

Waterdown's Memorial Hall – Vignette

Adapted from The Waterdown East Flamborough Heritage Society

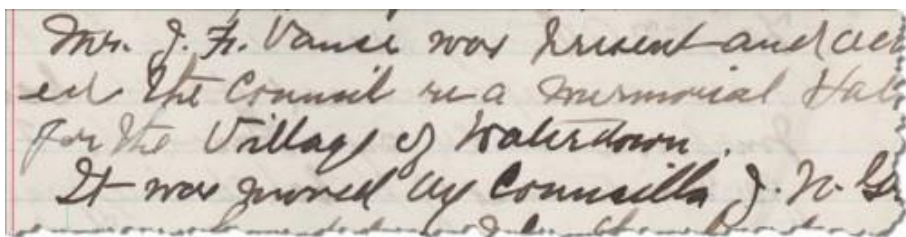
www.flamboroughhistory.com

October 5, 2017

Waterdown is fortunate to have two unique memorials to our service men and women. The Flamborough Archives contains photos and historical documents relating to Memorial Hall, built to honor the memory of First World War veterans, and Memorial Park, created and given to the Town to honour those serving in The Second World War. A third memorial, a traditional cenotaph in front of the Legion, was erected in 1985.



Waterdown Memorial Hall is one of less than a dozen community memorial halls erected in Canada after the First World War, yet strangely Hamilton has three of them; there are also halls in Carlisle and Binbrook.



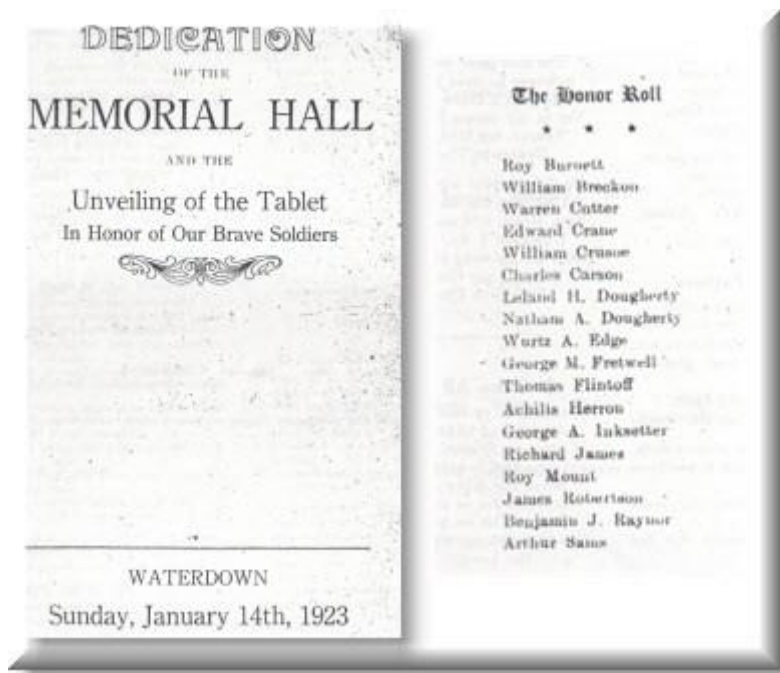
The earliest reference to the concept of a Memorial Hall is in the Waterdown Council Minute Books, February 10, 1919, when Mr. J.F. Vance 'addressed the Council re a memorial Hall for the Village of Waterdown'.

A Community League was organized and the goal was to construct a building that would function as both a memorial to those local citizens who had enlisted and died during the First World War, and as a community hall to meet the needs of the village.

During the war, funds had been collected by the "Patriotic Society", a group made up of the Waterdown Women's Institute, the King's Daughters and the Amateur Athletic Association. Using residual funds, the Waterdown Women's Institute purchased the site at 317 Dundas Street East, in 1920, and turned the property over to the Waterdown Council.

Construction on the Memorial Hall began in the spring of 1922 and was completed in the fall of the same year. In May 1922, the surrounding area was severely damaged by a fire that destroyed much of Dundas Street, between Main and Franklin. The Memorial Hall was not affected by the fire.

The Women's Institute was the driving force behind the building. Having purchased the site, they then turned their efforts towards raising funds to finance the construction. Waterdown Memorial Hall was dedicated at a Memorial Service on January 14, 1923.



During the service, a commemorative tablet containing the names of all villagers who had enlisted in the war and the 19 who had died, was unveiled. In the centre are the names of nineteen boys who died in action, and the names of those who survived form a border. “The Rev. Father Becker was to have taken part in the services, but owing to an accident on Guelph Road, he was unable to attend, being confined to his bed in the Guelph hospital” (Waterdown Review article Jan. 25, 1923). In total, Waterdown sent 108 men and women overseas during the First World War

Three days later, on January 17, the Hall was officially opened with a large banquet attended by approximately 500 people and a grand ball was held on January 19.

The Waterdown Memorial Hall was put to many varying uses immediately following its opening. In addition to housing village Council and Women’s Institute meetings, the hall served briefly as home to the Third Division Court of Wentworth County and in the 1940’s the basement was used as a dormitory for farm help. There was a cinema and the jail, installed in the basement and used once, for a man who allegedly stole a horse. Between 1948 and 1956 the village library operated out of the main floor while the basement was used as a shooting gallery for the local gun club. During the 1950’s a nightclub used the main hall and bricked up the side windows. The hall continues to be used by various community groups.

The clock tower on the original building, which housed the bell from the former Bell House, was deemed unstable after a severe winter, and was removed in 1949.



The Waterdown Memorial Hall after completion in 1922



Summer 1993: note the windows boarded up. Archives Photo # 1119

A commemorative drinking fountain, purchased by his wife in honor of Frederick Crooker was installed in 1930, later removed but re-installed in 1973. In 1979, a cobblestone memorial cairn with the plaque listing the names of those who lost their lives in World War 1 and incorporating the original bell from the Bell House and the Memorial Hall clock tower, was constructed. A second plaque was later added by the Waterdown Legion and the Waterdown Lion's Club, dedicated to the memory of the deceased Waterdown men who had served in the First World War.



While some questions remain as to the accuracy of the names included on the original plaques, the building is a unique memorial. In a letter to Garwood-Jones and Hanham, Architects regarding a Town of Flamborough LACAC study in 1968, Dr. Jonathan F. Vance (Professor and Canada Research Chair, Department of History, The University of Western Ontario) writes “Indeed, it is well to remember that the creation of war memorials, in Waterdown as in every other town, was very much a community effort. From the time the memorial was first mentioned.....it was to be an expression of the community’s feeling towards those who sacrificed themselves for the war.” “It stands, not simply as a memorial to the township’s war effort, but also as a memorial to the township’s character and self-image during the 1920’s”

