

## **Songsters and Preachers: Female Salvationists in Calgary, 1897-1930**

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### ***Calgary's Songsters***

In the heart of downtown Calgary, on the corner of Stephen Avenue Mall and First Street South West, stands an interpretative mural that also functions as a City walking guide. Situated on the site where the first Salvation Army Open-Air evangelistic rally was held in 1887,<sup>1</sup> the mural is dedicated to the *Entertainers*, and contains an illustration of the 1912 Salvation Army Band.<sup>2</sup>

The Stephen Avenue outdoor location was situated adjacent to Boynton Hall, which was in turn the first building rented by the Salvationists in Calgary.<sup>3</sup> The site continued to be used regularly for open-air meetings into the 1900s, and functioned to promote the presence of an Evangelical tradition, which offered spiritual and physical rehabilitation to those who sought assistance through its various programs. Over the years and even to the present, the Army continues to maintain a presence within the Calgary downtown core and to be a “part of the Stephen Avenue activities.”<sup>4</sup>

The inscription on the walking guide pays tribute to some of that early work and commemorates the Salvation Army songsters and band personnel who would meet on a regular basis for worship, song and testimony, in the centre of the rapidly expanding frontier City of Calgary.<sup>5</sup> The mural celebrates the music and entertainment of those weekly marches and meetings led by the band, and acknowledges the Army's contribution to Calgary's early days.

The mural, however, does not present the early Salvationists in their full religious colours. In its early years the Salvation Army was regarded as a flamboyant and unconventional sect. In Calgary, as on every other Salvationist mission field, the Army was aggressive in its activities and encouraged the public profile and participation of its female adherents. Women preached, evangelized, and sang in public, often to hostile, jeering crowds, and it is within the context of the early Salvation Army music ministry that many women found an arena to proclaim their faith. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women, known as “Songsters” or “Hallelujah Lasses,” would have been acknowledged as lay officers, thus in effect, recognized and accredited within their sect as evangelists.<sup>6</sup> As lay officers, these women would have had a regular opportunity to function as exhorters and, if they demonstrated stronger preaching ability, would also have been given the opportunity to preach at the open air meetings.

### ***Sectarian Mandate***

As part of the religious heritage of the Salvation Army, women were from the inception of the movement, officially regarded as equal members. William Booth (1829-1912) and his wife Catherine Mumford Booth (1829-1890) as founders of the Salvation Army, perceived the Army’s mission to be one of evangelism, spiritual and moral restoration, the enhancement of social order and respect for the law.<sup>7</sup> Incorporated within this claim to mission, the Booths held an official platform that advocated personal salvation and practical care, along with compassion and assistance for the needy, all based on New Testament ideals. Within the parameters of this self-proclaimed mandate, both William and Catherine Booth advocated the rights of women to preach, teach and evangelize.

When Catherine Mumford Booth wrote “Female Ministry; or, Woman’s Rights to Preach the Gospel” (c. 1859), she made her platform clear: women were equal in the sight of God, had worked as evangelists in the early church, were equal inheritors of the Spirit of God, and as such should take their rightful, equal place within the Army.<sup>8</sup>

To be historically accurate, however, it would appear that equality was never fully realized by female Salvationists within the ranks and on the mission field. Nevertheless, it is correct to state that the ministry of women in the Army during its formative years and into the present indicates that they

have been able to play an influential role and exert a public presence within the movement.

In the early years the Salvation Army offered the working class, and sometimes the middle-class woman, an opportunity for independence and responsibility within a new religious institution.<sup>9</sup> In London, Ontario, where the Army was first established in 1882,<sup>10</sup> this liberating influence was noted early in the history of the movement. In 1884, a columnist for the *London Advertiser* reported that an old lady was overheard to state: "There's a brave lot of lasses in the ranks, and they walk just as bravely as the men, and take just as big a step."<sup>11</sup>

### ***The Army's Invasion of Calgary***

By the early summer of 1887, the Salvation Army had reached Calgary. On 21 August 1887, they marched down Stephen Avenue, boldly singing and with banners waving. The Salvationists sang emotionally charged hymns and were accompanied by fiddles, tambourines and a drum. The *War Cry* stated that the music was impressive and that there was "none so tuneful."<sup>12</sup> Four Salvationist officers were mentioned in the same report published in the 17 September 1887 edition of the *War Cry* concerning this event. The officers were Staff Captain Young, Captain Dawson, Captain Mercer and Lieutenant Patterson. Captain Helen Mercer was the only commissioned female officer in the group.<sup>13</sup>

The months from September to November 1887 were considered to have been very successful for the Army and twenty-four soldiers enrolled in the first Corps,<sup>14</sup> which was named the Calgary Citadel Corps.<sup>15</sup> During this time, the Army lasses or songsters were objects of curiosity and proved to be an effective means of evangelism for the Calgary audiences. It is recorded that "Army girls sang their salvation with bright enthusiasm, cultivating the interest of the youth, and with their earnest heart appeals won many for the Saviour."<sup>16</sup> Two of these young women, known only by their married names, later became leaders within the Calgary Citadel Corps. One woman, known as Mrs. Charlie Jackson, was acknowledged as a pioneer Salvationist in the west. She served in the Army for forty-seven years, and rose to become an officer in its ranks.<sup>17</sup> The second woman was Mrs. Brown, who was accorded no given or Christian name. This lady was made a Rescue Sergeant after only six months as a soldier because "she was of a sympathetic nature."<sup>18</sup>

### *Early Female Leadership in Calgary*

The Army kept up its aggressive evangelistic campaign in Calgary and in one report circa 1888, from a male Salvationist known as Captain Desson, it is mentioned that on Sundays there were four marches per day.<sup>19</sup> Facts surrounding the reception of the Army and its practices during this time are varied. In one instance in the early days, the record indicates that Boynton Hall was filled almost every night for indoor meetings. The same report indicates that the open-air meetings were often boisterous with “a hostile element mingling with the crowd.”<sup>20</sup> Yet the *War Cry* reported that the press and the people appeared to welcome the Salvationists and that “the kindness of the western folk could hardly be surpassed.”<sup>21</sup> Whatever the facts that lie behind these reports, it is clear that Calgary as a frontier city, was never hostile to the Army. Indeed, an English politician who was visiting Calgary in 1888, wrote home stating that “it would evidently fare ill with any cowboy or idler who ventured to say a rude word to any of the Hallelujah Lasses.”<sup>22</sup>

It was not, however, only the Hallelujah Lasses, who enjoyed popularity or a degree of influence within the community. In a *War Cry* report circa 1949 there is a list identifying the commissioned officers stationed at Calgary Citadel Corps from 1887 until 1946. In this context, it should be noted that a Corps Officer is by definition a pastor of a congregation or corps.<sup>23</sup> Over the fifty-nine years covered there are fifty-four officers named with thirteen of these being single female Corps Officers or pastors.<sup>24</sup> In addition to this, of the forty remaining male officers the majority listed would also have been married as the Army placed great value upon the joint ministry of a married couple. Many of the wives were also officers but were not listed in their own right. The women merely took the name and rank of their spouse, thus losing their own separate title while continuing in the work of the Army.<sup>25</sup>

In Calgary, the female officers, songsters and band members<sup>26</sup> continued to play and lead in worship, and in 1892 the Calgary Citadel Band was founded.<sup>27</sup> The work and influence of the Army grew rapidly during the period from 1887 until 1940, and the presence of female leaders was evident at every stage of its development. Landmarks in the establishment of religious communities, together with the development of social and medical services, all detail the major contribution made by female Salvationists.

By 1901, Ensign Annie Taylor, who was the Officer-in-Charge or Corps Officer, purchased the property that was designated to become the site

of the Calgary Citadel building, situated in downtown Calgary. The Citadel was eventually completed in 1910.<sup>28</sup> Records indicate that Taylor was assisted by Sergeant Major K. Fullerton in the purchase of the property.<sup>29</sup> This legal transaction demonstrates an interesting historical dimension. Women in Alberta, and throughout the Dominion during the first three decades of the twentieth century, did not have the same legal rights as did their male counterparts not even being considered full persons under the law until 1929. Ironically, in addition to this legal reality, when Annie Taylor purchased the property on behalf of the Salvation Army, she was also at a disadvantage due to the fact that she did not possess suffrage rights in the Northwest Territories or the Dominion.<sup>30</sup> That she, as Officer-in-Charge, was given the authority to enter into this transaction on behalf of the Army testifies to the fact that as a person and a leader, Taylor's authority was recognized and her judgment respected. That Sergeant Major Fullerton assisted her in the purchase speaks more to the existing legal inequality and prevailing social prejudice of the time rather than to a display of the Army's sexist bias.

In the same year of 1901 another woman, known only as Mrs. Campbell, opened the first Salvation Army Sunday School in Calgary. Mrs. Campbell, who had herself been a convert from Methodism, joined the Army because it projected itself as "Fighting Sin and the Devil." Mrs. Campbell was by trade a seamstress and she modified one of her dresses into a Salvation Army uniform. Because uniforms were not standardized at this time, she wore a flat hat rather than the regular heavier peak bonnet worn by many Salvationist women.<sup>31</sup>

The Sunday School opened with twelve children, some of whom were illiterate. Using a tried and true Methodist approach, Mrs. Campbell taught them to read using the Bible as the teaching aid. The Sunday School proved to be a great success and it soon became necessary for her to enlist the help of several other members of the Corps as teachers.<sup>32</sup>

Mrs. Campbell was also the first person to organize the League of Mercy in Calgary. The League's function was to respond to the spiritual and social needs of the community and initially was consisted of eleven members, both female and male. The mandate of the League was to visit the sick and those in prison, and to help these people according to their needs.<sup>33</sup> In 1915, Adjutant and Mrs. John Merrett, together with Mrs. Elford, Mrs. Stunell and Mrs. Jackson were also listed in its ranks.<sup>34</sup> From its inception,

the League of Mercy was a highly respected and successful organization and is still an identifiable ministry in Calgary.

In October 1904, Mrs. Adjunct Adams and Ensign Kane (later Mrs. C. Bishop) were the first two social officers (social workers) to arrive in the City of Calgary. These women introduced one of the most important branches of Salvation Army work in the City,<sup>35</sup> which was a home for unmarried mothers. Later, with the assistance of a prominent Calgarian named W.H. Cushing, the women, negotiating under the same legal handicaps as had Ensign Taylor, secured property for a hospital and rescue home. This property was later used as an Eventide Home for elderly women.<sup>36</sup>

Further outreach through institution building came with the opening of the Children's Home in Calgary in 1908. Four Salvationists are named as the officers responsible for its establishment and one of these officers was Captain Lizzie Newell, who later married a Major Fullerton and hence became Mrs. Major Fullerton.<sup>37</sup>

By October 1912, increased membership led to a second Corps being established in East Calgary. The Corps was led by Captain Lizzie Newell and Lieutenant Mardall.<sup>38</sup> Later, in 1914, the Corps was transferred to the Hillhurst district in the City's northwest.<sup>39</sup>

By 1924, the proven success of the Salvation Army's social work program and its hospital care for women, necessitated the relocation of the original facility to larger premises. The work with unmarried mothers and the growing demands for the Army's high quality medical maternity care eventually led to the opening of the famous Grace Maternity Hospital and Girls' Home. This facility was always under the charge of a high-ranking female Army officer.

In addition to all of this work, female preachers, leaders and songsters also participated in other aspects of church life. These women organized groups such as the Citadel Home League in 1917 as an outreach program for women and children, and also became involved in the Scouting and Guiding movements. Further, female Salvationists became involved in women's organizations outside of their religious communities, such as the Calgary Local Council of Women and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>40</sup>

### *Specific Profiles*

It is evident from this information that Salvation Army women contributed to the formation of the social infrastructure of the City of Calgary, and more broadly, to the building of Alberta society. Against the Calgary backdrop specific information regarding the contribution of several women is available through which to demonstrate this personal dynamic.

There were woman like Millicent Shaw, who was born in Crossgate, Yorkshire in 1869. Millicent emigrated to Canada with her husband George McElroy in 1911, and the couple settled in Calgary that same year.<sup>41</sup> George McElroy had previously been the Band Master of Belfast Citadel and Millicent was a famous Salvation Army musician in Northern England.<sup>42</sup> Millicent McElroy played the cornet and was known as “the lady who played the cornet.”<sup>43</sup>

In Calgary, Millicent McElroy participated in the Saturday and Sunday night open-air services, playing, singing and preaching. She was also an involved member of the community and a veteran campaigner, working on the influential Calgary Local Council of Women for women’s rights and improvement of social conditions. In the context of women’s legal recognition, she campaigned alongside Nellie McClung, on the issue of recognition for women as full persons under Canadian law, which later culminated in the Person’s Case decision in 1929. In addition to all this, Millicent McElroy was a leading member of the Hillhurst WCTU in the campaign for a “dry Alberta.” She was also a dedicated supporter of the Red Cross during the First World War and developed a deep compassion for those affected by war, either as a soldier or as a member of a soldier’s family.

During the First and Second World Wars, Millicent McElroy regularly waited at the Calgary downtown Canadian Pacific Railroad train station for the Thursday train that brought the troops home during and after the war. She affectionately called the soldiers “the boys” and when the men disembarked from the train she would play rousing tunes to greet them. Throughout both wars it is reported that she never missed a train, even when on one occasion during World War Two an irate station master tried unsuccessfully to evict her from the platform. The event caused such an uproar in the community that the President of CPR granted her free access to the premises to play for the soldiers. The CPR President also gave her an open train ticket to compensate for the unpleasant event. For her work with the returning soldiers after World War One, Millicent McElroy received the King George

Medal. Later in 1935, she was the recipient of the prestigious Salvation Army Colonel's Medal and in that same year was awarded the Queen Mary Silver Jubilee Medal.<sup>44</sup>

Millicent McElroy was deeply committed to the care of war veterans by organizing weekly church services for the soldiers who were admitted into the long-term care facility at the Colonel Belcher Hospital in Calgary. She was also Chaplain of the Calgary Canadian Legion's main branch and held this position until her death in 1950 at the age of 81.<sup>45</sup>

Another dedicated Salvationist was a woman named Mrs. Lilly Williamson. Williamson was a Young People's Sergeant Major in the early 1920s, attached to the Hillhurst Corps, and she was influential in youth work for over fifty years. She was a talented, athletic woman, who encouraged children in sports and recreational activities. During the depression, Williamson organized outings for children who could not otherwise have afforded trips to places like the Cave and Basin in Banff. Mrs. Williamson was also a dedicated worker in the League of Mercy and active in her local community. Of note was the fact that she was a magician and the only female member of the exclusive Magic Club of Calgary. She had been invited by the Club to become a member and felt honoured by this recognition. Mrs. Williamson, however, worried that she might compromise her religious ideals in some way as a member and so stipulated that she would only use the magic tricks for Sunday School work to illustrate Bible lessons. To Mrs. Williamson's credit, another story is also part of her history. Mrs. Williamson had a sister who became pregnant out of wedlock. The sister gave birth to a little boy and abandoned him. Mrs. Williamson took the baby in and raised him as her own son. Even in later life, although he knew his origins, the man always affectionately referred to Mrs. Williamson as "mother."

In the 1930s, the Children Home was well-established and there was an unmarried female officer in her fifties, identified only as Major Haywood who was serving there. A tragedy occurred at the Grace Hospital in Calgary when a woman died shortly after delivering twin boys. Unable to care for the children, the father asked Major Haywood take them. As the Army at that time did not have extensive facilities to care for children under the age of three, Haywood declined. The father returned a few days later desperate for help. Major Haywood decided to care for the twins personally and stated, "I will take them and raise them until they are three years old." She kept her promise and for the next three years she took the little boys with her on most of her duties. When the twins reached the age of three Major Haywood gave



up her charge and the boys were placed for adoption.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, no record exists of how Haywood felt when she parted with her little charges.

### ***Historical Influence***

As observed earlier, true equality was never fully achieved for female Salvationists in the early years, yet it is clear that they exercised strong leadership and exhibited tremendous dedication. From the early days in Calgary when they participated in loud and flamboyant evangelistic marches, to the time of building religious organizations, their presence was always visible. Sadly, but consistent with the problems surrounding the documentation of women's religious history in general, their work has been largely overlooked. However, what is remarkable is that so much of their work has withstood the rigours of historical oversight and inadequate reporting. The women were dedicated to a religious cause and this gave them identity, self-esteem and a substantial amount of authority. Within their religious group they experienced a degree of emancipation that many of their sisters in other denominations were still working to achieve in the 1940s.

What makes the Calgary connection so intriguing is the fact that their sect allowed them to express their strength, creativity and independence with an amount of freedom that sometimes bordered on the flamboyant and theatrical. In the early years, Calgary was a frontier city that experienced rapid growth, booming populations, and massive waves of immigration and migration as the West was settled. Despite the sanction sometimes rendered by members of "polite" society, the female Salvationists contributed to the building of the West, and their legacy is very evident in the City of Calgary. They were often the unrecognized but indispensable co-builders in a religious organization that is still respected for its dedication, courage and compassion today. With all the good will in the world, the Stephen Avenue mural's tribute to the *Entertainers* could not even skim the surface of these women's legacies.

### ***Endnotes***

1. Letter from Major John E. Lake to Lieut. Col. Howard Moore, 29 September 1991, The Salvation Army Public Relations Department, Calgary.

2. *Press Release*, 19 September 1991, The Salvation Army Public Relations Department, Calgary. See also Letter from Major John E. Lake to Lieut. Col. Howard Moore.
3. Boynton Hall was rented as the first Army hall and was used for indoor meetings (*Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army in Calgary from 1887-1974* [Calgary: The Salvation Army, Public Relations Department, 1974], 4).
4. Letter from Major John E. Lake to Lieut. Col. Howard Moore
5. Jean Leslie, *Glimpses of Calgary Past* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd., 1994), 7. Calgary was incorporated as a city in 1894. In 1874, Fort Calgary had been established as a North-West Mounted Police fort. The settlement grew rapidly and was incorporated as a town in 1884 (Virginia Byfield, "New Year's Eve, 1899," *Alberta in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Vol. 1 [Edmonton: United Western Communications Ltd.], 14-17).
6. Robert Collins, *The Holy War of Sally Ann: The Salvation Army In Canada* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984), 179.
7. Catherine Booth, *The Salvation Army in Relation to Church and State, and Other Addresses* (London: S.W. Partridge and Co., 1883), 6.
8. Catherine Booth, *Female Ministry* (London: Morgan & Chase n.d. [c. 1859]; reprint, New York: The Salvation Army Supplies Printing and Publishing Department, 1975); and Collins, *The Holy War of Sally Ann*, 88, 97, 104, 105.
9. Diane Winston, *Red-Hot and Righteous: The Urban Religion of the Salvation Army* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 51.
10. R.G. Moyles, *The Blood and Fire in Canada: A History of the Salvation Army in the Dominion 1882-1976* (Toronto: Peter Martin and Associates Limited, 1977), 7.
11. *London Advertiser*, 18 April 1884.
12. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army in Calgary from 1887-1974* (Calgary: The Salvation Army, Public Relations Department, 1974), 6.
13. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 4.
14. *The Salvation Army Glenmore Temple Band – History*; see <http://www.sallynetalta.com/glenmoretempleband/gtbhistory.htm>
15. *The Salvation Army Glenmore Temple Band – History*.

16. *The Salvation Army Glenmore Temple Band – History*.
17. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 23.
18. “Mrs. Brown, Rescue Sergeant, Calgary Citadel,” *War Cry*, 3 June 1893, G. S. Railton Heritage Centre Archives, Toronto.
19. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 5.
20. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 4.
21. Report from Staff Captain Young, *War Cry*, 24 September 1887.
22. Moyles, *The Blood and Fire in Canada*, 26. Moyles does not give a primary source reference but merely indicates a quotation.
23. Salvation Army Terminology; see <http://www.salvationarmy.ca/Information/ArmyTerminology/default.asp>
24. “List of Officers Stationed at Calgary Citadel Corps Since Opening of Work, 21 August 1887,” *War Cry*, c. 1949.
25. Collins, *The Holy War of Sally Ann*, 87.
26. Men and women were active as band members and musicians.
27. *The Salvation Army, Glenmore Temple Band - History*.
28. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 10.
29. *Points of Interest* (n.p., n.d.), Glenmore Temple Archives, Calgary.
30. Women obtained the provincial vote in Alberta in 1916. In the Dominion of Canada, they obtained the right to vote in federal elections in 1918.
31. Salvation Army Research Project, March 2001, G.S. Railton Heritage Centre Archives, Toronto.
32. Salvation Army Research Project, March 2001.
33. Salvation Army Research Project, March 2001.
34. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 14.
35. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 14.
36. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 8.
37. *Points of Interest*.

38. *Points of Interest*.
39. *Calgary Glenmore Presents the History of the Salvation Army*, 13.
40. Interview with Ada Kelter, 24 April 2001, Glenmore Temple, Calgary. Ada was born 4 May 1914, Calgary, and was the granddaughter of Millicent Shaw McElroy.
41. Interview with Ada Kelter.
42. Pamphlet advertizing Miss M. Shaw, *Otley and Wharefedale Mission*. The date of Miss Shaw's performance is listed as Sunday, 4 January 1891 (From the personal archives of Ada Kelter).
43. From the personal archives of Ada Kelter.
44. From the personal archives of Ada Kelter.
45. From the personal archives of Ada Kelter.
46. Interview with Ethel Garnet.