

Fern Blodgett Sunde

Commemorative Statue

Unveiling October 17, 2020

Fern was raised in Cobourg and often went down to the lake to watch the ships, dreaming of working at sea some day.



The Blodgetts lived at 299 George Street and Fern attended Cobourg Collegiate before heading to Toronto to work .



When WWII started Fern decided to become a wireless radio operator but rejected by 2 schools before she graduated from the Radio College of Canada as the first Canadian female wireless radio operator. She was the first in her field.



The Canadian and British navy would not hire a woman but the Norwegian merchant ship the Mosdale hired her. In fact, the Norwegian merchant navy hired 22 additional Canadian female wireless radio operators over the course of the war. Fern blazed a trail for them.



Fern is worthy of recognition for breaking down barriers. But she did this within the context of World War II and this made her a hero. She made 78 crossings of the Atlantic avoiding submarines, receiving and sending coded messages, and earning respect and admiration because of her professionalism.



She showed courage and determination in the face of incredible danger. Other merchant marines and veterans who have heard her story are impressed with her bravery, and service.



Fern was the only woman in a crew of 36 living in less than ideal conditions, on duty for 12-14 hours listening for u boats, torpedos and SOS signals. As the Battle of the Atlantic continued and a second and third operator (both male) were hired, she was in charge.



In 1942 after the Mosdale's sister ship was sunk off the coast of Ireland Fern and Captain Sunde decided to get married as the chances of survival to the end of the war were slim.



In 1943, Fern was awarded the Norwegian War Medal by the King of Norway, the first Canadian and first female to be so honoured, recognized for her courage and contribution to the allied war effort. The Mosdale survived the war, and Fern lived to be 73.



A citizen's steering committee in partnership with the Cobourg Museum Foundation is committed to recognizing Fern Blodgett Sunde's achievements as the first Canadian female wireless radio operator, the first female to serve at sea in this role, a veteran who served with others in the Merchant Navy during the Battle of the Atlantic, a hero, a Canadian who made a difference.



We are asking for an in-kind grant of \$5,000 for the base of the statue and some landscaping to be done before the life sized bronze statue is erected in the meditation garden at the east end of Victoria Park.

We are also requesting \$2,000 for the unveiling ceremony which will be a celebration, open to all, recognizing Fern Blodgett Sunde and the Canadian veterans who fought in the Battle of the Atlantic.



Finances

- Total Estimated Cost: \$97,235 (including statue, education, website, plaques, program, unveiling ceremony)
- Government Grant anticipated \$25,000 (Dept of Veterans Affairs)
- Local fundraising began in February 2019 (Waterfront Festival, tea, on line donations, pledges)
- Fundraising across Canada began July 2019 (W. Garfield Weston Foundation \$10,000, Dalglish Family Foundation \$5,000)
- Fundraising internationally began August 2019
- Unveiling: October 17, 2020 (75th anniversary of the end of WWII)

With the support of the Town Council, Cobourg will, once again, be a town that remembers. On behalf of all Canadians, Cobourg will recognize the courage, determination, and resilience of Fern Blodgett Sunde, the first Canadian female wireless radio operator, within the context of the Battle of the Atlantic, a trailblazer and hero, with a statue overlooking the lake in a town she loved.



Photo by Katherine Love, posted to Cobourg Yesteryears.