's Division was created.”⁴⁶ In terms of its finances, Hayes argued that the WWEC was “under the supervision of the Canadian Jewish Congress, and as such has no semi-autonomous position” and most spending had to be pre-approved by the Men's Division.⁴⁷ Though the WWEC did have its own bank account to “keep buying the supplies at their convenience and to collect monies from well-wishers” for the comfort boxes, they were “under obligation as to the manner in which they collect or spend the money” and this activity was reviewed periodically by the male leadership of the CJC.⁴⁸ Even though members of the CJC Executive Board thought women were better at certain jobs, usually those that required time-consuming, on-the-ground, functional, ‘feminine’ labour, documents indicate that the Executive Board felt it needed to have oversight of the financial side of the WWEC's activities. Though such paternalism was undoubtedly common at the time, Hayes' letter underscores the difficulties of the WWEC in conducting its affairs independently of the CJC.

Similarly, the Executive Board of the CJC argued that it needed to be involved in running the Servicemen's Centres. In Hayes' confidential memo to Kirsch mentioned above, he argued that the Montreal Centre needed a much closer relationship with the larger War Efforts Committee, ideally with two men on the finance sub-committee and two men on the Centre's administration committee.⁴⁹ Though I have not found it in the archives, evidently Hayes sent a letter expressing this position to the Chair of the Montreal Servicemen's Centre, Emma Stewart. Stewart sent a curt response: “Replying to your recent note, I do not think we need a male director at the centre at this time. Things are running very nicely and with the present set-up I do think we can carry on.”⁵⁰

There were further clashes in the area of fundraising. The WWEC assumed complete financial responsibility for the comfort boxes very early on in the War.⁵¹ As the number of boxes sent by the WWEC increased exponentially over the War years, the WWEC women carried out substantial fundraising activities and stressed to potential donors that they were “not subsidized by the men in any way.”⁵² Their solicitation

of businesses and individuals to support the comfort boxes program led to conflict with the CJC. In May 1944, Rosalie Phillips, the Chair of the WWEC, wrote a letter to Kirsch stating that companies who regularly donated money and supplies had complained to the WWEC because the owners felt they were being solicited twice – once by the Combined Jewish Appeal, a portion of which funded war-work, and a second time by the WWEC to fund the comfort boxes. Phillips wrote, "The Women's Division is forced to the expedient of making application for inclusion in the campaign...if the executive of the War Efforts Committee agrees, by adding the amount to its objective."⁵³ The letter gives some indication of the women's frustration and displeasure with the CJC. While it could be argued that combining the fundraising into one appeal was beneficial since it streamlined the fundraising process, it had the effect of reducing the WWEC's autonomy and ability to conduct its own affairs without interference from the male leadership of the CJC.

May 18th 45.

MRS. L. PHILLIPS - 654 MURRAY HILL - WESTMOUNT, QUEBEC

Mr. Saul Hayes.
National Ex. Director C.J.C.
1121 St. Catherine St. W.
Montreal. 29
140

Dear Mr. Hayes:

This will advise you
of my resignation, effective
as of from May 31st 45.
Circumstances that
have arisen make it
difficult for me to continue.

Yours truly,
(Mrs) Rosalie Phillips

Image of Rosalie Phillips' letter of resignation as Chair of the Eastern Division WWEC, May 1945. Canadian Jewish Congress collection, War Efforts Committee series. Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives.

At least one woman submitted her resignation from the WWEC to the CJC due to issues she faced. Rosalie Phillips, who had served as the Chair of the Eastern Division WWEC for most of the War, sent a terse letter to Saul Hayes in May 1945. The letter read, "Dear Mr. Hayes: This will advise you of my resignation effective as and from May 31, '45. Circumstances that have arisen make it difficult for me to continue."⁵⁴ While Phillips did not explain exactly what were the "circumstances," a return letter from Hayes begging her to reconsider her resignation hints that various issues caused her resignation: "I would ask your permission not to act on it [her resignation] for the present as I understand there are certain things behind it which are unfortunate and should not be allowed to remain whether or not you resign."⁵⁵ Though Hayes is also not explicit about the issues of concern, one of these involved visiting injured Jewish soldiers in hospital. In either late 1944 or early 1945 the CJC convened a Rehabilitation Committee involved in hospital visiting, which the WWEC had been doing since the beginning of the War: "I understand that one of the difficulties stems from the handling of the Rehabilitation Committee's work, with particular reference to hospital visiting. I don't think it is necessary for me to go into the matter itself, but I should like to observe that your work as chairman of the War Efforts Committee is such that the hospital visiting is but a fractional part of the whole."⁵⁶ Hayes also begged Phillips to stay on: "I do trust you will reconsider in any event your resignation, as I for one would be disconcerted in feeling that after so many years of yeoman service you would be giving up just at the time when matters will automatically come to an end...I know many others in Congress will share my view."⁵⁷

Evidently Hayes was able to persuade Rosalie Phillips to remain in her position, because despite a return letter from Phillips stating that she "cannot see any useful purposes in discussing further the reasons for my resignation," her name appeared on Eastern Division WWEC correspondence after May 1945.⁵⁸ Despite her attempt to resign, the issue related to hospital visits was not resolved. The Eastern Division WWEC, with Phillips still acting as Chair, decided to address the issue formally as a Committee. This time the complaint was stated much more explicitly. An official letter sent to Hayes from the WWEC read:

At an Executive meeting of the Women's War Efforts Committee held on September 18, 1945 at Congress Headquarters, the following resolution was passed: That owing to the fact that a new committee was formed for hospital visiting without the knowledge of this Board, at the same time being aware of the fact that such a committee was already in existence and had functioned since the inception of the Women's War Efforts Committee, we protest to the Canadian Jewish Congress and go on record that until such matter is satisfactorily settled we withdraw our maintenance for this project.⁵⁹

The eventual outcome of this dispute and whether it was settled satisfactorily is not known. However, the fact that the WWEC felt the need to make such a strong official statement speaks to the frustration and anger the women felt at the men's casual disregard for their work. Such conflicts hint at the tensions that existed between the CJC and the WWEC, and the struggle for respect and autonomy, while also highlighting the ways in which the women fought back.

Despite such issues, the work done throughout the Second World War by the WWEC played an important role in burnishing the image of the Jewish community in Canada. The Servicemen's Centres were a massive success and a significant public relations triumph. They became known throughout the country as *the* place for soldiers to socialize. An article in the *Toronto Daily Star* dated March 9, 1944 stated, "The [Toronto] club's reputation for friendliness and service has spread across Canada and into the U.S. 'This is the first place any fellow from Fredericton heads for,' said Private Johnny Lindsay of that city. 'Check!' said Private John Harnick of London, 'and you can quote me!'"⁶⁰ The Centres' popularity was such that by the end of the War, the Toronto Servicemen's Centre alone was estimated to have had over 600 000 visitors in its three years of operation.⁶¹ The fact that the Centres welcomed all servicemen and women, and that all services were free, made these Centres a great attraction for military personnel from across Canada. This initiative was instrumental in introducing Canadian Jews to those who would not otherwise have interacted with them. It led to increased comfort and familiarity with Jews and helped to demonstrate to non-Jews that the Jewish community had a place and a role to play in Canadian society.

The WWEC disbanded in 1946, after it had completed several projects assisting survivors of the Holocaust.⁶² The Toronto Servicemen's Centre, the last to remain open, closed on December 1, 1945. A newspaper article about its closing notes that in the Centre's three years of operation, more than 1 200 young women volunteered at the centre as hostesses, and that it served more than "2,000,000 glasses of 'pop,' 1,200,000 glasses of milk, 2,500,000 sandwiches, 500,000 hotdogs and 125,000 slices of cake."⁶³ A WWEC report stated that by the end of the War more than 25 000 comfort boxes and 13 000 000 cigarettes had been sent to Jewish soldiers stationed overseas.⁶⁴ The CJC itself noted that the formation of WWECs across the country were "among the most successful organizational activities of the Canadian Jewish Congress."⁶⁵ Despite such internal recognition, once the Committee was disbanded the women who had done so much for the war effort were pushed back into the more isolated world of synagogue sisterhoods and other Jewish women's organizations. Their work there was almost entirely confined to projects within synagogues and the Jewish community, and thus much less public.

As a result, women such as Rosalie Phillips, Emma Stewart, and Jennie Brownberg, as well as the WWEC itself, are almost completely forgotten from the historical record.

During the War, the women and the WWEC received some credit for their work in various newspapers and reports. For instance, the 1943–1944 *American Jewish Year Book* states that “The women of the Jewish communities of Canada also operate a chain of Servicemen’s centers which the Canadian Jewish Congress has established.”⁶⁶ It is notable, however, that the CJC is given credit for the Centres’ establishment. In fact, reports from the CJC during the War often did not mention the WWEC, while the CJC took credit for the thousands of hours put into the Servicemen’s Centres, the comfort boxes, and providing home hospitality. For instance, a lengthy section on the Servicemen’s Centres in a CJC report in late 1943 entitled “Canadian Jewry and the War Effort” states that “The Canadian Jewish Congress Servicemen’s Centres established across the Dominion are recognized as an important contribution not only to the Jewish men and women in uniform but to the soldiers, sailors and airmen of every creed and religion...The Centres are staffed by volunteer workers to attend to the comforts of the boys and girls in uniform.”⁶⁷ Though the report notes the involvement of women as junior and senior hostesses in the Centres, it fails to acknowledge the lead role of the WWEC in their administration.

More recent scholars also fail to give due credit to the women of the Committee. For instance, one notes that “Comfort boxes’ containing such items as razor blades, cigarettes, socks, and chocolate bars were sent to servicemen overseas. At home, the committee [the men’s War Efforts Committee] created sixteen Servicemen’s Centres, equipped with lounge furniture and recreational equipment and staffed by several thousand Jewish volunteer women...”⁶⁸ Though women’s volunteerism was noted, this ignores the lead role assumed by women in running of the Centres, and that they were not simply under the direction of the CJC. Similarly, an organizational history of the CJC in Toronto describes the Servicemen’s Centre there without once mentioning the WWEC.⁶⁹ Even the CJC itself does not fully acknowledge the role of the WWEC during the War. In a commemorative book published for the Sixth Plenary Session of the CJC in 1986, some women of the WWEC are mentioned by name, but the WWEC is not explicitly named, and the projects it was responsible for, such as the Servicemen’s Centres, are attributed to the larger and male-dominated War Efforts Committee. The work of the women is not acknowledged.⁷⁰

The women of the WWEC surpassed the initial goals that were set out in early 1940. Their projects, such as the comfort boxes and home hospitality, helped to keep Canadian Jewish soldiers connected to the Jewish community. The Servicemen’s Centres shone a new light on the Jewish community, providing hundreds of thousands of soldiers a new and positive view of Jews, while at the same time maintaining a fine balance between being ‘too’ Jewish and not Jewish enough. The WWEC’s work with other Canadian women’s groups, such as the Red Cross, the YWCA, the CATS, and the CWVS helped to show non-Jewish Canadian women that Jews had a place in the country too, and that Jewish Canadians subscribed to the same patriotic ideals and

goals as non-Jews. However, at the same time, the WWEC posed a challenge to the male leaders of the CJC. As long as they remained within the boundaries set by the CJC, they could conduct their work as they saw fit. Once they were 'too' successful, or became more assertive about their role, the CJC attempted to circumscribe the women's activities and leadership positions. Despite these constraints, the WWEC carried on and ran what was arguably the most successful of the CJC's programs during the Second World War.

The women of the WWEC, along with Jewish women across the country, were instrumental to the response of the Canadian Jewish community to the Second World War. Despite this, there is little discussion of the WWEC in the relevant literature, and thus the years of work of such women as Rosalie Phillips has been ignored. Though the lives and experiences of Canadian Jewish soldiers, almost entirely men, have been examined, the Jewish women who did much for the war effort on the home front have continued to be undervalued. Scholars have thus missed a vital component in how the Jewish community came to be seen as an accepted and important part of Canadian society, and, moreover, how they came to be seen as full Canadian citizens. Examining Jewish women's work allows us to gain a fuller understanding of not only the War years, but also of the role and contributions of Canadian Jewish women in the Jewish community itself and in Canada as a whole.

1

The author wishes to thank Dr. Katherine McKenna, Dr. Monda Halpern, Dr. Nina Reid-Maroney, Dr. David S. Koffman, Jacob Evoy, and the two anonymous *CJS* reviewers for their help and incisive comments on this article. "Editorial," *The Bulletin*, January 16, 1943. Alex Dworkin Canadian Jewish Archives (hereafter ADCJA), CJC Collections, War Efforts Committee (hereafter WEC), DA18.1, Box 18, File 22 (Servicemen's Centres). Note that the 'WEC' in the reference refers to the male WEC of the CJC, and not the WWEC.

2

A 1942 report on the activities of the WWEC gives some details on Jewish women's general volunteer work on the home front, such as work for the Red Cross, buying and selling war and victory bonds, and volunteering to create 'V' (Victory) Bundles. See "Highlights of Women's War Efforts," Canadian Jewish Congress, 1942-1943," ADCJA, CJC Collections, War Efforts Committee, DA18.1, Box 18, File 21 (Women's Division, Miscellaneous Reports, Minutes, etc.).

3

For the involvement of Canadian women in the war effort, see Ruth Roach Pierson, *They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986); Ruth Roach Pierson, *Canadian Women and the Second World War*, Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Booklet*, No. 37; Jeff Keshen, "Revisiting Canada's Civilian Women During World War II," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 30, no. 60 (1997): 239-266; Jeff Keshen, *Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada's Second World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

4

For the purposes of this paper, 'war effort activities' refers to both home-front work, auxiliary military work such as home defense, and enlistment, though I concentrate exclusively on the home front aspect. For an excellent treatment of enlisted Jewish women, see Ellin Bessner, *Double Threat: Canadian Jews, the Military and World War II* (Toronto: New Jewish Press, 2017) and Sandra Lipton, "She Also Served: Bringing to Light the Contributions of the Canadian Jewish

Servicewomen of World War II," *Canadian Jewish Studies/Études juives canadiennes* 25 (2017): 93-116.

5

Memo to Samuel Bronfman from Oscar Cohen, September 17, 1939, ADCJA, CJC-BC/ZE R02. The CJC divided the country into three sections: east, central, and west. The eastern division included Quebec and everything to the east of it; the central division ran from north of Toronto (including Camp Borden) and included all Toronto and southwestern Ontario, while the western division included Manitoba and all areas west of it.

6

The WVEC did organize and coordinate its work with smaller groups such as individual synagogue sisterhoods, but larger national organizations such as Hadassah and the National Council of Jewish Women did not come under its aegis generally, though they did often work together.

7

Letter from Bertha Allen to Mrs. B. Rosenberg, November 11, 1940, Ontario Jewish Archives (hereafter OJA), CJC WEC, Box 1, Shelf 20-2, File 155. The work that the Sinais were asked to take on was supplying needed items such as glasses, towels, and sheets for the hospital.

8

"Resolutions Adopted at the 5th Annual Regional Conference of the Canadian Jewish Congress (Central Division)," January 7, 1940, ADCJA, CJC-BC/ZE R02.

9

James Walker, "Claiming Equality for Canadian Jewry: The Struggle for Inclusion, 1930-1945," *Nazi Germany, Canadian Responses: Confronting Antisemitism in the Shadow of War*, ed. L. Ruth Klein, (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012): 239; Gerald Tulchinsky, *Branching Out: The Transformation of the Canadian Jewish Community* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998): 212.

10

Minutes of the WVEC of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Central Division, March 19, 1941, OJA, Fonds 52, Series 7, File 3. The minutes include an itemized list of things to be included in the comfort boxes.

11

National Council of Jewish Women 50th Anniversary Book, 1897-1947, OJA, Fonds 52, Series 6, File 3. Boxes were sent every other month. In intervening months the WVEC sent each soldier 300 cigarettes.

12

Letter from Isaac Rose to Rosalie Phillips, July 6, 1944, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, box 18, File 19.

13

"Toys Sent Overseas," *Montreal Gazette*, November 30, 1944.

14

Quoted in "Women's War Efforts Committee," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, January 29, 1943, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, box 18, file 22.

15

Federated Jewish Women of Vancouver, B.C., "Report of Activities, May 20th 1943," ADCJA, CJC Collections, ZA1943, Box 6, File 74. The Federated Jewish Women of Vancouver, formed in 1940, was an umbrella organization of all the women's groups in Vancouver. However, its work was at least partially funded by the CJC, and it reported to the CJC. See also a letter from Lottie Levinson, Secretary of the WEC, Canadian Jewish Congress, British Columbia Branch, to H.R. Moscoe, Chair of the National War Efforts Committee, that details the women's groups and the need for funding assistance from the CJC. They needed assistance because the Vancouver Jewish community was not big enough to support the comfort boxes project for all Jewish soldiers stationed in British Columbia, as the province hosted a large number of soldiers since it was the embarkation point for the Pacific theatre. Lottie Levinson to H.R. Moscoe, November 3, 1943, ADCJA CJC Collections, ZA1943, Box 6, File 74.

16

Undated Special Bulletin on Furnishing Project from the Canadian Jewish Congress, ca.1943, CJC Collections, ZA1943, box 6, file 70.

17

Undated CJC War Efforts Bulletin, ca. 1943, ADCJA, CJC Collections, ZA1943, Box 6, File 70.

18

See for example, a letter from Bertha Allen to Mrs. J. Granatstein, in which Mrs. Granatstein is asked if the Holy Blossom Temple Sisterhood would be interested in sponsoring the 'Sergeant's Mess, #5 Initial Training School, Belleville", after the Temple outfitted a similar room for the Air Force. Bertha Allen to J. Granatstein, OJA, RG297, WEC, Box 4, Shelf 22-5, File 222.

19

Bessner, *Double Threat*, 2.

20

Gurston Allen, "What Jewish Women Here Are Doing To Help With The War," *Toronto Hebrew Journal*, n.d., ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, Box 18, File 6.

21

It is difficult to find definitive information on how the WWEC was organized, as I have yet to discover any sort of organizational flowchart. It is evident that each division of CJC had its own WWEC as there are existing meeting minutes from each, as well as city and town committee minutes.

22

Annual Report of the Women's War Efforts Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Western Division, December 1943, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1 box 18, file 21.

23

Pierson, *'They're Still Women After All'*: 35. The CWVS was later absorbed into the Women's Voluntary Service Division of the Department of National War Services. See Pierson, *They're Still Women After All*, 36-37.

24

Letter from Stella MacKenzie to Bertha Allen, November 3, 1941, OJA, RG297, CJC WEC, Box 2, Shelf 20-2, File 108.

25

Barbara Dundas and Dr. Serge Durlinger, "The Canadian Women's Army Corps, 1941-1946," Canadian War Museum, <http://www.warmuseum.ca/learn/dispatches/the-canadian-womens-army-corps-1941-1946/#tabs>, accessed September 9, 2017.

26

Women's War Efforts Committee Central Division meeting minutes, October 9, 1940, OJA, CJC WEC, RG297, Box 1, Shelf 20-2, File 170.

27

Ibid.

28

Ibid. There seems to be very little written on the CWSF, but a 1941 article in *Maclean's* lists the CWSF and the CATS as two separate groups, and a 1940 article in *The Georgetown Herald* states that the CWSF was then located only in Toronto, while the CATS was a national organization that had chapters across the country. See "Women in Uniform," *Maclean's*, August 1, 1941, <http://archive.macleans.ca/article/1941/8/1/women-in-uniform> and "Timely Topics for Women," *The Georgetown Herald*, October 16, 1940, <http://images.ourontario.ca/Partners/HHPL/HHPL000090490p0003f.pdf>.

29

Speech by Ethel Ostry, December 9, 1940, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, box 18, File 7.

30

Pamela Sugiman, "'Life is Sweet': Vulnerability and Composure in the Wartime Narratives of Japanese Canadians," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2009): 195-196. Japanese Canadian men were only allowed to enlist again after January 1945, and only because the British government asked that they be permitted because they were needed as interpreters in the Asian theatre. In the case of the First World War, James W. St. G. Walker argues the same process of trying to prove loyalty was evidenced by Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Black Canadian men who enlisted. See James W. St.G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *The Canadian Historical Review*, 70, no.1 (1989): 1-26.

31

Dionne Brand, "We Weren't Allowed to Go Into Factory Work Until Hitler Started the War': The 1920s to the 1940s" in *We're Rooted Here and they Can't Pull Us Up: Essays in African Canadian Women's History*, ed. Peggy Bristow (Toronto: University of Toronto Press: 1994): 186.

32

In the Toronto Centre alone, over 1200 women volunteered during the Centre's three years of operation. See "600,000 Guests is Club's Record in Three Years," *Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 3, 1945.

33

Memo on the Women's Activities in War Efforts Programme, November 25, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, Box 6, File 74.

34

Ibid.

35

"Canadian Jewry and the War Effort," pamphlet published by the Canadian Jewish Congress Central Division, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 71.

36

"The Story of the National Council of Jewish Women," OJA, Fonds 38, National Council of Jewish Women, Box 10, Shelf 37-7, File 8. The council house was also used by the WWEC to pack the comfort boxes.

37

Minutes of the joint meeting between members of the local Religious Committee and Executive of the Service Men's Centre, January 11, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 67.

38

Memo from H. R. Moscoe to Saul Hayes, March 12, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 65B. The CJC War Efforts Committee is not to be confused with the WWEC. The War Efforts Committee was instituted at the very beginning of the War, and was comprised almost exclusively of Jewish male leadership. As I explain below, the WWEC was instituted so that women could do work that the men thought women were better equipped to do.

39

Letter from Sydney Krupp to Saul Hayes, February 25, 1943, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 65B.

40

"Service Club," *New World Illustrated*, July 1943, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, Box 18, File 23. There were also senior hostesses whose job it was to supervise the junior hostesses and to oversee the daily activities of the Centre.

41

Letter from Saul Hayes to Sydney Krupp, Marc, CJC Collections, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 65B.

42

Letter from David Rome to Aaron Feld, November 8, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, Box 6, File 65A. Feld's original letter to Rome giving the reasons why the community wanted to avoid publicity is missing, but the reason seems to be that they felt they were 'just doing their part' for the war effort and this did not deserve any special attention.

43

Letter from H.R. Moscoe to Jennie Brownberg, June 29, 1944, OJA Fonds 69, File 5 (CJC Correspondence). Brownberg was the coordinator of the Halifax Centre, replacing Feld at some point.

44

Keshen, *Saints, Sinners and Soldiers*: 153.

45

Women's War Efforts Committee, Western Division Annual Report for 1943, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC DA18.1, Box 18, File 21.

46

Letter from National Executive Director of the Canadian Jewish Congress (the letter is not signed, but the Executive Director at the time was Saul Hayes) to G. Deas, Registrar, Department of National War Services, March 19, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 65A.

47

Ibid.

48

Ibid.

49

"Confidential and Candid," from Saul Hayes to David Kirsch, November 13, 1942, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, Box 9, File 85.

50

Letter from Emma Stewart to Saul Hayes, October 4, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 65A.

51

Letter from Rosalie Phillips, President of the Women's War Efforts Committee to David Kirsch, Chairman of the War Efforts

Committee, May 17, 1944, in which she outlines how the women have funded the comfort boxes. ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, box 18, file 19.

52

Minutes of the Women's War Efforts Committee, March 19, 1944, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, box 18, file 21.

53

Letter from Rosalie Phillips, President of the Women's War Efforts Committee to David Kirsch, Chairman of the War Efforts Committee, May 17, 1944, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, box 18, file 19.

54

Letter from Rosalie Phillips, President of the CJC eastern division Women's War Efforts Committee to Saul Hayes, Chairman of the War Efforts Committee, May 18, 1945, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, box 18, file 6.

55

Letter from Saul Hayes to Rosalie Phillips, May 23, 1945, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC DA18.1, box 18, file 6.

56

Ibid.

57

Ibid.

58

Letter from Rosalie Phillips to Saul Hayes, May 27, 1945, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC DA18.1, box 18, file 6.

59

Letter from Mrs. L. (Rosalie) Phillips to Saul Hayes, October 11, 1945, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC DA18.1, box 18, file 6. Though it is not explicitly stated, the executive committee mentioned appears to be the executive committee of the Eastern Division WWEC, the committee of which Phillips was chair.

60

"Volunteer 'Pinafore Girls' Hostesses to Servicemen," *Toronto Daily Star*, March 9, 1944, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, Box 18, File 23.

61

"600,000 Guests is Club's Record in Three Years," *Globe and Mail*, December 3, 1945.

62

Minutes of the Women's War Efforts Committee, April 30, 1946, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, Box 18, File 6.

63

"600,000 Guests is Club's Record in Three Years," *Globe and Mail*, December 3, 1945.

64

Undated report of the Women's War Efforts Committee, ADCJA, CJC Collections, WEC, DA18.1, Box 18, File 6.

65

Memorandum of the Canadian Jewish Congress, November 20, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, Box 6, File 74.

66

David Rome, "Canada," *The American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 45, http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1943_1944_6_BritCommonwealth.pdf. Accessed January 4, 2019.

67

"Canadian Jewry and the War Effort," pamphlet published by the Canadian Jewish Congress Central Division, 1943, ADCJA, CJC-ZA1943, box 6, file 71.

68

Walker, "Claiming Equality," 239. For one of the few histories that does mention the work of the WWEC, see Arthur J. Chiel, *The Jews in Manitoba: A Social History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961).

69

Jack Lipinsky, *Imposing their Will: An Organizational History of Jewish Toronto, 1933-1948* (Montreal & Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

70

Pathways to the Present: Canadian Jewry and Canadian Jewish Congress (Toronto: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1986). The book is also somewhat uneven in that each section detailing the history of the various CJC divisions is written by a different author, so while the author of the section on Toronto mentions women active in the WWEC by

name (though neglects to discuss explicitly their extensive work), authors of the other sections do not mention women. The section on Halifax, meanwhile, though it mentions the Servicemen's Centre, attributes it solely to the CJC and does not mention the leading role of the Beth Israel Sisterhood in its foundation or operation. It says only that the CJC opened the Centre in December 1942, even though the hostel was open prior to this date.