

THE STORY OF CANADIAN LEGION BRANCH No. 38

From 1931 to 1946

A brief sketch by

Thomas H . Raddall

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After the American Revolution several Loyalist regiments came to Nova Scotia and were disbanded there. One of the most famous was Tarleton's Legion, whose men were mostly from Carolina. The regiment had lost many men in battle and from fever in the South, and the remnant of them, with a number of wives and children, were dumped ashore at Port Mouton in the cold month of November 1783. They were given a certain <sup>amount</sup> ~~quantity~~ of salt meat and hard-tack, and told more or less. "There's your land. Make your living on it." As a special favour each man was given fourteen days' pay, his sole reward for hard service in a war that had lasted eight years. They were accustomed to the warm climate and rich soil of Carolina, and you know what our climate is, and what the soil at Port Mouton is like. They spent a terrible winter, in which many men, women and children perished, and when spring came at last their poor little wooden town was wiped out by a forest fire. I mention all this because it was the first time that a considerable number of war veterans were discharged in Queens County, and the lesson was long remembered.

Nothing of the kind occurred again until the Canadian veterans came home from the First World War. About 450 Queens County men had served in it, mostly in the army on the Western Front, where no less than 80 of them perished. In 1919 they~~n~~ formed a branch of the Great War Veterans Association, and for their headquarters in Liverpool they rented a long room over a ladies' hat shop, where part of the Stedman Store is now.

The citizens of Liverpool furnished it with easy chairs and lounges, card tables and so on, and made it a pleasant rendezvous for veterans all over the County. As a reward for their service the government of Canada paid the veterans a gratuity which in

most cases was just enough to buy a new outfit of civilian clothes, with a little left over for pocket money. Every one of them needed a job right away, but in Queens County in 1919 jobs were scarce and the pay was poor. A local wartime boom in lumber and ship-building had collapsed at the war's end. The only remaining industry of any size <sup>S</sup>consisted of two small and obsolete wood pulp mills at Milton, which employed about 150 men working in twelve hour shifts, and the basic pay was \$2 per shift. During summer and fall, when the Mersey River ran low, these mills were shut down for lack of water power, and their employees had to exist any way they could. There was no unemployment insurance. There were no pensions. In the coastal fishery and in the few remaining sawmills the pay and the chances were no better.

Consequently many of the Queens County veterans went away to look for work in the United States and elsewhere. About 1921, when the postwar slump was at its worst, the local branch of the GWVA folded up, and for the next ten years the veterans in the County had no organization at all. Yet there an urgent need for one. The federal government, struggling with the postwar depression, still had no adequate system of vocational <sup>n</sup>training, employment, medical care, or pensions for the veterans, and there was no organization to speak for them. This situation obtained right across the country, and so the Canadian Legion was formed from coast to coast.

Colonel C.H.L.Jones, head of the newly built Mersey paper mill, called for a meeting of representative veterans from all parts of the County, and on the evening of June 28, 1931, twenty-one of them came together in the old assembly room of Town Hall. They resolved to form a branch of the Legion with Col. Jones as president and Brenton Smith as secretary-treasurer. Smith hunted up the nominal

roll of the old GWVA branch at Liverpool and found over 300 names and addresses; but when he tried to get in touch with them he discovered that no more than 200 remained in the County. In the past ten years more than one-third of the Queens veterans had left the County, most of them for ever.

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The charter of Branch No.38 of the Legion is dated July 30,1931, and it bears the names of ten members: Col. Jones, Edward Hunt, Ralph Freeman, Gilbert Winters, J.A.McWilliams, Austin Parker, Herbert Smith, Brenton Smith,Albert Wright and Thomas Raddall. Of these Parker and Raddall are living today.

Brenton Smith worked to increase the membership, and when we held our first church parade on Augustx 16, 1931 we ~~truned~~ turned out about fifty men and one woman, army nurse Drew. The occasion was the presentation to Trinity Church of flags flown in France by No.1 Casualty Clearing Station, the first unit to go overseas from Queens County.

Our new branch had no money<sup>to</sup> build or even rent quarters for ourselves. All through the depression years of the 1930s we met in Town Hall, sitting on hard wooden chairs, and whenever the president asked the routine question "Is any comrade in need of aid?" there were always comrades in need. Every dollar we could raise went to these men and their families. All through these years, too, Austin Parker strove to get pensions or medical treatment for those who needed it. It was a long and hard battle, because the successive governments <sup>of</sup> ~~at~~ Canada were pinching every penny and trying to forget the war and their obligations to the men who fought in it.

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Each year we held a Remembrance Day dinner, sometimes in Liverpool's Masonic Hall, sometimes in the old Maple Leaf hotel in Greenfield, usually in the Mersey Hotel here in town. Men came to these from all over the County. One of those who traveled far was Ed. Ringer of Maitland Bridge, who had won the Military Cross as a captain of infantry. He served a term as president of Branch 38, and later removed to Boston, where he founded a branch of the Canadian Legion long known as the Edward Ringer Post.

Another who came far was Clark Murray, postmaster at Caledonia, who had served with the 85th Highlanders and was wounded at Vimy Ridge. Another was Big Jim Macleod of South Brookfield with his sweeping handlebar moustache. Jim stood six feet and weighed over two hundred pounds, a big man indeed, and for years he was the doyen of the Nova Scotia hunting guides. Some of you may recall also Ike Smart, with his fund of comical stories about the Northern District. There was Link Hunt, our genial host at the Maple Leaf Hotel. Gavin Creed of Mill Village, who could sit down at a piano and entertain for a whole evening, playing and singing everything from old army songs to the latest music hall ditties. There were two Micmac Indians, John Francis and Sam Glóad. Sam had won the Distinguished Conduct Medal at Ypres, serving in a company of Canadian engineers, tunnelling and planting mines under German strong points. Sam didn't know what he got the medal for. The whole war was a mad business, in strange places with weird names. So we wrote away to Ottawa and got a copy of the citation. John had served in the infantry as a sniper, but you had to prime him well to get him to talk about it. I don't think John was ever quite sure about an open season on white men just because they

wore a funny looking helmet.

You all know Jim Buchanan, for many years chief fish warden on the Mersey River. Captain Charles Copelin, who served in the British navy in War One, and was to serve throughout War Two in the Canadian navy. Jack McGorry, who became postmaster at Liverpool and retired as sheriff of Queens County. Gil Winters, chief of police at the Mersey paper mill. Austin Parker, who went to work at the old Milton pulp mills when he got out of the army, and eventually became treasurer and vice-president of Mersey Paper Company. Bill Joudrey, who started with a bowling alley in Liverpool and retired as a board member of the Nova Scotia Power Commission. One of our comrades was a quiet little man named Mack, who looked as if he'd never been outside Mill Village in his life. He had, though. He was one of a company of Canadian engineers serving with <sup>Allenby's</sup> Allenby's army in Palestine, putting up wooden bridges on the Hedjaz railway to replace the ones that Lawrence of Arabia had been so busy blowing up.

Well, these are some of the old comrades who come to mind. With such men, although we had no formal entertainment, our meetings were never dull.

Now and then we had something unusual. In September 1933 a large meeting of members from Lunenburg and Queens counties took place at White Point Beach. The chief item on the dinner menu was roast beef, and Colonel Jones, a man of wide ideas, determined to have a whole ox, or anyhow half an ox, roasted right there on the beach. He got the paper mill mechanics to make a huge turnspit with handles at each end. Also a giant tin pan to go underneath and catch the gravy. These were set up on the beach in the early morning, and two of our comrades volunteered to <sup>do</sup> ~~take~~ the roasting, which went on all day, keeping up the wood fire, turning the spit, and basting

the meat with gravy from the big pan. None of us, including the two cooks, knew a thing about barbecuing a whole side of beef. And we certainly didn't reckon with the sea wind, which blew most of the fire's heat away into the White Point woods. By supper time <sup>the</sup> meat was only cooked an inch or so on the outside. Meanwhile <sup>the</sup> boys had been patronizing the bar all afternoon, and at evening when they were called down to the beach to eat, they fell on that mostly raw beef and demolished it, as if they'd just got back from the hungry side of Vimy Ridge. So the affair turned out quite well. But we never tried to roast an ox again.

On another occasion we held the Remembrance Day dinner at the Greenfield hotel. Col. Jones was away but he provided a case of his own imported wine for the toasts. The wine was placed in the care of Comrade Hugh Dunlop, who ran a little store on the waterfront. On the night of November eleventh Hughie forgot all about the dinner and the wine, and in consequence we had to drink the toasts with home made beetroot wine from Link Hunt's cellar. Link warned us that the stuff had not had time to "work" properly and was mighty sour, but it looked good, a nice clear red, and we bravely sipped away at it.

Next year we dined again at the Greenfield hotel, and for fun someone suggested that we courtmartial Dunlop for his failure to deliver the Colonel's wine last year, thereby subjecting his comrades to poisoning by "a corrosive fluid alleged to be beetroot wine." I was appointed prosecutor, and the defending counsel was a United Church clergyman from Port Mouton, George Beck, who had been an artilleryman in the war.

We needed a tangible bit of evidence for the prosecution, so we got a quart bottle of red ink, poured out half of it, and filled the bottle up with vinegar, pepper and other tasty items that came

to mind. We pasted on the bottle a hand-written label which said  
 WINE  
 BEETROOT ~~W~~COURTESY MAPLE LEAF HOTEL, ~~XNEX~~~~TMH~~~~EX~~~~MX~~~~EX~~ and thus  
 had Exhibit A.

The court martial was carried out with military precision. The defendant was marched in between a pair of burly MPs and stood facing the table where the officers of the court were sitting. As prosecutor I set forth the case with a lot of high-flown language. George Beck countered with an eloquent speech in Hughie's defence. Then I had another go at him. Big Jim Macleod was not in on the gag~~x~~, and he sat watching and frowning at all this. Jim had been fortifying himself for the night's festivities with a bottle of medicine from Demerara, and he took a very dim view of the proceedings. It seemed to him that the whole gang of us were picking on his friend Hughie Dunlop, and after a while he couldn't stand it any longer. He came to his feet and shouted, "You say that beet wine last year was poison. Hell, I drank it and it didn't poison me!"

I said, "Comrade Macleod, are you prepared to prove this?"

"I certainly am!"

I said, "Pass him Exhibit A."

Jim peered at the label on the bottle, took a long swig, put the bottle down, and looked thoughtful for a minute. I could see a half circle of bright red on that blond moustache of his. Then he dived out of the doorway and into the night. The court dissolved in laughter and the case against Hughie was dropped by default.

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So we had fun sometimes, but those were just lively spots in the efficient routine of a year's work. With other branches of The Legion across the country we worked steadily and persistently to improve the lot of the war veteran in the years between the



great wars, and step by step we achieved our aims, obtaining improvements in pensions, medical care and other fields of our concern throughout Canada. The end result was a vastly better set-up for the men and women emerging from War Two than we ourselves had found after War One.

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During War Two the assembly room in Town Hall became a canteen and lounge for naval <sup>P</sup> personnel from ships in port, so we moved our meetings to rooms above what is now Hemeon's drug store on Main Street.

When German submarines began to prowl along our coast in the early months of 1942, knocking off ships right and left, some of them right outside of Liverpool harbour, the army authorities set up a reserve company of the West Nova Scotia Regiment here. All three of its rifle platoons were commanded by officers from this branch of the Legion. It was known that submarines were landing spies and saboteurs at various lonely beaches on the North American coast, and our B Company's job was to patrol <sup>the</sup> shore, especially the beaches east and west of us, and to tackle any attempted landings.

By the summer of 1944 it was clear that Hitler's armies would collapse within twelve months. I was president of the branch in '44, and we set up a strong committee to work closely with the heads of Mersey Paper and other local industries, to prepare for the employment of returning veterans, for the reception of their wives and children, for housing, and so on.

In 1946 we oldtimers of Branch 38 were glad to hand it over to the new veterans as a going concern, with a tidy sum in the bank. Most of us continued to be members of the Legion, but we felt that our own work was done. Starting as we did from scratch in the hard

times of the 1930s, with no precedent to guide us, I think we did it well.

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