

SAFE HAVEN: THE STORY OF A SHELTER FOR HOMELESS WOMEN

Rae Bridgman

Toronto: University of Toronto Press
Incorporated 2003

**REVIEWED BY SHARON
FERGUSON-HOOD AND
MARIE TOVELL WALKER**

Rae Bridgman is Associate Dean (Research) and Associate Professor in the Department of City Planning, Faculty of Architecture, University of Manitoba. This book describes her research around Savard's, a housing model in Toronto for chronically homeless women with mental illness. At first it seems to read like a textbook: but when one becomes accustomed to reading over parentheses, page numbers, authors' names and numerous quotes the story transcends its presentation and captures the reader's attention. It is only 140 pages long, but in that length Bridgman manages to present the players, the politics, the initial visions and the changes over time in both the visions and the practical reality. Her ability to cover these various aspects and perspectives gives the account credibility. It presents as an honest account.

A core theme is the dynamic between non-intervention and intervention. The project planners and the staff were constantly engaged in an effort to accept the women as they presented and to provide a home for them without any expectations of change while balancing this with the need to maintain safety for all concerned. The meaning of non-intervention and whether it is even possible came up frequently; it may not be, but it's interesting to read about how choices are made regarding this dynamic.

The politics of providing shelter is

loom large, and funding creates the problem of who can be a resident and who can't and for how long. Funders typically expect results. The basis of making Savard's home, with no expectations that residents would be required to access other services, made the vision difficult to achieve. The author implies great admiration for Savard's as they continued to eschew entry requirements and regulations that allowed other shelters to access the homeless population. Savard's was designed to be there for those who were not functioning in other shelters. Changes did happen over the years, resulting from experience, long discussions and agonizing over the pros and cons of what they were doing. Bridgman gives the flavour of these soul-searching interactions non-judgmentally. Our understanding of the situation is enhanced by her inclusion of a chapter that is a direct quote from Savard's logbook. It is a touching account of life at this shelter. It describes how people come and go, who is in jail, who is in hospital, who has friends and who doesn't, how violence is managed and by whom, and what it means to have this place to come home to. The writer convinced us that life at Savard's is very normal in a way that might not be conventionally understood.

A societal issue dealt with in microcosm in this small shelter is the question of individual versus community needs and rights. A strong point of this book is its presentation of events over time. As a longitudinal study it covers at least three years with a postscript giving some details of what happened later. Shifts happened and Bridgman allows us a peek into the inner sanctum as policies changed. The changes were in both directions. Some were a loosening of non-intervention, such as the decision that staff would dispense medications. Others were an increase in inclusivity as the women at Savard's were gradually brought into meal planning, cleaning duties and decisions about household management.

As a study in the practical application of respecting homeless women with mental illnesses, it was interesting to see that the residents were only included in meetings about three years after the facility opened. Could it have happened sooner? Maybe not. Abused, alienated and frightened women can need months or years of safety before they risk being open. Women did come and go, but Savard's gradually became home to a core group who became able to take small steps towards self-determination.

Bridgman, by her absence of political posturing, challenges us to look at our assumptions and questions our complicity in all kinds of systemic oppression.

FIGHT OR PAY: SOLDIERS' FAMILIES IN THE GREAT WAR

Desmond Morton

Vancouver, Toronto: University of
British Columbia Press, 2004

**REVIEWED BY LINDA
PYGIEL**

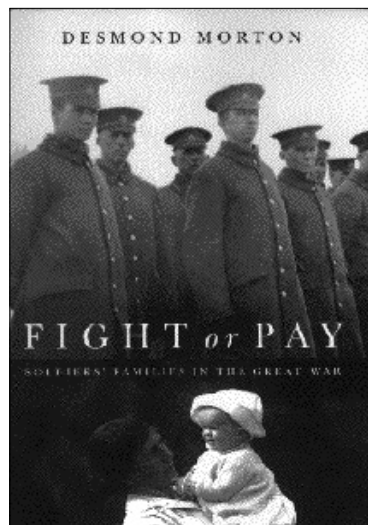
In the past few years a good deal of discussion has been generated by historians on both sides of the Atlantic about war and its capacity to produce new social welfare policies. Desmond Morton's new book, *Fight or Pay*, fits neatly into this theme as he examines the effect the First World War had on the creation of new welfare programs for families left behind when Canadian soldiers went to war. Deftly written and meticulously researched, Morton's book is a "must read" for students interested in the growth of the Canadian welfare state, scholars of gender studies, and for anyone with an interest in popular social history.

Professor Morton's examination of the political discussions leading to

the decision to pay separation allowances to soldiers' families reveals the Canadian government came to rely on a national charitable organization known as the Canadian Patriotic Fund (CPF) to augment allowances and war widows' pensions. The CPF would also, the government hoped, help to encourage recruitment by allaying a potential soldier's anxiety about leaving his family in economic straits. But as Morton points out, Canadian wives, widows and families who struggled to "keep the home fires burning" during the war paid a high price for their efforts: the loneliness of raising families without a husband's support and fighting for the meager sums the government and the CPF allowed them.

His book covers the period 1914 to 1930, from the time Canada joined the "mother" country in what was to be known as the Great War, to veterans' concerns for pension reform that became a core political issue in the 1930s. It is divided into eight chapters covering Canadian recruitment efforts, the inauguration of the CPF together with biographies of its founders, how the Fund operated nationally, and the failure of the CPF as a Canada-wide "social experiment." The most interesting aspects of the book for this reviewer are the new gender identities produced by the nature of the welfare policy pursued by the administrators and volunteers of the CPF.

Fight or Pay, the slogan of the Patriotic Fund, was not only the rallying cry for fundraising efforts to supplement government-paid separation allowances, but also the summons for trained, educated middle class women to claim their place in the nation. Under the leadership of Helen Reid, a McGill graduate and pioneer social worker, 650 selected volunteers dealt with over 15,000 families supplemented with allowances from the CPF over the course of the war. Reid and her volunteers, as Morton reveals, took a "maternalist" approach in taking responsibility for the protection of the



soldier's family. This was based on a "new" discovery in the early years of the twentieth century of the importance of women's maternal role in shaping the nation and promoting the safety and well being of the next nation-forming generation. At a conference in 1916, Reid defined her mission: "to exert a tremendous influence in the home of almost every soldier who has gone to the front.... Think what it will mean to make a better home than it was when the man went away."

To illustrate how the Canadian Patriotic Fund operated, Morton describes the routine inspection by Reid's volunteers of the homes of those seeking relief in order to attest to need and good character. Every effort was made to weed out the "undeserving" claims. For example, when women became pregnant while their husbands were in Europe, the mother's allotment from the CPF was lowered "because of her conduct." However, forming a national consensus on "deserving" and "undeserving" was complicated by the fact that the CPF was never fully established on a national basis, with provinces and regions developing their own criteria and their own eligibility conditions.

Morton balances the aims of the CPF with its critics. The "Patriotic" came under attack as early as 1915 from some western trade union

movements and socialists who wanted to see a tax-supported CPF instead of "the careless hand of charity." These critics assailed the discretionary powers of the Fund's inspectors and contradicted the claim that CPF allowances were allotted in the same manner as separation allowances. By 1917, when conscription was on the horizon and inflation bit into family economies, the CPF had become a controversial entity. Critics from British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario condemned the CPF and its fundraising efforts, appealing instead for new taxes to increase the \$20 a month separation allowance. By the end of the war, the Fund's popularity had vanished in a cloud of class resentment.

After tracing the complicated way the CPF administered its supplemental allowances to families, Morton ends his book with an appeal to modern Canadians. He asks us to remember the wartime sacrifices shared by wives, mothers and children of those who served and suffered in warfare.

In conclusion, this reviewer salutes Professor Morton for his tenacity in locating hard to find first-hand sources and for keeping his promise "to write the story of the families caught up in the Great War." And it is refreshing to see a military historian turn his attention away from the far-away battlefield to the other battle being fought on the home front by those left behind.

Linda Pygiel is a Ph.D. student in the Department of History at York University, Toronto. Her dissertation focuses on the development of government and charitable pension plans for military widows in Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.