

## Working Women on the Homefront: World War II

### Grade 10: Canadian History Since World War I

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#### Overview

All of the Archives of Ontario lesson plans have two components:

- The first component introduces students to the concept of an archive and why the Archives of Ontario is an important resource for learning history
- The second component is content-based and focuses on the critical exploration of a historical topic that fits with the Ontario History and Social Studies Curriculum for grades 3 to 12. This plan is specifically designed to align with the Grade 10: Canadian History Since World War I curricula.



We have provided archival material and an activity for you to do in your classroom. You can do these lessons as outlined or modify them to suit your needs. Feedback or suggestions for other lesson plans are welcome.

**In this plan**, students will work in jigsaw groups to explore four different areas of women's lives working at a World War II factory and then explore the role of bias in using primary sources.

#### Curriculum Connections

##### **Overall Expectations – Academic (CHC2D)**

##### *Communities: Local, National, and Global*

- explain how local, national, and global influences have helped shape Canadian identity;
- analyse the impact of external forces and events on Canada and its policies since 1914;
- assess Canada's participation in war and contributions to peacekeeping and security.

##### *Change and Continuity*

- analyse changing demographic patterns and their impact on Canadian society since 1914.

##### *Citizenship and Heritage*

- assess how individual Canadians have contributed to the development of Canada and the country's emerging sense of identity.

##### *Social, Economic, and Political Structures*

- analyse how changing economic and social conditions have affected Canadians since 1914.

### *Methods of Historical Inquiry and Communication*

- formulate questions on topics and issues in the history of Canada since 1914, and use appropriate methods of historical research to locate, gather, evaluate, and organize relevant information from a variety of sources.
- interpret and analyse information gathered through research, employing concepts and approaches appropriate to historical inquiry.
- communicate the results of historical inquiries, using appropriate terms and concepts and a variety of forms of communication.

### **Overall Expectations – Applied (CHC2P)**

#### *Communities: Local, National, and Global*

- describe some of the major local, national, and global forces and events that have influenced Canada's policies and Canadian identity since 1914;
- evaluate Canada's participation in war and contributions to peacekeeping and security.

#### *Change and Continuity*

- explain some major ways in which Canada's population has changed since 1914.

#### *Citizenship and Heritage*

- describe how individual Canadians have contributed to the development of Canada and its emerging sense of identity.

#### *Social, Economic, and Political Structures*

- explain changing economic conditions and patterns and how they have affected Canadians.

### *Methods of Historical Inquiry and Communication*

- formulate questions on topics and issues in the history of Canada since 1914, and use appropriate methods of historical research to locate, gather, evaluate, and organize relevant information from a variety of sources;
- interpret and analyse information gathered through research, employing concepts and approaches appropriate to historical inquiry;
- communicate the results of historical inquiries, using appropriate terms and concepts and a variety of forms of communication.

### **Getting Organized**

To prepare for this lesson, you can:

- ✓ Make overheads or create a PowerPoint with the introductory information found on: **Overhead 1: Exploration Through the Archives** and **Overhead 2: Research Question**
- ✓ Print out and make individual copies of **Student Worksheet: Working Women: Expert Group Notes**, **Student Worksheet: Working Women: Home Group Notes**, and **Student Handout: Working Women – Rethinking sources**
- ✓ Print out and make one copy of all the primary sources and organize them into Expert Group work stations

## **Lesson Plan**

- Begin by introducing the concept of an archive and how it can help answer research questions related to history. See **Overhead 1: Exploration Through the Archives** to introduce this to your students and the following text to prepare yourself:

Over the course of a lifetime, most people accumulate a variety of records. It starts with a birth certificate and expands into awards, bank statements, receipts, letters, photographs – anything that documents important events and relationships in one’s life. These records comprise an individual’s personal archives. Governments, businesses, schools, associations and organizations of all types do the same, keeping records as evidence of their activities and accomplishments.

These documents provide a fascinating view into the past. Like a detective investigating a case, a researcher using these records can get a sense of what a place looked like, what people were thinking, what life was like, and what happened and why. Anyone with an interest in the past, whether it is delving into local history, tracing a family tree, or probing decisions and events, will find answers in archives.

Some examples are:

- letters, manuscripts, diaries often from famous people
- notes or recordings of interviews
- photographs, sketches and paintings
- birth, death and marriage records
- land registries, titles to property, and maps
- court records
- architectural plans and engineering drawings
- audio, video and film records

Archives are important resources for answering our questions about the past. Records may be used to settle legal claims, they may clarify family history, they are grist for historians, and they impart to filmmakers and authors a sense of the ways things were. Whatever the reason, archives have a story to tell.

The first step is to identify your research question and what you are hoping to find in the Archives to provide support to that question.

- Following this introduction, use **Overhead 2: Research Question** to introduce the lesson’s research question:

**What was the work experiences like for women working in factories during World War II?**

**What image of working women did the company want to portray during World War? Why do you think this is?**

Introduce the Archives of Ontario have identified two collections that include letters/diary entries which can help you answer this question. These collections are:

**The Canadian Car and Foundry Collection**  
**The General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds**

A “Fond” is a group of records created by a single individual or a group.

- Following this introduction, organize students into groups of four for a jigsaw activity. Ask students to think about the topic of the day’s class and develop questions they, as a group, have about women working in factories during World War II.
- Following the introductory discussion each student in the group will visit one of four research stations, using **Student Worksheet: Working Women on the Homefront: Expert Group Notes** to take notes and answer the questions provided. Encourage students to think about the questions provided as well as the questions that they developed as a group.
- Once back in their home groups, students can take turns sharing what they learnt in their expert groups and use **Student Worksheet: Working Women on the Homefront: Home Group Notes** to take notes about each topic.
- In the following class, review the research question and ask students to look more critically at the sources they looked at. Ask students to use **Student Handout: Working Women – Rethinking sources** to think about the role of bias in the sources they looked at and whether it is preventative for learning history.
- Questions for discussion: Who created the documents they looked at? What they were originally for? What message or theme did they want to convey and why? Was the experiences that were presented a reality for all the women? Why or why not? How would they know? Did the sources they looked at answer the questions they developed about working women in World War II? Can students answer their original research question with these sources?

### **Extension/Accommodation**

Encourage students to develop and perform a skit or radio interview about another aspect of working women’s experiences

Ask students to write an essay discussing their findings from the jigsaw

Make this lesson an introduction to a trip to the Archives of Ontario and encourage your students to visit our website to research more about this topic.

### **Resources**

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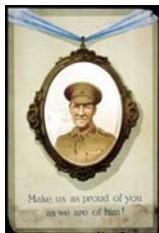
## Exploration through the Archives

Over the course of a lifetime, most people accumulate a variety of records.

Taken together, these records can provide a fascinating view into someone's life and into the past.

Like a detective investigating a case, a researcher using these records can get a sense of what a place looked like, what people were thinking, what life was like, and what happened and why.

Some examples of records that a historian may look at are:



- ✓ birth, death, and marriage records
- ✓ letters or diaries
- ✓ photographs, sketches, and paintings
- ✓ court records
- ✓ audio, video and film records



An **archive** is a place where these records and historical documents are preserved. The **Archives of Ontario** collects and preserves records with relevance to the history of Ontario.

Using primary sources from the Archives of Ontario's collections, you too can be an investigator exploring the past and understanding the present.



## Working Women on the Homefront

### Research Question

To begin using the records found at an archive, it is best to begin with a *research question* that can guide your search.

For this lesson, your research question could be:

**What was the work experiences like for women working in factories during World War II?**

**What image of working women did the company want to portray during World War? Why do you think this is?**



The Archives of Ontario have identified a “fond,” or record collection, to help you answer that question.

Today you’ll be working with **The Canadian Car and Foundry Collection** and **General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds**

### Directions

1. In your Home Group write a list of questions you have about women working in factories during World War II
2. Divide into Expert Groups where you’ll take notes on one topic
3. Go back to your Home Group and share what you learnt

**Student Worksheet: Working Women on the Homefront**

**Expert Group Notes**

Expert Group Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**Source 1 citation:**

What type of source was it?

What was it about?

Responses to 'Questions to think about':

Questions you still have:

**Source 2 citation:**

What type of source was it?

What was it about?

Responses to 'Questions to think about':

Questions you still have:

**Source 3 citation:**

What type of source was it?

What was it about?

Responses to 'Questions to think about':

Questions you still have:

**Student Worksheet: Working Women on the Homefront****Home Group Notes**

Back in your home group, take turns sharing what you learnt in your expert groups.  
Take notes to build a record of the sources.

**Group 1: Women in the Workforce 1**

Notes:

Sources used:

Questions I still have:

**Group 2: Women in the Workforce 2**

Notes:

Sources used:

Questions I still have:

**Group 3: Women and Recreation**

Notes:

Sources used:

Questions I still have:

**Group 4: Miss War Worker Beauty Contest**

Notes:

Sources used:

Questions I still have:

## Group 1: Women in the Workforce



Women soldering and assembling cables for airplanes,  
Canadian Car and Foundry Co. 1945, Fort William (Ont.).  
Canadian Car and Foundry Collection.  
Reference Code: C 190-3-0-0-43  
Archives of Ontario, I0002965

### Questions to think about:

- Who are in these photos? Is there anything sur
- What are the people in the photos doing?
- How are the people in the photos dressed? Can and/or facial expressions?
- What did the photographer want to capture in the photo trying to convey?



General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Canadian Car and Foundry Collection.  
Reference Code: F 2082-1-2-2.1  
Archives of Ontario, AO 2628

**Group 1: Women in the Workforce****SCHOOL TEACHER PAYS  
EMPLOYEES TRIBUTE**

In an article which appeared in the Toronto Evening Telegram recently, Miss Mary Galbraith, vice-president of the Federation of Women Teachers' Associations of Ontario, speaking on behalf of the school teachers who worked during the summer months at Scarborough, paid the regular employees here a high tribute.

"We worked with the grandest lot of women", Miss Galbraith is quoted as saying. "When we went into the plant we didn't know much about our jobs, but everyone was so kind to us that it made it much easier."

Continuing she said, "You sometimes hear criticism about people who work in munition plants, but there should be none, because these are the people who are really patriotic."

In her interview, Miss Galbraith stressed the fact that the teachers were here only temporarily to help out while the regular employees were on vacation. "It's the day-to-day employee who does the real work year in and year out. There are the housewives, girls, women with husbands and sons overseas and widows whose heart and soul are in their work. They are wonderfully patriotic and I have the greatest respect for them," she said.

General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Canadian Car and Foundry Collection.

Reference Code: F 2082-1-2-2.1  
Archives of Ontario, AO 2628

**Questions to think about:**

- What do you think the criticisms were of people who worked at munitions plants?
- What kind of women were working at the Scarboro Plant? Why were they more patriotic than others?

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**Group 1: Women in the Workforce**

“Let’s Visit” Radio Broadcast Transcript Program Introduction (1:17)

<b>Male Host</b>	<i>Let’s Visit!</i> We take on <i>Let’s Visit</i> microphone to one of the largest fuse filling plants in the Dominion of Canada.
<b>Female Host</b>	In Scarboro Plant of the General Engineering, at Toronto, Ontario. Your name is?
<b>Anne</b>	Mrs. Anne Edmonds.
<b>Female Host</b>	You are interested in doing a full-time war job Mrs. Edmonds?
<b>Anne</b>	Yes I am. With my husband overseas, I have felt for a long time that I should be helping too. Now the children are older and I have a plan for them to be well-looked after and I am ready to start.
<b>Female Host</b>	Well I’m glad to hear that! Canada has increased her ammunition filling program tremendously. We replace the millions of shells that are being used in the invasion. Plenty of ammunition means that saving of casualties, and the speeding of victory. Here at Scarboro, we are filling the fuses and other small parts of the shell. For this work hundreds of women are needed. Their desk fingers are especially skilful at those fine, light operations. You don’t need previous experience.
<b>Anne</b>	Oh you don’t need to sell me on the job here; after all, my mother and three sisters have worked here. They have told me how clean it is. They say the work isn’t hard to do or learn, and I hear the meals are grand. Anyhow, my family seems to feel they are doing something about this war, so I’d like to join them here.

Let’s Visit (1945)  
General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Radio Transcription Disk  
Reference Code: F 2082-1-3-1  
Archives of Ontario

**Questions to think about:**

- Why was it so important for women to come and work at the Scarboro Plant?
- Why did Anne want to work at the Scarboro Plant? Do you think her decision reflected the majority of women who worked at the plant? Why?

## Group 2: Women in the Workforce



Women wiring the main distribution panels for airplanes,  
Canadian Car and Foundry Co. 1945, Fort William (Ont.)  
Canadian Car and Foundry Collection  
Reference Code: C 190-3-0-0-42  
Archives of Ontario, I0002964

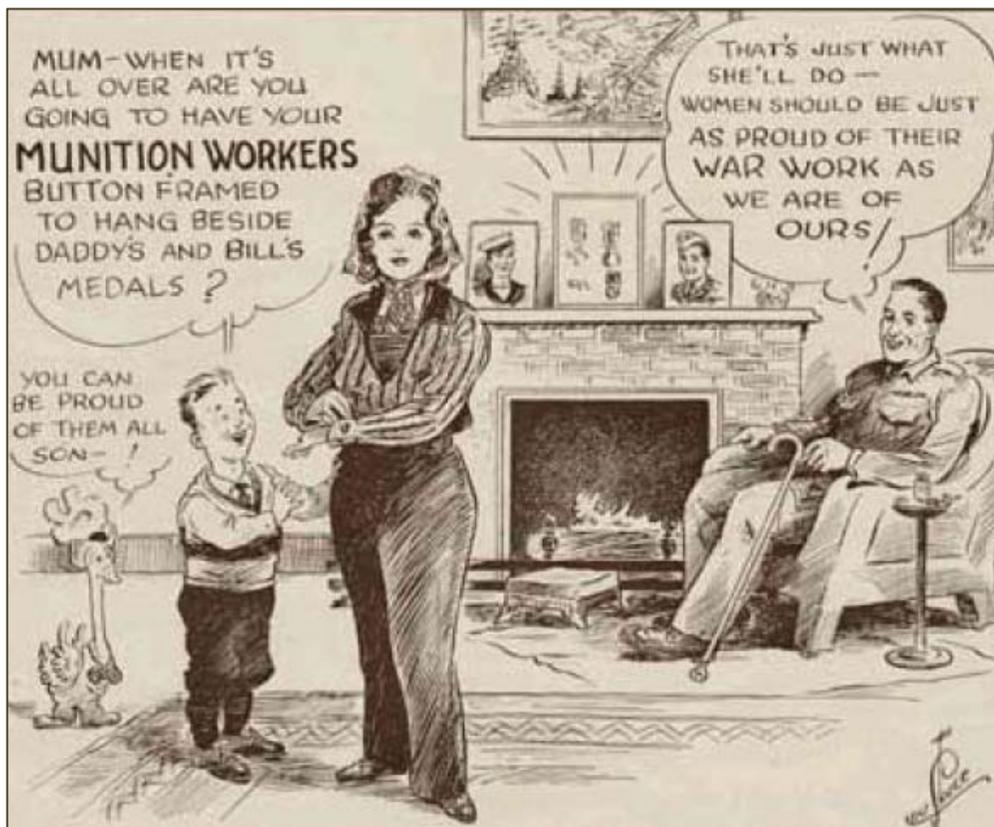


Filling Assembly, Primer 15  
General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Reference Code F 2082-1-2-2.3  
Archives of Ontario

### Questions to think about:

- Who are in these photos? Is there anything surprising in the photos? If so, what?
- What are the people in the photos doing?
- How are the people in the photos dressed? Can you infer anything from their postures and/or facial expressions?
- What did the photographer want to capture in the photos? Is there a message he/she is trying to convey?

## Group 2: Women in the Workforce



GECO Fusilier: A Powder Magazine  
Vol. 1 No. 2: April 11, 1942  
General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Reference Code: F 2082-1-1-22, Box 3  
Archives of Ontario

### Questions to think about:

- What does the cartoon say about the role of women in the workforce? What message, and to whom, was the cartoon trying to convey?

## Group 2: Women in the Workforce

### WE'RE ALL IN THE GOOD FIGHT TOGETHER

"COME then—let us to our task—to the battle and and toil" exhorted Winston Churchill, and throughout the length and breadth of the land the women of Canada have answered the trumpet call to national service with a zeal that is providing historians with the material for some of the brightest pages in the future annals of this second world war.

From offices, from stores, from factories, schools, and homes, from universities, have come the recruits for a swiftly expanding army of overalled women who by their amazing aptitude in mastering unfamiliar tasks have become a vital factor in our wartime industrial front, and have brought us in sight at least of the total production for total war towards which we are progressing.

But it is not only at the lathes, drill presses, boring and assembling machines, electrical wiring for aircraft, and the kind of work we do at "Scarboro"—to name but a few of the war occupations—where women are doing their bit. Women are playing an increasingly important part in scientific and chemical research, on the farms, in the replacement of men in essential peacetime industries—in fact, there are few aspects of the whole pattern of Canada at war where women are not playing a notable role.

How extensive is this participation is glimpsed by the fact that one out of every 38 women registered under the National Registration of two years ago is now directly engaged in wartime industry. This is a high percentage when it is borne in mind that 22 out of every 38 women registered at that time were listed as "homemakers" a large majority of whom, up to the present at least, have not been classed as available for industrial employment.

#### Women Will Fill the Gaps

More and more as the armed services require further withdrawals of men, as war industry simultaneously increases both in scope and tempo, further demands will be made on women to fill the gaps, for it is here only that adequate reserves remain.

Not even the sketchiest chronicle of what women are doing in this war would be complete without reference to their truly magnificent contribution in respect of the voluntary services. Among the numerous patriotic and charitable organizations officered and maintained by women from coast to coast, many millions of dollars have been raised and distributed for the relief of war victims in Britain and the occupied countries of our allies. Incredible amounts of clothing, food, medical supplies and comforts of all kinds have been sent to war torn Europe and Asia.

Mobile canteens and ambulances are further items in the imposing list of aid provided by Canadian women to the less fortunately situated Motherland.

Hostess houses furnishing recreational centres for the men of the armed services have been established across Canada. Canteens operated entirely by voluntary female help dispense food to men of the army, navy, and air force. Books, magazines, cigarettes, not to mention socks, mufflers, mitts, and dirty bags, are now routine matters. Food, clothing, and cigarettes are also supplied through the International Red Cross to British prisoners of war in Germany and other parts of the world.

All in all, the women of this country in whatever walk of life they may be, whether in uniform, overalls, or aprons, are entitled to hold their heads high, for they are doing a grand job in full knowledge of the fact—**THAT THE WAR CANNOT BE WON WITHOUT THEM.**

GECO Fusilier: A Powder Magazine

Vol. 1 No. 2: April 11, 1942

General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds

Reference Code: F 2082-1-1-22, Box 3

Archives of Ontario

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### **Questions to think about:**

- Where did the women come from who are in the workforce?
- What does the article say about the role women played in the workforce across Canada?
- What other areas did women work in?
- Why could the war not be won without the help of women?

### Group 3: Women and Recreation



Bowling

General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Reference Code F 2082-1-2-3.1  
Archives of Ontario

#### Questions to think about:

- Who are in these photos? Is there anything surprising in the photos? If so, what?
- What are the people in the photos doing?
- How are the people in the photos dressed? Can you infer anything from their postures and/or facial expressions?
- What did the photographer want to capture in the photos? Is there a message he/she is trying to convey?



Baseball

General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Reference Code: F 2082-1-2-3.2  
Archives of Ontario

### Group 3: Women and Recreation



Our attractive pin-up girls for this issue are: Top left, Blanche Ferguson, (Bldg. 31) top right, Evelyn Bowman, Shop 67B; bottom left, Vera Wightman, Shops 39 A, B, C; D; bottom right, Arleigh Estwick, Mechanical 10.

GECO Fusilier: A Powder Magazine  
Vol. 3 No. 2: May 8, 1944  
General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Reference Code: F 2082-1-1-22, Box 3  
Archives of Ontario

#### Questions to think about:

- Who were these photos aimed at?
- Do these photos seem a bit contradictory, considering the work women did at the plant? Why?

**Group 3: Women and Recreation****“Let’s Visit” Radio Broadcast Transcript The Recreation Program (1:30)**

Woman Host	Much of the health and happiness of our workers is due to our recreation programs. Recreation for women is under the direct of Ms. Helen [?], who will show us about the centre.
Man Host	How do you do Ms. [?]? Well, there’s certainly lots of space to play here. Tell me, just what games do you play?
Helen	Well, those big cans of [?] are provided for golf driving practice for those employees who plan on getting their exercise and sunshine on the golf course. And these shuffle board courts are used a great deal in spare moments, as more and more people are realizing the real thrill in this game.
Woman Host	Well can employees use this anytime during the day?
Helen	The centre is supervised from nine in the morning to ten at night, by two recreation supervisors, whose job it is to see that employees participate and learn. Our two badminton courts here are very popular. Players provide their own racquets, but birds are provided for them. The nets can be changed for volleyball, which is played by six enthusiastic shop teams.
Man Host	But do you find that these facilities are really used, and is it really necessary to have all these tennis tables, and driving courts, and shuffle board games we see here?
Helen	There certainly is. We are gradually building up more and more participation. And all over recreation survey last week indicated that 1,400 took advantage of recreational facilities, sponsored by both inside and outside the centre.

Let's Visit (1945)

General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds

Radio Transcription Disk

Reference Code: F 2082-1-3-1

Archives of Ontario

**Questions to think about:**

- Why was there a recreation program offered to employees at Scarboro? Why do you think it was so important?

**Group 3: Women and Recreation**

“Let’s Visit” Radio Broadcast Transcript The Health and Beauty Program (0:33)

Man Host	Well you have dramatic clubs and glee clubs as well.
Woman Host	Yes. But hell, did I hear you say beauty?
Helen	You certainly did. Our health and beauty program is popular among old and young. It provides relaxing exercises to music, and a good thing for a tired war worker.
Man Host	Well I tell you Helen those pinup girls are a good example of some of your beauty out here.
Helen	Yes, they’re selected as pinup representatives for the various shops. The pinup contest was planned and carried out by the Fusilier, our plant magazine, which is published every two weeks.

Let's Visit (1945)

General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds

Radio Transcription Disk

Reference Code: F 2082-1-3-1

Archives of Ontario

**Questions to think about:**

- What was the purpose of the health and beauty program?
- Why do you think Helen said “pinup representatives” instead of “pinup girls” as the man host said?

### Group 4: Miss War Worker Beauty Contest



GECO beauty contestants  
General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds  
Reference Code: F 2082-1-2-1  
Archives of Ontario, I0028230

#### Questions to think about:

- Who are in these photos?  
Is there anything surprising in the photos? If so, what?
- What are the people in the photos doing?
- How are the people in the photos dressed? Can you infer anything from their postures and/or facial expressions?
- What did the photographer want to capture in the photos? Is there a message he/she is trying to convey?



GECO beauty contest winners  
General Engineering Company (Canada) Fonds.  
Reference Code: F 2082-1-2-1  
Archives of Ontario, I0028229

**Group 4: Miss War Worker Beauty Contest***Attention All Ye Maidens Fair  
Fame And Fortune Ye May Share*

From the way things are shaping up it looks as if "Scarboro" will have an entrant in the beauty contest, restricted to women actively engaged in war plants, which is being sponsored by the Toronto Police A.A. Judging is to take place at the Toronto Police Diamond Jubilee Day to be held at the Exhibition grounds on July 18th.

To the winner will go a prize of \$400. Second money is \$100, and third \$25. Entrants must be 16 years of age or over, and must be clad in their factory costume. Office workers are barred.

As the suggestion of the management the matter of choosing a "Miss Scarboro" to represent GECO was considered and approved by the M.W.A. Executive and this

organization will sponsor the undertaking and assume responsibility for the selection. The management has promised its full co-operation. The actual mechanics of the local judging and selection have not been decided on yet, but will be given early attention, we are advised, and details will be given later.

It is understood that most if not all of the other war plants in the Toronto area will be represented, and it was felt by both management and the M.W.A. Executive that "Scarboro" has no reason to take backwater from anybody in the manner of feminine pulchritude. So, as was said at the start, it looks as if we'll be "in" there with a contestant that will take some beating.

**ATTENTION ALL YE MAIDENS  
FAIR FAME AND FORTUNE YE  
MAY SHARE**

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As the suggestion of the management the matter of choosing a "Miss Scarboro" to represent GECO was considered and approved by the M.W.A. Executive and this organization will sponsor the undertaking and assume responsibility for the selection. The management has promised its full cooperation . . .

It is understood that most if not all of the other war plants in the Toronto area will be represented, and it was felt by both management and the M.W.A. Executive that "Scarboro" has no reason to take backwater from anybody in the manner of feminine pulchritude. So, as was said at the start, it looks as if we'll be "in" there with a contestant that will take some beating.

**Questions to think about:**

- Why do you think GECO had a beauty contest?
- What does ". . . has no reason to take backwater from anybody in the manner of feminine pulchritude" mean?

## Group 4: Miss War Worker Beauty Contest

### CONTEST PRODUCES BEVY OF BEAUTIES

By the time this appears in print, the eight exponents of "super" feminine pulchritude to uphold the honor and glory of "Scarboro" in the "Miss War Worker" contest, will have been selected.

It's too bad the Fusilier had to go to press before the judges had made their decision, otherwise it would have been a pleasure to acclaim the local winners personally.

However, we can extend the congratulations of the whole of GECO personnel of "Scarboro" to the chosen octette and offer to them our very best wishes for their success on the 18th at Exhibition Park when "Miss War Worker" will be selected.

At the same time we must not overlook the others who entered the local preliminaries and who were not so fortunate as to be picked out to represent "Scarboro". Their good sportsmanship in entering in the first place made it a contest, and in the second place contributed not a little to the interest and fun of the whole affair.

It's unfortunate that our official entry by mutual agreement with the other plants, was restricted to eight because we think everyone will agree that any of our girls who went before the judges on Thursday night could have represented "Scarboro" with credit to the plant and themselves.

GECO Fusilier: A Powder Magazine  
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### Questions to think about:

- Why did the article use "feminine pulchritude" to describe the beauty contest?
- Do you get the impression that the contest was a success? Why?

### Student Handout: Working Women – Rethinking sources

1. Who created the sources you looked at?
2. Who or what do you think the documents were for?
3. What message did they want to send about women working at the factories during the war?
4. What kind of things do you think are missing from the point of view represented in the sources?
5. What did you learn from the sources you read or looked at?
6. Can you answer the research question – **What was the work experiences like for women working in factories during World War II?** – from only these sources?
7. What other sources would you want or need?
8. On a scale from 1 to 5, do you feel that these are valuable sources to learn from?

1

2

3

4

5

Why or Why not?