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Second World War Discovery Box

Personal Stories

## Verda Sharp Cook Dominion Bridge Company

When Verda was 22, she began working for the Dominion Bridge plant in Toronto. As a single mother, wartime factory work offered new opportunities and financial freedom.



Verda Cook, far left, with co-workers from the Dominion Bridge Plant in Toronto.  
Canadian Museum of History IMG20190008-001-Dm

## Life Before the War

Verda Sharp was born into an African-Canadian family in Toronto, Ontario in 1917. She married young, and had two children, but in the mid-1930s, she and her husband separated.

Now a single mother in difficult economic times, Verda moved back to her parents' home. She worked as a clerk and switchboard operator at a private medical clinic in Toronto.

## New Opportunities for Women

In 1939, Verda got a job at the Dominion Bridge plant in Toronto. She first worked on a riveting team, fastening together pieces of metal.

It was difficult work. The rivets were red-hot and caused bad burns if not handled carefully. Although work like this was challenging, the job offered better pay than her old job – an important consideration for Verda as a single mother.

As the war continued, Dominion Bridge expanded and began to make munitions at its Toronto plant. Verda was transferred to this department, where she made cartridge cases for anti-aircraft shells.

Verda's son recalled that his mother felt that her war experience had widened her worldview. As war demands grew, the industrial workforce in Canada diversified, and Verda found herself working with women from different backgrounds and different parts of the country. Some of her closest friends at the plant were women who had come from rural Quebec.

## Post-War Life in Canada

Verda later married Sanford Cook, and eventually left her job at Dominion Bridge to raise her growing family. She attended secretarial school, and took a job at the YMCA. She worked there for 31 years, rising to a prominent position within the organization.

She also became a community leader in Toronto, helping to found the Congress of Black Women and the National Black Coalition. In 1977, she was awarded the Queen's Silver Jubilee Medal in recognition of her longtime community service.