

Hamilton Remembers

Iain S. Sneyd and E. Clare Stewart

Even before the end of the First World War, on 21 October 1918, ground was broken in Hamilton, Ontario for a new school to be a permanent war memorial. The intent was to remember those people who fought and died serving their country and who came from what was then called Wentworth County. This school, now called Memorial School, is located at the corner of Main Street East and Ottawa Street. It was officially opened on 17 October 1919 by HRH Edward Prince of Wales on his visit to the city.



From across Main Street one can see the extent of the school. The elaborate façade of the building shows the name of the school and the dates of the war. On the archway above the front doorway are two inscriptions: "We gave our today for your tomorrow" and "We died that you might live".

Above four of the other doors were placed stones commemorating four prominent Canadian soldiers: Gen Sir Arthur Currie, Maj Gen Sir Edward M.B. Morrison, Lt Col John McCrae, and Lt Col William A. Bishop, VC. Note that the ranks we have

given are those inscribed on the stones when the building was erected. When an addition was made to the school at a later time, Bishop's stone was moved above a new door.

Inside the building there is Memorial Hall, which was dedicated 18 November 1925. Currie was a guest of honour at this event and said the following:

"I am glad that this Memorial takes the form of a school. Here you have lighted the torch that will burn up ignorance, for



ignorance breeds jealousy, selfishness, disease and folly, and can only be abolished by enlightened minds being applied to it. The end of education is to create people who can see clearly, imagine vividly, think steadily, and will nobly. Are we to allow the great tide of feeling that swept over Canada those days to vanish? We need it to overcome the difficulties in government in this country. The war was fought for too great a cost; the ideals it begot were too noble, the sorrow was too wide for it to vanish quickly from our lives."



On the pillars surrounding Memorial Hall there are sixteen bronze tablets. On each, there are about 130 names of Hamiltonians who died, for a total of 2,110 names. Included on the plaques are M. St. Clair Johnston and Charles E. Pattison, who are remembered at the Royal Bank of Canada branch in Winona, Ontario, and the Dougherty brothers and Roy Wheeler Mount who are commemorated on the Mountsberg, Ontario Cenotaph.

It is interesting to note that Walter Emmons who also is remembered in Mountsberg is not named on the Memorial School plaques. Neither is Gunner Charles Norman Young who was killed in 1916. The plaques end with the name Wylie. At least sixteen people between Wm. M. Yaffo and E.D. Zoller are missing. The authors located a list compiled by the Hamilton Spectator, from information found at the Hamilton Public Library Local History and Archives, which gives 1,739 names. There is a difference of 371 names, the equivalent of about three plaques, between the Spectator list and the Memorial School plaques. We are in the process of attempting to reconcile these lists. As well, we need to do additional research at the school to determine if another plaque may be found listing those at the end of the alphabet.



One name of note on the current plaques is Mae or Mary Belle Sampson, who was a nursing sister. Mae Belle graduated from the Hamilton City Hospital School of Nursing and attested in September 1914. She was in the first draft of medical personnel sent overseas. Mae Belle was Mentioned in Dispatches for her service in Salonika. Unfortunately she was also one of the casualties of the sinking of the Llandovery Castle Hospital Ship on 27 June 1918.

After the Second World War plaques were installed in commemoration of those students from Memorial School who served, including a list of the members of the Board of Education. There are also scrolls from local churches listing former students of the school who served.



Other features of Memorial Hall include the names of battles that Canadians fought in during the First World War. These are painted to resemble stone tablets over the archways around three sides of the Hall. On the proscenium arch above the stage are the painted words, "That our youth may ever remember the valiant soldiers of Hamilton who died in the Great War, this school is a Memorial."

This article is part of a project which made formal in 2017 what we had been doing for years – photographing cenotaphs and war memorials. The initial geographic area we covered was known as Wentworth County until 1974 when it became Hamilton-Wentworth, and then the City of Hamilton. We have concentrated primarily on monuments out of doors, in parks, in cemeteries, next to churches and other buildings, and in three cases entire buildings.

In 2018 we have expanded our area of interest to include monuments from around the world. Our plan is to have a complete, online, visual database of the memorials members of our family have photographed. To date we have photographed and created webpages for over 60 local monuments dedicated to Canadian soldiers and their families from the War of 1812 right up to the Afghanistan Conflict.

For further information about Memorial School and for a wider selection of photographs, please visit the school's page on our website: http://www.cscomps.on.ca/Individual_pages/Memorial_School.htm.

Iain S. Sneyd and E. Clare Stewart are military genealogists based in Hamilton, Ontario.