

Carving Out a Past: The Canadian Nurses' Association War Memorial

KATHRYN McPHERSON*

Nurses are the one exception to the lack of female figures corresponding to the “ordinary man” in monuments of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Canadian Nurses' Association War Memorial, unveiled in 1926 in honour of the 49 Canadian nurses killed in World War I, was conceived by the artist as a tribute to generic feminine caregiving. A second more complex story is told in the symbolism of the monument, which reveals that nurses' unique position lay not only in their distinctive uniform, their control over male bodies, their racial and ethnic privilege, and their contribution to the colonial, imperial, and national accomplishments of Canada, but also in the inclusion of nursing in masculine historical narratives.

Les infirmières sont la seule exception à l'absence de figures féminines correspondant à l'« homme ordinaire » sur les monuments du XIX^e et du début du XX^e siècles. Le monument aux morts de l'Association des infirmières et infirmiers du Canada, dévoilé en 1926 en l'honneur des 49 infirmières tuées durant la Première Guerre mondiale, fut conçu par l'artiste en hommage au secours type des femmes. Une deuxième histoire, plus complexe, se dégage du symbolisme de ce monument, à savoir que la position unique des infirmières tenait non seulement à leur uniforme caractéristique, à leur contrôle sur le corps des hommes, à leur privilège racial et ethnique et à leur contribution aux faits d'armes coloniaux, impériaux et nationaux du Canada, mais également à l'inclusion de la profession d'infirmière dans les récits historiques masculins.

RECENT RESEARCH in the history of monuments and popular culture has emphasized the significance of gender in understanding how and why commemorative statues were conceived and constructed. As Marina Warner's *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* convincingly argues, although women are rarely the subjects of public monuments, feminine symbolism serves critical allegorical functions in the iconography of Western culture. Warner writes, “[the] central assumption that an abstract concept — liberty, justice or victory — can be appropriately

* Kathryn McPherson is an associate professor of history at York University.

expressed by a female figure, remains in force today”, but notes that “even if executed with a high degree of naturalism, female figures representing an ideal or an abstraction hardly ever intersect with real individual women.”¹ Historian Tori Smith has added that, when high-profile women such as Queen Victoria met the masculine standards of political greatness and were rewarded with statues in their honour, their presence in the public domain was legitimized by maternal and domestic signifiers.² They were “commemorated mainly as a wife and mother, not as political figures”.³

However circumscribed the role of elite or symbolic women in public commemorations may be, images of non-elite women are almost non-existent. There is certainly no female equivalent to the “ordinary man” genre of monument building that dominated nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century public memorials in Europe and North America.⁴ The absence of female figures in those statues can be explained in part by the fact that many were erected to honour the war dead, and not until the late twentieth century have women participated directly in military endeavours.⁵ One exception to this gendered pattern of memorializing ordinary citizens is evident in public representations of nurses. Images of nurses adorn the external façades of buildings, appear in church stained glass windows, and are included in war memorials. Some of the women commemorated, like Belgium nurse Edith Cavell, could be classified as “famous individuals”, although how widely they would be known outside nursing circles is not clear. But others are representations of ordinary and unnamed nurses, such as the four carved figures that adorned each corner of Vancouver’s Georgia Medical-Dental building. When the building was detonated in the late 1980s the only parts of the lovely structure that were saved were the four nurses.⁶

The willingness of communities, artists, and governments to use nursing imagery in public spaces is the result of several factors. Nurses’ distinctive

1 Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), pp. 17, 28.

2 Tori Smith, “‘Almost Pathetic ... But Also Very Glorious’: The Consumer Spectacle of the Diamond Jubilee”, *Histoire sociale/Social History*, vol. 29, no. 57 (November 1996), pp. 333–356.

3 John R. Gillis, “Introduction, Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship” in John Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 10.

4 Alan Young, “‘We throw the torch’: Canadian Memorials of the Great War and the Mythology of Heroic Sacrifice”, *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (Winter 1989–1990), pp. 5–28; Daniel J. Sherman, “Art, Commerce, and the Production of Memory in France after World War I”, *Gender and History*, vol. 8, no. 1 (April 1996), pp. 82–107.

5 Gillis states: “As for the women who had contributed so much to the world’s first total war effort, there would be no monuments. Their assigned role was still, as it was in the private cults of the dead in the nineteenth century, that of chief mourners and mediums.” Gillis, *Commemorations*, p. 12.

6 Preserving the carved images was a gesture designed to win some public goodwill given the community outcry over the demolition of what some considered an historic building. Other images include the stained glass window in Vancouver’s St. Paul’s Church, the bust of Emily Edwards in the Vancouver City Archives, and the memorials to Jeanne Mance in Montreal.

uniforms make them easily identifiable, and therefore artistically useful, images. More importantly, until World War II most trained nurses worked outside hospitals, in private home care or in public health. As public women, seen on the streets, in clinics, and even in that most masculine of social spaces, the military, nurses' presence in public was consistent with their presence in the daily life of a community. These women who worked out of the domestic sphere still remained associated with stereotypically feminine activities, with the intimate, personal, nurturing work of caring for the sick. Their presence in the public space, whether in their daily work or in memorials, did not fundamentally challenge prevailing perceptions of appropriate femininity. Nurses' inclusion in public commemorations was legitimized by the same logic that allowed nurses themselves to transcend conventional female domestic space.

Nowhere was this more evident than in Canada's capital city, where nurses have garnered a prestigious place on Parliament Hill. There, the Canadian Nurses' Association (CNA) War Memorial stands as public testimonial to the 49 Canadian nurses killed in World War I. The process whereby the memorial was funded, designed, and erected has been chronicled elsewhere,⁷ but the statue itself warrants critical analysis. The War Memorial tells two, apparently contradictory, stories. In doing so, the monument relied upon and in fact cemented a particular analysis of nursing's past.

The memorial was unveiled in 1926 after more than five years of fundraising and political manoeuvring. In the years immediately following the Armistice of 1918 CNA provincial affiliates pondered how best to remember their fallen sisters. Some favoured an endowed chair at one of the few university nursing education programmes, others a post-graduate scholarship programme, and others a benefit fund for disabled nurses. After substantial debate, the decision to erect a statue in honour of nursing's victims of war prevailed. Initial estimates for a monument suggested the figure of \$65,000 was needed. With that sizeable target in place, local nursing groups began their fundraising efforts, although in the end only \$32,000 was required. Meanwhile, the national memorial committee faced the equally daunting task of negotiating space on Parliament Hill and commissioning designs.⁸

Throughout those negotiations, the CNA relied upon well-connected male professionals, capitalists, and artists. Toronto architect Frank Darling (one of the three professional assessors to the Canadian Battlefields' Memorials Commission) and an advisory committee of prominent Toronto men (that until 1924 included artist Lawren Harris) convinced Prime Minister William

7 Natalie Reigler, "The Work and Networks of Jean I. Gunn, Superintendent of Nurses, Toronto General Hospital 1913–1941: A Presentation of Some Issues in Nursing During Her Lifetime, 1882–1941" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1992), chap. 9, "A Memorial to the 'Service of Humanity'".

8 *Ibid.*

Lyon Mackenzie King that the War Memorial belonged not in Major's Hill Park adjacent to the Parliament Buildings, but in the heart of the Centre Block itself, in the Hall of Fame. To secure that location, the CNA assured King that the bas-relief memorial would revolve around an historical theme, for which the Hall of Fame was designed.⁹ With the details of the location confirmed, the CNA proceeded with the competition for designs. The adjudication committee (which included James Hervey MacDonald of the Group of Seven) selected veteran sculptor George William Hill, well known for the many war memorials he had already designed.¹⁰

When the memorial was presented to the public in August 1926 the bas-relief carving received immediate praise from the many nurses across the nation. Photographs of the memorial soon began to appear in nurses' local fundraising campaigns, on calendars, and on programme covers for local nursing festivities and graduation ceremonies. The appeal of the elegant image lay in its apparent celebration of nursing as women's work. The two sides of the statue depicted two crucial moments in Canadian nursing history: the nuns who provided the first health services to the fledgling communities of seventeenth-century New France and the nursing sisters whose ministrations to Canadian troops in World War I made them the first women to have a formal role in the Canadian Armed Forces.

Linking these two sets of images is the female figure of Humanity. Dressed in Greco-Roman or classical garb, Humanity's femininity underscores the sex-specific nature of the activities depicted. Humanity's outstretched arms bridge the three centuries that had passed between 1639 and 1914; holding the Caduceus in her left hand, she looks and reaches right to contemporary Canadian society and the women who served it. The Caduceus (traditional symbol of medicine) is critical to Humanity's allegorical function. If Warner is right that allegorical female figures were distinguished by "devices" such as "improbable nudity, heroic scale, wings, [and] unlikely attributes",¹¹ then the male symbol of medicine combined with the classical dress ensures that Humanity is not mistaken for a real woman.

By the 1920s viewers would have been familiar with the allegorical functions images like Humanity filled. As Serafina Bathrick's article "The Female Colossus: The Body as Facade and Threshold" demonstrates, female figures were often used in nineteenth-century carvings like the larger-than-life statues that adorned the World's Fairs in Philadelphia in 1876 and Chicago in 1893. According to Bathrick, in the century that witnessed the transformation of artisanal or handcraft production into industrial and mass

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Hill was well known for his statues of political figures such as George Brown (1913) and D'Arcy McGee (1922), but made his career from commissions for World War I memorials. By the end of his career he had designed nearly a dozen. Agnes Joynes, "Sculpture of G. W. Hill", *Saturday Night*, May 14, 1938, p. 2.

¹¹ Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 28.

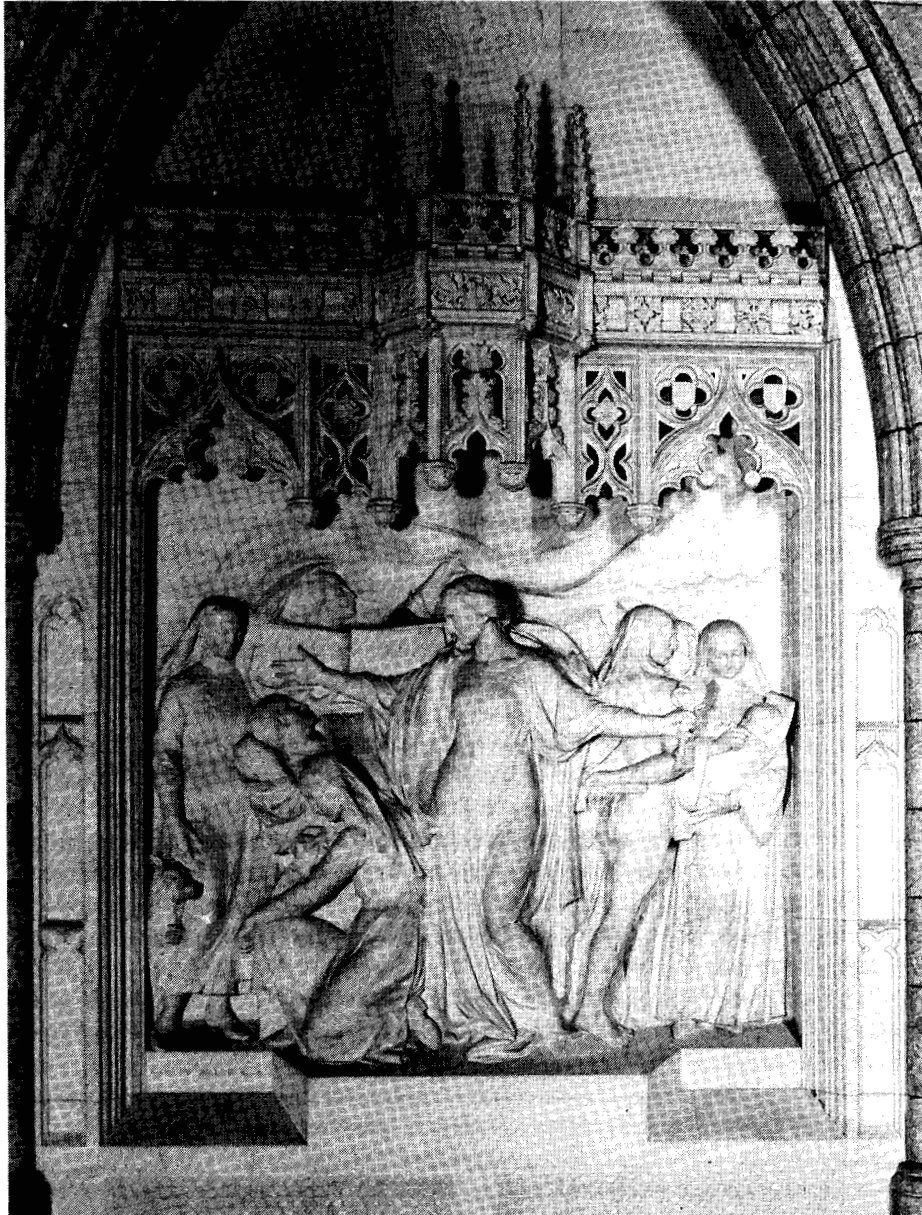


Figure 1 The Canadian Nurses' Association War Memorial (CNA Archives).

production, the figure of “Woman”, reproduced in Greco-Roman style, served important ideological needs.

As if to naturalize the machine-made object, women’s capacity for reproduction provides the manufactured image with an artisan trace and an aura to convince us that we still experience culture “first hand”.... As columnar statue the monumental Woman appeared to represent a more earthbound nurturant guardian whose symbolic presence in the new industrial city or exposition anchored it in an ancient culture.¹²

The War Memorial’s rendition of female Humanity appears to fulfil similar functions. True, the War Memorial was constructed in the 1920s, when the nineteenth-century prescriptions against women in public had been challenged successfully by the women’s movement, suffrage, the new paid work options for women, and the declining birth rate, not to mention sexually liberated flappers. But calling upon nineteenth-century imagery of Woman as symbolic reproducer of culture may have appeared necessary to the artist and his audience precisely because in the interwar years the older notions of public and private spheres for men and women were eroding. In an era when Canadians worried (again) over the significance of the “new woman”, the memorial’s use of conventional female imagery reminded the audience of the long tradition of female nurturing that superseded the more recent challenges to gender relations.¹³

That Hill conceived of the memorial as a tribute to generic feminine caregiving was made clear in his interpretive statement. The text carved at the bottom of the statue explained: “Led by the spirit of humanity across the seas woman by her tender ministrations to those in need has given to the world the example of an heroic service embracing three centuries of Canadian history.” That “nurse” should be read “woman” was reiterated by Mackenzie King whose message to the CNA at the time of the unveiling (King did not attend himself) stated: “It is most fitting that the first place in the nation’s Hall of Fame should be accorded to a memorial commemorative of the heroism, devotion and sacrifice of women.” The Prime Minister continued:

It will be a source of pride and joy to all that, in commemorating the immortal service of those of their number who lost their lives in the Great War, the Nurses Association have sought to disclose the larger service, which from

12 Serafina K. Bathrick, “The Female Colossus: The Body as Facade and Threshold” in Jane Gaines and Charlotte Herzog, eds., *Fabrications: Costume and the Female Body* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 79–99.

13 For a discussion of women and public space in nineteenth-century America, see Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

earliest days, the women of Canada have rendered in the making of our nation, and to portray, as the Memorial so beautifully does, the international significance of service to humanity regardless of race or creed, or clime.

King was not alone in conflating the contribution of nurses with that of Canadian women generally. Newspaper reports of the memorial's unveiling were published in "women's" sections, such as the Toronto *Globe's* "What Women Are Doing" page.¹⁴ Parliamentary tour guides continue to explain the memorial in terms of the tradition of women's healing.

While observers interpreted the War Memorial as a tribute to women's contribution to the Canadian nation, the memorial was telling a second, more complex story. The apparent celebration of the universality of women's work was contradicted by the carving's features that distinguished nurses from other women. The nuns and nurses represented in the statue wear occupationally specific uniforms. Like members of female orders, nurses of the interwar years jealously guarded the right to don the official regalia, a right which only graduates of three-year hospital apprenticeships were granted.

Nurses' differentiation from all women was also signified in the memorial by the relationship of the female figures to their patients. Until the Second World War, nurses were the only group of women invited into the male military establishment and were the only females permitted close to the front lines of battle. Their formal role as caregivers to the nation's armed services was, as the statue suggests, a unique one. The image of the seventeenth-century nun caring for a baby appears more conventionally feminine, and in fact plays upon the iconography of madonna and child. Yet the fact that the child, wrapped on a cradle board, was Iroquoian disrupts the suggestion that nuns shared with other women maternal instincts. Had the nun been interacting with Iroquoian women, the nursing care being provided might have been associated with midwifery. But by depicting the nuns as communicating with Iroquoian warriors, the artist inferred that the nun was caring for the sick, rather than attending a birth. Given the CNA's interwar position on nurse midwives (that obstetrical care was medical work only),¹⁵ the absence of the child's mother freed the nursing profession from linking itself to female reproduction and maternity.

The absence of First Nations women also challenged the universality of nursing as women's work. By portraying the Iroquois turning to nuns for medical aid, the statue implies that comparable services were not available

14 "Marble Memorial for Heroic Nurses" and "Memorial to Nurses Unveiled at Ottawa", *The Globe*, August 24 and 25, 1926. In 1938 *Saturday Night* author Agnes Joynes concluded that Humanity "dominates and unites" the statue. "She holds as a sceptre the caduceus. It is a fitting symbol in a work of this kind." Joynes, "Sculpture of G. W. Hill", p. 2.

15 On the CNA's opposition to the introduction of British-trained nurse-midwives in the years after World War I, see Suzann Buckley, "Ladies or Midwives?" in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979).

from women in their own communities. Like the nursing profession in twentieth-century Canada, which until the 1940s denied most women of colour entry into training programmes or professional associations, the memorial's rendering of nursing's past discounted the healing skills of First Nations women as nursing. Nursing was then not the preserve of women, but of white women representing Western culture.¹⁶

Indeed, by beginning the narrative of Canadian nursing history with the nuns of 1639, the artist and the CNA suggested that an equally important story being told was not just the universality of nursing as women's work, but nurses as participants in colonization and nation-building. As Hill's published "Interpretation of the Sculptured Panel" explained:

The group on the right of the panel represents these noble sisters who at the call of "Humanity" left their native country, France and came to a land of savages to help the sick and needy.... Beside [the nun] are standing the dreaded and treacherous Iroquois, who suspicious and ignorant, were ever ready to return evil for good.

As agents of civilization, nuns brought good to the evil land of savages. So, too, did the nurses of World War I advance the cause of civilization, this time returning to the old world to defend "freedom" and the economic domination and imperial possessions of the allied powers. In this context, the Caduceus was not only a signifier of healing, but a symbol of Western medicine being held out as a weapon against the savagery of the Iroquois.

The sculpture alluded to nation-building in a further way. By uniting the French-Canadian tradition of religious nursing orders with the Canadian Army Medical Corps nurses of World War I, most of whom were English Canadian, the monument suggested the inextricable interconnections between the two founding nations. The two solitudes were linked by the universal Humanity, an image that no doubt appealed to passing politicians struggling with post-conscription-crisis Canada and the tricky political business of balancing the interests of Quebec and Ontario. Of course, artistically and allegorically, Humanity did not mediate between two equal cultures. The figures of New France were tightly grouped, looking inward, and centred around the Caduceus. Humanity's grasp on the Caduceus thus appears to be pulling the past forward. Her back is turned on the past and her gaze and gesture are toward the future.

This claim to contributing to the larger projects of imperialism and nation-building was premised upon the convention of feminine passivity. The nuns were focused on saving the soul of the Iroquois child, not confronting the power of Iroquoian men. Indeed, Hill emphasized the domestic nature

16 This argument is made more fully in Kathryn McPherson and Meryn Stuart, "Writing Nursing History in Canada: Issues and Approaches", *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1994), pp. 3-22.

of the nuns' civilizing efforts by explaining that the sister was "within the pallisades", within the domestic sphere. This was not the vigorous and aggressive colonization of European men, but the work of "gentle tamers" whose very presence soothed the savage brows around her. Female passivity is even more striking in the World War I image. The wounded soldier, like the Iroquoian baby, is receiving the ministrations of the female attendants, but neither nurse is actually doing anything. The nurse in the front is kneeling with her head down, almost praying. The nurse in the back has one hand obscured and the other is flat at her side. This depiction of the work of military nurses contrasts with the realities faced by CAMC nurses who assisted in the labour-intensive surgical repair of the shattered bodies of young men.¹⁷ On both sides of the monument it is the very presence of female healers as symbols of colonialism and nationalism that gives them power, rather than their roles as active participants.

The images of masculinity depicted in the memorial are slightly more ambiguous. Contrast the phallic power of the Iroquois men with the impotence of the unconscious soldier. Neither masculine image presents the possibility of sexual relations between nurses and the male patient or family members. This was of special concern to early twentieth-century nurses whose legitimacy in the health care team was dependent upon their claims to sexual respectability, and for whom keeping a job might well mean convincing wives and sweethearts that they posed no threat to domestic happiness when they invaded a private home to care for a sick family member.¹⁸ For the military nurses the wounded soldier is completely dependent, unconscious and therefore impotent; the soldier is desexualized. Hill's representation of the nurse-soldier relationship was consistent with similar images generated for military propaganda during World War I.¹⁹ In contrast, the physical power of the Native men is revealed by their physiques that are muscular and lean. The erect tomahawk held by the front figure signifies that the Iroquois are dangerous and different. The nun may be threatened physically by the Iroquois men, but her vows of chastity (as

17 For a description of the pace of work expected of military nurses, see Brandon General Hospital Archives, box 87, Wilhelmina Mowat Waugh, "White Veils, Brass Buttons and Me: Memoirs of a Nursing Sister in World War I in the Canadian Army Medical Corps, 1915-1920", unpublished manuscript, n.d.

18 For an analysis of potential sexual tensions at the bedside, see Kathryn McPherson, *Bedside Matters: The Transformation of Canadian Nursing, 1900-1990* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), chap. 6.

19 A World War I promotional poster for the British Red Cross depicted a serene nurse holding a soldier on a stretcher. The image was so out of proportion that the soldier appeared doll-like rather than human. The poster's caption, "The greatest Mother in the World", underscored the non-sexual relation between nurse and patient and allowed the nurse to claim status simultaneously as female healer and, more than that, "greatest mother". Darracott, *The First World War in Posters from the Imperial War Museum, London* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), p. 30. This image is analyzed in Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

represented in her dress) and the racial difference between her and the men transform the potential sexuality of the Iroquois into savagery and the potential sexuality of these public women into purity.

The symbolic interconnection of sexuality and racial categorization did not just serve an occupationally specific narrative; it also created the national narrative into which nurses were inscribed. Post-colonial theorist Ann Stoler has observed that, for European imperialists, “colonial discourses of sexuality were productive of class and racial power, not mere reflections of them.... These discourses of sexuality could tell not only the truth about individual persons, but about racial and national entities.”²⁰ By the early twentieth century post-colonial national entities like Canada continued to rely on racial and sexual signifiers not only to distinguish the white nation from the aboriginal one, but also to differentiate the new world nation from its European heritage. Like the Australian feminists Marilyn Lake has studied, Canadian nurses of the 1920s endorsed a national narrative that was neither Aboriginal nor European, neither fully old world or new.²¹ The War Memorial’s distinctly North American imagery of contact between nuns and Natives reminded viewers that Canadian nurses contributed to the twentieth-century war effort, but they did so as representatives of a new nation in the new world. Indeed, sculptor Hill was not alone in using subordinate or savage Native imagery to signify Canada’s unique history.²² Like the female Humanity, aboriginal figures such as the Iroquoian men of the War Memorial functioned allegorically to tell a story that had nothing to do with First Nations people themselves.

The most perplexing figure in the memorial is that of the dog. Although dogs are sometimes associated with faithfulness and fidelity, Hill’s canine image appears more menacing than friendly. The dog’s strong stare and its position at the edge of the carving suggest that the dog is designed to represent death. Dogs’ “old and uneasy reputation in folk belief as corpse-eaters” is no doubt linked to the mythological Greek figure Cerberus, the three-headed dog who guarded the entrance to the underworld, barking at the souls of the dead and allowing them to enter but forbidding them to leave.²³ In this capacity, the dog symbolizes two things in the memorial. As a signifier of death, the dog stands on the left side of the statue in opposition to the baby on the right. The nuns and nurses mediate between

20 Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 176, 184.

21 Marilyn Lake, “Between Old World ‘Barbarism’ and Stone Age ‘Primitivism’: The Double Difference of the White Australian Feminists” in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns, eds., *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1984), and “Colonised and Colonising: The White Australian Feminist Subject”, *Women’s History Review*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1993), pp. 377–386.

22 One such public memorial — the 1915 statue of Samuel de Champlain with a First Nations scout crouching at his feet — recently has been the centre of artistic, historical, and political critique. “Statue Target of Native Ire”, *Globe and Mail*, October 8, 1996, p. A8.

23 Richard Cavendish, *Visions of Heaven and Hell* (London: Harmony Books, 1977), p. 96. Thanks are extended to Gillian Poulter for her help with this analysis.

birth and death. Its position on the left half of the carving also places the dog in relation to the modern nurses as the Iroquois men were to the nun. The logical parallel between the two sets of male warriors — the Iroquois and the modern soldier — is thus disrupted and viewers are reminded to liken the two forces of death, modern warfare and Native violence, not the two groups of men. The presence of the dog also reminds viewers that the likeness they are supposed to note is between the dependent soldier and the dependent baby, while the symbolic counterpart to the non-human dog is the sub-human Iroquois.

This second story told by the War Memorial is made more complex by the statue's final figure. In the background, on the side of the present, is History. The male figure is holding "the book of records from 1639 to 1918". With his other hand, History is "lifting the veil" of the past, which "reveals down through the ages as it were the great deeds of heroism and martyrdom of the early nursing sisters". The symbolism used by the artist is intriguing. Like Enlightenment thinkers, who used (masculine) reason and science to pull the veil off (feminine) nature, the male figure of History is pulling the veil off the past to inscribe the activities of nurses within the masculine narrative of political and imperial history.²⁴ The memorial thus inscribes nurses in the book of history just as it inscribes them on the wall in the heart of Canada's political system. As such, the memorial reveals that nurses' unique position within Canadian society lay not only in their distinctive uniform, their control over male bodies, their racial and ethnic privilege, and their contribution to the colonial, imperial, and national accomplishments of Canada, but also in nursing's inclusion in masculine historical narratives.

The central tension within the 1926 War Memorial, therefore, is between the ahistorical feminine Humanity and the historically specific accounts rendered by masculine History. In this tension, Humanity is subordinated to History: her outstretched arms appear to be grasping the past and presenting it to the future and to History.

However complex, the War Memorial's narrative cannot be analyzed as a pure or spontaneous expression of nurses' own vision of their historical past. While the CNA members retained the right to select the design that best suited them, questions of location and style were also dependent on the actions and visions of others. Mackenzie King's Liberal administration, George William Hill, and the advisory committee all played key roles in shaping the public face of Canadian nursing. In many ways the War Memorial also built upon a nineteenth-century tradition of feminist historical writing that, as Cecilia Morgan has shown, claimed a place for women like Laura Secord in Canada's imperialist and loyalist past.²⁵

24 Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper and Rox, 1980).

25 Cecilia Morgan, "'Of Slender Frame and Delicate Appearance': The Placing of Laura Secord in the Narratives of Canadian Loyalist History", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, new series vol. 5 (1994), pp. 195–212.

While it reflected those broader social forces, the memorial also fulfilled a specific function for Canadian nurses in the interwar era and since. As working women who had limited control over their labour market and who faced stiff competition from untrained or lesser-qualified practitioners in the community, trained or graduate nurses sought ways to distinguish themselves from other female healers. At the same time they needed to use the conventional elements of femininity to legitimize their position in the world of work. Nursing leaders, especially, were committed to winning professional status for their occupation, distinguishing nursing from domestic service and midwifery. For an occupation that was struggling for professional recognition, the rendition of history offered by the memorial legitimized nursing in terms of a conservative, trans-historical definition of nurse as “Woman”. The memorial simultaneously ruptured that link between conventional femininity and nursing, however, by claiming for trained nurses a distinctive relationship to healing and a special place in the masculine historical narrative of colonization and nation-building. As such, the narratives of the memorial reflected the broader social and historical consciousness being promoted by CNA leadership in the interwar years.

That this vision of nursing history constituted a useful past for Canadian leaders and members of the occupation is reflected in other modes of historical presentation produced at the time. Early historians of nursing self-consciously contributed to the professionalizing efforts of their peers by celebrating the noble antecedents of modern nursing. The “whig” narrative, presented in major American nursing textbooks (such as Lavinia Dock and Adelaide Nutting’s two-volume study)²⁶ reconstructed a “western civilization” narrative which documented the long tradition of nursing contributions to Western society in the past and predicted the inevitable march to professional stature in the future.

Canadian publications echoed this analysis. The 1929 *Pioneers of Nursing in Canada* provided short biographies of European-Canadian nurses, ranging from New France’s Jeanne Mance to western Canada’s Mary Ellen Birtles, who were “pioneers” of the fledgling occupation and the fledgling nation.²⁷ Similarly, the only survey of Canadian nursing, the 1947 publication *Three Centuries of Canadian Nursing*, reviewed nursing in the 300 years of European habitation by stating that “from the day on which the Augustinian Sisters landed at Quebec, nursing in this country has often been

26 M. Adelaide Nutting and Lavinia L. Dock, *A History of Nursing: The Evolution of Nursing Systems from the Earliest Times to the Foundation of the First English and American Training Schools for Nurses* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1907). See also Elizabeth Jamieson and Mary Sewall, *Trends in Nursing History: Their Relationship to World Events* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1940).

27 The History of Nursing Society, McGill University, ed., *Pioneers of Nursing in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Nurses’ Association, 1929). This volume is organized similarly to the American collection edited by Meta Rutter Pennock, *Makers of Nursing History: Portraits and Pen Sketches of Fifty-nine Prominent Women* (New York: Lakeside Publishing Co., 1928).

a dangerous trade requiring supreme courage and devotion on the part of those who plied it.” Like the statue, these published histories considered the unpaid attendance of religious sisters an antecedent of modern nursing, but did not include the healing services of Native women as part of the same narrative. In this way the colonizing and missionary roles of Western nursing were subtly celebrated.²⁸

The final irony of the 1926 War Memorial is that only one other carving was completed in the revered Hall of Fame, presumably due to lack of money in the 1930s and lack of interest in the subsequent decades. Few Canadians now know of the memorial's existence, and when it is noted or reproduced by nursing publications it is used uncritically as an illustration of nursing's noble past. A critical reappraisal of the monument is important for nursing historians and feminist historians alike, however. The War Memorial reveals the contradictions faced by a female-dominated occupation trying to locate itself within a patriarchal health care system and body politic. Contemporary nurses must confront the fact that the history they have carved for themselves, while representing the significant contributions working women have made, also makes invisible nursing's tradition of racial exclusivity and the complicated relations between nurses and other women (including feminists).

Historians of women and public spectacle might pay greater attention to the colonial context of monuments such as the CNA's War Memorial. Colonies like Canada that came to nationhood in the turbulent (and monument-crazy) nineteenth century offered a unique public space for historical representations of ordinary women — Evangeline, Madeleine de Verchères, Laura Secord, and the pioneering nuns²⁹ — whose contributions or hardships were memorialized as part of the process of defining Canada as a separate nation with a distinctive past. Within this colonial and post-colonial context, public images of white women embodied complex messages about race, nation, sexuality, and gender while empowering some women to carve a place for themselves within the narratives of collective memory.

28 John Murray Gibson in collaboration with Mary S. Mathewson, *Three Centuries of Canadian Nursing* (Toronto: MacMillan Company of Canada, 1947), p. v.

29 Canadian historians have begun to provide analyses of the historical and commemorative representation of such figures. See Morgan, “‘Of Slender Frame and Delicate Appearance’ ”; Colin M. Coates, “‘Commemorating the Woman Warrior of New France: Madeleine de Verchères, 1696–1930’” in Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld, eds., *Gender and History in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996).