

Veterans with a Vision

Studies in Canadian Military History

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The Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded



In 1918 some of the approximately two hundred Canadian blinded servicemen from the First World War helped create the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). In 1922 they formed their own veterans' organization, the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded (SAPA). These veterans were joined by war-blinded Canadians from the Second World War and the Korean War. Together they fought for improved pension and social legislation for the war blinded and for all disabled veterans and furthered the interest of Canadians with vision loss in general. Today, SAPA actively monitors and promotes veterans' rights and is a member of the National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada.

Veterans with a Vision

Canada's War Blinded in Peace and War

Serge Marc Durflinger

Published in Association with the Canadian War Museum
and the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded



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En mémoire de
Marie-Lina Ste-Marie (*née* Gagné) (1896-1985),
my grandmother, who was blind

and for Bill Mayne

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Preface

She was aged and walked about the crowded six-room flat slowly and deliberately. Still, she got around surprisingly well and was able to do all she needed, never complaining. She cleaned, cooked, mended clothes, listened to television and radio programs, made numerous phone calls, and showed her children and grandchildren great love and affection. The widow of a wounded First World War veteran, she loved to laugh and had a terrific memory. She seemed to have a rather normal life for a woman in her late seventies. Except that she was completely blind. Her name was Marie-Lina Ste-Marie (*née* Gagné), but to me she was always simply “Mémé,” my grandmother, a delightful, strong-willed woman who had a hand in raising me. I barely noticed that she could not see through her piercing blue eyes, and rarely gave a thought to the fact that she had never actually seen me. It was never an issue because her courage in overcoming her disability showed me at a young age that one did not need sight to have vision.

And so, when the opportunity presented itself to write this book, I leapt at the chance. It would not just be a fascinating and historiographically meaningful topic of enormous professional interest, casting new light on the experiences of Canada’s war-disabled veterans; it would also be a subject that *mattered* to me. In some manner, I hoped that writing this book would pay homage to all of the country’s blind, including my grandmother, and that researching the

history of Canada's war-blinded veterans would take on an emotive personal dimension for me. This is precisely what has happened, which I hope is occasionally reflected in the pages that follow.

In May 2002, I gave a speech at the Royal Canadian Military Institute in Toronto. Despite the many people in attendance that evening, I could not help but notice the large number of Second World War veterans. One group of men, resplendent in their cardinal-red berets (which I did not recognize), especially stood out – because they were blind. These veterans were members of the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded (SAPA) and some had come from the Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, home to hundreds of Canadian veterans requiring long-term care, to hear me speak. I was deeply moved by their presence. After I had delivered my address, I was introduced to a very distinguished gentleman. Bill Mayne, war blind, was a long-serving member of SAPA's executive. We exchanged very sincere greetings and pleasantries, and then he was gone.

Some time later, Krysia Pazdzior, the Ottawa-based associate executive director of SAPA, telephoned me with a proposal. Thus began a series of conversations and meetings involving Krysia, Bill, Jim Sanders, at that time CEO of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), Richard Huyda, a dynamic CNIB volunteer and retired archivist, and others, that resulted in my writing this book on behalf of SAPA and the CNIB. The research began in 2005.

The documentary evidence allowing this history to be written has been staggering in volume and quality: a true cornucopia of material constituting both an historian's dream come true and the enormous and time-consuming challenge of deciding what to include and what to set aside. The archival material from SAPA's national office, superbly organized by Richard Huyda, consisted mainly of correspondence files, membership and statistical data, members' case files, financial statements, the highly detailed and enormously helpful minutes of the meetings of SAPA's executive and other

committees maintained since 1922, numerous pamphlets, tracts, and minor publications published by SAPA in its eighty-five-year history, a complete run of the *SAPA Chronicle* (an especially informative newsletter begun in 1975), thick collections of newspaper clippings, numerous instructive photographs, and important audiovisual materials including oral history testimony.

The voluminous CNIB Papers, held at Library and Archives Canada (LAC), also have proven a treasure trove of rich and untapped historical material relating to Canada's war-blinded veterans. Like SAPA's archives, the CNIB Papers, covering the period from the institute's founding until the 1970s, consist of institutional and correspondence files, statistical data, financial statements, minutes of meetings, and numerous minor publications. A shocking amount of material deals directly with SAPA and the war blinded. The CNIB Archives in Toronto also yielded an immense quantity of pertinent material, while additional relevant sources were located in other manuscript and government record groups at LAC, especially the Edwin Albert Baker Papers.

Secondary sources supporting this research were a different story. Very little has been written on Canada's veterans, especially disabled veterans, and less still is available on Canadian veterans' organizations. Nevertheless, more than a hundred books and articles were consulted in the preparation of this book; most of these are listed in the select bibliography. In addition, although an extremely small number of Canada's more than 1.6 million twentieth-century veterans, the war blinded have written a surprising number of powerful and evocative memoirs. James Rawlinson's 1919 account of his military service and blinding during the First World War, *Through St. Dunstan's to Light*, is a minor classic. Of the four books written by veterans of the Second World War, David Dorward's little-known *The Gold Cross: One Man's Window on the World* (1978) is a beautifully written and deeply reflective memoir deserving of a much wider readership. John Windsor's *Blind Date* (1962) is also a moving and

honest rendering of the shock of being blinded and the challenges that followed. Neil Hamilton, the lone blinded Royal Canadian Air Force veteran to have penned his reminiscences, wrote *Wings of Courage: A Lifetime of Triumph over Adversity* (2000), an unvarnished rendering of his tribulations in the postwar world and of the deep courage, and spousal love, required to persevere. Finally, the Honourable Barney Danson, a defence minister in the 1970s, wrote his memoirs late in life. *Not Bad for a Sergeant* (2002) reminds readers that near-total vision loss can occur even decades following the loss of a single eye in combat. The story of Canada's war-blinded veterans is an important one, and I feel privileged in having played a role in bringing their experiences before a broader public.

Acknowledgments

Many kind people have assisted me in preparing this history. The executive and staff of the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded and of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind have been unfailingly co-operative and generous with their time. I would especially like to acknowledge long-time SAPA member Bill Mayne, whose passionate interest in the history of Canada's war-blinded veterans sparked this book project. Bill graciously took the time on more than one occasion to answer my many queries.

At my request, a CNIB-SAPA editorial committee was struck to review the manuscript, and I am grateful to Jim Sanders, Bill Mayne, Richard Huyda, Glenn Wright, and other occasional readers for their comments and encouragement. Jim Sanders, the CNIB's CEO, was always a source of support and good advice. Following his retirement in 2009, Jim, also serving as SAPA's executive director, very helpfully continued as the CNIB's contact with UBC Press and with me. Since the beginning of my involvement with the story of Canada's war blinded in 2004, Krysia Pazdzior, then SAPA's associate executive director, served as my contact. Having worked for SAPA for some twenty years, Krysia was always enthusiastic about this book project. Cheerful and generous, she helped me in many ways.

Richard Huyda, a retired photo archivist from Library and Archives Canada and a long-time CNIB volunteer, took on the demanding task of organizing SAPA's files and did so with great efficiency. He

similarly helped organize the SAPA-related CNIB Archives in Toronto. His hard work made my research at SAPA's Ottawa headquarters and in Toronto much easier and more enjoyable. Equally important, Richard scanned nearly two hundred photographs and illustrations, including nearly all of those appearing in this book. I am indebted to him for this and for his encouragement and advice. Others of the CNIB-SAPA family to whom I owe thanks are Barbara Marjeram, Euclid Herie, Anne Michielin, JoAnne Mackie, Anne Sanders, John Andrew, and Laura Mayne. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Veterans Affairs Canada.

For the last fifteen years, I have benefitted from working alongside or consulting with Canada's finest military historians. The following have helped shape my understanding of Canada's military past, encouraged me, and, in most cases, provided me with research ideas for this book: Tim Cook, Terry Copp, Jack Granatstein, Jeffrey Keshen, Marc Milner, Desmond Morton, and Roger Sarty. Tim was also kind enough to give me a wonderful copy of *The Blinded Soldiers and Sailors Gift Book*, which I very much appreciated. I also acknowledge the help of University of Ottawa graduate students (as they were at that time) Nic Clarke and Sarah Cozzi, who offered useful research leads and good conversations. John Parry in Toronto gave freely of his precious time and sage advice throughout this project.

It was a pleasure to work once again with the skilled professionals at UBC Press. Given the needs of the visually impaired readership for this publication, the press agreed, with CNIB input and support, to produce a book different in font, font size, margin justification, and paper stock from its normal offerings. For their guidance through the publication cycle, I am grateful to Emily Andrew, Holly Keller, Melissa Pitts, and Peter Milroy. Sarah Wight did a superb job copyediting the manuscript, and Dianne Tiefensee was a meticulous proofreader and indexer.

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dean Oliver, Director, Historical Research and Exhibits Development,

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To my wife, Janine Stingel, and my five-year-old son, Maxime, I express my love and gratitude for enduring with me through yet another book project.

Finally, I would like to offer my heartfelt appreciation to Canada's war-blinded veterans. Their story has profoundly inspired me.

Acronyms

AA	Amputations Association of the Great War
AVOC	Associated Veterans Organizations of Canada
BESL	British Empire Service League
BPC	Board of Pension Commissioners
BVA	Blinded Veterans Association (US)
CCA	Canadian Corps Association
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CFLB	Canadian Free Library for the Blind
CNIB	Canadian National Institute for the Blind
CPC	Canadian Pension Commission
DND	Department of National Defence
DPNH	Department of Pensions and National Health
DSCR	Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment
DVA	Department of Veterans Affairs
EIA	exceptional incapacity allowance
HSB	Halifax School for the Blind
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MHC	Military Hospitals Commission
NCVA	National Council of Veteran Associations in Canada
NIB	National Institute for the Blind (UK)
PPCLI	Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry
PRB	Pension Review Board

RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
SAPA	Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded (before 1942, Sir Arthur Pearson Club of War Blinded Soldiers and Sailors)
VAC	Veterans Affairs Canada
VAD	Voluntary Aid Detachment
WBTC	War-Blinded Training Committee
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

Veterans with a Vision

Introduction

Books written about the conflict record major political decisions and their results; they speak of generals, and of heroes. There is a paucity of literary tribute to those who offered their youth to war; nor are there books which tell of the disabled, the war blinded, the amputee, the burnt-out veteran.

– David Dorward, blinded in Sicily, 1943

According to estimates provided by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), citing information gathered by Statistics Canada, in 2006 about 836,000 Canadians had suffered vision loss while 108,000 were registered as clients of the institute.¹ The standard measure for visual acuity (the perception of detail) is the commonly recognized Snellen chart. The different-sized letters printed thereon are configured and shaped so that a person with normal vision can read them all from a twenty-foot distance, hence the categorization of 20/20 vision. In metric terms, this is expressed as 6/6, based on a six-metre distance. However, an individual able to see only the top line, consisting of the chart's largest letter, is rated at 20/200 or 6/60, the second number representing the distance at which someone

with normal vision could read the same line. This is the boundary for determining legal blindness.²

But despite this large number of Canadian blind, only a handful can be classified as “war blinded,” that is, those whose vision loss occurred while on military service in wartime, or whose post-service blindness was attributable to earlier wartime service. These men and women are to be distinguished from “blind veterans,” that is, war veterans who, as a result of aging, disease, accidents, or other factors, lost their sight in a manner having nothing to do with their prior military service. This book is about Canadian war-blinded veterans, not blind veterans.

At the time of writing, Canada has been at war in Afghanistan since 2001. A new, albeit much smaller, generation of veterans is being created that will succeed those of the Second World War (1939-45) and the Korean War (1950-53). In addition to the 138 fatalities recorded through December 2009, Canada’s approximately 600 wounded soldiers from the Afghanistan conflict include some severely disabled veterans. Among them are those with serious eye injuries. They join a small but influential group of blinded Canadian veterans from past conflicts whose courage and perseverance have helped reshape the way Canadians and Canadian government departments and agencies have perceived war disability in general and blindness in particular. The experiences of Canada’s war blinded, from the South African War (1899-1902) to the present day, and the story of their work on behalf of all disabled Canadians as well as all Canadian veterans and their families, constitute an unexplored facet of Canada’s social history.

Blindness is a poignant disability, and it is all the more so when those afflicted are a robust group of capable youth whose grievous injuries were sustained while on military service. In 1918 some of the approximately 170 Canadian blinded servicemen (and a handful of servicewomen) from the First World War (1914-18) were the driving force behind the creation of the Canadian National Institute for the

Blind. In 1922 the Canadian war blinded formed their own veterans' organization, an advocacy group closely linked to the CNIB, to see to their special needs as pensioned veterans and as newly blinded Canadians. The Sir Arthur Pearson Club of War Blinded Soldiers and Sailors (renamed in 1942 as the Sir Arthur Pearson Association of War Blinded, or SAPA) took its name from the wealthy British benefactor who, in 1915, established in London the St. Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors and assisted all the British Empire's war blinded to retrain for their new lives without sight. A generation later, these First World War veterans were joined by a comparable number of war-blinded Canadians from the Second World War.

Edwin Albert Baker, blinded at Ypres in 1915, was one of Canada's most remarkable veterans of the First World War. Known to royalty, world statesmen, and ordinary veterans, he acquired international fame as an eloquent advocate for the world's blind and especially for blinded veterans. Figuring prominently in this book, his story is intimately intertwined with the founding and growth of the CNIB and SAPA, and the successful social integration of Canada's war-blinded population. He served as the CNIB's managing director for four decades, was SAPA's secretary for nearly as long, and was among the first recipients of the Order of Canada, founded in 1967 as a Confederation centenary program; no one argued with the choice.

Baker and the other war-blinded veterans had been shocked upon their return to Canada to find that the lot of the blind was miserable and that their social status deprived them of their dignity. CNIB historian Euclid Herie has noted that until the twentieth century in Canada, "blind people were relegated to poverty, derision, pity, abuse, and social conditions that, with few exceptions, left them with a bleak promise for the future."³ It seemed far-fetched that the blind could be educated and productive, and could form a part of mainstream society. Families took care of their blind, if possible. No institutions were fully capable of retraining newly blinded adults.

Young blind Canadians obtained a basic education and some vocational training at schools in Brantford, Halifax, and Montreal. Although some became musicians or worked in trades, such as basket and broom production, most remained in poverty.

According to American historian Frances Koestler, the traditional occupational sphere of the blind in the early twentieth century could be a "life sentence" to a preordained menial occupation equated with blindness itself in much of the public's mind. Known as the "blind trades," these occupied a scale from playing music and piano-tuning to semi-skilled work including broom-making, chair caning, and weaving, and down to more desperate ventures such as street peddling or simply begging.⁴ "They were feared, shunned, pitied, ignored," Koestler begins her exhaustive 1976 study of blindness in the United States. She goes on to state that "the belief that blindness equals uselessness has prevailed so long and so firmly in western culture that its traces have yet to be fully erased."⁵

Yet, given that the Canadian war blinded had sacrificed their sight in the name of victory and higher ideals, a grateful public was unwilling to accept that their heroes should suffer such humiliation. Edwin Baker would not accept it for himself or for others. But would employers be willing to take risks on blind employees? "Emancipation" would occur with a change in attitude among the sighted, certainly, but also among the blind themselves.⁶ The blinded veterans, far more organized and militant in their demands than the civilian blind, were in the forefront of this change and acted as catalysts for their own success. That they were significant actors and decision makers in determining their futures and in advocating for access to sighted society on the basis of ability, never pity, is a thematic thread running throughout this work.

There have always been war-blinded and war-disabled veterans. But having the state care for them, to an extent, and assume responsibility for their civil re-establishment is a decidedly twentieth-century phenomenon. In 1254 French king Louis IX founded l'Hospice des

Quinze-Vingts in Paris, a refuge or almshouse for three hundred blind people. While the origins of this institution are open to some scholarly debate, it seems that King Louis was motivated to assist the blind by his devotion to some of his soldiers who had been blinded during the Crusades.⁷ In 1813 Prussia offered some form of compensation for blinded veterans of the Napoleonic Wars, while Britain, in 1818, offered financial compensation and opened a special hospital for veterans suffering vision loss or “military ophthalmia.” The first American legislation specifically pertaining to blinded veterans’ compensation was passed in 1864, during that nation’s Civil War, at which time a fully blinded veteran obtained the reasonably generous disability pension of twenty-five dollars a month.⁸

The First World War’s massive casualties, including hundreds of thousands of maimed and severely disabled veterans, obliged governments to devise precedent-setting disability pensions and civil re-establishment schemes to assist them to find wage-earning work, which together could provide sufficient income for them to look after themselves. In the days before the development of the welfare state, such a plan – while significantly expanding the boundaries of state intervention in the lives of Canadians – lessened the likelihood that disabled veterans would become permanent public charges. Seen in this light, the pension and retraining programs were shrewd government investments both socially and fiscally. Promoting the veterans as productive and independent members of society also dovetailed nicely with contemporary social views of a man’s role as his family’s self-reliant breadwinner.⁹

Yet the First World War radically altered the country’s social values and revolutionized the role of the state in people’s lives. In part, these changes were driven by the need to care for the country’s wounded and disabled veterans. Public views of the nation’s blinded citizens also changed. If former soldiers could be retrained in occupations rarely opened to the blind in the past, why could not civilians be similarly trained? The occupational ghettos of broom making

and basket weaving could expand to more challenging, rewarding, and potentially lucrative skills. For most of the major combatant powers, including Canada, the First World War proved the watershed between the era when people feared and avoided contact with the disabled and the era when governments tried desperately to reintegrate disabled veterans into an employment stream leading to as normal a life as possible.¹⁰ This trend continued even more strongly in Canada following the Second World War, with the re-establishment and life-course experiences of the war blinded standing out as successful examples of individual, institutional, and government cooperation in the areas of retraining, job placement, financial security, and social reintegration.

When Canada's war blinded came home to face their futures in the aftermath of the First World War, the prospects for the blind in Canada had changed dramatically since the outbreak of war in 1914. The federal government had assumed responsibility for its disabled soldiers, and the opening in 1918 of the CNIB's government-funded retraining facility, Pearson Hall, on Beverley Street in Toronto, gave the country's war blinded an opportunity to reintegrate into Canadian life, find stable employment, and regain a strong measure of independence. In fact, the CNIB's main role in its first few years of operation was to care for and retrain Canada's war blinded under contract to the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment, established in February 1918. Once most of Canada's war blinded had been retrained, by 1922, the CNIB maintained close bonds with them by providing perpetual aftercare services. At this point, the CNIB turned most of its attention to assisting Canada's far more numerous civilian blind. Public recognition of the blind as functioning members of society, sympathy for their plight, and, in the case of the returned soldiers, appreciation for their patriotic sacrifice, heralded a new beginning for the relationship between the sighted and the blind in Canada.

Increasingly, the assistance granted the Canadian veterans became an entrenched right, not a form of charity, and the government assumed greater responsibility for the returned men's perpetual care and welfare. The aid was universal, based in government obligation, and could not be denied through a means test or any other restrictive policy.

Pensions were always more generous to disabled veterans, including the war blinded, than was the slowly evolving government-funded financial compensation for the equivalent group of civilian disabled. In Canada, the war blinded also benefitted from some travel concessions and the free provision of specialized technical equipment. Noted American disability historian David Gerber believes that, in most Western countries, "disabled veterans consistently have been dealt with ... more generously than ... perhaps any other cohort in society." He further claims that despite advances in government aid to the civilian disabled, seemingly often driven by veterans' pensions legislation, "the gap has never closed between disabled veterans and disabled civilians."¹¹ This seems true of the Canadian experience as well. Like most historians of the blind, Gabriel Farrell similarly notes that in virtually all nations assuming responsibility for their war blinded, the latter serve as a model for the civilian blind seeking similar social benefits. Farrell refers to this as "veteran preferment," and notes that it has a "long history" in all categories of war-related disability.¹² In addition, he believes that the war blinded are given an exalted position among the disabled; this is certainly borne out by SAPA's experience.

"War blinded. Few phrases evoke a stronger response ... in which shock, pity, and guilt seek release through a passionate desire to make amends."¹³ So writes Frances Koestler, further remarking on the "sad irony" that war, with its numerous blinded casualties, has tended to "arouse the conscience of the public to needs they comfortably ignore in peacetime." Support for the patriotically ennobled

war-blinded veterans led to greater understanding and sympathy for all blind citizens. She refers to this as the “war-quicken awareness of blindness.”¹⁴ Euclid Herie makes clear that Canada exemplifies this phenomenon.¹⁵ Canadian historian Susanne Commend also believes that Canadian government programs for the war blinded, and disabled veterans generally, noticeably advanced the profile and causes of the civilian disabled, with the latter eventually benefitting, for example, from advanced retraining methods and prosthetic designs.¹⁶

But, as David Gerber notes, while positive ripple effects seem obvious, it remains difficult to ascertain the degree to which advancements in the care and rehabilitation of disabled war veterans have stimulated government-sponsored benefits, over time, for similarly afflicted civilians.¹⁷ The documentary evidence is fragmentary, and the causal link difficult to nail down. Accordingly, the present work, in concentrating on the war blinded, does not seek to argue conclusively that government-sponsored programs for disabled veterans *directly* led to the adoption of similar programs or legislation for the civilian sector. Nevertheless, in Canada at least, the CNIB-SAPA relationship was so close and intertwined that the veteran and civilian groups may have advanced the other’s causes in roughly equal measure. Each group pressured the government for greater assistance, often collaboratively. In fact, for decades Baker and other war-blinded veterans, such as Harris Turner and Alexander Viets, SAPA stalwarts all, were also among the CNIB’s leaders and decision makers. They simultaneously advocated for Canada’s civilian and military blind, whose collaboration was probably closer than in any other nation. Certainly the war blinded themselves firmly believed that their pressure on government for improved social programs helped blind civilians. Canadian medical and disability historian Mary Tremblay has conclusively shown that, in the post-Second World War period, Canadian paraplegic veterans led the way for government-sponsored rehabilitation programs that quickly and directly benefitted civilian

paraplegics.¹⁸ Gerber considers this situation exceptional, and it is partly explained by the fact that the Canadian Paraplegics Association, a veterans' group, was willing to assist civilians and eventually opened its membership to them. This close Canadian civilian-veteran co-operation was not mirrored in the disability experience of the United States or other countries.¹⁹

Only broadly and tangentially does this book treat the correlation between the government's veteran and civilian programs and policies for the blind. For this, for social and policy developments affecting Canada's civilian blind, and for the shifts in public perception of the blind generally, the reader is referred to Euclid Herie's history of the CNIB and Marjorie Campbell's biography of Baker.²⁰ But the present work does show the influence of the war blinded on certain specific positive developments for the civilian blind, such as the founding of the CNIB and the war blinded's establishment of a scholarship foundation for blind youth.

If it was unusual for veterans' groups made up of single-disability members to align themselves with their civilian counterparts, it was equally odd for different and sometimes competing special-interest veterans' associations to closely co-operate in the pursuit of shared objectives. This makes the history of SAPA and the Canadian war blinded rarer still, because they not only reached out to the civilian blind but, under Baker's strong leadership, also forged a powerful alliance of disabled and pensioned veterans. While representing different needs, all shared the desire to obtain greater post-service benefits and entitlements. In 1943 SAPA played a leading role in creating, and became a charter member of, the National Council of Veteran Associations (NCVA), a remarkable grouping still in existence (with some fifty member organizations) and still displaying strong solidarity among its participating associations. The war blinded served as a hinge not just between the civilian and military blind but between disabled and non-disabled veterans, as this book seeks to document.

Over the last half of the twentieth century, the NCVA was frequently successful in pressing veterans' claims in briefs before parliamentary committees, royal commissions, the Canadian Pension Commission, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and other government agencies. SAPA formed part of a powerful lobby group. In general, the NCVA has been successful because of the joint petitions, mutually supportive goals, and close, fraternal co-operation of its members. Sometimes it co-operated closely with the much larger Canadian Legion, and sometimes its members stood alone in the struggle for greater veterans' benefits. Remarkably, given that Canada's war blinded were few in number, two SAPA members, Edwin Baker and William Mayne, the latter a Second World War veteran, have served as chairmen of the NCVA. "SAPA by itself could never have attained the high standard of pensions and benefits [the war blinded] now enjoy," wrote Mayne long after the war.²¹

In the 1920s, the war blinded felt the need to lobby the Dominion government for improved war disability pensions and other benefits to which they believed their war injuries entitled them and for which Ottawa had made little or no provision. It was in order to improve their negotiating position that they formed SAPA. Like the war blinded in most other countries, notably Germany,²² the Canadians refused to be submerged in larger veterans groups such as the Great War Veterans' Association or, later, the Canadian Legion, preferring to remain a specific grouping, best able to articulate and promote their own interests. SAPA maintained its full independence as a member of the umbrella NCVA.

Because the war-blinded's injuries occurred in defence of the realm, their heightened visibility in general society might have prompted, in Gerber's phrase, "gratitude, generosity, and guilt"²³ among Canadians. But the war blinded were insistent on reminding Canadians and the government of their status as veterans, not allowing themselves to be seen merely as blind Canadians, the objects

of well-intentioned pity. Instead, the war-blinded veterans helped *define* their social roles and the manner in which their fellow sighted citizens viewed and would remember them. As much as possible they seized their own destinies; most who came into contact with them did not offer pity, but rather admiration. The war-blinded veterans carved out their own place in society, being unwilling to be assigned a place by a potentially misunderstanding public and federal bureaucracy, no matter how genuinely sympathetic.²⁴

As Gerber notes, “disabilities and disfigurements become a particularly significant marker for an individual’s or group’s social identity and self-understanding.”²⁵ Canada’s blinded veterans displayed a strong collective sense, having suffered similar fates at similar ages, often in similar wartime circumstances. They were young men leading vigorous lives at the time of their loss of vision. They still harboured their hopes and aspirations and they remained capable. They had not always been blind.²⁶ There was thus an instantaneous sense of community. Self-help comes easier under these circumstances, and Canada’s war-blinded veterans maintained a very well-organized community, complete with regular social activities and large-scale national reunions. They also worked together to obtain generous government pensions and meaningful rehabilitation programs, while fiercely maintaining their individual and social independence. Successive federal ministers responsible for veterans, bureaucrats at all levels of the hierarchy, pension officials, and of course the CNIB validated the war blinded’s finely developed sense of identity and facilitated their ability to mount unified, directed advocacy campaigns.²⁷

Canada’s veterans, especially disabled or wounded veterans, are generally ignored in the Canadian historical literature, while SAPA and the war blinded are virtually unknown outside of the few works pertaining to the CNIB.²⁸ Gerber, a leading international scholar of disabled veterans, has noted that the existing scholarly literature on

veterans, disabled veterans, and government veterans' policy is shockingly sparse: "Disabled veterans are neglected figures in the histories of war and peace."²⁹ Although there are two published histories of the Royal Canadian Legion, works pertaining to Canadian veterans' organizations are also almost completely non-existent.³⁰ SAPA's story, and especially that of the Canadian war blinded as individuals, is a meaningful addition to the burgeoning field of socio-military history as well as to the rapidly developing professional and scholarly interest in disability history. While this book treats the experiences of Canada's war blinded in general, a major element of this study is devoted to the institutional history of SAPA and its eighty-seven-year involvement in ameliorating the lives of its members and improving the lot of all blind Canadians.

History is about people; so, too, is war. Wherever possible the narrative that follows seeks to highlight the human dimensions to the story of Canada's war-blinded veterans and to use the men's own voices, or at least their personal stories, to add immediacy, poignancy, and intensity to the text. I have sought to capture some of their spirit of perseverance because, in the end, the war blinded looked after themselves, and each other, very well. Typical is the example of Verne Russell Williams, who was severely wounded and blinded in 1944 while serving with the North Nova Scotia Highlanders in France. He raised a family but, due to his disabilities, was unable to work for most of his life. SAPA's fraternal assistance might have been essential to his overall well-being.³¹ Many wounded men like him, living out their lives quietly, have been forgotten in our perhaps understandable desire to focus commemorative activities on those who did not return from Canada's wars. We know much about our war dead but next to nothing about our war wounded. But these hundreds of war-blinded veterans are the subject of *this* book, and I hope that this work will encourage further scholarship into the treatment and civil re-establishment of other groups among Canada's more than 200,000 war-wounded veterans of the twentieth century.

The first chapter introduces readers to Canada's first celebrated war-blinded casualty, the legendary Lorne Mulloy, who lost his sight during the South African War (1899-1902). It goes on to trace the re-establishment experiences of Canada's First World War blinded attending St. Dunstan's in Britain, with a focus on Edwin Baker, and explains the war blinded's fundamental role in creating the CNIB and their influence on government policy toward all Canadian war-disabled veterans.

Chapter 2 addresses SAPA's origins, goals, and activities in the 1920s and describes the challenges that confronted the organization and its war-blinded members. The focus is on employment retraining at Pearson Hall, the CNIB's Toronto facility, social reintegration and bonding, including the first of many large-scale reunions of war-blinded veterans, the provision of federally funded and CNIB-administered aftercare services, SAPA's emergence as a strong veterans' advocacy group under Baker's guidance, and the instilling in these mainly young men of a sense of personal independence and a will to carry on.

The economic crisis of the 1930s badly battered Canadians, including many veterans and especially the disabled. Chapter 3 describes how the war blinded protected their hard-won pension gains and assisted each other through the fraternity of blindness, with the critical assistance of their families and some CNIB volunteers, mainly women. The blinded struggled to survive economically, strictly controlled eligibility requirements for SAPA membership, and participated visibly in commemorative events, including the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial in 1936.

Chapter 4 deals with the years of the Second World War and shows how, with government assistance, the CNIB and SAPA planned for blinded veterans' civil re-establishment, reopened a rehabilitation and training centre (Pearson Hall), and established a residence (Baker Hall) in Toronto. This chapter also discusses the extraordinary partnership between the CNIB, SAPA, and the Department of Pensions

and National Health, replaced by the Department of Veterans Affairs in October 1944. The newly blinded veterans, some of whose stories are detailed in this chapter, were retrained to be functioning members of society and benefitted enormously from the experiences of the First World War veterans. The newcomers eventually took on leadership roles in the Canadian blinded and veterans' communities.

With hundreds of thousands of new veterans to deal with, the federal government was obliged to revisit its pension and rehabilitation policies, culminating in the extensive legislative package known as the Veterans Charter. Chapter 5 discusses this development and introduces some case studies of the post-1945 re-establishment process. It also explains SAPA's institutional growth to 1970 and its important role as a veterans' pressure group, detailing the large-scale, prominent war-blinded reunions that symbolized the tight bonds between those Canadians from two generations who had sacrificed their vision while on national service.

Chapter 6 introduces the evolving federal pension policies and programs as they affected the war blinded into the twenty-first century, details the complex relationship that developed between the CNIB, SAPA, and the Department of Veterans Affairs following the latter's assumption of responsibility for the delivery of war-blinded aftercare services, and describes the final SAPA reunions. This final chapter is also about the war blinded's legacy of hope for, and assistance to, the civilian blind, especially students. The perpetually funded F.J.L. Woodcock/SAPA Scholarship Foundation financially supports education and independence among Canada's blinded youth. This, perhaps more than any other single factor in their history, demonstrates that Canada's war-blinded were truly "veterans with a vision."

1 Canada's First War Blinded, 1899-1918

I was unlucky enough to get in the way of one of the shrapnel bullets. I felt a slight sting in my right temple as though pricked by a red-hot needle – and then the world became black. Dawn was now breaking, but night had sealed my eyes.

– James Rawlinson, blinded at Vimy, 1917

The modern political era for Canada began in 1867, when several colonies in British North America agreed to merge into a new Confederation. The resulting Dominion of Canada grew to vast geographic proportions in the following years, incorporating other colonies and, before the end of the century, attracting large numbers of immigrants, many from the British Isles, to settle its sparsely populated territory. Within a generation, the country's Atlantic and Pacific coasts were linked by a transcontinental railway. By 1900, most of Canada's 5.3 million inhabitants still lived in rural areas, although increasing industrialization led to greater urbanization and a denser concentration of road and rail networks. Montreal was Canada's largest city, with a population of 267,000 in 1901, rising to 406,000 in 1911; Toronto was a distant but growing second. Canada was a confident and comparatively affluent young country. In 1904, Prime

Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier uttered his oft-repeated boast that “the Twentieth Century shall be the century of Canada.” Most of his compatriots would have agreed.

Even though about 28 percent of Canadians were of French ancestry, Canada was very much a British country. It remained a British colony, a constituent part of the British Empire with no formal international status. The British monarch was Canada’s sovereign, the national flag remained the Union Jack, and Canadian citizenship was unknown, all Canadians being British subjects. Until the 1950s, Canada’s governor general was a British nobleman selected by London.

Since the 1870s, the British Empire had grown into an immense worldwide territorial and economic unit. Britain was the world’s most powerful naval and commercial nation. Despite occasional violent opposition to British rule in some colonies, most Canadians of British ancestry considered the empire a progressive and stabilizing force in the world. Stirring popular accounts of imperial conquests filled books, journals, and newspaper articles, and promoted the idea that Britain’s heroic armed forces fought for justice and higher ideals. Patriotism was a strong social principle. Duty to the empire and sovereign was primordial for many English Canadians and British immigrants residing in Canada. On the other hand, Canada’s support for, and engagement in, British imperial rivalries and wars led to some domestic political and linguistic discord; imperialism was as divisive as it was unifying.

As a result of this ingrained sense of patriotic duty, all those serving or having served in the military stood highly in public esteem throughout the empire. Being a “Soldier of the Queen” was a noble pursuit and, given the often sacrificial nature of war service, received social acclaim not normally accorded to civilian vocations. It is within this context of late Victorian and Edwardian imperial and patriotic zeal that Canada embarked on its first overseas conflict and suffered its first publicized case of war blindness. The South African, or Boer, War (1899-1902) was fought over territorial and economic disputes

between the British Empire and two small republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, bordering Britain's colonies in southern Africa, whose European population consisted of Dutch colonists, known as Boers ("farmers" in Dutch). All told, Canada sent more than 7,300 troops to help Britain defeat the Boers.

Blinded in South Africa

In December 1899, at the age of twenty-four, Lorne Mulloy, an unmarried school teacher from Winchester, Ontario, a fervent patriot, and a firm believer in the British Empire, volunteered for overseas service with the 1st Battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles. He was shipped overseas to serve in South Africa. One year later, he was back in Canada a celebrated and decorated imperial and Canadian hero, the very model of courage, selflessness, service, and sacrifice. He had been presented to Queen Victoria, fêted by the Lord Mayor of Liverpool, and hailed in the press throughout the empire.¹ Trooper Mulloy had achieved fame and earned these accolades through his courageous actions in July 1900 during a desperate struggle with the Boers. But he had paid a price: he was permanently blinded by an enemy bullet that penetrated temple to temple. The poignancy of his condition led to an outpouring of national sympathy, while his determination to pursue his life's ambitions earned him admirers everywhere. Frequently known thereafter as "the Blind Trooper," Mulloy was Canada's first war-blinded casualty of the twentieth century.

Historian Carman Miller has referred to Mulloy, evidently the only fully blinded of 252 Canadians wounded in the South African War, as "a living monument to the cost of Canadian participation in the war."² Certainly Trooper Mulloy, winner of the coveted Distinguished Conduct Medal, was easily the best known of Canada's disabled veterans from South Africa, among whom were also amputees and the seriously disfigured. Yet, despite his being a powerful symbol

of war's devastating effects, the remainder of Mulloy's life was not all gloomy and, although no one knew it at the time, his impressive career set the standard for what Canada's war blinded could achieve given proper training facilities, government willingness to assist, and the support of an appreciative public. Mulloy proved that Canada's war blinded could be successful and productive citizens.

But Ottawa did not assume financial responsibility for South African War disability pensions, and Mulloy received a paltry British pension of eighteen dollars a month, not enough to make ends meet. While not exactly a charity case, as were most blind Canadians, proceeds from his many speaking engagements, like the seventy-three dollars he received in March 1901 following a lecture at a Methodist church near Cornwall, were no doubt helpful.³ The heavy involvement of the state in regulating and paying reasonable military disability pensions would have to await the First World War.

In the meantime, the Canadian Patriotic Fund (CPF), a high-profile charity with royal patronage, was set up to assist those disabled or infirm as a result of service in South Africa, and to help their needy dependants. The CPF awarded Mulloy the comparatively enormous sum of more than four thousand dollars to pay his way through Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, and Balliol College, Oxford. Although the CPF sought to dispense aid equally and had a two-thousand-dollar ceiling on gratuities to permanently disabled veterans, Mulloy's "ability, courage, and charm," not to mention the interest of Sir Sandford Fleming, chancellor of Queen's University, gained him special favour, according to historian Desmond Morton.⁴ Mulloy's highly publicized wounding resonated emotively with Canadians, establishing the profile of the blinded Canadian soldier in the public's consciousness.

Newspaper accounts of his return to Canada suggest that society considered blindness a hopeless future. Even Mulloy felt that his "hopes, aims and aspirations [were] all cut down at a swoop, sudden and irreparable." He proved himself wrong. Perhaps ahead of his time,

one letter-writer to a Kingston newspaper noted that the government should help the war blinded obtain meaningful employment, which, in Mulloy's case, "would make life under his great affliction more tolerable." Soon thereafter, the independent-minded Mulloy insisted that a determined blind man could enjoy a successful life. "Remember," he stated, "the three most important things are self-mastery, self-reliance and purposeful self-direction."⁵

Mulloy demonstrated, perhaps beyond all reasonable expectations in his era, the extent to which blindness could be overcome. His academic achievements, including a law degree in 1920, and life-long interest in public affairs showed that blinded soldiers could re-establish themselves in Canadian society. He married in 1911 and was employed at the Royal Military College of Canada as a professor of military history. During the First World War, with the honorary rank of colonel, he remained a prominent public figure, frequently appearing in support of recruiting drives and strongly endorsing compulsory military service. Not surprisingly, he was also a vocal advocate for the war disabled. Moreover, he sailed, golfed, and rode horses.⁶ Lorne Mulloy was an early trailblazer for Canada's war blinded and the blind in general.

Canada's War Blinded of the First World War

In the period before the outbreak of the First World War, Canada's tradition of limited military pensions and care for returned soldiers or their survivors was based in parsimony; governments did not wish to assume extended or expensive responsibility for disabled veterans' pensions. For example, fully disabled "other rank" pensioners from the 1885 Northwest Campaign might obtain up to sixty cents a day at a time when a casual labourer needed at least one dollar a day for sustenance.⁷ Although officers received greater government generosity, other disabled veterans were condemned to poverty unless family or friends could render assistance.

Canada's disabled pensioners were few in 1914, and there were no precedents for dealing with thousands of partially or fully disabled ex-servicemen.⁸ In Britain, disabled soldiers begging on street corners reflected the appalling poverty of the unfortunate victims of war. Those who were blinded seemed especially sad cases. Few provisions existed for the care of the disabled who would soon be returning from distant battlefields. Moreover, no facilities offered specialized medical care or retraining for the maimed or sightless.⁹

In the United States, meanwhile, the outrageously generous and politically laden pensions awarded to Civil War veterans led to such financial excess that by the turn of the twentieth century the US government's very solvency was threatened. Canada would have to find a middle ground by adequately caring for its returned men, as the public would deem fit, without rewarding idlers anxious to benefit from a lax pension system. In fact, although many returned men would have to fight for their right to proper pensions, medical care, job training, and survivors' benefits, government involvement in, and responsibility for, their provision signalled revolutionary advancements in the role of the state in caring for Canadians. And, according to historians Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, all Canadians ultimately benefited from the social programs that flowed from these precedents.¹⁰

In the summer of 1914, the First World War broke out following years of mounting political and military tension in Europe. On 4 August, after German forces invaded Belgium, whose security Britain had pledged to uphold, Britain declared war on Germany. Canada could not remain isolated from the conflict; constitutionally, and in the eyes of the world, it remained a British colony. When Britain was at war, so was Canada.

Canada's military response was outstanding. Through a Herculean effort, though not without political controversy, the nation mobilized for war. From a 1914 population of approximately

7.8 million, nearly 620,000 men and several thousand nurses were on active service during the war. Some 425,000 of these served overseas with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Another 24,000 fought in the British air services, while 5,000 joined the Royal Canadian Navy. The cost to Canada in human lives was appalling: more than 60,000 soldiers lost their lives and another 138,000 were wounded in action. Thousands of others were injured in accidents or permanently weakened by the effects of disease.¹¹ Places such as Ypres, the Somme, Vimy, Passchendaele, and Amiens assumed enormous importance in the annals of the nation's military history and were etched in the collective memory of Canadians for generations.

Although the first contingent of Canadian troops was hurriedly shipped to Britain in October 1914, the first Canadian unit to see active service in the front lines was the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), which saw action in the first week of January while serving in a British division. The 1st Canadian Division landed in France in February 1915 and entered the line at the end of that month at Neuve Chapelle. In April the Canadians were shifted to the Ypres sector, in Belgium.¹²

It was in the Ypres Salient, an Allied-held bulge extending into the German front line, that the Canadians conducted their first major operations. The more than 6,000 casualties suffered there by the 1st Canadian Division in April and May heralded the beginning of a steady stream of disabled veterans. Here, too, Canada suffered its first war-blinded casualty of the First World War: Lance-Corporal Alexander Griswold Viets, serving in the PPCLI, was blinded in May 1915. While he repaired a trench parapet, a German mortar bomb landed beside him, destroying his eyes and inflicting numerous wounds on his face, arms, and legs.¹³

Ottawa soon realized that taking an active role in recasting the lives of Canada's war disabled would be essential to their future

success, and also precedent setting. The men's patriotic sacrifices and visible suffering could not be ignored. Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden agreed that the sheer number of returning wounded Canadians obliged the federal government to intervene with programs to care for them and assist with their rehabilitation. The Hospitals Commission (later the Military Hospitals Commission, or MHC) was established on 30 June 1915 to administer a system of medical and convalescent facilities in Canada for returned soldiers. Ernest Henry Scammell became its secretary.¹⁴

By September 1915, the military discharge depot at Quebec City was processing about a hundred wounded or ill soldiers every week. An increasingly effective Canadian Army Medical Corps and a well-organized casualty-evacuation system meant that a greater number of soldiers survived serious head wounds and other disabling injuries.¹⁵ It was critical for the government to assist them to improve their physical condition and find employment, not only on compassionate grounds but also to show potential recruits that if injury befell them, they would be properly looked after with pensions, retraining, and proper medical care.¹⁶ Besides, the best means of reintegrating wounded soldiers and preventing them from becoming a public charge was to assist them to become productive, wage-earning members of society.¹⁷

In 1915 a British parliamentary committee reported that "the care of the soldiers and sailors who have been disabled in the war is an obligation which should fall primarily upon the State: and the liability cannot be considered as having been extinguished by the award of a pension from public funds. We regard it as the duty of the State to see that the disabled man shall be, as far as possible, restored to health and that assistance shall be forthcoming to enable him to earn his living in the occupation best suited to his circumstances and physical condition."¹⁸ Canada, too, accepted this principle and, with time, and not without growing pains, established programs, facilities,

and a bureaucratic structure allowing disabled veterans to live and work in dignity. Few would benefit more from this change in attitude than Canada's returning war blinded.

By early 1917, of more than 13,000 patients administered by the Military Hospitals Commission in Canada, only 177 had suffered major amputations and only nine had been blinded – although many other Canadian blinded and amputees were being cared for in specialized British facilities. These returned disabled men gained immediate and widespread public support and sympathy.¹⁹

Sir Andrew Macphail of McGill University's Faculty of Medicine, the official historian of Canada's medical services during the war, noted that "wounds of the eye in war appear to be uncommon merely because they are so often fatal, being in association with more extensive lesions."²⁰ Nevertheless, by August 1917, the French were reporting some 2,400 totally blinded soldiers, and the British had suffered in excess of 1,300 before war's end. Soldiers of the British and Dominion forces suffering serious eye wounds were evacuated to an ophthalmology ward at No. 83 General Hospital at Boulogne, containing 150 beds.²¹

Many eye wounds causing partial or complete blindness resulted from contact with poison gas, especially mustard gas. Frequently, the full effects of gas exposure manifested themselves only years after the war, creating difficulty with pension claims based on wartime attributability. Immediately after exposure, gas casualties could contract subacute conjunctivitis, often successfully treated in the field by a combination of bandaging to shade against light, warm saline solution, and eye drops of liquid paraffin or atropine ointment.²² But as eye casualties and incidences of blindness mounted among British and Dominion troops, so, too, grew the means of caring for these men and of retraining them to be independent. The organization created for this purpose, St. Dunstan's in London, England, epitomized innovation, resourcefulness, and courage.

St. Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors

At the outbreak of war in 1914, Britain's National Institute for the Blind (NIB) was headed by Arthur Pearson, a wealthy and energetic newspaper magnate. Pearson had for a decade been in failing eyesight, the result of glaucoma. By 1908, he no longer had sufficient sight to read or write properly. At the end of 1913 his eyesight failed completely, and he learned that he would be blind for life. Thereafter, his generous patronage of Britain's civilian blind was exceeded only by his devotion to the empire's war blinded.²³

Immediately upon the declaration of war, the NIB offered its services to the British government. The institute's 1914 annual report, unquestionably from the pen of Arthur Pearson himself, notes that "all blinded soldiers and sailors will receive pensions from His Majesty's Government, but this must not form an inducement [for] them to live purposeless lives. Given a good training, blinded soldiers and sailors may become useful citizens." Here was Pearson's guiding wartime philosophy, which, with the help of the Red Cross Society and the Order of St. John, led to the creation of St. Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors – the world's leading readaptation centre for the blind.²⁴ The patriotic impulses unleashed by the war and the public's natural sympathy for its maimed and blinded veterans provided Pearson with the opportunity to help the blind on a scale hitherto unknown and to showcase their impressive capabilities and accomplishments. St. Dunstan's would serve as a model of rehabilitation and vocational training, affirming one of Pearson's mottos: "Lots of people see without perceiving; blind people learn to perceive without seeing."²⁵

Among the first blinded Allied soldiers of the war was a Belgian whose eyes were destroyed by a bullet on the first day of the German siege of Liège in August 1914. He was sent to a London military hospital and, hearing of his case, Pearson visited him to offer encouragement. Not long after, two blinded British soldiers were treated at

a military medical establishment in Chelsea, London. Pearson paid them a call as well. These visits sparked his idea to establish a dedicated facility to assist with the recovery and retraining of the empire's war blinded. A home was loaned to him for this purpose by a wealthy friend, but the volume of eye casualties soon outstripped the capacity of his Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors.

Pearson sought a spacious building with grounds on which to expand as the need arose. In March 1915, he secured St. Dunstan's, a spectacular and historic property of fifteen acres in Regent's Park owned by an American financier, Otto Kahn. Apparently, no estate in London was larger except Buckingham Palace, and the St. Dunstan's property was already well known throughout the United Kingdom. Ironically, even the German kaiser had been a prewar visitor. Returning to the United States, Kahn allowed Pearson unrestricted use of his estate, including the right to add buildings and alter existing structures. Pearson's new hostel and rehabilitation centre took the name of the original property: St. Dunstan's Hostel for Blinded Soldiers and Sailors – a name soon famous the world over.²⁶

On 26 March 1915, 14 British war blinded were moved from the earlier cramped location to St. Dunstan's. A year later their number had grown to more than 150 in residence at St. Dunstan's and in annexes elsewhere in Britain. These included at least seven Canadians and some Australians and New Zealanders. "The Commonwealth family of St. Dunstan's had come into being," wrote St. Dunstan's historian David Castleton.²⁷ Pearson himself noted in 1919, with some exaggeration, that with "practically no exceptions all of the soldiers and sailors of the British Imperial Forces blinded in the war came under my care, in order that they might learn to be blind." He continued, "At the very moment when it would be most natural for them to be despondent I wanted them to be astonishingly interested. I wanted them to be led to look upon blindness not as an affliction but as a handicap, not merely as a calamity but as an opportunity."²⁸ Pearson's creed influenced two generations of Canadian

war blinded and allowed them to participate fully in society and in life's pleasures. British officer Ian Fraser, blinded on the Somme in 1916 at the age of eighteen, recalled the psychological and emotional importance of St. Dunstan's: "My weakened link with the past snapped, but not before I was securely bound to the future. Fearfully and reluctantly at first, then more firmly, and finally with resolution, I crossed the bridge between the old world and the new. Pearson was waiting at the other end, his hand stretched out to help me."²⁹

At Pearson's suggestion, the War Office sent all serious eye casualties to the 2nd London General Hospital at Chelsea on the Thames embankment (the former St. Mark's College for Women). Early in the war, most men were blinded from gunshot wounds, though subsequently splinters and blast effects from exploding artillery shells and grenades accounted for a higher proportion of eye casualties. Pearson met the new arrivals at the hospital and introduced them to the possibilities available at St. Dunstan's and to his philosophy that blindness need not be the end of a productive and happy life. The gift of a quickly mastered Braille watch proved that the road toward independence could begin immediately. The patients were regularly visited by cheery St. Dunstan's staff, a practice that Pearson insisted motivated the newly blinded into accepting vocational training and drawing strength from the company of others similarly disabled.³⁰ And there were many of them: at St. Dunstan's peak, following the terrible battles of 1916 on the western front, there were some eight hundred men in its care.³¹ For his efforts, Pearson was knighted in 1916.

St. Dunstan's was a hostel, distinctly not an "institution" or a refuge. It was a functional place, where men could be retooled. It was financed through public subscription and received donations from all quarters, including many Canadians and the Canadian Red Cross. In 1918 Pearson wrote that "there are no expenses whatever in connection with a stay at St. Dunstan's; board, lodging and everything else is absolutely free."³² Many of the instructors at St. Dunstan's

were blind themselves, a morale boost for the men that contradicted the biblical view that "if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." The men were immediately trained in Braille and typewriting and offered various sorts of vocational training including boot repair, mat and basket weaving, poultry farming, telephone switchboard operation, and massage therapy (later known as physiotherapy). Training lasted from six to eight months for the less-complicated trades.³³ Those trained as joiners made small articles intended for sale, such as picture frames, tea trays, and ornamental tables. Those raising poultry were taught to distinguish different breeds of birds by touch alone and learned to operate incubators and manage the daily affairs of a poultry farm, including the simple carpentry needed to make coops and gates.³⁴

Typewriting was of the greatest importance to the war blinded, as it gave the men the independent ability to communicate privately with others. The first letter was normally an "enormous thrill" for the writer and no less so for the recipient. "It is the first positive, active, useful thing that [a blinded soldier] ... can do for himself, and its morale effect is very great indeed," wrote Ian Fraser.³⁵ Once St. Dunstaners passed the typewriting course, they were rewarded with a typewriter as a gift.

The St. Dunstan's massage-therapy program lasted twelve to eighteen months and included basic but challenging courses in anatomy, physiology, and pathology, with all the body's bones made familiar to the students through touch. This was followed by more extensive training at the NIB and on-the-job experience at several hospitals in London. There then followed the examinations (the "most severe in the world," according to St. Dunstan's) held by the Incorporated Society of Trained Masseurs. To the spring of 1918, no St. Dunstaners had failed these examinations and one, Canadian Private D.J. McDougall of the PPCLI, had finished second in a field of 320. St. Dunstan's massage graduates were in high demand at military hospitals, where they assisted with wounded soldiers' physical

rehabilitation.³⁶ More than 130 St. Dunstaners, including Canadians, became masseurs. Reflecting in 1961, following four decades of work at St. Dunstan's, Fraser, by then Lord Lonsdale, believed that "in no occupation have St. Dunstan's men been more successful than physiotherapy."³⁷

St. Dunstan's also offered many recreational activities and morale- and team-building exercises, and many life-long friendships developed there. Female Voluntary Aid Detachment workers (VADs) provided "companionship" and, if required, "solace" to the men and also undertook many household tasks to help maintain the premises.³⁸ The VADs were nearly all unpaid volunteers who, Fraser remarked, "did not lend, but gave."³⁹ Moreover, the term "VAD" at St. Dunstan's included "the many kindly folk, who, while not belonging to any definite organisation, give a great deal of their time, their thought, and their sympathy to the blinded soldiers." The women accompanied the men on walks, read to them, organized entertainment, and "befriend[ed] them in countless other ways."⁴⁰ In fact, a number of romances blossomed between blinded soldiers and VADs, and several marriages resulted. By the spring of 1919, at least three blinded Canadians had married overseas.⁴¹ These women's skills should not be underestimated. During the First World War, some Canadian St. John Ambulance VADs studied Braille in anticipation of assisting the war blinded. All obtained first aid and basic nursing certificates, although fully trained nurses were ineligible to be VADs. Near the end of the war, others completed courses at the University of Toronto's Hart House Military School of Orthopaedic Surgery and Physiotherapy, operated by the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment.⁴²

As soon as a Dominion casualty was brought to St. Dunstan's, the normally tough-talking Sir Arthur Pearson wrote the man's wife or mother an encouraging and cheery letter, explaining the "manifold activities" available at the facility and that, as he himself was ample proof, blindness need not imply "mental or physical extinction."

Correspondence between Pearson and a man's family could continue for months or even the full length of the man's stay. This seemed to confirm others' impression that Pearson's "kindliness of heart was concealed under an autocratic manner."⁴³

Many Canadian St. Dunstaners stayed in touch with their benefactor. Alexander Viets, the PPCLI soldier blinded at Ypres, was Canada's first graduate of St. Dunstan's, leaving in March 1916. Some months later he wrote a long letter to Pearson explaining his activities and business successes since returning to his hometown of Digby, Nova Scotia. He was soon busy selling magazine subscriptions, including some for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies Home Journal*. This allowed him to regain his confidence and return to selling insurance, his prewar occupation. "That was the work you advised me to take up again when I told you I had experience in it," wrote Viets. "I have the greatest reason to be thankful for having followed your advice." He moved to Toronto in October 1916 and became a successful agent for the Imperial Life Assurance Company of Canada. He wrote Pearson in 1919 that he was thriving: "Good health, a profitable occupation and a happy home are a combination that many a sighted man is not in possession of."⁴⁴

Another Canadian St. Dunstaner, James Rawlinson, a private in Ontario's 58th Battalion, published his wartime experiences not long after his return to Canada. *Through St. Dunstan's to Light* (1919) is a straightforward account of what St. Dunstan's vocational training and sense of camaraderie could mean for a young man tragically and suddenly deprived of his sight. His might serve as a reasonably representative account of many blinded Canadians' experiences. Rawlinson was part of a working party behind the lines near Vimy Ridge in the early morning darkness of 7 June 1917. Caught in an enemy artillery barrage, he "was unlucky enough to get in the way of one of the shrapnel bullets. I felt a slight sting in my right temple as though pricked by a red-hot needle – and then the world became black. Dawn was now breaking, but night had sealed my eyes."⁴⁵

In hospital in Boulogne, his left eye was removed, but he still clung to the hope that his right eye might yet be made good. Captain Sir Beachcroft Towse, VC, a blinded hero of the South African War, paid him a visit. Towse, who would head the NIB from 1922 to 1944, then "hit me harder than any Hun shell could hit a man. He snapped out in a voice penetrating, yet with a cheery ring to it: 'Well, you are blind, and for life. How do you like it?'" Wrote Rawlinson, "For about five seconds ... the night that sealed my eyes seemed to clutch my soul. I was for the moment 'down and out'; but I braced my spirits in the presence of this dominating man. I would show him how a Canadian soldier could bear misfortune ... I swore just a little to ease my nervous strain, and replied, 'That's a hell of a thing to tell a guy.'"⁴⁶ "Now the cruel fact had to be faced," he continued, "the only world I would see henceforth would be that conjured up by the imagination from memories of the past."⁴⁷

During Rawlinson's treatment at the 2nd London General Hospital, some St. Dunstan's staff read the men newspapers and told them what St. Dunstan's could offer. But nothing could prepare Rawlinson for the occasion when Pearson, "one of the geniuses of the present age" and "a miracle worker," called on him at the hospital.⁴⁸ During that first meeting, "darkness seemed to vanish" and Rawlinson "knew full well that I should not be a burden upon anybody, sightless though I was." Before being discharged to St. Dunstan's, Rawlinson visited on a number of occasions to speak with the men already undergoing training. In the meantime, he learned some of the basics of Braille at the hospital. He was transferred to St. Dunstan's in August 1917 and stayed sixteen months, until December 1918. He qualified as a stenographer, taking Braille shorthand and typing it out on a regular typewriter at the rate of more than one hundred words per minute.⁴⁹

Rawlinson recalled that at St. Dunstan's "nothing was compulsory except sobriety." But the care given the men there made them wish to "help others." The Canadian war blinded took on leadership

roles in the blind community in general and were to become ambassadors for their disability. Alexander Viets wrote in the *St. Dunstan's Review* of 1917, "The care and education of the blind in Canada generally ... is in a very bad state ... [W]e think it will be through the returned blinded soldiers that considerable interest will be aroused, and when the war is over a lot of good can be done in ... educating and interesting the general public."⁵⁰ This proved correct.

Though probably never exceeding 10 percent of St. Dunstaners in residence, the Canadians maintained an esprit de corps and often stuck together, for example, in their own very successful rowing and tug-of-war teams. According to one British resident, while neither group formed cliques, as such, both the Australians and the Canadians "kept extra ties among themselves."⁵¹ They also consoled and supported each other – as in the case of Rawlinson helping a twenty-year-old blinded Canadian who felt his life was over. The despondent young man responded well to encouragement and subsequently became an outstanding student.⁵² One proud blinded Canadian, George Eades, led the contingent of five hundred St. Dunstaners who were reviewed by the king in Hyde Park on the day of the Armistice, 11 November 1918.⁵³

"What I am, I owe to St. Dunstan's," wrote Rawlinson:

and while labouring here [in Toronto] my heart ever goes back to dear old England. I feel towards St. Dunstan's – and so do all the boys who have passed through her halls – as does the grown man for the place of his birth. She is home for me. I was born again and nurtured into a new manhood by her, led by her from Stygian darkness to mental and spiritual light, and my heart turns with longing towards her. At times separation from the genial atmosphere of this paradise of the sightless, from contact with the dominating, kindly presence of Sir Arthur Pearson and his noble assistants, weighs heavily upon my spirits. But there is work to be done here in Canada.⁵⁴

The war blinded did, in fact, lead the way in organizing Canada's blinded population and in revolutionizing public perceptions of their disability.

Edwin Albert Baker

Edwin Albert Baker was a remarkable blinded veteran and advocate for the sightless everywhere. He was dogged, resourceful, energetic, charismatic, and utterly devoted to improving the lot of Canada's blind population, perhaps especially the veterans. His intimate association in the founding of the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and his lifetime leadership roles with the institute afforded it the national prestige and international acclaim that it might not otherwise have obtained.

Baker was born in 1893 in Ernesttown, Ontario, near Kingston, into a farming family. He graduated from Queen's University in 1914 with a degree in electrical engineering. Keenly interested in the military, he had served in the militia for five years prior to the outbreak of the war, at first in the 4th Hussars and later in the 5th Field Company, Royal Canadian Engineers. He was accepted for service in the CEF in February 1915, serving overseas as a lieutenant with the 6th Field Company, RCE, in the 2nd Canadian Division. Baker recalled that "as our ship pulled away from the harbour and put out to sea, a number of us leaning over the rail took what might [have been] for many of us a last look at the shores of Canada."⁵⁵ For Baker, this proved to be the case, though not in the manner that he had anticipated. He was in Britain by April and in Belgium by September 1915.

In October Baker commanded No. 3 Section of the 6th Field Company. He and his men spent the night of 9-10 October at Kemmel, about ten kilometres south of Ypres, perilously repairing severely damaged communications trenches linking rear areas with the front lines, and restoring a front-line trench destroyed by the detonation of a German mine. Baker was later awarded the Military

Cross, the French Croix de Guerre, and a Mentioned-in-Dispatches for his leadership and daring that night. The following evening, he led a party of five or six military engineers and up to sixty men pressed into fatigue duty to continue the work. He was arranging the rebuilding of part of the secondary line, perhaps thirty metres from the front line, when he entered a battered trench. It had been partially filled in with debris and fallen sandbags "so that it did not conceal anyone standing upright," recalled Baker. "I found myself with my head and shoulders above the top of the trench. A German star-shell lit up the desolate landscape ... I remember wondering if there was any possible chance of the enemy being able to see us. I think the last thing I saw was that bright, floating star shell for, as I watched, a bullet smashed through the bridge of my nose and left me to the mercy of the darkness and my friends." The bullet passed across his left eye and behind his right. "I've had it, boys!" was the first thing he uttered to those around him. He would never see again. He was twenty-two.⁵⁶

Baker had known of blinded Trooper Lorne Mulloy before the war. But other than that one shining example, the blind people he had seen were either beggars or completely dependent, being awkwardly led around by family members. He felt condemned to such an existence. Like all cases of blindness, Baker was transferred to No. 2 London General Hospital, where he spent nearly ten weeks. Near the end of October 1915, Arthur Pearson visited and presented him with a Braille watch. Baker did not immediately realize that he had just encountered one of the great formative influences on his life and career. Not long after, Baker toured St. Dunstan's and engaged in a deep conversation with another war-blinded man. Thereafter, he was convinced there was life after blindness, and that it began at St. Dunstan's.⁵⁷

By most accounts, Lieutenant Baker was the first Canadian officer to attend St. Dunstan's. Arriving on 2 January 1916 and staying until July, for a while he roomed with fellow Canadian Alexander

Viets and with New Zealander Clutha Mackenzie. But he soon moved to officers' quarters at 21 Portland Place, another home loaned to Pearson by a benefactor, where Pearson and his wife also stayed. Baker developed a very close, almost filial relationship with Pearson, who served as inspiration and mentor. While at St. Dunstan's Baker became an excellent typist, learned Braille, and easily passed the business course.⁵⁸

Baker's distraught mother, learning of his plans and knowing little of St. Dunstan's, understandably wished for her son to come home immediately and, in December 1915, wrote Pearson to this effect. In a lengthy reply, Pearson reassured her that St. Dunstan's was the best possible place for Baker and that he was thriving. "There are numberless ways, some small, some great, in which he can be helped here in a manner which would be impossible in any home, however loving the care bestowed upon him." Pearson reported that Baker "already makes his way about with a freedom most unusual in one newly blinded." In January 1916, Pearson again wrote Mrs. Baker that her son was "showing the greatest aptitude of any Officer or man who has been blinded in the War ... His cheeriness and good humour are never failing, and he makes friends wherever he goes." Two months later, Pearson was even more pointed in his compliments: "He is quite the most confident, self-reliant man of all the 160 blinded soldiers with whom I have come into personal contact" since the opening of St. Dunstan's. Two years later, on hearing of Baker's appointment with the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment (DSCR) in Ottawa, Pearson wrote Mrs. Baker that "of all the twelve hundred soldiers who have now come under my care there is not one of them as well fitted for this work as is your capable and courageous son."⁵⁹ Nevertheless, when Edwin Baker was returned to his mother's arms at the Kingston train station in September 1916, she burst into tears, hugged him tightly, and exclaimed "Eddie! Eddie! My poor boy!"⁶⁰

With a single man's pension of seventy-five dollars a month, Baker, determined and confident, set about finding work. He did not have to search long. By October 1916, he was working at the Ontario Hydro-Electric Power Commission in Toronto as a typist for a further seventy-five dollars a month. Soon thereafter he was promoted to preparing "trouble" reports from hydro substations.⁶¹

Edwin Baker was appalled to learn on his return that Canada had no training facilities even approaching those that Pearson had managed to set up at St. Dunstan's. There was no government employment placement program and no clear understanding of the needs of returned blinded soldiers; in fact, there was next to nothing at all in the way of support and aftercare.

Baker maintained an interest in the war and in patriotic activities. In October 1916 he spoke at Massey Hall, Toronto, at a fundraiser in aid of the Red Cross, and in the spring of 1917 he spoke at Victory Bond rallies. In April 1917 he was gazetted a captain.⁶² He had become something of a celebrity, with the seriousness of his wound and his obvious capability earning him a public profile and widespread respect and admiration similar to that which Trooper Mulloy had encountered following his return from South Africa. Intentionally or not, Baker's growing fame helped him bring attention to the plight of Canada's returned war blinded. Dr. Charles Rae Dickson, honorary president of Toronto's Canadian Free Library for the Blind (CFLB), lauded Baker, "this brave lad," and noted at the time that the governor general, the Duke of Connaught, was impressed with Baker's "fine bearing and bright hopeful spirit."⁶³ In 1916 Dickson also met Alexander Viets and thought highly of him and the training he had received at St. Dunstan's.

Baker and Viets, close friends and collaborators, used the CFLB's Braille holdings and joined its management board in 1916. When they learned that the already pitifully small CFLB was to close and put its materials into storage for lack of funds, they decided to

actively take up the cause of Canada's blind. Baker, Viets, Dickson, and Sherman C. Swift, the CFLB's secretary-general and librarian, obtained financial assistance from the Toronto Women's Musical Club and purchased a home at 142 College Street to serve as a new headquarters. They obtained donations of furniture and a piano, among other things, to make the new facility comfortable. This became Canada's first, informal, location where blinded soldiers returned from overseas could meet.⁶⁴ But far more was needed to properly organize Canada's blind population, and the returned soldiers would be in the forefront of change. Theirs was an achievement of profound importance to all Canadian blind: the establishment of the CNIB.

Initial Provisions for Canada's War Blinded

Despite their limited number, Canada's First World War blinded proved a challenge to Ottawa's system of re-establishing disabled veterans. For example, Ottawa dithered for more than two years over the formal procedures for the treatment, rehabilitation, and eventual repatriation of Canada's blinded soldiers. It simply was not clear what would happen to them upon their return.

As early as November 1915, Sir Frederick Fraser, a leading blind educator, had guardedly offered the use of the Halifax School for the Blind's facilities to the Military Hospitals Commission (MHC) as a potential alternative to sending Canadians to St. Dunstan's.⁶⁵ Fraser sought to make his school the premier retraining centre for the war blinded. But not all in Canada's blinded community agreed with the policy of shipping untrained and perhaps emotionally fragile blinded soldiers back to Canada – especially to a school designed for children. The CFLB, too, was interested in the plight of Canada's handful of returned blinded veterans. Rivalries between the two institutions were worsened by personality clashes and magnified as blinded

casualties became more numerous and Ottawa hesitated over the best means of ensuring the men's rehabilitation.

In March 1916, the MHC promised to advise the CFLB of the arrival in Canada of all blinded soldiers but admitted that "at present the Commission has not a complete list of Blinded Soldiers who have returned."⁶⁶ On being pressed for the government's plans by Dickson, T.B. Kidner, the MHC's vocational secretary, implied that the problem of the war blinded was not significant given that perhaps fewer than a dozen Canadians were then in training at St. Dunstan's. Kidner confessed that "nothing has yet been considered" with respect to where the men officially would or should be retrained.⁶⁷

Given the inadequacy of Canadian facilities, it was clear to these blinded civilians that the only realistic option was to send all Canadian blinded casualties to St. Dunstan's. In July 1916, Kidner wrote Swift that, henceforward, this would be the MHC's policy.⁶⁸ In fact, however, due to Canadian administrative confusion in Britain and contradictory signals from Ottawa, this would not actually prove the case until mid-1918. Some soldiers went to St. Dunstan's while others were shipped home by medical authorities lacking clear instructions. Some Canadian war blinded, erroneously assured of proper treatment at home, opted for a speedy return.

Sherman Swift and Charles Dickson made a formidable pairing in agitating for the best available treatment for Canada's war blinded. Dickson, a medical doctor, had worked for twenty-eight years in the field of electricity as it applied to medical practices. When he was accidentally blinded in 1908 in the course of X-ray and electro-therapy experimentation, he associated himself with the CFLB and with Swift, who had been a first-class scholar at McGill University.⁶⁹ Born in Kingston in 1858, Dickson had a long history of voluntary service and philanthropic work including helping form the Canadian St. John Ambulance Association and the Canadian branch of the British National Society for Aid of the Sick and Wounded in War,

subsequently renamed the Canadian Red Cross Society.⁷⁰ A fervent patriot and imperialist, Dickson took on the cause of the war blinded as his own and, after meeting Viets, quickly accepted the merits of the St. Dunstan's philosophy. For the next twenty years he was to befriend virtually every blinded Canadian soldier.⁷¹ Dickson firmly believed that the best teachers of the blind were other blinded people: "None but a blind man can appreciate the psychology of the blind," he wrote, explaining St. Dunstan's high rehabilitation success rate.⁷²

Always on the lookout for any war-blinded veteran who had not been to St. Dunstan's and whom he could assist, Dickson stayed in close touch with the co-operative W.F. Moore, who worked with the MHC at the CEF Discharge Depot in Quebec City. Dickson also sought information on any returnees with eye conditions likely to lead to permanent blindness. In October 1916, for example, Moore sent Dickson the names of three soldiers invalided home suffering from retinitis pigmentosa. The CFLB had committed to trying to secure employment for as many returned blinded men as possible, filling a void where the government had yet to assume responsibility. For example, when Alexander Viets moved to Toronto, he was a house guest of Dickson's for several weeks while the CFLB helped him find work in the insurance world.⁷³ Although Dickson and Swift's responses were ad hoc and restrained by lack of funding, they offered more practical help than, as it soon transpired, was given returned soldiers at Fraser's Halifax school.

In 1916 and 1917, small groups of Canadian war blinded arrived at the Halifax School for the Blind (HSB) for vocational training at government expense. Most had arrived from Britain following combat- or disease-related blindness; some were suffering from blindness caused in training accidents or brought upon by service conditions. A few of these men had never left Canada. The Canadian Red Cross and the CFLB sent them Braille watches as encouragement. In the summer of 1917, these men formed a cross-section of those

blinded while serving with the CEF. Private John Ross, born in Ireland and a resident of Missouri at the outbreak of war, was blinded at St. Éloi, south of Ypres, in April 1916 from a rifle-grenade blast that inflicted twenty-five wounds on his body. He was learning Braille, type-writing, and massage therapy. Private Peter Donaldson, born in Ayr, Scotland, and a resident of Fort William, Ontario, lost his sight from a gunshot wound in September 1916 while serving in the 28th Battalion at Courcellette on the Somme; he underwent similar training to Ross. Private Leonard B. Hopkins, born in Alberta, joined the 89th Battalion, but he was returned to Halifax in 1917 when it became apparent during training in Britain that his eyesight was failing drastically. Sergeant Alexander Graham, also born in Ayr and formerly of the Royal Artillery, transferred to the Canadian Garrison Artillery and lost his sight before the war, reportedly due to strain on his optic nerves. He entered the HSB in 1913 and graduated in 1917 as a piano tuner. However, he stayed on to render assistance to blinded soldiers in Braille and massage, and eventually trained as a masseur.⁷⁴ One soldier, Private Marion Smith, an American who enlisted in Alberta, was blinded while training at Valcartier, Quebec, and never sailed for France.⁷⁵

Supported by Baker, Viets, and other war-blinded veterans, Swift remained as dogged as Dickson in pressing Ottawa for a firm commitment to send all Canadian war blinded to St. Dunstan's. In October 1917, Swift wrote Sir James Lougheed, president of the MHC, that he had heard "persistent rumours" that the Canadian war blinded were to be repatriated and not sent to St. Dunstan's, and that special facilities were to be built in Canada instead. He wrote that Baker and Viets were said to deplore such a move, noting that a Canadian version of St. Dunstan's could hardly be built overnight. According to Swift, about a dozen Australian war blinded had elected to be retrained at home in schools for blind children and the result had been "disastrous." "The blinded Australians finally rebelled and demanded to be sent ... to St. Dunstan's for scientific and enlightened

training." Swift was adamant that any Canadian policy to deprive men of St. Dunstan's training would be simply "criminal." If the men returned to Canada without proper training, their desire to become independent would be stifled by a family naturally wishing to "pet, pamper and spoil" them. Moreover, since a number of British-born Canadian war-blinded had decided to stay in Britain following their St. Dunstan's rehabilitation and military discharge, bringing them home as a matter of policy seemed foolish.⁷⁶

The main reason Swift wanted the MHC to send returned blinded Canadians to St. Dunstan's for proper training was that he believed Fraser's efforts at the HSB were not up to the task. Swift felt that Fraser was a self-aggrandizing attention seeker. He cautioned Lougheed about Fraser: "there is a movement now under way in Canada to induce our Government to bring blinded Canadian soldiers home." According to Swift, "already a spirit of discontent is appearing among the few blinded Canadians undergoing instruction" in Halifax. "They feel they are not getting all that is possible, nor all they deserve," a situation which would be remedied at St. Dunstan's. Officials at the MHC seemed unaware of any problems. Ernest Scammell wrote Dickson that the men in Canada were "progressing satisfactorily" and that he had no opinion on whether they should be returned to Britain to attend St. Dunstan's.⁷⁷ On this file, at least, the astute but overworked Scammell might not have done his homework.

Given that the government had pledged to assume the costs of retraining the war blinded, the CFLB did not solicit or accept money for their care. "People all over the country are sending in contributions, small and large," Swift wrote Scammell in November 1917. "Everybody nowadays persists in adding the word 'soldier' to the word 'blind,' many blind men are stopped in the streets and asked if they have been at the Front, a khaki color tinges the whole public view of the blind." This sensitization would serve Canada's blind population in the future. Swift sought MHC permission to accept such funds and, underscoring the CFLB's main interest in supporting

all blind Canadians, Swift reminded Scammell that "in a most important sense, the general cause of the Canadian blind is bound up with the question of our blinded soldiers." In an effort to avoid embarrassment, the MHC opposed any public appeals but agreed that the CFLB could use unsolicited donations to create a "trust fund" for the war blinded.⁷⁸

Canada's blinded were coalescing into an advocacy group, stimulated by and seeking to derive advantage from the patriotic impulses unleashed by the war. Also, the civilian blind strongly supported the war blinded. CFLB staff were of the opinion that the pension allotment for blinded soldiers was "utterly inadequate." Insisted Dickson, "If the Government makes any mistake in the matter of Pensions it should be on the side of cheerful liberality rather than stinginess."⁷⁹ Swift argued that poverty led to stigmatization of the blind as incapable and deficient – which in turn led to their poverty. Accordingly, pension amounts had to be sufficient for the war blinded to live in dignity and be perceived by the public as contributing members of society.⁸⁰

The federal government ranked pensions according to the severity of each soldier's disability, itself defined by the veteran's capacity to earn a living. Pensions served as a form of "top-up" to ensure an adequate (though often minimum) income. From Ottawa's perspective, if pensions were too generous, veterans would have no incentive to retrain or even work. And, as historians Morton and Wright have noted, "the idea that the disabled could earn a genuine living defied experience."⁸¹ Moreover, if the pensions were indexed to take into account a man's earnings, then what incentive would there be for retraining? The CFLB lobbied the government on behalf of individual soldiers. "The cry is for recruits and more recruits," Dickson wrote acidly to the Board of Pension Commissioners (BPC). "Shall we say 'go' [and] if you fall you will get a soldier's grave, but, if you are foolish enough to lose your sight, God help you, Canada knows nothing about blind men!"⁸²

Moreover, the BPC frequently ignored the lingering effects of injuries as the cause of veterans' deteriorating eyesight. For example, a Private Poirier had obtained a 40 percent disability pension for having lost an eye during the war. But as the sight in his other eye severely worsened in 1917, he lost his job with the Post Office. Poirier probably suffered from sympathetic ophthalmia, a condition associated with an existing eye injury or single-eye loss characterized by a perforation or the presence of a foreign object. Frequently, over a period of months or years, the victim loses vision in the healthy eye as well. However, the pension board disagreed that Poirier's impending total blindness was attributable to war service and denied his claim for a pension increase.⁸³ Private William French, formerly of the Royal Canadian Regiment, lost an eye in a wartime accident at the Dominion Arsenal in Quebec City and received a pension of a mere eleven dollars a month as a consequence. He subsequently lost the sight of his remaining eye to sympathetic blindness but received no pension increase. Since French had been a soldier prior to the war and was enlisted as fit during the war, Dickson believed that the board's notion that his blindness was caused by a pre-enlistment eye disease should be "disregarded." Similarly, Dickson wished to know why blinded Private W.D. McMillan, formerly of the 21st Battalion, residing in St. Catharines, Ontario, received a paltry twenty-two dollars monthly.⁸⁴ The system seemed devoid of generosity or compassion, was applied inconsistently, and exemplified the government's lack of experience in dealing with war-blinded veterans.

Continuing social class distinctions were also reflected in the pension system. Private Harris Turner, a prewar journalist from Saskatchewan who was blinded at Sanctuary Wood in June 1916 while serving in the PPCLI, wrote in his magazine, *Turner's Weekly*, in January 1919 that it was appalling that a man's rank would dictate the amount of disability pension he received. "That an officer with an

arm off should get twice as much pension as a private with an arm off," he wrote, "is unfair, unjust, unsound, undemocratic, unreasonable, unBritish, unacceptable, outrageous and rotten."⁸⁵ He might have noted that the overwhelming number of Canada's growing war blinded were drawn from the non-officer class.

The situation for blinded soldiers at the Halifax School for the Blind, and the horrors of blindness itself, were thrown into high relief as a result of the tragic Halifax explosion in December 1917. Two vessels collided in Halifax harbour, and one of them, the *Mont Blanc*, was packed with high explosives. The resulting detonation devastated a good part of the city and killed nearly two thousand people. The HSB, located at Murdoch Square about three kilometres from the explosion, suffered massive superficial damage and all its windows were blown out. But there were no serious casualties among the staff or pupils. Wrote Sir Frederick Fraser, "The soldiers, many of whom have been on the battlefields of Flanders, declare that the most intense bombardments experienced by them were slight in comparison with the explosion." The school was pressed into service as an emergency hospital and a large number of Haligonians were treated there. Fraser, anxious to inform the CFLB that his work with blinded soldiers would continue, wrote Dickson that within five days of the explosion the special department charged with blinded soldiers' re-establishment was back in operation.⁸⁶

Following on the heels of the explosion, Fraser launched a fundraising campaign for \$500,000, to build a new facility in Halifax for the war blinded. He hoped to capitalize on the nation's sympathy for the stricken city, on the public's desire to assist the war blinded, and on the wide publicity allotted the large number of eye injuries that had resulted from the explosion. Fraser wrote Swift that more than two hundred Haligonians were blinded and that the HSB required the money to reorganize and see to their needs.⁸⁷ Overall, 5,923 eye injuries were reported, with 16 people losing both eyes

and 249 one eye. Forty-one people were rendered completely blind in the explosion, at least three of them soldiers. Many eye injuries were sustained by women looking out their windows in the direction of the blast, which sent shards of glass into their faces.⁸⁸

The turf war between the CFLB and the HSB had broader implications than the care of the war blinded. Talks had been ongoing for a year among the principal blind organizations to create a unified national group, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind. Fraser's reluctance to fold his operation into a larger one seemed to lead to his embellishing the success of soldiers' training in Halifax. One of Swift's contacts in the city, informally keeping an eye on the HSB, penned Swift a note in which he wrote that the soldiers were displeased and uncomfortable with their presence at the Halifax school. Some had taken up residence nearby rather than be quartered at the school and be subject to its many rules drawn up for children and young adults.⁸⁹ The men were told to obey all existing rules, including a 9:00 p.m. bedtime and no smoking or drinking. According to an earlier chronicler of SAPA's history, the men rebelled against these strictures and "reacted like good infantrymen and the resultant spree shook the school." The soldiers were speedily billeted at a hotel that was then destroyed in the Halifax Explosion.⁹⁰ In January and February 1918, Swift sent pipes and tobacco and games such as checkers and dominos for distribution to the eight blinded soldiers then under care at Halifax.⁹¹

Meanwhile, Ottawa took steps to establish a firm policy with respect to where Canada's war blinded would be retrained. Colonel Murray McLaren of the MHC visited St. Dunstan's to investigate whether Canadians should be sent there or redirected to Canada. He was impressed by what he saw and, in December 1917, reported very positively on St. Dunstan's. The MHC issued a press release about McLaren's visit, almost certainly in response to a letter published in the press by Baker, Viets, and Quartermaster Sergeant Bertram Mayell, PPCLI, all war blinded, against the establishment of facilities

in Canada that would compete with St. Dunstan's. This was no time to be nationalistic. St. Dunstan's was obviously the place for the men to get the best care and civil re-establishment training. The MHC admitted that much stock would be placed in the three blinded veterans' opinions.⁹²

In February 1918, two soldiers sent letters to Dickson complaining about conditions at the Halifax School for the Blind. Sergeant Alexander Graham, blinded in military service prior to the war and affiliated with the HSB for several years, wrote:

The existing schools for the blind have not solved the problem of the adult blind, nor do they appear to have given the matter much attention. This statement is born [sic] out by the manner in which the re-education of blind Canadian soldiers has been carried out at this institution. The soldiers, while in England, were told that there were institutions in Canada equal in every respect to St. Dunstan's, and on the strength of this assurance they returned to the Dominion. They soon realized that they had made a great mistake in so doing. The ordinary school for the blind is about the last place to which blind soldiers should be sent ... I have heard nothing but praise of the work done by Sir A. Pearson in Great Britain. I have never heard a good word said about the work being done here.⁹³

Graham went on to state that two of eight soldiers at the school were so disappointed that they planned to leave to enter American establishments. "Surely, Sir, we have a Pearson in Canada," he wrote, "and if he will step forth and take his proper place he will have the best wishes and practical support of all the soldiers here."⁹⁴

British-born Corporal Abel Knight, thirty-three, married with a child, was wounded at Ypres in May 1915 while serving with the PPCLI. Dickson sent him a Braille watch and, in reply, Knight wrote the following:

In your letter ... you ask ... what professions we intend to follow. Well, after six months at this Institute, I can only reply that "I don't know." I came here last September enthusiastic and under the impression that I should meet men who have studied the blind adult question. My experience here has proved to me beyond all doubt that having got us here the officials at this Institute considered their labours ended.

Any complaint is met by the question, "What do you want to do?" I ask you, Sir, if Sir Frederick Fraser, after 45 years experience among the blind, does not know what a blind adult can do, how the devil can I, who was blinded by misadventure in the Ypres Salient, be expected to know?

... Until last month there were no Braille writers that would write in this place. I received my first lesson on a print typewriter two weeks ago, so am yet dependent on others to write my letters. True, a course of massage can be taken here, but I don't like that profession, nor am I prepared to become an itinerant vendor of scrubbing brushes.

The only thing achieved in my case here is the killing of all ambition ... my only desire now is to get home to my family, re-education or no re-education.⁹⁵

With the creation of the CNIB only weeks away, it seemed an opportune moment to expose Fraser's work as unproductive and to encourage Ottawa to enter into a partnership with the new organization to ensure proper training at St. Dunstan's and to co-ordinate the retraining of the blind in Canada. Money was at stake, and Swift wrote a number of damning letters to potential HSB donors. Swift informed one of Fraser's American benefactors that "if after twelve months trial the net results of his attempt to readapt a dozen blinded soldiers to their new life are deep-seated resentment and openly expressed contempt of ... his methods, what assurance have we

that his civilian protégés will not come to the same distressing conclusions?"⁹⁶

For fear of breaking their confidence and inviting retribution against them, Dickson refused to send Graham and Knight's letters to Ernest Scammell at the MHC. Swift, however, was quick to notify Scammell of their existence, evidence of soldiers' "discouragement approaching despair." Swift reminded Scammell that the CFLB had, as early as 1916, insisted to the MHC that all blinded Canadians attend St. Dunstan's and pointed out that "the failure of our Government to see to it that our blind men were kept where they ought to have remained has resulted in such a scandalous state of things as now obtains in Halifax." "I am heartsick and discouraged over the whole business," wrote Swift.⁹⁷ The federal government had to act; its dithering was becoming public knowledge while the soldiers bore the brunt of the confusion and internecine rivalries among Canada's civilian blind.

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind and Retraining the War Blinded

After a year of planning, drafting a constitution, and consulting and negotiating with various organizations for the blind across Canada, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind was formally created in Toronto in March 1918. Dr. Charles Dickson was elected president (a post he relinquished in August to Lewis M. Wood) and became the general secretary. Edwin Baker served as vice-president, while Alexander Viets and Harris Turner joined the council, or executive committee. Later, blinded soldiers Lieutenant-Colonel T.E. Perrett of Regina and D.M. Ross of Toronto became members while Turner took a sabbatical. The fledgling organization's models were St. Dunstan's and Britain's National Institute for the Blind, and it incorporated the philosophy of independence promoted by the CFLB. Viets and Baker

proposed Pearson as honorary president of the CNIB (he was already a patron), and Pearson accepted the honour.⁹⁸ The ties between the CNIB and St. Dunstan's were very close and would remain so. The war blinded had served as the impetus for the CNIB to form, they were heavily represented among its founders, and they served as the institute's first major clientele, with the retraining costs borne by the federal government. The war-blinded veterans' influence was thus felt immediately and was long lasting, especially in the case of Baker.

In a few years, the CNIB spread its services and the expertise it had acquired in assisting the war blinded to Canada's civilian blind. One blinded soldier remarked that "if as the result of our blindness the public will become interested in and have sympathy for the civilian blind, the affliction will have been well worth while." According to the CNIB's first published information sheet, "this admirable stand ... [had] the endorsement of all the war blinded." Moreover, "the great movement which has now been commenced for the Blind [i.e., the CNIB] may be regarded as a memorial to the gallantry and sacrifices of the Canadian soldiers who have lost their sight in the war."⁹⁹ But the organization was born of war and there was an official distinction between the war blinded and the civilian blind: the returned men received government support such as specialized training, pensions, some travel expenses, and some technical equipment.¹⁰⁰ It became the war blinded's and the CNIB's mission that these provisions be extended to cover all of Canada's blind.

On the other hand, in 1918, the CNIB's Sherman Swift wrote, "It is eminently true that our gallant blinded soldiers have recently focused public attention more directly upon the blind in general. It is not true that the needs of our soldiers gave birth to public interest in the blind." He saw the publicity given the war blinded as enhancing public understanding of the issues pertaining to all of society's blinded. Similar situations developed in France, where the Association Valentin Haüy looked after the war blinded, and in the United States. But Swift was proud of the work the civilian blind had undertaken

before the war and noted that the existence of even a meagre civilian infrastructure for the blind had facilitated the readaptation of the recently war blinded. He estimated that the war blinded and their needs, and the availability of public funds to match these, had advanced the cause of the civilian blind by as much as twenty-five years. This "sudden injection into the veins of the blind body politic" had proven a "vitalizing stream." One advantage the war blinded brought to the broader blind community was that they had all recently had sight; the abilities they had acquired over their lives and their knowledge of the sighted world were extremely important in helping long-blinded Canadians.

Not all members of the CNIB were thrilled with the exalted status of returned blinded soldiers. Charles W. Holmes, hired in July 1918 as the first director of the institute, and clearly not on the friendliest terms with either Dickson or Swift, saw the war blinded as like any other blind people. He felt that blind persons' abilities and aptitudes should dictate their retraining schemes, not a hierarchical system valuing patriotic service in the first instance. In other words, a more apt civilian should have greater call on the demanding massage training course, for example, than a less promising soldier.¹⁰¹ The difference, and some of the frustration, lay in the fact that Ottawa at the time recognized only its responsibility to pension the war blinded. Patriotic service favoured them, whereas the civilian blind had had little opportunity to serve their nation in time of war – or peace.

The institute's founders sought to establish a permanent, viable, and well-led organization catering to the needs of all Canada's blind. Such an organization could speak with greater authority and more realistically entice government subsidy and partnership in caring for the needs of the dozens of war blinded streaming home to Canada, some without benefit of St. Dunstan's training. It was these latter men's plight that most exercised Baker, and he and Viets sought to establish a smaller version of St. Dunstan's in Toronto to accommodate

them. But the cash-poor institute required government assistance to set up a training program.

The matter of where to train Canadian blinded soldiers was still not settled. Pearson noted the case of a Canadian soldier whom he had visited at London's No. 2 General Hospital and who, in turn, visited St. Dunstan's and expressed a strong desire to attend. But he was earmarked for a speedy return to Canada. He went to see Pearson, explained the situation, and, through Pearson's personal intervention, was able to be taken on strength at St. Dunstan's. But, as Pearson put it, "If he had not had the sense to come and see me he would undoubtedly have been shipped back to Canada."¹⁰²

Dickson wrote Major-General G.L. Foster, the director of medical services overseas, noting that the CFLB (now part of the CNIB) was instructing three soldiers in Braille and typewriting and that "not one of these men was told about St. Dunstan's."¹⁰³ Even late in the war major communications problems existed overseas which resulted in needless delays in training.

In order to streamline the process of returning St. Dunstan's graduates to Canada, in May 1918 Pearson began informing local representatives of the Canadian Invalided Soldiers' Commission, part of the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment, of a soldier's upcoming graduation six weeks prior to the fact. This was to help ensure "suitable arrangements have been made for them when they arrive in Canada." Although the pieces were finally falling into place, an angry Pearson noted that there continued to be some "ridiculous efforts" at the repatriation centre in Folkestone to induce Canadians to return directly to Canada without benefit of St. Dunstan's. Already, according to Pearson, ten men were being detained there on a variety of "pretexts," rather than being sent to St. Dunstan's. One "frivolous" excuse offered was the need to supply glass eyes, which St. Dunstan's "could supply in five minutes."¹⁰⁴

The creation of the CNIB and the authority with which it spoke on behalf of the war blinded helped enormously. Finally, on 31 May

1918, Walter E. Segsworth, the director of the vocational branch of the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment (DSCR), wrote Dickson at the CNIB that *all* Canadian war blinded willing to attend were to be sent to St. Dunstan's. None of Canada's war blinded were obliged to undergo retraining, but all who refused treatment at St. Dunstan's had to sign a waiver to this effect before two witnesses.¹⁰⁵ Segsworth was serving on the CNIB council as the representative of the Invalided Soldiers' Commission. Behind the scenes, Baker seems to have influenced the adoption of this long-desired policy. Baker was in the process of being hired by the DSCR to administer policies relating to Canada's war blinded. In February, the DSCR and the Invalided Soldiers' Commission had replaced the MHC in most functions: medical care, job retraining, and employment placement for its "graduates." Ernest Scammell had become the new ministry's assistant deputy minister.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Segsworth agreed that any blinded soldiers in Canada wishing to go would be sent to St. Dunstan's with travelling expenses and vocational allowances paid by Ottawa. Major-General Foster, the Canadian Army director of medical services in Britain, was duly advised; there would be no more hasty returns to Canada.¹⁰⁷

The CNIB immediately set to work to create programs for Canada's war blinded, registering as a war charity so that it could raise funds specifically for their welfare. It expanded the Braille and type-writing courses set up by the CFLB. Before the end of May 1918, five soldiers were in training. Moreover, as a clear example of its advocacy role, the CNIB communicated with all war blinded to inform them of their pension rights and began involving itself in securing employment for the returned men. By August, Dickson claimed that he was being "consulted daily ... by the staff of the Invalided Soldiers' Commission and by the Soldiers themselves."¹⁰⁸

Sir James Lougheed, by this time the minister of soldiers' civil re-establishment, noted that the government's care for the blind was complicated by the development of blindness in some invalided

soldiers and the absence of training standards in Canada. Accordingly, the DSCR's vocational department created a special branch for the war blinded and "secured the services of someone who was fully acquainted with all details in connection with the training and employment of blinded soldiers."¹⁰⁹ On 1 August 1918 the federal government appointed Captain Edwin Baker, vice-president of the CNIB, to the DSCR's vocational training staff as the secretary, Blinded Soldiers Department, "to take full charge of the Canadian Blinded Soldiers' problem," as one CNIB publication phrased it.¹¹⁰ Essentially, the DSCR had created a blinded aftercare service that would be operated by the CNIB under contract with Ottawa. Baker was familiar with the care, rehabilitation, and employment prospects for the war blinded in both Britain and Canada.

The indefatigable Baker, only twenty-five, immediately set out to make St. Dunstan's positive philosophy into Ottawa's guiding policy. Baker moved to Ottawa and his influence was quickly felt. The DSCR contacted thirty-seven blinded veterans and offered them passage to St. Dunstan's. Twelve accepted, while twenty-five chose to wait for a suitable CNIB retraining facility to be established in Toronto.¹¹¹ Perhaps some of the latter did not wish to make the effort. St. Dunstan's imposed some self-discipline and drive on the men, something occasionally missing from their hitherto lax training regimens in Canada. Not everything went smoothly with early CNIB training. In October 1918, Charles Holmes, the CNIB director, wrote Baker that imposing a "serious ... business-like" vocational training routine on the men had led to difficulties: "two or three of these fellows are admittedly of very difficult disposition and out to make trouble ... The testimony is unanimous that the group which is already gone back to St. Dunstan's was away ahead of that which is still here in point of calibre, mentality, [and] social level." The tough-minded Holmes wondered how much "latitude" the CNIB should give the men in terms of "irregularity of attendance, indifference of application to work, and dictatorship in general as to what they will and will

not do."¹¹² These were important questions, and Holmes and Baker worked to implement a process the DSCR, the CNIB, and the soldiers could live with.

A number of returned men with worsening vision problems were without St. Dunstan's or Canada-based training since they were not blind (defined as having less than 10 percent vision in each eye with corrective lenses) at the time of their discharge. But dozens of soldiers seriously aggravated or developed eye disorders while on service that progressively deteriorated following discharge. Baker saw his role with the DSCR as seeing to the "training and welfare of all blinded Canadian soldiers." He maintained files on all blind men and those on their way to becoming blind. Baker was anxious that the CNIB initiate some training of those returned soldiers with progressive blindness while they could still see. He felt that if these men were returned to their families, "little would be accomplished in the way of attaining independence," although "independence is a key to happiness" among the blind. Moreover, according to Segsworth, the best vocational training results were with men blinded immediately, and not gradually, since "there was not the mental strain of a long period of indecision and mental and physical re-adaptation."¹¹³

Baker conferred constantly with CNIB officials, met with as many of the blinded veterans across Canada as possible, offered them advice on pension claims, and kept their best interests in mind. He co-ordinated the furnishing of raw material if the men were producing items for sale and assisted with the marketing of their wares. In short, he "supervised the personal and business details in connection with every man who has graduated" or was enrolled in DSCR-approved training programs. It was Baker who decided whether the DSCR would pay to send a man to the CNIB for training, and what form this training would take. It was not always easy. For example, a Private Minnett "was rather hard to deal with," wrote Baker to Holmes, "as he had most impossible ideas regarding his future." Wishing to take a poultry-raising course at Guelph, Minnett could not conceive

of a viable plan to undertake such an operation, and Baker “would not consent to his taking the course.” Later, Minnett hoped to take up massage therapy but Baker felt he was unsuitable. Private Stevens was an “intelligent and practical man,” but “if he had only a little more education,” Baker would have recommended him for the demanding course in massage.¹¹⁴ He tried to direct the men toward training programs best suited to their intellectual and physical capacities and their life experiences. It seemed a bit harsh at times, but the system had to be shown to work and, wherever possible, potential failure was identified and the men’s retraining regimen redirected.

Corporal Charles Purkis, a war-blinded Canadian veteran of the 34th Battalion who had been trained at St. Dunstan’s in 1918, instructed poultry farming to blinded veterans in residence at Guelph’s Ontario Agricultural College. This was doubly convenient since Purkis hailed from Preston, close to Guelph. Specifically recommended by Pearson, Purkis, also a skilled carpenter, impressed Baker, who was no easy sell. By January 1919, Baker had sent five men to Purkis and his sighted assistant. Each man was provided with tools and “a small individual pen of fowl for which he will be responsible and thus secure actual practical experience.” In November 1919, Purkis set up the poultry-farming course in Preston.¹¹⁵ The Soldier Settlement Board facilitated the settling of the blind farmers and provided loans if needed. With the assistance of friends and relatives, the men selected locations for their poultry farms, normally on a plot of land varying from three to ten acres and near a suitable market.¹¹⁶ This well-run program showed that Baker’s initiatives were paying off; the war blinded *could* be retrained.

Canada’s First World War blinded came from all walks of life and backgrounds, and the DSCR occasionally contracted with organizations other than the CNIB for blinded soldiers’ training. In 1920 Segsworth, the DSCR’s retiring director of vocational training, remarked that one of the blinded men, from the 2nd Construction Battalion, raised mainly in Nova Scotia, was “coloured,” as were all the members

of this segregated unit. He had successfully trained as a cobbler at the Halifax Technical School and lived in a section of Halifax "occupied by coloured people, and secures all their repair trade." Another man from Montreal's 60th Battalion had successfully completed a year-long course in broom making at the Montreal School for the Blind. Segsworth noted that he "suffers from shell shock, which has affected his mental capacity." The Montreal school employed him directly.¹¹⁷

Perhaps more typical was the case of Trueman Gamblin from King's County, New Brunswick. He had sold his woodcutting business and enlisted in 1915 at the age of twenty-nine. In July 1916, he proceeded overseas and by November had joined the 26th Battalion at the front. Gamblin later recalled, as recounted by his daughter, that during the storming of Vimy Ridge on 9 April 1917, "the last sunlight he remembers seeing was the brief break in the storm clouds in early afternoon of that day. A heavy shell exploding close by shattered the optic nerves in both eyes leaving him totally blind." Gamblin followed the usual medical route through Boulogne, St. Mark's Hospital in London, and then No. 2 General Hospital. Several operations to restore his vision were unsuccessful. He was trained in joinery at St. Dunstan's and returned to Canada in November 1918. He had married in Britain and he and his wife raised five children.¹¹⁸

By October 1918, 110 Canadian soldiers were known to have been blinded in the war, of whom about 45 or 50 were back in Canada. The breakdown of their place of training and their stage in the training stream provides a snapshot of the situation just prior to the cessation of hostilities:

- 19 graduates of St. Dunstan's
- 3 graduates from Canada
- 38 in training at St. Dunstan's
- 15 in training in Canada
- 15 in hospital in Britain
- 2 deceased in Canada

- 15 unable or unwilling to retrain
- 3 miscellaneous.

About 20 percent of these men had good guiding sight, another 20 percent had difficulty in getting about, 20 percent had light perception only, and 40 percent were "dark blind." The causes of blindness among them included gunshot and shrapnel wounds but also optic atrophy caused by exposure to poison gas, retinitis pigmentosa, detached retina, sympathetic blindness caused by the earlier loss of a single eye, facial wounds causing cataracts, spinal meningitis, existing vision problems aggravated by wartime service, and eye disorders contracted while on active service.¹¹⁹

By October 1918, 85 percent of the men trained or in training had been taught Braille and typewriting. Braille took on average five or six months to master sufficiently to pass a proficiency test. Upon successful completion of the typing course, students in Canada, as at St. Dunstan's, received the gift of a typewriter, which, according to Segsworth, would prove to be "one of his best friends during the rest of his days." Avocational training offered at St. Dunstan's, and in Canada, to build up manual dexterity (or "hand culture") and a sense of proportion and distance included basketry, netting, and mat-making. CNIB aftercare and follow-up visits were also begun with graduates.¹²⁰

Blinded soldiers under the care of the CNIB mounted an impressive retraining and readaptation demonstration at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in August and September 1918. They showcased their proficiency in reading Braille, typewriting, basket and tray making, scarf weaving, and rug making. Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden visited the men's exhibits, as did Ontario premier Sir William Hearst and Sir James Lougheed.¹²¹ But despite the impressive showing, Canada's facilities for the blind were as yet unable to cope with the large number of war blinded. Only after the CNIB opened Pearson Hall, in December 1918, were the results even approaching satisfaction.¹²²

Pearson Hall

Initially, the CNIB's DSCR-funded retraining programs were provided at CNIB headquarters at 142 College Street, Toronto, formerly the location of the CFLB. The institute's executive offices were at 36 King Street East. It became increasingly clear that a new facility was needed. The same site could serve as a "club" for the war-blinded men, where they could feel at home, meet other Canadians similarly disabled, and exchange counsel and information. At the 23 September 1918 CNIB executive committee meeting, Baker "suggested that suitable quarters be secured in the City of Toronto as a Club House for Blinded Soldiers in which those who desired might reside and those who resided outside might also come for social privileges." It was agreed that "steps in this direction should be taken," but an arrangement would have to be worked out with the federal government first.¹²³ Fortunately, Captain Baker worked at the DSCR and doubled as vice-president of the CNIB. The obvious conflict of interest in Baker's dual role seemed never to be raised. Clearly the DSCR found him a more useful employee *because* of his CNIB connection.

In October 1918, the CNIB leased an elegant Second Empire mansion at 186 Beverley Street, in a fashionable district of downtown Toronto, for \$12,000, using funds made available by the federal government. The house was purchased outright for the CNIB for \$38,000 the following year.¹²⁴ It had been built in 1876 for George Brown, a father of Confederation and founder of the *Globe* newspaper. It was located on a lot of 200 by 250 feet "within easy walking distance of several car-lines, but not immediately upon any of the noisy thoroughfares."¹²⁵ After remodelling, it served as the main retraining and rehabilitation centre for Canada's war blinded, adopting on a much smaller scale the philosophies and methods of St. Dunstan's. The CNIB took possession of the building in early November and welcomed its first resident a month later; fifteen men were expected almost immediately.

In January 1919, Sir Arthur Pearson was present for the official opening of the building named in his honour. It was a proud moment for all the Canadian war blinded, and perhaps especially for Edwin Baker, who was able to welcome his mentor to Canada's mini-St. Dunstan's, which Baker had been so instrumental in setting up. Pearson Hall was a testament to Pearson's work. On 6 January Pearson was the special guest at a banquet at Pearson Hall given by some twenty-seven war blinded from all over Canada, most of whom had been trained at St. Dunstan's. A reporter from a Toronto newspaper remarked that "the very air tingled with emotion." Alexander Viets rose and stated that "no mere words could voice our feelings tonight ... We welcome tonight not so much the man of title, friend of kings and queens and princes, but our old friend, the friend of the blind soldiers, the man with the big heart ... the man who came to us in our hour of gloom and pointed the way to the light." Other testimonials followed. When Pearson spoke, the same reporter noted that it "made an outsider feel an intruder on almost sacred ground." Pearson closed by reminding the veterans that they "must take particular care never to lose that feeling of seeing."¹²⁶ "I have never spent a more delightful evening in my life," Pearson later remarked, "than I spent listening to them telling of what they were doing and how they were doing it. ... [A] feeling of intense pride came into my heart." Several years later Baker recalled that Pearson "spoke that night of the men who owed so much to him, reminding them of the old St. Dunstan's days, of the great satisfaction it was to him of being privileged to assist them and of the hopefulness, optimism, and confidence he had as to their future and what he expected of them. He charged them to remember the St. Dunstan's axioms and to carry on in their respective spheres as normal men."¹²⁷

Braving the January cold, Pearson formally declared Pearson Hall open on 7 January 1919. Baker's biographer hailed the event as a "milestone" in his life.¹²⁸ That evening a large public gala in Pearson's honour, and in honour of all war-blinded Canadians, was held at

Massey Hall under the auspices of the CNIB. The distinguished speakers were Sir James Lougheed, Sir William Hearst, Edwin Baker, and Pearson himself. Baker referred to Pearson as the "greatest man the world of the blind has ever known." He also emphasized that the attention and assistance given blinded soldiers would benefit all Canadian blind: "We blind soldiers also feel that the cause of the civilian blind is our cause. We have been lucky enough to have had a Sir Arthur Pearson, and we want to see every blind person given ... as good a chance." Pearson later spoke to enthusiastic gatherings in Hamilton, Montreal, Ottawa, and in the United States.¹²⁹

Donations of every amount to help renovate the building poured in from all sources, including Britain and the United States. The Girls' Club of the T. Eaton Company in Toronto sent \$1,000. In May 1919, Toronto's Miss Alice Fisher sent \$6.50 collected from her bridge club, and in June the Montreal chapter of the Canadian Red Cross Society donated \$100. The same month Naomi Harris donated \$30, the proceeds from selling lilies of the valley on the highway in Clarkson, just west of Toronto. In July Miss M. Thompson of Toronto sent a cheque for \$60.05, the proceeds from a bazaar given by a group of children. "A deputation of these little children came to [Pearson] Hall with the cheque," wrote Dickson to Holmes, "and were greatly interested in meeting some of the men and in seeing the Braille Writer." In 1921 the stewards and crew of the *S.S. Assiniboia*, a Canadian Pacific steamer plying the Great Lakes, donated \$30. "I may say that a good percentage of our boys are returned soldiers and we all deem it an honour to be able to assist your institute," wrote D.A. Sutherland, the chief steward.¹³⁰

Pearson Hall was financed in part from the CNIB's general account and specific donations, but monies also accumulated in the Blinded Soldiers' Fund, which consisted of unsolicited donations to the CNIB to further its work on behalf of blinded soldiers. Helping the war blinded was a popular charitable pursuit, and the fund grew rapidly. In the first fourteen months of the CNIB's operation, to May

1919, the DSCR granted the institute \$2,325 for vocational training, while the Blinded Soldiers' Fund received \$4,852 in donations. Among the many contributions, ranging from \$2 to more than \$800, mainly from Ontario, were those from several chapters of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, local Red Cross associations, corporations and businesses, such as the Dunlop Tire and Rubber Company (\$50), regimental or military associations, and private citizens from all classes. The Canadian Women's Association for the Welfare of the Blind, which in April 1919 was renamed the CNIB's Women's Auxiliary, took on the responsibility of furnishing the building, mainly using publicly donated household goods.¹³¹

Social and entertainment committees were convened at Pearson Hall to organize Friday-night dances, parties, theatre nights, and other recreational activities. A player-piano was installed, as was a small gymnasium. Dedicated Red Cross VADs were assigned to help staff the centre and, according to a very early history of the CNIB, some bereaved women "found solace in caring for those who had lost sight during the Great War." Domestic arrangements were seen to by a house committee headed by Anne Clarke, the wife of Ontario's lieutenant governor. In its first annual report in 1919, the CNIB credited the members of this committee, the volunteer teachers and workers, and the "devoted" VADs with the successful functioning of Pearson Hall. Baker later recalled that the "loyal and active ... VADs rendered never-to-be-forgotten service throughout the whole training period."¹³²

Men undergoing training at Pearson Hall received pay and allowances from the DSCR and were obliged to pay twenty-five dollars a month for their room and board. This money was then held in trust and returned to them in a lump sum on completion of their training. St. Dunstan's "graduates" could stay without charge from one to three months and thereafter pay twenty-five dollars a month.¹³³ Making Pearson Hall a hospitable drop-in centre for employed graduates of St. Dunstan's or CNIB training was excellent for the morale of the

residents still undergoing training, some of whom were “fired with ambition to do as well” as those who had succeeded in life despite their disability.¹³⁴

Dr. Charles Dickson became the first chairman of the CNIB's Blinded Soldiers Committee, overseeing the affairs of Pearson Hall, its residents, and trainees, and living there as well. Dickson's assistant at Pearson Hall was Roy Dies, brother of William C. Dies, a blinded Canadian soldier. William, serving with the 50th Battalion, had lost both eyes and his right arm during a 3:00 a.m. trench raid at Vimy on 13 February 1917. His last visual memory was of one of his comrades jumping into a trench and engaging German soldiers. Dies did the same and never saw again.¹³⁵ Roy had been working with the YMCA in England at the time of his brother's wounding and quit that position to help care for him and other wounded men at St. Dunstan's. “Sir Arthur Pearson says Roy Dies knows more about blinded soldiers and their needs than any other sighted man he has ever met,” wrote Dickson in November 1918.¹³⁶ Bill Dies went on to become president of the Sir Arthur Pearson Club of War Blinded Soldiers and Sailors.

The CNIB reported that “without exception,” every soldier trained at St. Dunstan's “possesses an independence and determination of character that is quite extraordinary.”¹³⁷ Although the training at Pearson Hall was more modest and mainly intended for those not having attended St. Dunstan's, according to Sherman Swift, the new facility was “a very satisfactory replica in miniature” of St. Dunstan's and the name, Pearson, stood for “practically all that is good in the training and re-education of the military blind the world over.” With the cessation of hostilities, and the flow of Canadians to St. Dunstan's down to a trickle, it was important that Canada take charge of its own retraining needs to meet the challenges of the postwar period.

By the spring of 1919, the CNIB estimated conservatively that about 125 Canadians had been blinded during the war, of whom perhaps 100 would be permanently resident in Canada, with most of the remainder in Britain. Later statistics showed that as of March

1919, some 1,347 Canadians had suffered some form of visual impairment as a result of their military service, though only 139, slightly more than 10 percent, required vocational retraining as a result of being judged 100 percent disabled due to blindness (though not necessarily 100 percent blind). Similarly, about 10 percent of Britain's 12,000 eye cases required training at St. Dunstan's. Of Canada's 139 blind cases, 46 had lost both their eyes.¹³⁸ Due to subsequent cases being discovered and the incidence of delayed blindness, by the early 1920s the tally of blinded men from the First World War approached 200, and this was far from the war's final tally. Of these, 92 received training at St. Dunstan's and most of the remainder trained at Pearson Hall.¹³⁹

Pearson Hall was a great success. Nevertheless, occasionally it was difficult to deal with some of the men. James Rawlinson, for example, was possessed of a robust personality which rubbed many of his colleagues the wrong way. In January 1919 Baker, no fan of Rawlinson, who was then in residence at Pearson Hall, wrote Holmes that "the proposition of finding work for [Rawlinson] is rather a difficult one and rendered more so by his attitude in the matter. He takes the position that he should receive the preference in the appointment of a Braille teacher at Pearson Hall ... I do not think he possesses the necessary personality and disposition to make a success as an instructor. He is of a persistent and argumentative nature and rather inclined to be a grouch."¹⁴⁰ Fortunately, Rawlinson was hired by the DSCR office in Toronto, where he gave "entire satisfaction" according to Dickson.¹⁴¹ Baker also recommended that Holmes organize outdoor exercises for the men to "eliminate the tendency towards moping" that some men exhibited. Despite the outpouring of public support and sympathy and Ottawa's willingness to pay for the men's retraining, life for these newly blinded young Canadians was far from easy.

To successfully meet their readaptation challenges and ensure adequate government support, Canada's war-blinded veterans were

obliged to remain cohesive and vigilant, lest a grateful nation forget its heroes' postwar needs. Pension entitlements, medical care, and job retraining programs required constant improvements in the decades following the war's end. Frequently, special interest groups among the veteran population needed to have their voices heard above the rest. The war blinded were one of these groups. With spirited leadership, and the camaraderie of those with shared experiences, Canada's war blinded forged a new organization they could call their own. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and acting in close co-operation with the CNIB, the Sir Arthur Pearson Club of Blinded Soldiers and Sailors served its members' professional and personal needs and stood as a model of what a capable, willing, and dedicated group of veterans could accomplish.