



WHONNOCK REMEMBERS ITS OWN

This coming Monday, November 11, when the official ceremonies commemorating the sacrifices in the time of war are getting underway at the cenotaph in Haney, a small group of residents of eastern Maple Ridge will start assembling in front of two commemorative plaques at Whonnock Lake Centre.

The Whonnock ceremony is a simple and intimate affair. A minute of silence marks the eleventh hour, and poppy wreaths are placed at the two plaques honouring the soldiers from Whonnock who died in battle in the two World Wars.

Also those who died in later conflicts and those who today serve on dangerous missions will be silently remembered.

After that, someone may want to recite John McCray's moving "In Flanders Field." Another may read something else, or tell a story appropriate for the occasion. Those present may decide to sing our national anthem. Then, after a short greeting of friends and neighbours, all will quietly go their way.

This year there will be a small display of war memorabilia, but the most remarkable artifact is without doubt the old brass remembrance plaque showing the names of soldiers who fell in the First World War.

This plaque was once attached above the main door of the former community hall when, in 1920, that building was renamed Whonnock Memorial Hall. Many years lat-

er, after the old hall was demolished, the plaque found its way to a permanent place in the front of Whonnock Lake Centre, where a second plaque was added to remember the fallen of the Second World War.

The ten soldiers named on the 1914–1918 plaque were all connected to Whonnock in some way, but for half of the men the association with Whonnock is no longer known. Most likely they were relatives or friends of people living in Whonnock at the time rather than residents. The links with Whonnock of the other five men are well documented.

British-born *Robert Fletcher* was among other things a real estate agent. He farmed on top of Byrnes Road. Fletcher was so eager to join the overseas forces that he reduced his age to be allowed to enlist. His wife Georgina, a member of Whonnock's Norwegian Lee family, served many years on the board of the community hall. After the death of her husband and the sale of the farm, she anonymously helped pay off the substantial debts of the hall in his memory.

Arthur Hackney came to Canada in 1900 and left the following year to fight in South Africa. He returned in 1903 and settled in Whonnock on land purchased from Ashton Spilsbury. He subdivided part of this land and arranged for access to the new properties—the present Spilsbury Road. In 1911 Hackney moved to New Zealand, and when the war in Europe started, he fought with the New Zealanders in Egypt, at Gallipoli and in France. In 1917, wounded in battle, he was shipped back to New Zealand and declared "... no longer physically fit for war." That did not stop Hackney from returning to France that same year, this time with the Canadians, and he was killed in action just a few months before the armistice. A plaque in the Anglican Church in Whonnock honours his life and sacrifice.

The Whonnock Anglican Church also carries a plaque in memory of *Robert Harris* who, with his brother James, started farming in 1898 on 130 acres land in Ruskin. Later they ranched close to Whonnock Station on two five-acre lots. In the spring of 1913 Robert Harris married Annette Brown-Clayton in the Whonnock Anglican church. The following year, after the declaration of war by Britain, the brothers immediately joined British regiments. Like Hackney, Robert Harris served in Egypt and at Gallipoli before joining the battle at the Western Front.

Only a few years before the war started young fisherman *Alfred Sorenson* came from Norway with his parents and siblings. In 1997 Millie Kirkwood still had tears in her eyes when she remembered her brother, "... he was just not nineteen but so healthy looking and such a good boy. And this Englishman, he came, he was getting young

men to go overseas. So this English officer said: 'Well, you should be at war, fighting for your country... you are not a slacker, are you?' And Alfred – that stuck in his crop. 'I am not a slacker,' he said, and he went, and three years later he lost his life."

Sam Roy Garner was related through marriage with Robert Robertson, Whonnock's first white settler. Rejected in Vancouver on his first attempt to join the Canadian overseas forces, Garner re-applied in New Westminster under the alias Roy Cromarty. He was enlisted under that assumed name and sent to the France. Charlie Owen – born in Whonnock but a lifetime resident of Albion – told author Ed Villiers that, running in panic through the trench at his first German artillery bombardment, he came face to face with Garner, "... who was calmly sitting on a bench smoking a pipe. A piece of corrugated tin above his head protected him from being splattered by mud. [Garner] removed the pipe from his mouth and said quietly, 'There's no point running from 'em, Charlie. You'll just as soon run into one as away from one.'" Charlie came home to tell the story and he lived to the age of 96 years.

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