

# TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Nursing Sisters Overseas

By Erika Baird Executive Director, Aurora Historical Society

It was not only men who went overseas during World War I. A number of Canadian women also went over, serving as Nursing Sisters.

## Nursing

Sisters had served in Canada since the North-West Rebellion of 1885 and had proved themselves to be very effective. All of the women were volunteers between the ages of 21 and 38 who were trained as nurses. During the war, the sisters were not directly at the front in the trenches, but they could be very close.

## One

woman from Aurora who served with this distinguished group was Kathleen Sisman. Sisman was born on March 16, 1883, to Thomas and Emily Sisman, and grew up on Mosley Street. In 1905, she left Aurora to attend Nursing School at Roosevelt Hospital in New York City, graduating in 1908. After graduating, she remained in New York, living in a nurses' residence in Manhattan Ward 22 (1910 American Census).

## By 1916,

she had returned to Canada on an April 21, 1916 she enlisted in the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force as a Nursing Sister. Her records state that she was 5 feet, two inches tall, 110 lbs, and had all of her teeth! She was first posted to Granville Hospital in Ramsgate, England, before being transferred to Shorncliffe, in July, then to France in April 1917. She continued her service until after the Armistice, finally sailing home on May 30, 1919, after 3 long years.

## Sisman

survived the war, as did most other Nursing Sisters. Of the 2,504 who served, 53 were killed in action, including 14 who perished when the Canadian hospital ship Llandovery Castle was torpedoed by a German U-Boat (Veteran Affairs Canada).

## The

Canadian Nursing Sisters were nicknamed the "Blue Birds" during the war due to their uniforms, which consisted of blue dresses and white veils.