

More Stories from St. Luke's Churchyard - The Heavenly Twins by Pam Gaudio

First Lieutenants Ellanore Jane Parker and Murney May Pugh were members of the Canadian Army Medical Corps during World War I and were dubbed "The Heavenly Twins." They both received the British General Service Medal, the Victory Medal, and the Allied Armies Medal for their contributions to the war effort. Murney also held the Mons Star, a memento of the fact that she was in France with the first 15 nurses called to the front.

The couple met at the Canadian hospital at Netherhaven on Salisbury Plain where they both won Red Chevrons for their first year of service in the war. Prior to meeting here they lead completely different lives. Pugh, born in Ontario, came from a line of Army personnel. She received her nurse's training at Halifax's Kingston Military Hospital and was called to service at the outbreak of the war. When she reached England she learned nurses were desperately needed in France. She went to Boulogne and helped the wounded at the Battle of Mons who were evacuated to a five story hotel. She later went to Netherhaven. It was here that she met Parker.



From the National Archives of Canada website.

Parker, born in the UK, immigrated to Canada and took her nurse's training at Winnipeg General Hospital then returned to England. In 1910 she joined the Canadian Army Nursing Corp. Both women went to France early in 1915 with the Canadian General Hospital staff at Le Tresport and then worked at the newly constructed hospital at Joinville-sur-Marne. It was here that they treated the first mustard gas casualties from Vimy Ridge and the Somme. The medical staff also suffered from the effects of the gas poisoning as soldiers' clothing and skin were saturated with phosgene and chlorine. Pugh suffered with a burned throat but Parker's trouble was much worse. Parker had a susceptible chest and suffered with respiratory problems. At the end of the war Pugh and Parker, who was quite ill, returned to Canada on a hospital ship.

In 1919 the two women moved to Los Angeles, California for the betterment of Parker's health. It was here that Parker began a career as a writer and poet from the confines of her bed. She wrote two fictional books of war experiences, *The Flower of the Land* and *The Land Lay Waiting*. Pugh helped with copying and editing when she wasn't working at Garfield General Hospital. Parker experienced several attacks of pneumonia resulting from the gas poisoning and every time she became ill she was not expected to live. Pugh always nursed her back to health.



Photo credit: Pam Gaudio

In 1948 the couple moved to Victoria, BC and eventually designed a new home on Eastdowne Road. In their collection of artifacts was a very special letter, a hand-written note on pale blue-grey paper stamped, "Buckingham Palace" dated 1918 which read:

"The Queen and I wish you God-speed, and a safe return to the happiness and joy of home life, with an early restoration in health. A grateful Mother country thanks you for faithful services. Signed George R.I."

Parker died at age 86. Pugh outlived her by nine years and died in 1974. Friends forever, they are buried beside each other in St. Luke's Churchyard.