

FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA: *Music of the Great War, 1914-18*

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THE OUTBREAK OF THE First World War wrought a profound and immediate change in the content of Canadian patriotic songs. Themes that had long inspired the nation's composers – natural beauty, the vastness of the country and the wealth of its resources, opportunity for the energetic immigrant – suddenly became peripheral at best. Patriotism was redefined almost exclusively as loyalty to King and Empire and the willingness to bear arms in their defence. Not surprisingly, Ontario was the source of the great majority of wartime patriotic songs published in Canada during 1914-18. However, the musically inclined of British Columbia did not shy away from the challenge, and the centennial of the outbreak of the “war to end all wars” presents an opportunity to survey the patriotic songs they were motivated to compose.

In the decade and a half before 1914, musicians of British Columbia typically favoured religious themes and compositions modelled on a broad range of classical forms.¹ A few more popularly oriented songs expressed nostalgia for homes left behind in Britain or Ontario; a few more sang the praises of the young Dominion and of new homes in its Pacific province. Only Arthur Leslie's “Loss of the Titanic” spoke of a contemporary event of international significance. Musicians did not entirely abandon familiar themes and styles for four years after August 1914, but the geographically distant war provided them with a shared focus that has not been equalled before or since. The music they produced clearly indicates how profoundly the conflict in Europe affected this province and underlines the extent to which the fundamental attitudes towards the war that predominated in the rest of English-speaking Canada also prevailed in British Columbia.²

¹ See Dale McIntosh, *History of Music in British Columbia, 1850-1950* (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1989), 237-56.

² Original copies of their sheet music are found in several locations. The British Library (BL) has the most comprehensive collection. Library and Archives Canada (LAC) holds a dozen titles in hard copy and a dozen more are available on microforms through the National Library. A few originals are also found at each of the following: British Columbia Archives

Many compositions of the war years were performed locally or privately and are known to us today by their titles alone. Programs of the Victoria Ladies' Musical Club, for example, indicate Kate Paget-Ford's "For the Empire" and "Watchdog of Old England" by Mrs. A.J. Gibson were presented in concert, as was club conductor J. Douglas Macey's musical accompaniment to John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields." The absence of an established music publisher in British Columbia persuaded Victoria songwriters who sought a wider audience to approach firms outside the province. The recruiting song "Canada for Empire" by Violet Bridgewater and Laura Lewin was published in 1915 by the Anglo-Canadian Music Company in Toronto, while "The Canadian" by Edward Parsons and J.A. Shanks found favour with an English publisher in 1916. Possessing a pioneer background and remarkable abilities, the song's eager Canadian soldier is ready to blaze a trail, just as "he did when the Klondike was young and a trail o'er the Rockies he flung" – but this time the trail is to Berlin.³

Unlike their counterparts in the provincial capital, musical patriots in the rest of the province relied on self-publication to bring their compositions to public attention. During the first few months of the war, Salmon Arm's assistant postmaster John F. Leonard self-published his composition "Rally Round,"⁴ while in Vancouver, Madame Loeser and businessman Charles F. Harrison identified themselves as publishers of their self-penned patriotic songs.⁵ Harrison's response to the declaration of war was a lively two-step march called "The Best Old Flag on Earth." The flag referred to, of course, is the Union Jack, a colour illustration of which occupies the whole of the front cover of the sheet music. In the last line of the chorus, in which the lyrics read "For the Maple Leaf,

(BCA), Museum of Vancouver (MV), Vancouver Public Library (VPL), University of British Columbia (UBC), University of Alberta (UA), McMaster University (MU), and University of Victoria (UV). Like the Salmon Arm Museum (SAM), regional community archives may hold compositions published locally. For locations of specific titles, see the checklist located on page 125.

³ The pioneer-woodsman volunteer of this song is a splendid match for the stereotype of the Canadian soldier that was endorsed and fostered after the war. See Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987), 136-40.

⁴ John Leonard enlisted in February 1916 at Kamloops. In October, with the 172nd "Overseas" Battalion CEF, he embarked for England and served there with the Canadian Forestry Corps. Like many immigrants from Great Britain, Leonard retained a strong feeling of allegiance to the old country even after years of residence in Canada. For indications of the strength of such attachments, see Patrick Dunae's *Gentleman Immigrants* (Vancouver: Douglas & Macintyre, 1981) and Jean Barman's *Growing Up British* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1984).

⁵ Harrison had arrived in Vancouver from Ontario circa 1910. Not a professional musician, he worked as an accountant with a timber company for a couple of years before launching his own business, the Vancouver Typewriter Company.



Figure 1. Loyalty and patriotism: Harrison dedicated his first wartime publication to “Canada’s Overseas Contingents.” Image M007 courtesy of Royal BC Museum, BC Archives.

Our emblem dear,” the melody references “The Maple Leaf Forever,” English-speaking Canada’s unofficial anthem of the day.⁶ Harrison attended to product promotion as well: copies of “The Best Old Flag on Earth” were available for purchase at Fletcher’s music store in Victoria in early 1915.⁷

⁶ Originally published by Harrison in Vancouver, the piece was subsequently also published in Toronto, first by Harrison himself and then by Musgrave Bros. Cover, lyrics, and a music file are available at McMaster University. See <http://digitalcollections.mcmaster.ca/harrison-charles-f-sheet-music-1914>.

⁷ *Victoria Colonist*, 19 February 1915.

The commercial success of his first effort apparently encouraged Harrison, who would publish seven more of his own compositions before war's end.⁸ His example was followed by others, a few of whom published their songs under their own banners, but most of whom engaged the printing services of Western Specialty Ltd., a Granville Street office supplies store with its own print shop located on Dunsmuir Street. The company's name appears on the title pages of more than half the compositions considered here – always as a printer, not as a music publisher. Typically, songwriters would have made arrangements with Western Specialty for a certain number of copies to be printed at an agreed upon price.⁹

Piano teacher Winifred Carden was perhaps the first of the composers writing about the war to make arrangements with Western Specialty: her lighthearted “Line Blocked” appeared early in 1915. (Humour would be a common ingredient in American war-related songs once the United States entered the conflict, but it was much less frequently found in Canadian patriotic songs.)¹⁰ “Line Blocked” imagines the Kaiser trying to book passage on a train – first to Paris or Calais and then to Warsaw – only to be told by the booking agent each time that rail lines are blocked to all those destinations. The agent suggests he try another day but cautions that the Allies intend “to shut him up in old Berlin.”

Also in a humorous style, Charles Harrison followed upon his success of the previous year by publishing what he advertised as a “great comedy war song.” “They Were All Irish” employs the stock figure of the misguided Irishman for whom everything turns out splendidly in the end despite the odd decisions and mistakes he consistently makes. When their ammunition runs out, a dozen Irish fighters armed with only shillelaghs charge up a hill to defeat a hundred Germans (“You can tell they’re sons of guns / From the way they chase the Huns”). Then, to give other Allied soldiers a crack at the Germans on the Western Front, the Irish fighters are sent to the Dardanelles where they take a castle by mistake. Predictably, the result is nevertheless favourable (“For they had the time of their lives / With the Sultan’s forty wives”).

⁸ Like other local composers, Harrison also wrote songs unrelated to war themes. Only his titles referencing the war are considered here.

⁹ Some depositories identify Western Specialty Ltd. as a publisher. Perhaps the distinction between publisher and printer would have been less ambiguous had Western Specialty followed the example of Whaley, Royce and Co. The prominent Toronto music publisher stated clearly when a song had been “printed for the composer.”

¹⁰ Titles like “We Don’t Want the Bacon, We Just Want a Piece of the Rhine” indicate just how far some American songwriters were willing to stretch for a laugh.

Respectfully Dedicated to Sir R. L. Borden,
Empire Builder

WHY DON'T YOU WEAR A UNIFORM

The Famous Canadian March Song

WRITTEN AND COMPOSED BY
GEORGE WARNICKER
VANCOUVER, B. C.

CANADA'S FAVORITE SONG WRITER
Author of "LITTLE GENERAL BOBS," Etc.
*Sung by all the Leading Singers
Played by all the Leading Bands*

FOR SALE AT ALL MUSIC DEALERS

Copyright, Canada, 1915, by George Warnicker

WESTERN SPECIALTY LIMITED, MUSIC PRINTERS, VANCOUVER, B. C.

COPY DEPOSITED NO. 31280

Figure 2. Duty and responsibility: George Warnicker challenged “the slacker” bluntly in 1915. Image courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, No. 23189252.

Vancouver’s songwriters were not inclined to use humour after 1915. As the war showed little indication of a quick conclusion, the serious themes of recruitment and imperial obligations came to predominate. Songs promoting recruitment are recognizable from their titles alone. “Sons of the British Empire: Your Country is Calling You” by the prolific Charles Harrison, and E. Cottington’s “Come! Boys! Come!” urged men of fighting age to “respond to the call.”¹¹ One such song went beyond the basic issue of recruitment. George Warnicker had first been moved

¹¹ While most of the war-related songs printed by Western Specialty Ltd. are certainly the creations of Vancouver residents, one at least may not be. “Come! Boys! Come!” is probably the work of White Rock’s Emma Cottington, whose fourteen-year-old son enlisted in Vancouver in May 1916.

to compose at the time of the Boer War, and, in 1915, he was once more motivated by armed conflict. “Why Don’t You Wear a Uniform” was dedicated to “Sir R.L. Borden, Empire Builder” and aimed directly at able-bodied men in civilian clothes. The slacker became a common figure of opprobrium soon after it was acknowledged that the war would last more than just a few months, but Warnicker was probably the first in the country to condemn him in song.¹²

Among local songwriters, there was a clear consensus about the nature of the adversary Canada was facing.¹³ In “Canada for Ever,” Arthur Ainsley and Henry Cross express the popular view of the Kaiser. He was evil personified, and the Canadian Expeditionary Force was intent on confronting that evil (“Out to wreck a Fiend’s ambition / And to burn his hellish toys / Putting Europe in condition / Are our brave Canadian boys”). Distinguishing between Canadian and British armies seemed unnecessary. The Canadian composers of “Marching through Berlin” claimed the Germans could not “scare the British soldier.”¹⁴ Even when Canada was specified, its efforts were most commonly described within the imperial context. “Hail Britain Hail (Song of the Canadian Patriots)” was advertised as “a stirring new patriotic song ... that cannot fail to appeal to all ... during these days when the entire energies of the Empire are devoted to upholding the Cause of Right and Liberty.”¹⁵ Song sellers evidently shared the views of songwriters.

One song deserves particular mention for the illustration on the cover of the printed sheet music. A lively two-step by Vancouver policeman Harry Shaw and fireman George Chalmers, “I’m Only a Khaki-Clad Soldier and I Hail from Old BC” imagines a soldier “from the land of the lofty pine” singing while on night watch. The cover shows smoke from a burning church in the far distance rising to obscure a sunny mountain scene, but the soldier on duty in the foreground seems to be in little danger. Clearly demonstrating why a local lad should be on the Western Front, the drawing makes no attempt to convey the harsh reality he would find there. What the illustration does reveal is that this song – like nearly all war-related songs published in British Columbia – was written for a home audience. Apart from asking why a soldier on sentry

¹² Like many of his peers, Warnicker was not shy about self-promotion, as Figure 2 demonstrates.

¹³ That consensus was shared regardless of gender, occupation, or social class.

¹⁴ This is not the song of the same title sung by Ethel Merman in the 1942 film *Stage Door Canteen*. See Kurt Adler, ed., *Songs of Many Wars* (New York: Howell, Soskin, 1943).

¹⁵ *Victoria Colonist*, 7 January 1916.

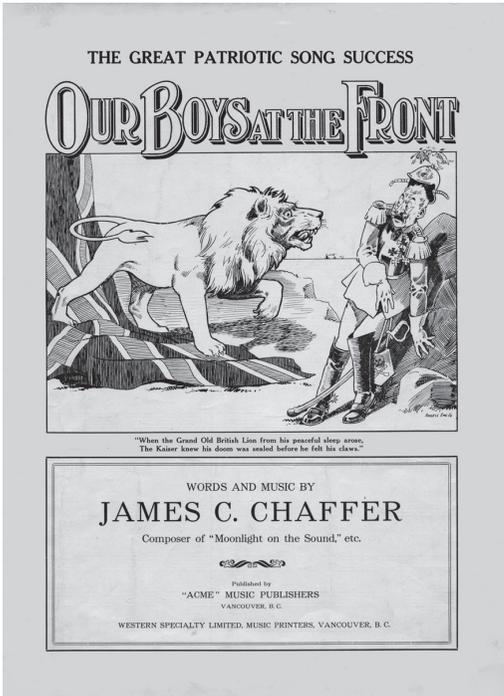


Figure 3. An optimistic assessment: James Chaffer's Kaiser poses little threat to an aroused British Empire. Image courtesy of Library and Archives Canada, No. 16984774.

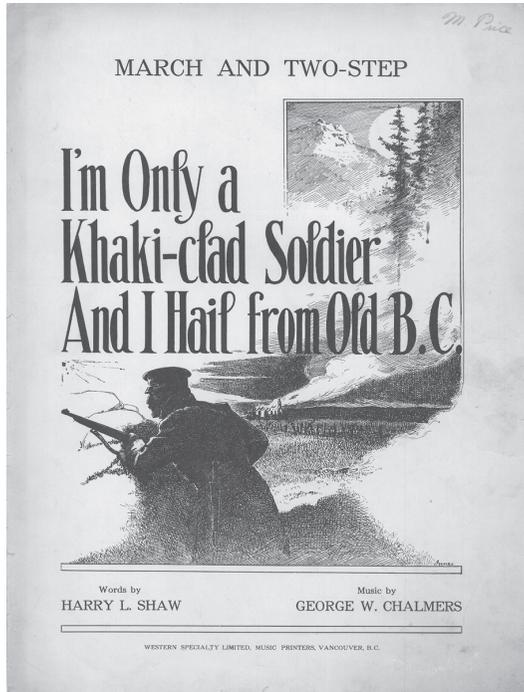


Figure 4. A connection illustrated: The "lofty pine" in British Columbia is shown to be threatened by the conflict in Europe. *Source:* Author's collection.

duty would chose to sing a brisk marching tune, soldiers at the front may well have found such illustrations and lyrics somewhat laughable.¹⁶

If general allusions to sacrifice were abundant, direct references to death were rare. Compositions by two Vancouver women addressed this fact of war. In “His Dream of the Golden West,” Sarah MacIntyre’s soldier dreams of his sweetheart, parents, and home as he dies and “sleeps with the noble slain.” (“He loved his country best / They covered him o’er to dream some more / To dream of the Golden West.”)¹⁷ The sense of personal loss is most evident in the compositions of Amelie Lane McNeill, a piano teacher with the Vancouver School of Expression.¹⁸ In 1916, she dedicated her first title (“To My Soldier Boy”) to her husband, Captain James McNeill, who was with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France. In 1917, she dedicated subsequent compositions (“We’ll Be Waiting, Boys, for You” and “Canadian Battle Song”) to his memory.¹⁹ MacIntyre and McNeill made explicit the reality of death in war and the sense that death in this particular war possessed a unique quality. Their fallen were but two of the “noble slain” that the postwar years would make such an effort to mythologize and memorialize.²⁰

Of the several professional musicians who contributed to these wartime songs, the work of only two would find favour beyond the Rockies. The publication in London of the poem “In Flanders Fields” in 1915 inspired musicians throughout the British Empire. The organist at Vancouver’s Wesley Methodist Church, Australian-born J. Deane Wells, had been a local resident for a decade when he published his musical score set to McCrae’s words in 1917. The composition impressed listeners as an ideal accompaniment for the poem and soon became a local favourite. Printed originally by Western Specialty, the score was quickly picked up by Frederick Harris for publication in Ontario and England.²¹

Bentley Collingwood Hilliam was a more recent English immigrant. Employed initially as a journalist in North Vancouver in 1912, he aspired

¹⁶ Cover, lyrics, and a music file are available at <http://bcsheetmusic.ca/htmpages/imonlyakhakiclad.html>.

¹⁷ Cover, lyrics, and a music file are available at <http://bcsheetmusic.ca/htmpages/hisdream.html>.

¹⁸ The Vancouver School of Expression offered instruction in music, languages, public speaking, and performing and dramatic arts.

¹⁹ A veteran of the South African war, Captain James McNeill of the 1st Regiment, Canadian Mounted Rifles, enlisted at New Westminster on 24 March 1915. He was listed as missing in action on 16 September 1916.

²⁰ For a full assessment of that effort, see Vance, *Death So Noble*.

²¹ Wells’s score is still highly regarded today. See *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* at <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/emc/in-flanders-fields>. The copy held by LAC was published in Toronto. See AMICUS No. 2323961.

HIS DREAM OF THE GOLDEN WEST

Words and Music by SARAH MacINTYRE

Arranged by THEO. J. HUTTON

Copyright, Canada, 1915, by Sarah MacIntyre

Figure 5. The noble death in song: Sarah MacIntyre’s brave soldier “loved his country best.” *Source:* Author’s collection.

to a musical career and was quickly welcomed into local theatrical circles, being particularly admired for a comic touch and his compositions with local settings. In 1915, Hilliam is identified by *Henderson’s Vancouver Directory* as musical director of the Imperial Theatre. The first of his wartime compositions indicates the talent for lively lyrics that would soon make him famous. The “Song of the Canadian Engineers” (“We’re Canadian Engineers / And we want the world to know it / We’re fine and fit and we think we’re It / And we’re going abroad to show it!”) was published in 1917 by the 6th Field Company of North Vancouver,

in which unit he ultimately held the rank of lieutenant.²² Hilliam was stationed with the 6th Field Company in Ottawa, and, by the end of the war, had composed several additional war-related songs. All are in a comic style and all were placed with commercial publishers in major centres – Toronto, London, and New York.²³

In 1917, for the fourth year in a row, the proprietor of the Vancouver Typewriter Company offered to the public a new song inspired by the war. But much had changed since Charles Harrison published British Columbia's first patriotic song in 1914. Three years later, war fatigue was everywhere apparent, and, perhaps in keeping with Vancouver's other songwriters, Harrison too had tired of exhorting young men to arms. His final publication of the war is not, strictly speaking, even about the war, but in 1917 it would have been viewed in that context. With beavers and colourful maple leaves pictured on the cover, "My Own Dear Canada" makes no reference to the conflict in Europe and is entirely in the tradition of the many patriotic hymns that had been written since Confederation. It is a song longing for a return to peace and simpler times, yearning for what was by then being recalled by war-weary British Columbians as a golden era stretching back years (if not decades) before 1914. The song found a receptive audience, selling remarkably well in Vancouver, although some of its lines ("Dear old land of the beaver / I will never leave her") might be viewed (uncharitably perhaps) as further evidence of fatigue.²⁴

Composers of the war songs were apparently made restless by the peace. His patriotic declaration notwithstanding, Harrison moved to Chicago at war's end. Hilliam found acclaim in New York and did not return to British Columbia after the war; Wells and McNeill were quickly gone from Vancouver as well. They and their fellow songwriters had

²² "Song of the Canadian Engineers" is the only title considered here that was written directly for a military (rather than for a civilian) audience. Hilliam enlisted as a sapper in 1916 and was quickly promoted to lieutenant, largely because of his abilities as an entertainer. See his autobiography *Flotsam's Follies* (London: A. Barron, 1948), 29-33.

²³ Most (if not all) of these songs were written while he was with the 6th Field Company in Ottawa. See Hilliam, *Flotsam's Follies*, 34-44. Only one is specifically Canadian in content: "Knocking the 'K' out of the Kaiser: Canada Spelt with a 'K'" was published in New York by M. Whitmark and Sons in 1917.

²⁴ Harrison continued his part-time musical career in the United States and became a naturalized American citizen. Despite a claim by the *Encyclopedia of Music in Canada* (<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/emc/charles-harrison>), it is unlikely that "My Own Dear Canada" sold over ten thousand copies in the Vancouver area alone. Sales of that magnitude, even nationally, would have been truly exceptional. The Dumbells' bestselling sheet of the 1920s, for example, was lauded for having finally achieved a Canadian sale of ten thousand copies. See Jason Wilson, *Soldiers of Song: The Dumbells and Other Canadian Concert Parties of the First World War* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), 116-17.

FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA:
A CHECKLIST OF PUBLISHED MUSIC OF THE GREAT WAR, 1914-18

- Ainsley, Arthur J., and Henry E. Cross. "Canada for Ever." Vancouver: Ainsley, Cross Co., 1915. (BL, LAC)
- Carden, Winifred B. "Line Blocked." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1915. (BL, LAC)
- Chaffer, James C. "Our Boys at the Front." Vancouver: Acme Music Publishers, 1915. (BL, LAC)
- Cottington, E. "Come! Boys! Come!" Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1917. (BL, LAC)
- Easson, Art. E. "When I'm on My Way Back Home." Vancouver: Popular Music Co., 1915. (BL, LAC)
- Harrison, Charles F. "The Best Old Flag on Earth." Vancouver: Harrison, 1914. (BL, LAC, BCA, UBC, MU)
- "My Own Dear Canada." Vancouver: Harrison, 1917. (BL, LAC, MV, BCA, UBC)
- "They Were All Irish and You Can't Keep the Irish Down." Vancouver: Harrison, 1915. (BL, LAC)
- Harrison, Charles F., and Will R. Wright. "Sons of the British Empire: Your Country Is Calling You." Vancouver: Harrison, 1916. (BL)
- Hilliam, B.C. "Song of the Canadian Engineers." North Vancouver: 6th Field Company, 1917. (BL, LAC)
- Judd, Edward, and Horace Harper. "The Army of the Empire." Vancouver: Home Publishing, 1916. (BL, LAC)
- Leonard, John F. "Rally Round." Salmon Arm: Leonard-Ingles Publishing, 1914. (BL, LAC, SAM)
- Lewin, Laura, and Violet Bridgewater. "Canada for Empire." Toronto: Anglo-Canadian, 1917. (BL, LAC, VPL)
- Loeser, Madame. "On to Victory." Vancouver: Loeser, 1914. (BL, LAC)
- MacIntyre, Sarah. "His Dream of the Golden West." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1915. (BL, LAC, BCA, UBC)
- McNeill, Amelie Lane. "To My Soldier Boy." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1916. (BL, LAC, UA)
- "We'll Be Waiting, Boys, for You." Vancouver: McNeill, ca. 1917. (BL, LAC)
- McNeill, Amelie Lane, and John W. Thompson. "Canadian Battle Song." Vancouver: McNeill, ca. 1917. (BL, LAC, BCA, UA)
- "Here's tae the Kilties." Vancouver: McNeill, 1917. (BL, LAC, UA)
- Parsons, Edward, and J.A. Shanks. "The Canadian." London: West & Co., 1916. (BL)
- Phillips, Gervaise. "Kaiser Bill Said Don't Come Here." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1916. (BL)
- Shaw, Harry L., and James W. Casey. "I'm Longing for You, Sweetheart." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1916. (BL, LAC, VPL)
- Shaw, Harry L., and George W. Chalmers. "I'm Only a Khaki-Clad Soldier and I Hail from Old BC." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1915. (BL, LAC, MV, UBC)
- Shepard, Jock, and Theo. J. Hutton. "Marching Thro' Berlin." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1915. (BL, LAC, MV)
- Tripp, John David A., and Margaret M. Fawcett. "Hail Britain Hail: Song of the Canadian Patriots." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1915. (BL, LAC)
- Warnicker, George. "Why Don't You Wear a Uniform." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1915. (BL, LAC)
- Wells, J. Deane. "The Dawn of Liberty." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1917. (BL)
- Wells, J. Deane, and John McCrae. "In Flanders Fields." Vancouver: Western Specialty Music Printers, 1917. (BL, LAC, MV, UV)

produced a body of work that is representative of the themes found in patriotic war songs in the rest of English-speaking Canada.²⁵ A century after the Great War, the conflict is regarded essentially as a clash of empires – not a struggle for freedom against a demonic enemy, not a defence of civilization itself, and not (as the Americans would belatedly characterize it) a crusade for democracy. The contemporary songwriters of British Columbia had no such benefit of hindsight. Their songs reflect their understanding that Canada was fighting for the clear and uncomplicated values of God, King, and Empire. Although questions about such assumptions were increasingly prevalent towards the end of the war, they found no expression in music published in Canada's westernmost province.

Like the rest of the country, British Columbia saw no significant production of war-related songs during the Second World War. To provide the popular soundtrack for that conflict, Canada would rely upon British and American composers and revivals of a few well-known standards from the Great War. The patriotic offerings published by British Columbia's musicians during 1914-18 were not among the songs revived. Almost completely forgotten in archives large and small, their printed music and lyrics can perhaps be dismissed as little more than a curious footnote to a war that was half a world away. Nonetheless, the songs also indicate how profoundly the Great War affected the people of this province and, at the same time, how distant in memory that war has become.

²⁵ See Barbara Norman, "Canadian Sheet Music of the First World War" on LAC's website: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/sheetmusic/028008-3300-e.html>.