

# Building erected in remembrance of World War I veterans

by Gerald Belanger

Marmora was one of the last few villages in Ontario to erect a memorial building to commemorate its local men who had enlisted for overseas service in World War I.

Council frequently discussed the issue but was unable to solve the financing of such a huge project without costing the ratepayers a huge increase in their taxes. The fact that a business depression followed the war did not help their cause.

When Baldwin Chester Hubbell offered to sell a vacant lot on the corner of Matthew and Forsyth Streets, Council purchased the lot for approximately \$1,000 and waited. Finally, on July 1, 1921, a huge Dominion Day celebration was organized to raise interest and funds for the proposed Memorial Fund. On October 26, a Smoker was held in the Town Hall to raise money for the Memorial Building. One of the baseballs, used in the World Series and autographed by Babe Ruth, was raffled off at this event. The draw was made by Roger T. Peckenpaugh, captain of the New York Americans who had a cottage at Crowe Lake for years.

During the war years, under a Special Act of Parliament, Marmora could issue debentures to raise money for patriotic purposes. The Act

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specified that this money could only be spent for patriotic or memorial purposes and for no other purpose. Mr. Hart from the Department of Agriculture, Toronto, who was responsible for approving government grants concerning community halls, visited Marmora on March 24, 1922. During his visit, he gave his support for the construction of a new Memorial Hall at a projected cost of \$6,000 including the site.

When Council was informed that \$3,000 would be refunded from the Marmora Hydro Electric Commission for overcharging on village street lights and commercial lighting, it was considered using the money just to erect a huge monument on the vacant lot. However, to settle the issue, Council decided to issue a Memorial by-law and let the citizens of the village decide.

On March 8, 1928 the Marmora Herald wrote;

'When the boys from the village enlisted for overseas the citizens promised that their patriotism and sacrifices would never be forgotten. Now that the opportunity is presented to commemorate those sacrifices in a tangible manner, it is a duty to support the proposal.'

On March 1, 1928 the Memorial by-law passed with a vote of 121 for and 33 against.

One of the very first proposals for a memorial was to be a public or community hall with a public library, rest room and a club room for the Great War Veteran's Association (GWVA). However, in October, 1927 a new plan was submitted to Council. It suggested that a building be erected combining a Post Office, Public Library and Fire Hall with rental apartments available on the top floor. On February 6, 1928, Reeve George B. Airhart and his councillors - Fred Johnston, Frank Newton Marett and A. Harry Connor met with representatives of the GWVA and the Women's Institute to finalize the building plans and specifications for the new Memorial Building. They also agreed that the financing of the Memorial Building would consist of; \$5,000 raised by debentures, \$3,000 utilized from the refund from the Hydro Electric Commission, \$2,000 raised and pledged from popular subscriptions, \$420 the Government was willing to pay for yearly rent on the Post Office, and \$250-\$400 anticipated for yearly rent on the Memorial Building apartments.

It was agreed to pay \$401.25 for twenty years in order to meet the annual payment on the debentures. Under this plan the ratepayers would not need to raise any of the cost of new building and it would not increase their tax bills. The total cost of the new Memorial Building was projected to cost \$11,000.

The architectural firm of Hornsby and Allan of Peterborough and Lindsay designed the new building. Shortly after their plans were approved, work started in July, 1928. Day labour was used instead of issuing a contract for the whole job. Rufus Joyce was assigned to be the foreman in charge of the construction of the building. Frank Gray drilled the Memorial Building well for \$2.25 per foot, including the casing. Fred Holland was responsible for the foundation work.

Delays occurred when it was discovered that Mr. Holland could not use the existing foundation walls as expected. As a result, the old foundation walls had to be removed and new ones built. This added another \$2,000 to the overall cost of the new building. It was decided to construct a ladies' rest room in the basement which necessitated extra excavation and an extra foundation wall.

Because of the delays, Fred Johnston who had originally opposed the Memorial Building By-Law, took a roasting from his fellow supporters. Fred decided to take them into his confidence in regard to his reason for the delays. According to his explanation, the Federal Government had made the Council agree, as a condition of leasing part of the building as a Post Office, to fit up part of the building as a Liberal Committee Room. They also wanted to erect a large electric sign outside the building. The bait was easily swallowed and some very lurid language apparently followed his explanation.



Because of the extra work involved, the Council were forced to issue another debenture this time for \$4,000 effective December 10, 1928. The yearly payment would be \$320.19 for twenty years. The total cost of the building had now escalated to \$15,000.

Village Council had previously requested a grant from the Marmora and Lake township Council towards the cost of the new Memorial Building but it was rejected at the Township Council meeting held on June 4, 1928.

The new Memorial Building was officially opened to the public on December 27, 1928 at 2 p.m. The following dignitaries gave addresses at the opening ceremony: Honorable Robert J. Cooke (M.L.A.) Dr. Embury (M.P.) and Charles E. Hanna (ex-M.P.)

Captain Charles Bleecker read the names of the 28 men who were inscribed on the bronze tablets mounted on either side of the main entrance to the building. The first librarian in the new building was Miss Jennie Connor.

By the end of March, 1929, the WI had raised the necessary \$1,265 to have the clock permanently installed by Mr. Bond in the Memorial Building. The clock had been temporarily installed because the WI were waiting for the gong and other parts to be shipped from the Synchronnoma Company in England. The clock would strike every hour and was guaranteed to run without attention for months and not vary more than a minute or two in a season. The clock must be synchronized with the master clock in the library and another one in the Senior Citizens' Clubroom in order for it to work.

The Post Office moved into the new Memorial Building on January 21, 1929. George Robert Hartley and his wife Nina Prinner had purchased the property on the east side of Forsyth Street from James Warren Hickey where the old Post Office had been situated. George intended to remove the verandah from across the front and stucco the rest of the building. The Hartley's operated a jewellery and watch repair business in the north end on the ground floor until 1943. Eventually the property was purchased by Francis Cook who officially

opened a Barber Shop on July 2, 1960.

When the lease expired on the Post Office in 1949, it was decided after considerable negotiations with the Federal Post Office Department, to sign a new extended lease. During this period, the Post Office was greatly enlarged to include all that portion of the building previously used as a fire hall. The floor in the fire hall was raised to the same level as that of the present Post Office. The rental was adjusted to \$1,600 per year.

In December, 1948 the Post Office became a government office building. It meant that the postmaster, James W. Hickey and his wife Mary Allegra Watson were now civil servants on salary instead of being paid a commission on the amount of business transacted by the local office.

Finally the Federal Government erected a new Post Office Building on the east side of Forsyth Street and the transfer of equipment from the Memorial Building took place during the first week of May, 1959.

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