

Canadian Scholar Speaks on World War I Anti-War Perspective at International Conference

June 23, 2014

TORONTO – Dr. Jo Vellacott, a Canadian scholar living in Toronto, will speak at the 83rd Anglo-American Conference of Historians, July 3-4, 2014. Her talk is *The War Work of an Anti-War Activist: Catherine Marshall, 1914–1918*.

“As we remember the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I, it is important to remember those who were vocal peace advocates during that time,” stated Vellacott.

“We forget that there were those who sought to promote non-violent means to deal with international conflict,” said Vellacott. “Opposition to militarism was, for some, based not only on the horror of sending young men out in their thousands to be killed but as much or more on a recognition of what it did – and still does – to humans to be forced to harm and kill others. We see the truth of this today when we consider the harmful impacts of war on soldiers who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.”

Ursula Franklin, University Professor emerita, Massey College, said, “I emphatically welcome the efforts of Vellacott and others to bring into the current commemorations of 1914 original accounts of the anti-war activities of the time. As Canadians, our own sense of integrity demands that we do not silence dissenting voices, such as those of anti-war and pacifist citizens. Their respectful inclusion is essential and can make the difference between genuine remembrance and revisionist story telling.” Franklin is the author of *The Real World of Technology* (House of Anansi Press, 1999 [1990]), *The Ursula Franklin Reader: Pacifism as a Map* (Between the Lines, 2006), and *Ursula Franklin Speaks, Thoughts and Afterthoughts* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014). Franklin was awarded the Pearson Peace medal in January, 2002, by the United Nations Association in Canada, and she is a Companion of the Order of Canada.

Vellacott’s research as a historian has focused on the history of women and of work for peace, particularly during World War I. Her research began with a focus on the well-known pacifist, Bertrand Russell, whose papers are held at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and later moved to focus on a peer of Russell’s, Catherine Marshall.

“Catherine Marshall was a key British suffragist who aimed for something more than equality, important as that was. She hoped that women would bring a new perspective to government. For her, work for peace was an integral part of her feminism,” explained Vellacott. “At a practical level, Marshall brought her experience as an organizer and campaigner to the No Conscription Fellowship, created early in the war by young socialists and Quakers, drawing Bertrand Russell also into this work. Among her other accomplishments, she took part in founding the still-active international women’s peace

movement called the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.”

Vellacott earned degrees at Oxford University, the University of Toronto and a PhD in History at McMaster University. She has served as assistant to the Dean of Women at Queen’s and taught at Concordia University. She is the author of *Bertrand Russell and the Pacifists during the First World War* (Harvester, 1981), *From Liberal to Labour with Women’s Suffrage: the Story of Catherine Marshall* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), and *Pacifists, Patriots and the Vote* (Palgrave, 2007).

Not a lifelong pacifist, Jo served as an Air Mechanic with the Women’s Royal Naval Service, in the Fleet Air Arm in Scotland during the Second World War. She is now a very active Quaker.

At the age of ninety-two, she lives in an apartment in a retirement community in downtown Toronto, enjoys drawing and painting classes, sews items for charity and Quaker causes, and enjoys the company of many friends and of her son and daughters. Wanting to make use of her special knowledge, she is currently writing a series of short pieces on little-known events and activities relating to peace work during the First World War.

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