

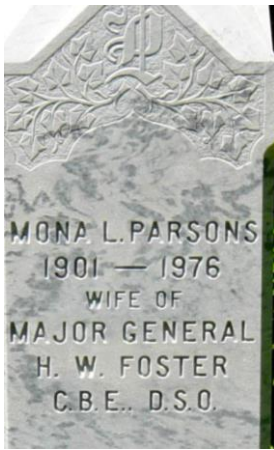
MONA LOUISE PARSONS

By Gloria Stephens

Mona Louise Parsons was born February 17, 1901, the daughter of Norwal and Mary (Keith) Parsons of Middleton, NS. Her siblings: Ross and Gwyn

Mona was blessed with having a *'wonderful voice and a natural grace'*

Mona died November 28, 1976 at age 75, in Wolfville NS and is buried in Willowbank Cemetery. Her tombstone states, wife of Major General Foster but no mention of her deeds.



1929

EDUCATION:

- Macdonald School in Middleton, NS, built in 1903 and burned in 1909 and replaced. The school was the

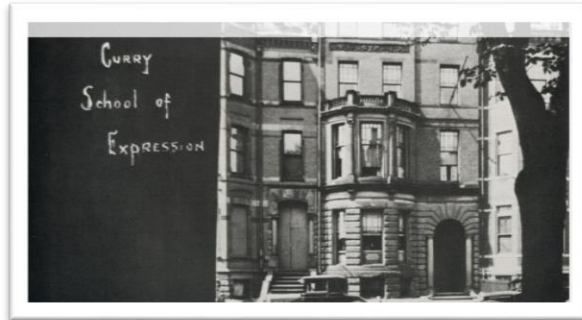


first Consolidated School in Canada, by Sir William Christopher Macdonald.

- Acadia Ladies Seminary, connected to Acadia University in Wolfville, NS. It was considered to be a ‘finishing school for ladies’. Mona received a certificate in elocution. Currently the seminary is a residence for male and females and has the reputation of being haunted because in its early years a pregnant student hung herself in the open hallway.



- Conservatory of Music and Fine Arts- here Mona developed an interest for drama and theatre
- Curry School of Expression in Boston. This was a liberal – based institution founded as a school of elocution and expression. Mona obtained a further certificate in elocution.



- Jersey School of Medicine where Mona graduated as a Registered Nurse cum laude in 1935. In the midst of the Depression, Mona was an independent woman embarking on a solid career.



WORK EXPERIENCE:

- Taught elocution at Conway Central College, Conway, Arkansas
- Member of Ziegfeld Follies in 1929 to pursue acting and theatre.
- Nursed with an Otolaryngologist, Dr. Ross Faulkner, a NS expatriate, in New York City.

- Member of the informal Amsterdam Resistance network 1940 -1941 during the Nazi occupation
- Four years in a Nazi prison, at hard labour and nursing the ill and sick when appropriate without being caught
- Volunteer nursing at # 6 Canadian Field Hospital while awaiting repatriation to Holland.

LIFE EXPERIENCES:

- 1911 Mona's father's business burned and he moved the family from Middleton to Wolfville where he started another business.
- 1914 Mona's father and brother Ross joined the Overseas Expeditionary Force. Her brother was wounded at Lens in 1917. Mona, a thirteen year old, was impressed with the war stories and the restraints of home and community which led her to help the war effort by knitting socks and mitts for the soldiers. Later in her life with this memory she decided to become a nurse.
- 1929 Mona became a member of the Ziegfeld Follies. Ziegfeld was very impressed with her beauty, ability and curved legs, as he was with all the 'girls', said Mona. She soon became bored with this life and began to look for something else.
- 1930 she was recalled home because her mother had suffered several strokes. Mona was so impressed with how the nurses took care of her mother, she enrolled in a nursing school.
- 1935 Mona graduated as a Registered Nurse and nursed in New York City in Park Avenue offices of an Otolaryngologist.
- February of 1937 Mona's brother asked her to show a millionaire Dutch client, Willem Leonhardt, around New York, which she did. September 1 of 1937 they married in the Town Hall with family and a few close friends. After an extended Honeymoon on the French and Italian Riviera they lived in a three storied house in Laren, Netherlands, called 'Ingleside'. Servants lived on the third floor. 1940 the Germans invaded Holland which changed their lives forever.
- 1940 -1941 they repatriated downed allied airmen in their home, hiding them on the third floor after discharging the servants, to protect them should the Germans find out. Their social status gave some protection from the Nazis. The last airmen they hid was Flight Engineer William Moir and Navigator Richard Pope but moving them to Laide, they were intercepted by the Gestapo. Richard kept in touch with Mona over the years and mentioned her in his book.

- 1941 an informant caused their arrest, September 29, 1941, at home. Mona's husband hid and she said that he was away on a fishing trip. She stayed behind to secure their house and two dogs. Their house was occupied by the Germans for the duration of the war.



Mona was one of the first female civilians to be tried by a Nazi military tribunal in the Netherlands. She was condemned to death

by a firing squad for treason. When sentenced, her dignified demeanour impressed the judge allowing an appeal, she was then sentenced to life in prison at hard labour. She lived in squalor, disease and hunger. Still she showed kindness by giving scraps of food to others, nursing the ill, sick and dying, with limited supplies and without angering the guards, otherwise she would be punished. Her jobs in prison were varied and difficult. She became ill with bronchitis and diarrhea, weighting 94 pounds. In the Infirmary she was made to knit socks for the German soldiers and in doing so would put knots in the wool to cause blisters. No medicine was available, were four to a tiny cell, built for one person. For the four years in prison she slept on the floor with only straw. She was in solitary for two weeks for writing a letter in English, as the prisoners were not allowed pencils, paper or books.

When working in a bomb facility she deliberately mis-wired weapons. During the 12 hour shift, no talk was allowed and if doing so would be severely punished. She was moved many times during the four years. While in Vechta, she met a young Baroness, Wendelien von Boetzelaer.

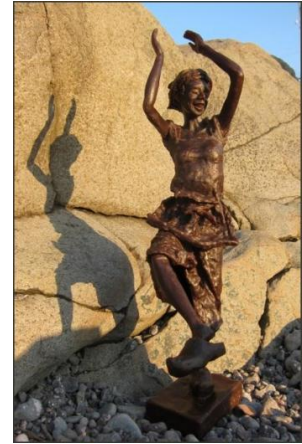
In 1945 Vechta was bombed and they managed to escape. For weeks they walked across Germany posing as German Sisters. They managed by exchanging labour for food and lodging, which was in a barn. Mona's acting skills became invaluable as she used a speech impediment to conceal her Canadian accent when speaking German, even though she fluently spoke German. Eventually they became separated. Mona continued on and finally reached the Dutch boarder. She was in very poor physical condition, barefoot, suffering infected blisters, very thin and exhausted. Mona sought out a farmer who took her to an army base. She was almost arrested there but convinced the guard that she was Canadian. She volunteered her nursing skills at #6 Canadian Field Hospital while awaiting repatriation to Holland. Mona and her husband Leonhardt were reunited after the war but he did not recover from his prison experiences and died, 1956.

Mona had another fight on her hands, to secure benefits from Leonhardt, her millionaire husband's estate. After a long battle she received nothing because of family in-fighting and court rulings in Holland.

- 1957 Mona returned to Nova Scotia. She managed to save a few things from her home in Holland; opera glasses, a few pieces of silver and crystal but the ‘scares of her experiences remained’.
- 1959 she became reacquainted with a childhood friend, Major General Harry Foster, they married and lived in Lobster Point, Chester, NS. Mona lived life as a retired person after this. Harry died in 1964.
- 1970 Mona returned to Wolfville. Her health suffered from her horrendous experiences during her prison time and effects of the war. She gradually became bedridden and isolated. Her hands were gnarled from the labours in the prisons.
- 1976 Mona died .

AWARDS:

- Commendation from British Air Marshall, Lord Arthur Tedder of the Royal Air Force
- US President Dwight D. Eisenhower for her extraordinary courage and daring escapes with gratitude from the American people.
- Street named, Mona Parsons Drive in Bedford, NS
- Parson’s Hall at Acadia University, Wolfville , NS, as a Residence
- Women of Wolfville, fund-raising to erect a statute in memory of Mona in the City Square (Marquette statute designed by Nistal Prem de Boer, of King’s County, NS (*as celebrating her spirit.*)
- NS Heritage Day will honour Mona Parsons in 2018



REFERENCES:

- Andria Hill- “Mona Parsons: from Privilege to Prison; from NS to Nazi Europe”
- Patrick Watson- “ Poise and Dignity Saved Mona Parsons”
- Richard Pope wrote a book on his experiences during WW2 and mentioned his relation with Mona Parsons.