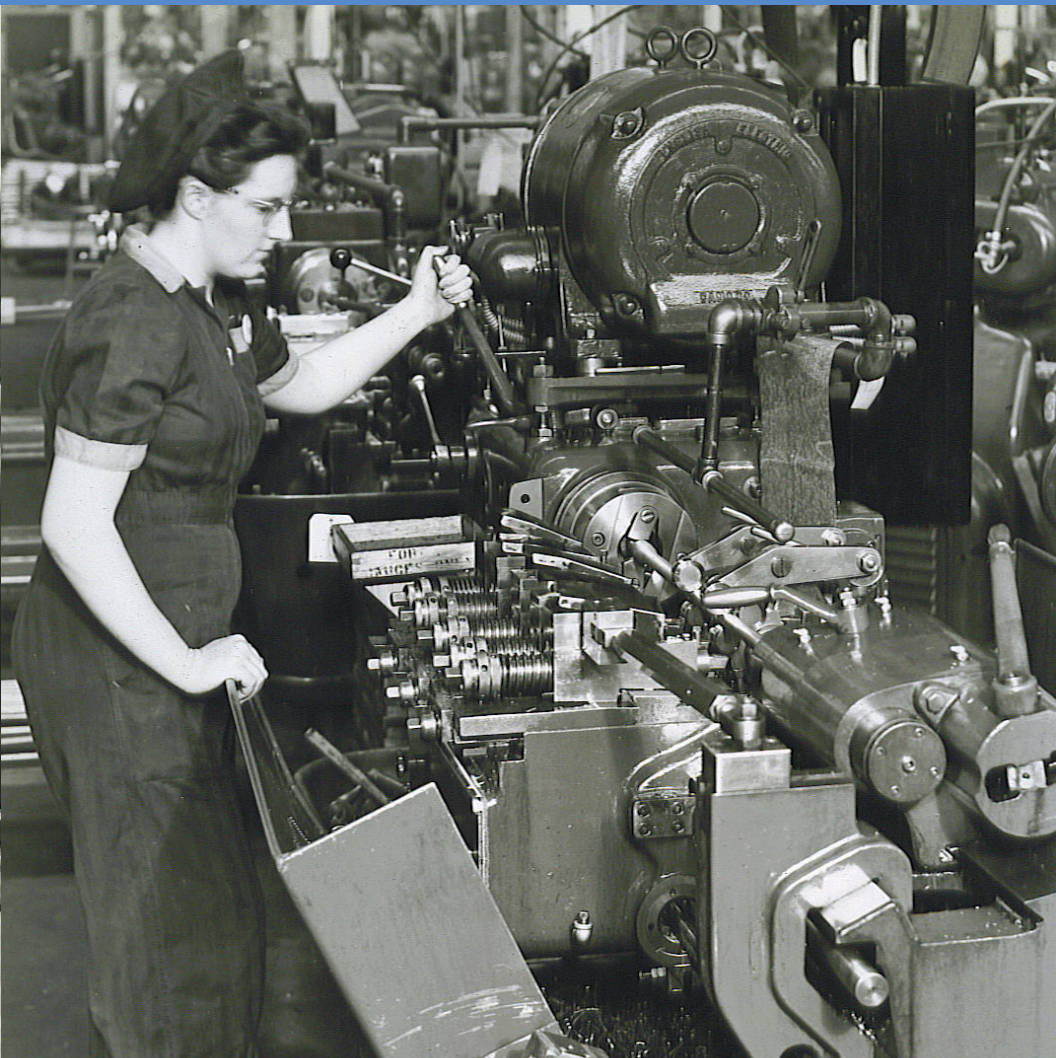


“Airplanes, Bullets and Bomb Girls” *The Arsenal Lands*



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What are the Arsenal Lands?

A large tract of land in the Lakeview area of southeast Mississauga has been used over time for various military purposes, including a rifle range, aerodrome, weapons training, armaments manufacturing and military barracks. Collectively referred to as the Arsenal Lands, combined the area covers 15.7 hectares along the south side of Lakeshore Road, stretching roughly between Cawthra Road and the Etobicoke Creek.

The Arsenal Lands included the former Long Branch Rifle Ranges, Curtiss Aviation School (Long Branch Aerodrome) and the Dominion Small Arms Limited factory site. All three entities had strong connections to military production and training through the First and Second World Wars.

While collectively referred to as the Arsenal Lands, each property has their own history. The place reference of Long Branch was used when the sites were operational, referring to the nearby community and streetcar line in Etobicoke. They were geographically located entirely within the Lakeview community of modern Mississauga.

Front cover: Small Arms Limited, munitions factory assembly line, c1943

Below: Small Arms Limited factory, 1952



Long Branch Rifle Ranges



Above: Long Branch Rifle Ranges, Long Range, c1940

The Military District of Ontario formed the Ontario Rifle Association in 1868 to promote and encourage the development of National Defence measures through the establishment of military training grounds. Consequently, a rifle range was constructed along Toronto's waterfront at Garrison Commons.

In 1891 the Ontario Rifle Association relocated their rifle range to Lakeview, naming it the Long Branch Rifle Ranges. The ranges were used as training grounds for cadets, local militia, and the Department of Militia and Defence. The Ranges stretched along the shores of Lake Ontario, and shooting competitions were held annually on its Short, Medium and Long range facilities. The first competition at Long Branch in 1893 attracted more than 250 competitors.

During the First World War the Ranges were used for weapons training for new recruits into the Canadian Expeditionary Force, the local 36th Peel militia battalion, and training for the Home Guard and the Women's Home Guard. In 1917, the Royal Flying Corp developed the Cadet program to train pilots in the adjacent Long Branch aerodrome (Curtiss Aviation School). The cadets used the Rifle Ranges for ground combat training.

At the beginning of the Second World War the Long Branch Rifle Ranges served as a militia training centre. Rifle competitions resumed in 1946 until 1957, when the Ranges were closed. For a short period of time the barracks buildings on the property were used for temporary civilian housing.

Curtiss Aviation School & the Long Branch Aerodrome

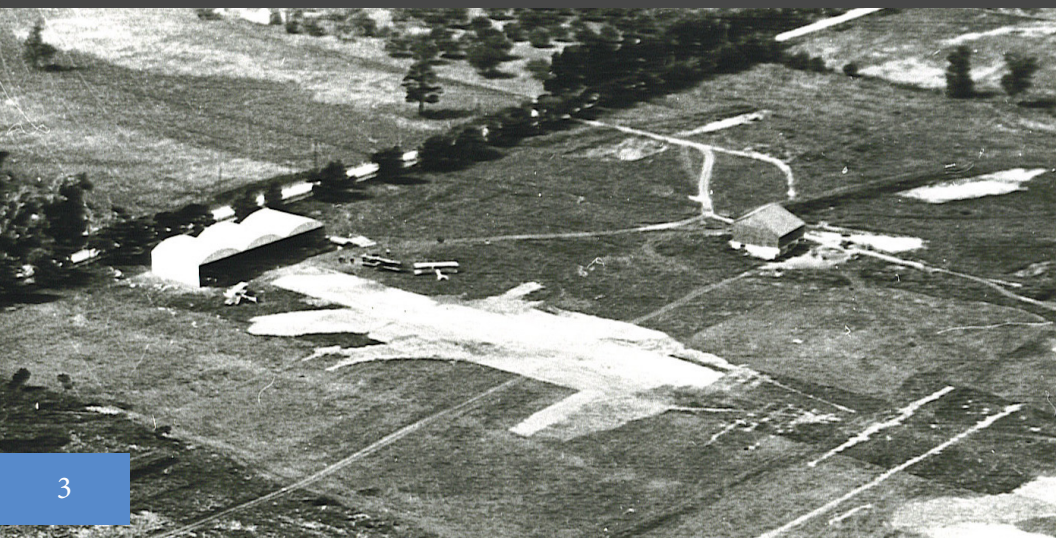
Adjacent to and immediately east of the rifle range was Canada's first aerodrome, which operated here between 1915 and 1919. In May of 1915, Curtiss Aeroplanes and Motors, Ltd. established a flying school in Lakeview. The school, and the nearby Curtiss aircraft factory, were managed by J.A.D. McCurdy, Canada's first aviator. Students at the school piloted Curtiss Model F "Flying Boats" and the Curtiss JN-3 "Jenny" biplane.

Students at the school initially had to pay their own way: \$400 for 400 minutes of flying time. Students came from a wide area, including some from the United States. After graduation, pilots went to England for further training and would join either the British Royal Flying Corps or the Royal Naval Air Service. The Curtiss Aviation School produced 129 graduates. 34 of these pilots lost their lives overseas in training accidents and combat. The Curtiss Aviation School closed at the end of 1916 with the formation of the Royal Flying Corps Canada.

In January of 1917 the Long Branch Aerodrome became home to X and Y Squadrons of the Long Branch Cadet Wing with the newly formed Royal Flying Corps Canada. Cadets were trained in clerical work, mechanical transport, aerial gunnery, wireless communication, photography and other military responsibilities. New barracks buildings were added in the spring of 1918. At its height the aerodrome could accommodate 1200 cadets. The aerodrome closed in 1919 and the Royal Flying Corps training facilities were relocated to a larger air field.

Below: Long Branch Aerodrome Air Field, aerial image, c1916

Right: Munitions workers, Small Arms Limited, c1943

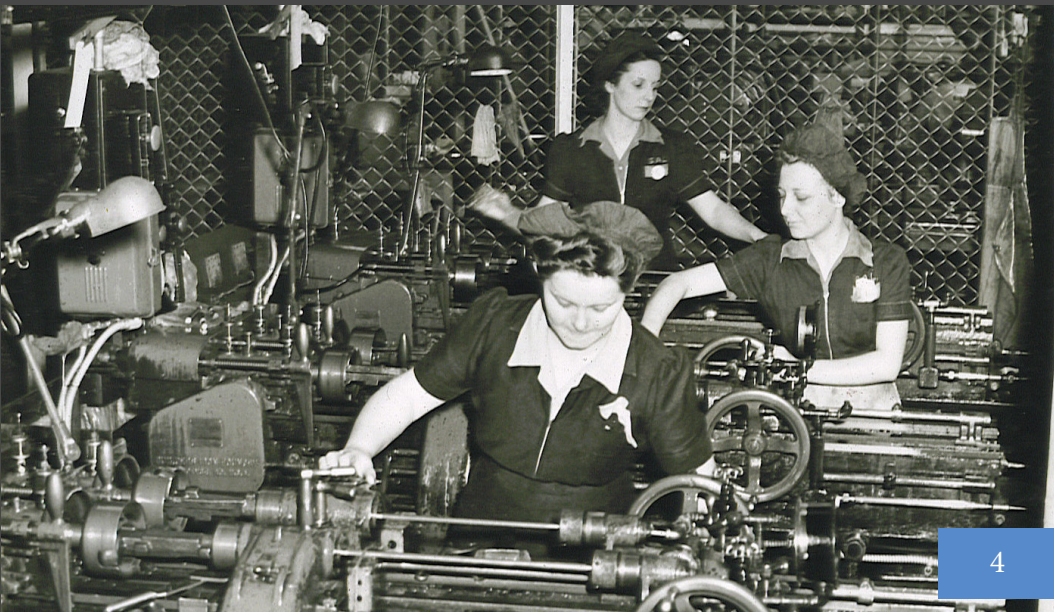


Dominion Small Arms Limited

The Canadian Department of National Defence authorized the construction of a small arms manufacturing facility on June 6, 1940. The company was named Dominion Small Arms Limited, and operated as a munitions factory. On August 7, 1940, a Crown Corporation called Small Arms Limited assumed responsibility for the facility under the guidance of the wartime Department of Munitions and Supply.

By early November of 1940, the factory was functional, with its key personnel in place, and began taking delivery of small arms machinery from the United States and from the Ross Rifle Factory in Quebec. The single-storey 81,000 square foot factory originally cost \$8 million to build. Soon after, the factory size was doubled to meet demand. In June of 1941, the Small Arms factory had a staff of 735 and the first five rifles were submitted for tests and trials.

By September of 1941 a total of 200 rifles had been assembled and shipped overseas, but as the needed output was steadily increasing, the number of employees had risen to 1200. By the end of 1941, 7589 rifles had been manufactured. The first rifles from the Small Arms factory were considered remarkably fault-free, and were compared favourably to the British manufactured Lee-Enfield No. 4 rifles, which the Small Arms Limited also began producing. In February of 1942, the first Mark II Sten submachine guns were assembled at the factory, and by the end of 1942 some 206,389 No. 4 rifles had been produced. Production reached its height in 1943 with the manufacturing of 357,724 No. 4 rifles.



“Bomb Girls”

The demand for labour by wartime industries during the Second World War was high since many young men in the labour force were already enlisted in the armed forces. Small Arms Limited employed recruiters who travelled across Canada offering jobs for single women or married women without children with husbands in the armed forces. Hired workers were given free passage to Toronto for a good paying job in good working conditions. In total, the personnel department hired over 14,000 employees during its entire operation.

In 1943 when Small Arms, Limited was in full operation, it employed approximately 5,500 employees working three 8-hour shifts producing over 30,000 units per month. Approximately 62% of the employees in the munitions factory were women, who earned approximately 50 cents an hour. One quarter of them were aged 40 or older. The Second World War marked the first time work in munitions factories were opened to women. In addition to the munitions factory, the company also built a large dormitory for its workers, and engaged its workforce in many recreational activities.

Left: Small Arms Limited, munitions factory assembly line, c1943



Post War Years

Following the war, Small Arms Limited became a division of Canadian Arsenals Limited and continued to produce a variety of small arms, including the Sten gun for Taiwan. However, the company could not compete with civilian industries, and while manufacturing ventured into other fields, the business was increasingly difficult to maintain. As a government facility, managers were not allowed to solicit business, and had to rely upon government contracts. The former Small Arms Limited munitions factory (Long Branch Facility, Division of Canadian Arsenals Limited) closed in the summer of 1976.

The Long Branch Rifle Ranges, Long Branch Aerodrome, and Small Arms Limited were important contributors to the Canadian war effort during the First and Second World Wars.

Below top: Munitions workers, Small Arms Limited, c1945

Below bottom: Curtiss Flying School, Long Branch Aerodrome, June 1916

Back cover: Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" biplane, Long Branch Aerodrome, c1917





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