

The Depression years left a generation marked indelibly by privation and loss of dignity. It also transformed the politics and invalidated much of the conventional economic wisdom of the time.

In 1935, before leaving for the rigours of the British House of Lords, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett assaulted the credulity of the electorate with his new-found compassion for the victims of the Depression. To the surprise of only a few, the Royal Commission on Price Spreads allowed that corporate capitalism “harboured behind its imposing facade so much that needs cleansing”. On the dusty banks of the Assiniboine Brandon lay, on the surface at least, a veritable “hotbed of quietism”.

Though Harry Cater had been defeated in 1931 and T.A. Crerar, Brandon’s Member of Parliament and a Liberal Cabinet Minister, had not survived the 1930 federal election, Brandonites remained moderate in their politics. It was not until 1943 that a Co-operative Commonwealth Federation candidate was elected to the Manitoba legislature from Brandon.

In Europe during the Thirties anarchy was being loosed. It was said that the “best lacked all conviction while the worst . . . (were) full of passionate intensity”, and now as the decade closed, the stage was being arranged for the opening of World War II in September, 1939.

Canada’s declaration of war on September 10, 1939 resulted in the enlistment of over 400 Brandon and district men in the armed forces and 100 women in the Women’s Army Corps. It also created a labour shortage and by June, 1941 only two percent of the Brandon work force was without regular employment.

While the wartime labour shortage brought novel vocational opportunities for women, war also ushered in austerity. Gasoline, meat, coffee, sugar, and butter were rationed. Women’s nylon stockings ceased to be.

The war also brought the dull, persistent drone of airplanes to the skies over Brandon after the city was named an air force training centre for pilots from around the Commonwealth.



Airmen from Commonwealth Air Training Plan, guests in a Brandon home, 1942