



THE COLLINGWOOD CENOTAPH

H. David Vuckson

On Sunday, August 5th, 1923 at 4:00 p.m., Collingwood's completed Cenotaph (it was started in 1922) commemorating the citizens of Collingwood who lost their lives in the First World War, was unveiled before a large crowd on the grounds of the CNR Station on St. Paul St. The 1914-18 conflict, because of its severity, had been called "The Great War" and "The War To End All Wars". In April 1917, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States, reversing his previous policy of neutrality, sought from Congress a declaration of war against Germany "to make the world safe for democracy". Unfortunately, none of these utopian sentiments took into account human nature which causes wars in the first place. Now, 101 years since the end of the war to end all wars, the world abounds with wars and rumours of wars.

On October 6, 1917 when the Great War still had more than a year to go before the guns would fall silent, a meeting was held by the patriotic ladies of the I. O. D. E. (Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire) to discuss the erection of a war memorial. The advocated site was at the north-east corner of Hurontario and Hume Streets on land owned by

George Leach of Duntroon, the site known as Leach's Park. At that corner, Leach's Park occupied lots 1-5 on the east side of Hurontario St. and lots 6-7 on the north side of Hume St. It would have cost \$4700.00 to purchase this land in 1917. The location may seem confusing to the multitudes who remember this corner being part of the boys' school yard of the 1925 Collingwood Collegiate/Senior Public School/Admiral Collingwood School building. At the time Leach's Park existed, the original 1874 C.C.I. building, with a north/south footprint, was located much farther east on Hume St. near the northern section of Ste. Marie St., the front entrance and Victorian era tower of that school building facing directly up the southern section of Ste. Marie St. That school building burned down in December 1923 more than a year after the initial granite base of the Cenotaph was erected on St. Paul St. It is assumed that eventually the Collingwood Board of Education purchased Leach's property to incorporate it into the school yard for the new, much larger C.C.I. that opened in January 1926 with an east/west footprint. In the 21st Century, the rounded corner of the new Monaco development will occupy the site of Leach's Park.

Leach's Park was not the only candidate for a location for a war memorial. The grounds of the 1904 Carnegie Public Library at the south-east corner of Maple and Second Streets were also suggested by some as a suitable place, as were the grounds of the then-Grand Trunk Railway Station on St. Paul St. The lower floor of the Carnegie Building also contained the Huron Institute Museum and it is understandable that a location such as this dedicated to Collingwood's past would be an appropriate location for such a monument.

More meetings were held and the location for the war memorial became a subject of much debate. In the end, the railway station

grounds on St. Paul St. (now home to the Collingwood Museum) were chosen. Next, there was announced a competition to design the monument. The award-winning design was by a twenty-eight-year-old architect and native son of Collingwood, Charles Henry Lawrence Macdonald (1894-1963), a veteran of the Great War. Charles and his older brother Fred, both in their early 20's, had enlisted with the 48th Highlanders in August 1914. Arriving at the Front in France in February 1915, both brothers were wounded in April. Charles was more severely wounded than Fred and was captured by the enemy, hospitalised and kept for three years as a Prisoner of War.

In peacetime back in Collingwood after his discharge, Charles Macdonald was again an architect. Using his brother Fred as the model for his entry in the contest to design Collingwood's War Memorial, Charles designed a bronze statue of a bugle boy in military uniform playing *The Last Post*. I recently became aware of a family connection to this man who designed Collingwood's Cenotaph. Charles Macdonald was married by Rev. Samuel Farley, the minister of First Presbyterian Church, Collingwood, on November 8th, 1922. His bride was Wilhelmina Nolan (1898-1985), my 2nd cousin 1x removed. She was the grand-niece of my great-grandmother O'Brien. Wilhelmina Nolan, when age 7, had also performed the role of flower girl at the 1905 marriage of my grandmother Eva Mildred O'Brien to R. J. Hewson.

The Cenotaph was accompanied from the beginning, and still is, by four tall lamp standards and a flag pole. The day the Cenotaph was unveiled, the ladies of the I.O.D.E. presented a Union Jack flag which was raised during the ceremony. Four buglers sounded *The Last Post*. Very fittingly, the words *THE LAST POST* are cast into the base of the statue which faces west.

The extensive engraving on the granite base of the monument was paid for by the Admiral Collingwood Chapter of the I.O.D.E. and is reported to have cost \$800.00. The side facing St. Paul St. bears the words,

THIS MEMORIAL WAS ERECTED IN GRATEFUL AND LOVING MEMORY OF THE HEROES WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918 A. D. BY THE CITIZENS OF COLLINGWOOD ONT., IN THE YEAR 1922 A.D.

The other three sides of the base list the names of the war dead—more than 100 names of men and women—under the heading *HONOR ROLL*. Curiously, the American spelling was used instead of the British “*HONOUR*”.

In 1959 the Collingwood Branch of The Royal Canadian Legion advocated for the addition of two granite “wings” to be placed to the north and south of the monument honouring the citizens of Collingwood who died in the Second World War. These wings, engraved with 59 names, were unveiled on August 14, 1960 bearing the words,

TO THE HONOUR AND GLORY OF THOSE WHO PAID THE SUPREME SACRIFICE IN WORD WAR TWO— LEST WE FORGET.

In 1982 additional engraving was added to the base of the World War II wings: *KOREA 1950-1953*.

A separate plaque in English and in French honours another aspect of those who served in wartime:

CANADIAN MERCHANT NAVY—THE LIFE LINE OF THE WORLD 1914-18, 1939-45, 1950-53

In 2007, after 84 years of weathering, the Bugle Boy statue was taken down to undergo some repairs and restoration, the incentive being government grants that were available for the purpose of refurbishing cenotaphs. When the statue was returned to its pedestal, there was a re-dedication ceremony. Some years earlier, around the turn of the 21st Century a brass plaque was added just below the statue on the St. Paul St. side by Dr. C. H. Nolan Macdonald, the son of the statue's designer stating:

DESIGNED BY CHARLES H. L. MACDONALD 1894-1963 A NATIVE SON

For 97 years, ceremonies have been held at the Cenotaph on November 11th to honour those who gave their lives. The Collingwood Kiltie Band with about thirty musicians, played for these Remembrance Day services for many years. By the 1950's when Bill Newby was Bandmaster, the Kiltie Band uniforms were worn out, moth-eaten and too expensive to replace, so the band was renamed the Collingwood Civic Band and supplied with new simple uniforms of navy jackets and grey pants. In the 1960's under Bandmaster Jim Knights, I participated as the bass drummer. David G. Brown, my Grade 5 teacher at Victoria School on Maple St., still with us in 2019 at age 96, played cornet in the band. In my public school days in the 1950's "Mr. Brown" would stand in the hallway at Victoria School and play *The Last Post* for Remembrance Day. Years later, he and I were colleagues in the Civic Band.

When we played at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Day, we stood on the west side of St. Paul St. opposite the monument. The memorial hymn "*O Valiant Hearts Who To Your Glory Came, Through Dust of Conflict And Through Battle Flame...*" was played at these ceremonies.

David Brown showed me how, during the playing of this hymn, to simulate a cannon fire salute using the bass drum. One of the lines of the hymn is, *“tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved....”* and at the word “proved” I would count 2, 3, 4 and then, in a short pause in the music I would strike the bass drum hard to simulate a cannon shot before the words moved on to say *“your memory hallowed in the land you loved”*.

Following the tragic, untimely death of Jim Knights in the summer of 1969, my band days were over. The Collingwood Civic Band continued on for a time under Howard Riome and later, Ernest Berry, but eventually it faded from the scene. On Remembrance Day 1999, Sheila Stewart and Garth Wilson attended the annual gathering at the Cenotaph and were saddened to see the veterans marching to the ceremony accompanied by recorded music from a tape player on the back of a jeep. They knew that this was not good enough and decided that in November 2000, the veterans would have a live band for the parade. This was the beginning of what became the Beinn Gorm Highlanders Pipe and Drum Band. In Gaelic, the name means, very appropriately, “Blue Mountain”. The auditorium at the Royal Canadian Legion on Ontario St. was offered as a weekly practice space in exchange for the band’s participation at Remembrance Day services. In addition to the November ceremony, the Beinn Gorm Highlanders, with over 40 personnel on their Band List in 2019, play an open air concert once a month during the summer at the Amphitheatre on the former Collingwood Shipyard site. They also play at Robbie Burns night and on St. Patrick’s Day as well as at many other locations, events and parades, nearly 24 performances in 2019.

The grounds of the Collingwood Museum are a peaceful green space in the downtown area. Credit for these manicured grounds, created in 1923, the same year that the Cenotaph was completed and dedicated, has been attributed to the CNR Station Agent of the day, Robert William Thom (1875-1955) who came up with the idea and urged its completion. Very fittingly, the semi-circular entrance road to the Museum is now known as Veterans Crescent. A World War I artillery piece on the grounds is a silent reminder of what the Cenotaph stands for. Another now-silent reminder of the past on the grounds is the bell from Victoria Public School that stood on Maple St. This bell which called three generations of my Collingwood family to school is fixed in a stationary position and the clapper has been removed, but when I am in Collingwood I take the opportunity to strike the bell with my knuckles and the sound takes me back more than 65 years. Personal memories aside, the Victoria School bell also rang for many of the veterans whose names are engraved on the Cenotaph.

In retrospect, it turns out that the St. Paul St. location *was* the ideal spot for the Cenotaph considering that of the other two proposed locations, Leach's Park was absorbed by the grounds of the new 1925 C.C.I. as part of the Boys' school yard, and the Carnegie Library was lost to an arson fire in 1963 and subsequently replaced with a new one-level building with a different footprint. Since the opening of the new Public Library at the corner of Ste. Marie & Simcoe St. in April 2010, the 1960's replacement library building at Maple and Second St. has been repurposed as apartments. In any case, considering the changes in land use, the Cenotaph would have had to move from either of the other two locations that were proposed in 1917. Those who, at that time, advocated for the Cenotaph on the grounds of the Carnegie

Library/Huron Institute Museum, would be pleased if they could have known that Collingwood's replica 1872 Grand Trunk Railway Station would one day be the site of the town's Museum, with the new Public Library just around the corner.

As we approach Remembrance Day 2019, may we acknowledge the lives and the sacrifice of those that are honoured by the Collingwood Cenotaph in the words penned in 1919 by Sir J. S. Arkwright:

O Valiant hearts, who to your glory came

Through dust of conflict and through battle flame;

Tranquil you lie, your knightly virtue proved,

Your memory hallowed in the land you loved.

And from the 1914 poem *For the Fallen* come these words from poet Laurence Binyon:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,

We will remember them.

David Vuckson, a native son of Collingwood, is a great-grandson of pioneer Collingwood merchant R. W. O'Brien. His roots in town go back to 1875. David and his wife Pamela live in Victoria, B.C.