



'WE'LL MEET AGAIN' - Joanne McMurren, standing at far right, poses with over 30 war brides from Windsor and Essex County who she honoured at a tribute luncheon April 24.

War brides honoured

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"There's my Bill," said Essex resident Bernadette Szejbut, nee Walker, proudly viewing a wartime photo album that formed part of the vast collection of photos, stories and memorabilia assembled to highlight the lives of local war brides.

From Bolton, England, Szejbut met her husband, a pilot, who escaped Nazi-occupied Poland in 1939. He continued the fight in France, where he was wounded, before making his way to England. Despite an uncertain future, love still bloomed, and the couple was married in 1942.

"After the war, Bill didn't want to return to Europe," said Szejbut, who arrived in Canada aboard the ship RMS Samaria in 1950, landing at Canada's famed Pier 21, an immigration centre in Halifax.

Most of the area war brides are from England, having found love in the middle of a war.

"My mother didn't think I knew my own mind," said Kingsville resident Rose Stanley, nee Dench, speaking of meeting her husband Gordon, a corporal with the Royal Canadian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Proudly self-described as "a Londoner," Stanley was only 16 years old when she first met the dashing Canadian she would marry.

"It was love," said Stanley, who delighted the Woodslee gathering by donning the wedding dress she wore on April 7, 1945. "It is faded, but it still has character," she said.

Stanley and the majority of war brides arrived by ship at Pier 21 in Halifax in 1946, many months after their husbands had been repatriated to Canada. By 1948, 43,454 war

brides and their 20,997 children had arrived in the country to begin a new life.

"We hadn't seen such lights," said Stanley, remarking on the bright lights of Canada's cities, a stark contrast to the many years of blackouts in war-torn England.

McMurren recognized 75 area war brides, including four from World War I and 55 still living in this region. Each war bride, or surviving family, was presented with a gift bag "of goodies" including a

lucky horseshoe reminiscent of those given to the brides on their wedding day.

War brides who had landed at Pier 21 were also presented with a certificate recognizing their marriage to a Canadian serviceman and honouring them for "following their hearts" to Canada.

"Pier 21, the immigration shed in which you were first welcomed to Canada, will always be here so you have a special place to return and remember," states the certificate.

Speaking at the tribute, Lakeshore Mayor Tom Bain commended the war brides for their significant contributions.

"In your own individual way, and as a group, you have added to the history of Canada," said Bain.

Speaking on behalf of the war brides, Eileen Baker of Wheatley praised the event as being the best of any celebration in their honour, including events last year in Toronto that were missed by many.

"This tops it!" said Baker.

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