

Mississauga Remembers

The First World War



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Our Boys

Canada was a young country in 1914, not yet independent from Great Britain. When war was declared on August 4, 1914, Canada was also at war.

Over the course of the war some 619,636 Canadians enlisted with the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Of those men and women, approximately 60,000 members died during the war. The Royal Canadian Navy reported 150 deaths, and some 1,388 Canadians died while serving with the British flying services. Amongst those Canadians who fell during the war were more than 90 young men from historic Mississauga. While they did not know Mississauga by name, they came from the villages and rural communities of Toronto Township: Clarkson, Cooksville, Dixie, Erindale, Lakeview, Lorne Park, Malton, Meadowvale, Port Credit and Streetsville.



Front cover: Soldiers from Streetsville, Bennett Drennan at front right, possibly accompanied by Harold Irvine and William Weylie, 1917, courtesy of the Streetsville Historical Society

Above: Soldiers en route to Toronto at Clarkson, 1915, courtesy of PAMA

To Go or Not to Go

Right from the outset of the war, there was social and political pressure on the young men of the community to enlist for service. Many newspaper ads included posters that appealed to patriotic duty to Crown and County, while others appealed to mothers and wives to “send their men”. Farmers and agricultural producers in rural areas such as historic Mississauga were hard-pressed to determine the best course of action: to stay and work the farm to support the war effort or to enlist and leave.

Voluntary enlistment was strong in the early years of the war; the first contingent of 31,200 Canadians (amongst them some 200 men from Peel County) arrived in Britain on October 14, 1914. Initially dubbed “Canada’s Answer”, it soon became apparent that there would be no quick end to the war and that many more soldiers would be needed. By mid-1916, Canada had enlisted some 300,000 recruits, but had committed to raising 500,000 more by the end of the year; this pressure led to a conscription crisis in 1917. Amidst much controversy, the Military Service Act was passed on August 29, 1917, which allowed the government to conscript able-bodied young men into military service.

In historic Mississauga there was a local recruitment office in Port Credit, while other “travelling” recruitment officers periodically came to Streetsville and Malton. Most of the young men from historic Mississauga who enlisted in the early years of the war did so voluntarily, while there were those in later years who were conscripted into service. Once enlisted, some basic training took place at the Long Branch Rifle Range and the Cooksville Fair Grounds. Following training, many made the march along Dundas Street to Hamilton, while others travelled via train to Niagara or Valcartier, Quebec, before going overseas. Upon arrival in Britain, Canadian troops re-assembled on the Salisbury Plain outside of London, England, prior to being sent across the English Channel to the Front.

In Battle & On the Homefront

Soldiers from historic Mississauga found themselves fighting alongside British and other Canadian troops in the trenches and on the front lines in France, Belgium, Germany, and elsewhere. Some of “Our Boys” fell in battles at Neuve-Chapelle, Ypres, Artois, Festubert, Loos, Beaumont-Hamel, the Somme, Bazentin Ridge, Thiepval Ridge, Fromelles, Ancre, Arras, Vimy Ridge, Messines, Hill 70, Menin Road, Passchendaele, and the Marne. Some were taken as prisoners during the war, while others received medals and promotions for their conduct. Many, many more were injured, some of whom died later of wounds, and others who were discharged from service and would carry the marks and memory of war for the rest of their lives.

For the residents of historic Mississauga, there was a strong desire to support the war effort. Women’s auxiliary groups, church groups, local branches of the Women’s Institutes, and the Women’s Patriotic League provided care packages and knit clothing for those overseas. Local branches of the Red Cross, Orange Lodges, Masonic Temples, Young Men’s Clubs, and the Odd Fellows also organized support drives for the war effort.

The type of fundraising event would take the form of the seasons. Garden parties and concerts were prominent in the summer, fundraising booths at the fair were done in the fall months, and the bulk of the knitting and bandage rolling was done during the winter season. Raised funds were often donated to war-targeted causes such as the Red Cross Society, Peel Ambulance Fund, Belgian Relief Fund, Serbian Relief Fund, Soldier’s Comforts Fund, Blind Soldiers Fund, or used for their own patriotic work to purchase supplies.

Top right: In the Front Line Near Fleurbaix, Major Norman Robson, courtesy of the William Perkins Bull Collection, PAMA

Bottom right: Clarkson Women’s Institute Gathering, Wives and Daughters of Soldiers, 1917, Heritage Mississauga



In the Air



Curtiss Flying School, Class of July 1916, courtesy of the Toronto Public Library

Historic Mississauga was also home to Canada's first aerodrome. The Curtiss Aviation School at the Long Branch Aerodrome opened in June of 1915. The School, under the direction J.A.D. McCurdy, produced 130 graduates for the Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Flying Corps. The Curtiss Aviation School closed on December 15, 1916.

In January of 1917 the Long Branch Aerodrome became home to two squadrons, X and Y, 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 Long Branch Aerodrome closed in 1919.

Remembrance & Cenotaphs

The City of Mississauga is home today to several cenotaphs, memorials, honour rolls, commemorative plaques, and other forms of remembrance that connect to the First World War. Most of these predate the City itself.

Our oldest cenotaph, the Port Credit Soldiers' Memorial, was unveiled on November 9, 1925. The following year, on July 1, 1926, Streetsville unveiled their cenotaph, officially known as the Great War Overseas Veterans' Memorial. These cenotaphs, originally commemorating the fallen from the First World War, continue to be a focal point of Remembrance Day Ceremonies in the City of Mississauga today.

Below: Veteran Joseph Paquette, Port Credit Cenotaph, Remembrance Day 2011, Heritage Mississauga

Back cover: Soldiers luncheon at Clarkson, Summer 1915, courtesy of PAMA





For more information, contact Heritage Mississauga:



1921 Dundas St. W.
Mississauga, ON L5K 1R2
905-828-8411
www.heritagemississauga.com