

The McGregor Family & The First World War

Includes information from a Flamborough Historical Society Vignette

As in the rest of Canada, many local families had more than one family member involved in some capacity. The Waterdown Village Council presented each young man who enlisted with a wrist watch - a ritual that had to be discontinued as more and more were called to war.



While it was not unusual to have two children, usually sons, serving overseas, the McGregor family of Waterdown was unique: four of their seven living children served during the First World War. Against all odds, all of them survived and came home.

- **Charles Walker McGregor** (1883-1949) was assigned to the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force, 164th Battalion.
- **Elizabeth Muriel McGregor** (1888-1987) was a nurse, assigned to the Canadian Overseas Expeditionary Force, Canadian Army Medical Corps.
- **Flora McGregor Frid** (1889-1987) was also a nurse. Since the Canadian government did not allow married women to serve overseas, she joined the American Red Cross in London. She served at the American Hospital, St. Katherine's Lodge, Regent's Park.
- **Douglas Urquhart McGregor** (1895-1953) served in the Royal Air Corps, rising to the rank of Captain. He was awarded the Military Cross for gallantry in leading patrols against hostile formations.

Their father, Dr. John Owen McGregor (1850-1928) was born in Nelson Township and practiced medicine in the Waterdown area from 1884 to 1927. In 1878 he married Eliza MacKenzie (a key figure in the life of the village during her life – particularly in the *Women's Institute*), who had come from Scotland as a young child. Together, Eliza and John had eight children, seven of which survived to adulthood. Two became notable surgeons in the Hamilton area and three became nurses. *"Dr. McGregor was very active in the political life in Waterdown. He was elected Reeve of Waterdown in 1895, served on the Village of Waterdown Council for 16 consecutive years and was Warden of the County of Wentworth for two years beginning in 1897"* (WEFHS Heritage Paper # 149, Fall 2000)



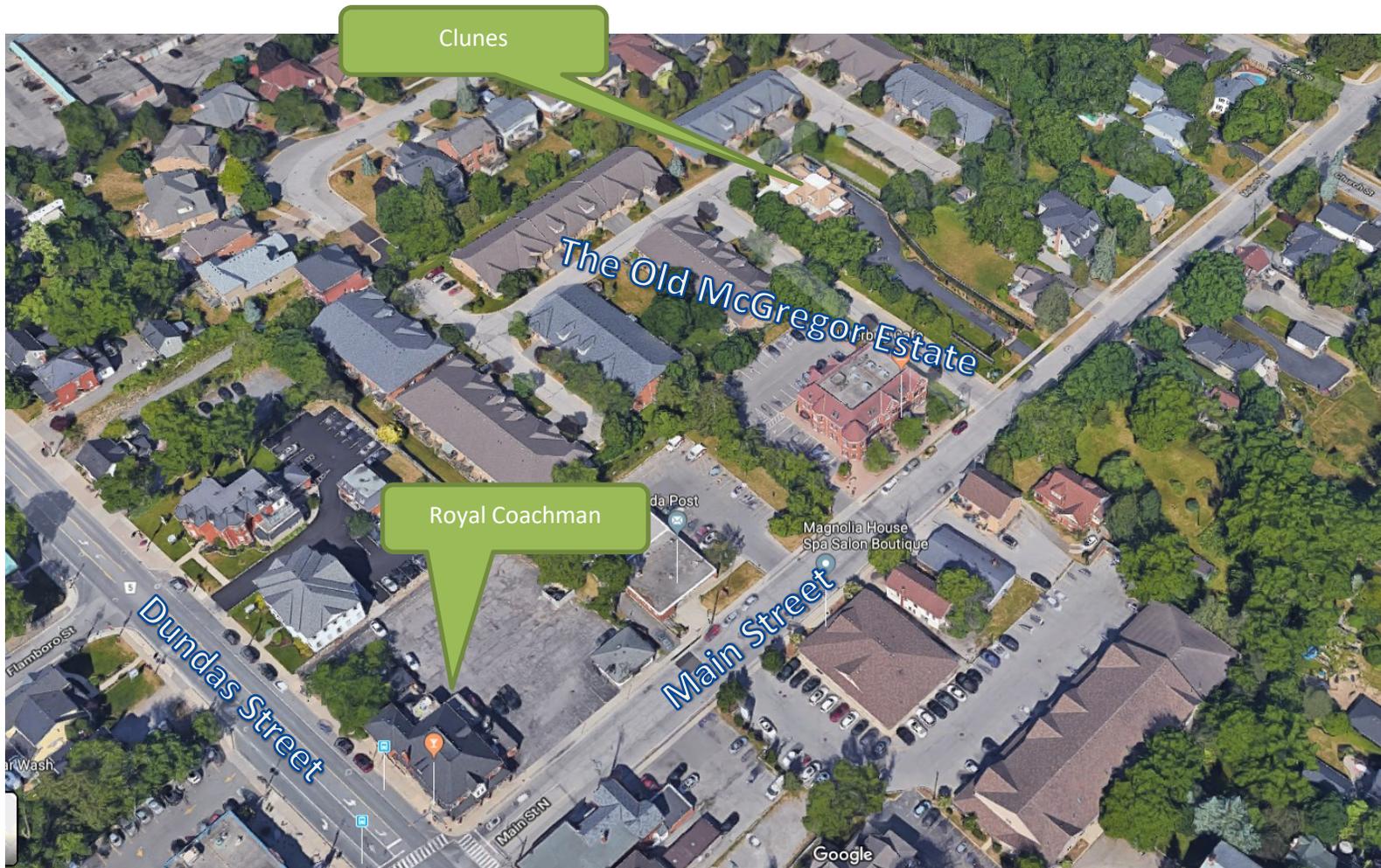
The McGregor family residence, "Clunes," was the social centre of the village during the late 19th and early 20th century. During the First World War, the property was the site of garden parties raising funds for the war effort.

The biggest of these saw 3,000 people gather on the grounds during the summer of 1915.

The garden party, a fundraiser for the Red Cross organized by the *Daughters of the King*, was detailed in Jonathan Vance's *A Township at War* and was attended by Lieutenant Governor Sir John Hendrie (a frequent visitor to East Flamborough) and former Lieutenant Governor Sir John Gibson.

The star of the gathering, wrote Vance, was war hero Colonel James Ballantine:

"With Ballantine's appearance at Clunes, the war at last came home to the township. They had heard of it from an eyewitness, who described to them the hell their boys had faced at Ypres. His account had breathed life into the often sterile newspaper stories and the sketchy reports that friends and relatives had sent in their letters home."



Address of Clunes: 49 Main Street N, Waterdown

Sources: Making A Difference – The McGregor Family & WWI – Vignette, Flamborough Historical Society, 2017.
Vance, Jonathan. *A Township at War*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2018.

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