

## TIME TRAVELLER'S DIARY: Aurora Remembers

By Michelle Johnson

After the signing of Armistice on November 11, 1918, Canadians were relieved to usher in a period of peace. Soldiers serving overseas were joyously welcomed home and the idea of resuming a semblance of non-war life began to emerge. Unfortunately, these attempts were thwarted by other devastating factors such as the influenza outbreak of 1918-1919, shell-shock, and an economic recession related to low wheat prices.

It must have been emotionally exhausting to rectify the experiences of war (both home and abroad), the promise of peace, and the day-to-day realities of a new time.

By the early 1920s, a sense of optimism began to creep into the zeitgeist. Known as the roaring twenties, the new decade is often credited with introducing the age of modernity. New communications technologies were filling the airwaves and screens, new transit options were traversing the roads and skies, and pop culture embraced new aesthetics and tastes. Amid this changing cultural landscape, plans for memorializing soldiers, who paid the ultimate sacrifice in the Great War, began to take shape.

During the War, Aurora was truly a small town with a population of approximately 2000. In such a small town, the loss of the twenty-four men who died in combat had a searing effect on the community. After the war, Herbert Fleury (co-owner of J. Fleury's Sons) acted as an unofficial ambassador from Aurora to the cemeteries in France. In 1921, he toured the Flanders battlefields that were scattered with temporary wooden crosses.

In 1924, the close personal and business relationship between Herbert Fleury and Sir William Mulock provided the impetus for community action ? in this case to build a memorial to those who had given their lives. Sir William Mulock purchased the land for a war memorial and offered to contribute \$10,000 ? but only if citizens from Aurora, King and Whitchurch could raise the same amount. Herbert Fleury's role, aside from making his own contribution of \$1,000, was to chair of the Aurora War Memorial Association, which would petition residents of the three municipalities in an attempt to raise the remaining funds.

By April 1925, the Association secured the funds and the cornerstone of the memorial was ceremoniously put in place. Construction of the war memorial took just under six months and it was unveiled during a dedication service on October 3. The scene of the unveiling was described by the local paper, ?The darkened clouds as if reminiscent of the days of the war parted and the bright sunshine shone through on the bowed heads of 3,000 men and women who had gathered to do honour to the fallen heroes of this section? (Aurora Banner, October 9, 1925). The Aurora war memorial pre-dates the Canadian National Vimy Memorial (1936) and the Dominion War Memorial (1939).

As the 100th anniversary of armistice approaches we invite you to join us at the following commemorative events:

Armistice Day: 100 Years of Remembrance

Commemorating a defining time in Canada's history through a unique local lens

Wednesday November 7, 7p.m.

Brevik Hall, 22 Church Street

Cadet Candle Light Vigil

Saturday, November 10, 7-11 p.m.

Aurora War Memorial, Peace Park