



Town Hall Monuments of the Past

By H. David Vuckson

This story originally appeared in the Enterprise-Bulletin newspaper on July 11, 2014. This is a much-expanded version of that story for Canada's 150th Anniversary of Confederation and brings up to date the story of the 1967 Centennial Flame.

In 1967 to celebrate Canada's 100th birthday, many Canadians took on one or more "Centennial Projects". One admirable project in Collingwood was to have a Centennial Flame burning eternally in front of the Town Hall similar to the one on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, but on a much smaller scale. With guidance from C.C.I. teacher and Chairman of the Collingwood Centennial Committee, Benjamin Vande Weerdhof, the students in the technical shops at C.C.I. created a tall, black spiral metal structure which has on its exterior a number of brass plaques symbolic of different aspects of Collingwood's history including trees and axes to chop them down (from the early days when the townsite was a cedar swamp), a native canoe, a cannon, a sailboat, a steam locomotive, a factory, a baby's cradle, a milk bottle (reminds me of Potts Bros. Dairy and their horse-drawn milk wagons) a steamship, an army tank, a hockey player, and a skier A gas pipe passed up through

the inside of the spiral to a burner at the top and the structure was erected on a masonry planter in front of the Town Hall at the edge of the sidewalk opposite the entrance doors to the Arena.

Adult drivers with several station wagons took a team of runners from C.C.I. to Parliament Hill in Ottawa where they lit a torch and then ran the flame in relays to Collingwood. Their 300-mile progress from Ottawa was eagerly followed via long distance telephone calls, the only "Social Media" existing at that time. Members of the Relay Team included Joe Matanowitsch, George Best, Mervin Ferguson, Bruce Monteith, Robert Phillips, Bruce Bell, Jim Badowski, Ross Chessell, Bill Johns, Doug Chessell, John Chipchase, Dale Copeland, Len Kilius, Murray Hale, Jeffrey Reeves and Jim Hammond. The runners and their drivers all wore T-shirts proclaiming: "COLLINGWOOD CENTENNIAL FLAME RELAY OTTAWA TO COLLINGWOOD". It was a fine example of school spirit, community spirit and national pride for a small town.

When the relay team arrived in town about 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 5th 1967, Hurontario Street was crowded with spectators waiting to witness this much-anticipated event. Mayor Alick McDonald, resplendent in his Chain of Office and a top hat, opened his speech with the words, "This is an illuminating situation!" The gas was turned on, the Collingwood flame was lit with the torch from Ottawa, and there was general rejoicing. The Centennial Flame was a noble idea and many hours and much sweat and expense were put into its realization.

However, within about a year or so, the gas was permanently turned off and the eternal flame at the top of the standard was replaced with a light bulb in a coach lamp. I recall that the cost of the gas had something to do with this. Judging by past photos of the Town Hall, the restyled "Centennial Light Bulb" seems to have been removed at the

time of the reconstruction of Hurontario St. around 1980. It can be seen in its original spot in the photo on page 223 in *Reflections*, a photo taken prior to the 1983 fire that destroyed the C.E. Stephens building (just visible on the right) to the immediate south of the Town Hall.

The Centennial Flame standard, originally expected to function for generations, is now 50 years old and suffering from the ravages of time, weather and neglect. It stands, its significance long forgotten, on the lawn on the Hurontario St. side of C.C.I. directly across from The Candy Factory. Photos taken in June 2017 show it to be rusted and the paint faded and chipped. There is a portion of the original gas line still inside the spiral as well as a portion of the metal electrical conduit for the light bulb that replaced the gas.

In mid-June 2017, Carole Stuart, the Collingwood Public Library's Coordinator for Collingwood Local History and Genealogy investigated what might be done to make use of the Centennial Flame standard for July 1, 2017. She had discussions with the Principal of C.C.I., the Mayor, the Town Public Works Department, the B.I.A. and others. Most were receptive to the idea, but the short time frame, the logistics of getting the standard freshly painted and setting it up again in front of the Town Hall, getting a supply of gas, who would pay for the gas, etc., etc., proved to be insurmountable. It is hoped that the students at C.C.I. could, come September, make it a class project to take the flame standard inside to the technical shops and to do some restoration on it and then display it with pride on the school grounds in memory of the C.C.I. graduates who both created it half a century ago and ran the flame from Ottawa to light it.

Unlike the short-lived Centennial Flame on Hurontario St., Collingwood's 1967 outdoor Centennial Pool at Third and Spruce Streets, which also opened with a speech by Alick McDonald, lives on and, since 2013, is now enclosed permitting year-round use.

The Centennial Flame was not the only monument to have stood for a time in front of the Town Hall and to then subsequently disappear years later. More than 70 years earlier, in May 1895, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.), in an effort to discourage the consumption of alcohol and to keep men out of saloons, erected a tall cast iron water fountain with lions' head faces on four sides of it in the same spot where the Centennial Flame would stand many years later. The fountain was quite tall with what looks like a large bowl or bird bath on the very top. Fred. T. Hodgson, that enthusiastic promoter of Collingwood, stated in 1896, "A splendid fountain, a gift to the town by the W.C.T.U. of Collingwood, stands in front of the hall". Instead of paying for "firewater" in a saloon, people as well as horses and dogs could drink the fine water of Georgian Bay from the fountain's different outlets for free.

The W.C.T.U., founded in the United States in 1874 and in Canada in 1894, erected "Temperance Fountains" in a multitude of communities in Canada and the United States, each one being separately commissioned and they varied in appearance. Some were very plain and some were quite elaborate; some were cast iron and others were of masonry construction. Many of them still exist, functioning or not. In Barrie, the local W.C.T.U. chapter had erected a fountain "on the gore" (triangular piece of land) at the Five Points in 1890, costing \$300.00. With the increase in motor vehicle traffic, the Barrie fountain was moved to a side street in 1925, its fate after that date unknown. A

Temperance Fountain similar or identical to the one in Collingwood still exists in Lunenburg, Nova Scotia standing on a gore at the intersection of Falkland, Lincoln and Dufferin Streets and Station Lane. No longer operational and painted green and gold, it now serves as a support for a stop sign, a crosswalk sign, two street signs and as a base for a street lamp post. It bears a plaque stating, "TEMPERANCE FOUNTAIN THIS FOUNTAIN WAS PRESENTED IN 1911 BY THE WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION OF LUNENBURG TO QUENCH THE THIRST OF THE CUSTOMERS AND THEIR HORSES AND OXEN AT THE NEARBY MARKETPLACE THE FOUNTAIN FLOWED FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS UNTIL TRAFFIC PATTERNS CHANGED DEDICATED OCTOBER 1911 BY MAYOR J.J. KINLEY DEDICATED OCTOBER 1993 BY MAYOR D.L. MAWHINNEY A PROJECT OF THE LUNENBURG HERITAGE SOCIETY".

The Collingwood Temperance Fountain disappeared at an unknown date decades after its installation. At the time of the Collingwood veterans being welcomed home from overseas circa 1919, the topmost part of the fountain was being used as a flower pot. It was still there in a 1931 photo. Anita Miles speculated that the fountain may have been claimed by a scrap metal drive about ten years later during World War II. There is a photo of it on page 120 in the local history book *The Chicago of The North*. It is doubtful whether these fountains actually kept men out of the saloons but they certainly were of benefit to passing individuals on four legs as well as two.

There appears to be plenty of room out front of the Town Hall today amid the trees, flagpoles, benches and shrubbery for another monument. I think a statue of the town's namesake, Admiral Lord Cuthbert Collingwood in his naval uniform, would look impressive in front of the building that symbolizes Collingwood. Anyone interested?

Ben Vande Weerdhof put me in charge of another Centennial project that took place at midnight on Friday June 30th, 1967. In the weeks before the event I had arranged for church bells (Trinity United, All Saints Anglican and St. Mary's Catholic), industry whistles (Kaufman Furniture, Smart Bros. and Collingwood Shipyard) and the siren at the Ste. Marie St. Firehall to sound at midnight as the clock ticked over into July 1st. [Interestingly, in the 1800's such bell ringing and whistle blowing was used to indicate a fire in the town and to summon the firemen.] Smart Bros. Cannery at the foot of Hurontario St. had a steam whistle on their roof that had not been used in years because the Shipyard whistle across the fence could be heard throughout town. At my urging, the stationary engineer at Smarts hooked up a pull rope to blow their own whistle at midnight on June 30th. Smart's whistle was used a few more times when their employees gathered on the roof to watch a ship launching and blew the whistle in salute as another new ship tasted the water of Georgian Bay.

In conjunction with church bells and industry whistles, another monument at the Town Hall [and a relative latecomer, considering the age of the building], the iconic Town Clock and Bell, was a significant part of my Centennial plans. The Town Hall, also originally known as the "Market Building" because of the Market Square and merchant stalls out back, was first built in 1889-90. Opened in June, 1890, it was gutted by fire two months later almost to the day. The older, frame Market Building/Town Hall out back caught fire on Tuesday, August 12, 1890 and the flames spread to the brand new Town Hall/Grand Opera House and several other adjacent buildings including the stable for the

Grand Central Hotel where there was plenty of hay and straw to fuel the flames.

Collingwood's waterworks were quite a new thing at that time. The Pump House on Raglan St. was steam powered. When there was a fire, someone had to race down to the east end of town to let the engineer know there was a fire and to request an increase in the water pressure. This would involve lighting an additional boiler for more steam pressure to boost the water pressure and this, of course, took time. That fateful day in 1890 was a Civic Holiday and most people in town were either away or at Central Park for the entertainment. When the alarm was sounded at 3:45 p.m. the firemen had to leave the park to rush to the Fire Hall and to then wait for someone to show up with a team of horses to pull the steam-powered Silsby Fire Engine. For about an hour after the firemen started their attack on the fire, the water pressure was low and this allowed the flames to spread rapidly. By the time the water pressure was increased it was so great that it burst numerous lengths of fire hose. Given the circumstances, the Collingwood Firemen, aided by their brethren from Orillia and Meaford, did the best they could. Ironically, a banner had been strung across Hurontario St. in front of the Town Hall announcing that the firemen would be giving a "grand demonstration" that day. Little did they know!

There appears to have been near-adequate insurance on the old and new Market Buildings. The Town Hall's two major merchant tenants, Oliphant's Drug Store and Nettleton's Jewelry Store were particularly hard hit in the loss of their stock. Owners of other buildings behind the Town Hall had only "partial" insurance on their wooden buildings and contents to cover their losses.

The Town Hall's substantial walls remaining intact after the fire, the building and attached Grand Opera House were rebuilt within those walls. The Town Hall tower had the traditional space for four clock faces and a bell, but due to lack of funds remained embarrassingly empty and boarded up from 1890 until 1951 when a private citizen, Mr. Frank E. Courtice (1876-1957), who for over thirty years had been Chief Engineer at the Collingwood Shipyard, and his wife Emma donated funds for the installation of the English-made clock and bell. Isabel Griffin has recorded that when it came time to install the clock and bell, a number of charred timbers in the tower had to be replaced. The clock and bell were dedicated on August 5, 1951. At last, the Town Hall was complete.

[In 1910 a British post card publisher gave Collingwood a fake town clock by pasting a picture of a clock face on the empty tower and issuing it as a view of "City Hall".]

The icing on the cake for July 1st, 1967 was to manually ring the bell one hundred times at midnight on June 30th. I first obtained permission to do this from the Town Hall; I then signed out a huge long-handled wooden mallet from my summer job at the Shipyard. Don Mason, David Towns, Bob Hammond and I made our way up to the bell from inside the Town Hall before midnight while a crowd gathered on the sidewalk below. From down at street level, Herb Homuth the Town Clerk, called up to me, "Be careful with my bell!" When the Fire Siren sounded at midnight we four bell ringers took turns striking the bell 25 times each with the wooden mallet and in this way Collingwood rang in the Centennial of Confederation in style. The bell survived and

continues to sound over Collingwood today as it has for the last 66 years. Unlike the Temperance Fountain and the Centennial Flame that did not last, this Town Hall monument is a permanent legacy of the generosity of its donor Frank Courtice and marks his tribute to the Town of Collingwood that provided him with the largest part of his life's work at the Collingwood Shipyard from 1902 until his retirement.

.David Vuckson is a great-grandson of pioneer Collingwood merchant R. W. O'Brien. His roots in town go back to 1875. He and his wife Pamela live in Victoria, B. C.