

# Buffy's Corner



## Conserve, Educate and Celebrate Brampton's History

The Official Newsletter of the Brampton Historical Society

Fall 2025

### From the Editors

Each fall, many Canadians purchase and wear a poppy to honour the sacrifice of our armed forces on November 11 – Remembrance Day. Jonathan Scotland provides an in-depth article about the origins of the annual Poppy campaign. When government programs fell short, the poppy campaign was first started to provide financial, employment and other assistance to WW1 veterans. Needless to say, it was not without controversy.

In this edition, we also profile the first Mayor of Brampton – John Haggert.. In the second half of the 1800s, his company was one of the largest employers in Brampton. Fortunately, his home, Haggertlea, is still standing and can be easily found in a quick trip to downtown Brampton – just across from parking lot 4 at the railway station.

In July, some BHS members enjoyed a private tour at PAMA at the ALL-ABOARD exhibit. Check out the photos.

Let us know if there are any historic persons, places, and events that you want featured here. Of course, member stories are welcome.

*Buffy's Corners*

*Editors ..... Elizabeth Charters  
& Giulia Geraci*

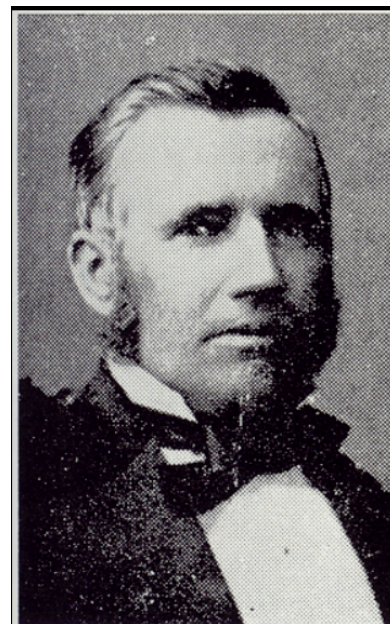
### The Origins of Canada's Remembrance Day Poppies

The poppy has been central to Canadian commemoration of wartime sacrifices since its adoption over 100 years ago. Despite this ongoing effort to remember, the iconic red flower's history is often taken for granted, its early years almost completely overlooked. Even the Canadian Legion's literature recalls only that "the Great War Veteran's Association in Canada (our predecessor) officially adopted the poppy ... on July 5, 1921."

What is often forgotten is that the poppy's history began to work its way into Canada's commemorative ether even before war's end. The flowers were grown in Canada, planted on Canadian graves, used in wreaths, and, by the early 1920s, worn on lapels.

Dubbed "flowers of remembrance," they drew inspiration from John McCrae's famed poem and were embraced as a symbol to remember the war's dead. But to wear a poppy in the war's aftermath meant more than just remembering Canada's fallen.

Early campaigns stressed that buying the artificial flowers supported veterans facing economic hardship. It was no idle concern. Unlike the men and women who returned after the Second World War, no post-war boom welcomed the veterans of 1914–1918. In its place were a failed bonus campaign, .....Continued on page 2



JOHN HAGGERT  
First Mayor of Brampton  
1874-75-76

### John Haggert – Brampton's First Mayor

Previously known as Buffy's Corners, Brampton was incorporated into a village in 1853 with a population of just over 500. Within a few years, Brampton became the County Seat in 1865-1866. The Peel County Courthouse and County Jail were built in 1866-1867. In 1873, Brampton was incorporated as a town; the population at that time was around 1800 people. John Haggert, a well-established businessman in Brampton, was elected to be the first Mayor of Brampton for 3 terms from 1874 to .....continued on page 5

## Remembrance Day Poppies (cont'd from page 1)

labour strife, and a gruelling fight for pensions. With the economy in recession, the stakes for selling poppies were high – so high that their sale would become embroiled in a scandal that wound its way to the Canadian Senate.

Between 1921 and 1926, these blood-red flowers came to stand for more than remembering the war's sacrifices. They were a potent reminder that the "square deal" veterans fought for had not yet come to pass.

flower was the "one real rival to the Maple Leaf as a possible national emblem." With the Armistice signed, Canadians began linking the flower to concepts of victory and peace. Hugh Ritchie's poem "Victory," was typical. It concluded: "The fight that ye so well begun/ Is finished now and nobly won. / So 'midst the poppies sleep in peace / In Flanders Fields." By the early days of 1919, communities across the country began to consider whether poppies were a fitting way to commemorate the war.

An early use of the flower to honour the memory of those who

grounds," but their seeds could threaten grain fields. The provincial minister preferred trees "in memory of the men who have fallen." So concerned was the Vancouver Sun about a poppy infestation that it warned those who considered ordering seeds from Flanders "should be hanged, drawn and quartered." Little wonder that the idea did not take hold.

Growing Canadian poppies did not appeal to journalist Edna Kells either. The long-serving women's editor of the *Edmonton Journal* expressed her doubts about bringing seeds from Flanders to Canada in February 1919. She worried not about weeds, but about being reminded of "the sadder side of the war." A friend had shown Kells some blossoms sent home by her son. "Treasured" though they were, wrote Kells, her friend's face "did not brighten as she showed them, nor will it ever as she touches them." Kells understood the growing value of the poppy as a commemorative symbol, yet she could see no way, with the "shadow of war still lying heavy on the heart," that poppies might bring happiness. "And if they did not bring happiness, what purpose would they serve?"

Transplanting poppies was not to be, but the flowers soon became a common way to mark Canadian graves. As the *Globe* reminded its readers, poppies could be used to honour Canadian sacrifices to demonstrate that "those who lay sleeping beneath the poppies had not given their all in vain." In July 1919, Charles Garwood, a skilled gardener who had enlisted in 1914 with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, exhibited a floral "Peace Display." Its central feature, as reported by the *Ottawa Citizen*, was a white wreath of approximately 5,000 flowers, which surrounded a vase of poppies placed "in memory of the boys who died .....continued on page 3



*A wartime Victory Bonds poster, variously dated, but possibly from as late as 1918. Though in the public domain, this image is of a poster held in the Toronto Reference Library's Baldwin Room, and is part of a donation by John McCrae, who died on service in France in 1918.*

In the spring of 1918, Percival Mitchell, president of Toronto's horticultural association, recognized the symbolic ties between poppies and the country's war dead: "No Canadian who has ever read 'In Flanders Field' [sic] will ever look at a poppy again without thinking of the graves in Flanders." He was not alone.

Canadians across the country embraced the poppy for its symbolism. That April the *Globe* even declared that the famous

died in the conflict was to plant "Flanders Poppies" in Canadian soil. St. Thomas and Chatham, in southwestern Ontario, were some of the first towns to commit to the plan, although horticultural societies cautioned against widespread planting for fear that the poppies would become a "noxious weed." Ontario's agriculture minister (and a future premier), George S. Henry, raised similar concerns. Planting poppies may have appealed on "sentimental

## Remembrance Day Poppies (cont'd from page 2)

'over there.'" In Toronto, 25,000 people gathered at Prospect Cemetery to decorate soldiers' graves. The tributes included a six-by three-foot display depicting a white cross and poppy-covered ground. "Gone, but not forgotten," read its inscription.

By 1921 the poppy had made its way from gravesides to wreaths and then to lapels. Most accounts credit Anna Guerin with introducing the idea of selling artificial poppies to the Great War Veterans' Association (GWVA). But she was not the only one to suggest their sale. The Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) also considered a similar use for the flowers that June. At the Toronto meeting of its national chapter, the order proposed poppy sales to raise funds for a war memorial. Although the IODE preferred the symbolism of the maple leaf over that of the poppy, the idea of using the flower to commemorate the war was clearly en vogue.

For the GWVA's first Poppy Day, the artificial flowers were provided by Guerin and manufactured by the "women and children of France."

Demand for large and small poppies, used in wreaths and for pinning on a coat or jacket, increased the next year, and the association sourced its poppies from a Toronto firm. In expectation of even greater success in 1923, the GWVA partnered with the federal government to manufacture poppies.

Production was carried out by the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment (DSCR) Vetcraft shops, one of the few direct employment schemes operated by the federal government (sometimes in conjunction with the Red Cross) to employ disabled veterans who were otherwise unable to re-enter the workforce. In the early 1920s,

veterans working in these shops constructed household items such as vases, desks, chairs and, from 1923 onwards, poppies.

Vetcraft shops were involved specifically in poppy making to assist disabled veterans. According to the *Ottawa Citizen*, the cheapest way to acquire and distribute the commemorative flowers was to rely on private enterprise, but the GWVA decided in 1922 that it wanted to partner with the DSCR to manufacture poppies, even if it cost



Interwar-era lid of a Vetcraft poppy box.  
Source: Canadian War Museum,  
"Remembrance Day Commemorative Print"  
(c1920s-1930s), Object number:  
19940057-001.

more. The price of the vetcraft poppies may have been higher, but "the great majority of communities have willingly agreed to pay a greater price for their supply in order that the entire proceeds from the poppy distribution may be utilized for good purposes and not be devoted in part to private gain."

So keen was the association to support Canadian veterans that it turned down an opportunity to buy discounted poppies from the United States – a fateful decision that may have avoided a potential scandal. The American-sourced poppies were leftovers from Memorial Day and were supposed to have been manufactured in France, likely by the same widows and children

supported by Guerin. It turned out, however, that the poppies had actually come from Germany. When their source came to light, newspapers jumped on the fact and denounced the "German" poppies while simultaneously praising the GWVA for supporting Canada's wounded veterans, especially vetcraft workers.

Finding employment for veterans was a serious issue early in the war's aftermath. Jobs were scarce and, in September 1919, the *Edmonton Journal* reported that at least 30,000 veterans were without work. That number would only rise as seasonal employment came to an end. Farm labourers were not kept on after threshing, especially in the prairie provinces, and private employers in urban centres were often wary of taking on men either older or less capable (whether because of physical or psychological trauma) than younger civilians who had not served. Bryce Stewart, of the federal Department of Labour, feared that on the west coast "there was bound to be considerable unemployment."

Veterans would continue to have difficulty finding work throughout the period, and although the provincial and federal governments had committed to preferential hiring for returned men, few positions existed; the state was unwilling to create more. Ottawa did offer placement programs, but these were often temporary, and more permanent employment schemes, like the soldier-settlement plans, proved disappointing.

As initial reports of the association's plan for poppy sales made clear, selling the flowers achieved three goals: (1) To employ disabled veterans; (2) To assist the

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## Remembrance Day Poppies (cont'd from page 3)

disabled and the war's dependents through proceeds from sales; and (3) To remember the sacrifices of Canadians. By committing solely to vetcraft poppies, the GWVA not only ensured that wounded veterans would receive continued employment, but it also added an incentive for Canadians to support poppy sales.

While rival ex-soldier associations spent much of the early post-war era in-fighting and arguing over which was the rightful voice of Canada's returned men, there was no disputing that the GWVA led the charge among the various veterans' groups to distribute poppies. By collaborating with Guerin, the association quickly established itself as the defacto organization dealing with these flowers of remembrance.

The 1923 agreement with the DSCR continued the trend. Competing organizations largely agreed to support the proposed plan because it was a win-win scenario. Vetcraft shops would gain additional orders, and profits from the sale of their poppies would be transferred to ex-soldiers (or their dependents) in need of assistance.

Nothing precluded other veterans' groups from selling poppies; they just had to agree to sell them at the same price as the GWVA. Since all proceeds would assist veterans, the various ex-soldier associations were free to concentrate on selling poppies in the lead-up to 11 November. Estimates for 1923 suggest that slightly more than 1,000,000 poppies were sold; that number more than doubled in 1924.

Media coverage of these successful campaigns captured an important shift in what the poppies stood for. While the first Poppy Day had been held to honour Canada's fallen and to assist the orphans of France, the focus of the 1923 campaign was clearly the plight of Canada's

veterans. As Armistice Day approached, the *Ottawa Citizen* reported not on the poppy's symbolism as a tool to remember, but as a way to assist returned men: "The campaign in connection with the sale of poppies, in aid of disabled war veterans and relief work of the Great War Veterans Association, promises to be one of the most successful of its kind."

That message was echoed in Saskatchewan where, in an 11 November editorial, the Regina Leader made clear that donning a poppy had a "dual meaning": one was remembering the fallen; the other was supporting Canada's wounded veterans. Not only would vetcraft employees be paid for making poppies, but also, the paper reported, "the balance of the receipts from the sale of the poppies will go to the various relief funds maintained by the Great War Veterans for the assistance of needy ex-service men and their dependents."

The GWVA's poppy campaign seemed to put into practice what Baron Byng, the governor general, had declared during his 1921 Armistice Day message: "Honor the dead by helping the living." But while there was peace on the poppy front, the veterans' groups continued to fight over how to assist returned men.

Rivals of the GWVA complained that Ottawa favoured the association, and they challenged the use of canteen and disablement funds to pay for a GWVA office to assist ex-soldiers. Soon the dispute over this "adjustment bureau," as the office became known, expanded to include the GWVA's poppy sales. When the debate about the association's handling of veterans' issues reached the House of Commons, a Senate committee was called to investigate.

Chaired by N.A. Belcourt, the committee addressed rumours that the GWVA was mismanaging funds

intended for the assistance of veterans, including allegations that it maintained a monopoly on the poppies produced by the DSCR and, worse still, that it was profiting from their sale.

The association denied any wrong-doing, but the senators found otherwise. Their report, published 18 June 1925, was damning. It accused the GWVA secretary, Grant MacNeil, of breach of trust, and on the poppy question the Senate determined that there was a "quasi exclusive privilege" afforded to the GWVA to sell the artificial flowers in Canada. It also found that "the commercialization of the sale of these poppies" had taken place and ordered that the practice be eliminated.

MacNeil and the GWVA maintained that any money raised from the sale of poppies supported the association's wider goals of assisting Canada's veterans. The distinction did not matter. With its reputation irreparably tarnished, the GWVA joined with other veterans' groups at a unity conference to form the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League. The association's fifth poppy campaign would be its last.

It is unlikely that MPs and senators shed a tear for the GWVA. Its advocacy for veterans had been a thorn in the side of successive federal governments, and while Belcourt's report recognized the symbolic power of the poppy ("The wearing of a poppy on Armistice Day has become a custom upon patriotic and sentimental considerations."), its findings did not address how the manufacturing and sale of poppies helped employ and assist veterans. To do so would have given credence to the GWVA's demands for the state to increase assistance for Canada's veterans.

For their part, regular Canadians appeared unbothered by Belcourt's report; certainly it did nothing to ..... Continued on page 5



## Remembrance Day Poppies (cont'd from page 4)

affect poppy sales. A month before Armistice Day, the *Calgary Herald* observed that orders for GWVA poppies exceeded those for 1924 by "several hundred thousand." Unlike the Senate committee's report, the paper explained the ever-growing popularity of the artificial flowers by again highlighting their "double significance." They were the "living

evidence of remembrance" that also provided "funds in local centres for relief and assistance of the needy and distressed among veterans ...[and] to give employment to seriously disabled veterans in Vetcraft and Red Cross work-shops throughout Canada." The *Ottawa Citizen* summed up the matter nicely: "Buy a Poppy and Help Provide Employment for the Disabled Men Who Fought in [the] Great War."

Sales of Canada's flowers of remembrance increased again in 1926, the first year the new Canadian Legion organized the campaign, which continued to play up the flower's dual symbolism of remembering the fallen and employing the wounded. By that point the selling of poppies in the lead-up to Armistice Day had become a well-entrenched tradition, one in which millions of Canadians took part. Although the sale of these "flowers of remembrance" has taken on different meanings over the decades, it should be remembered that this tradition is

rooted in an effort not only to commemorate, but also to assist those who do not lie in Flanders' fields.

- Jonathan Scotland

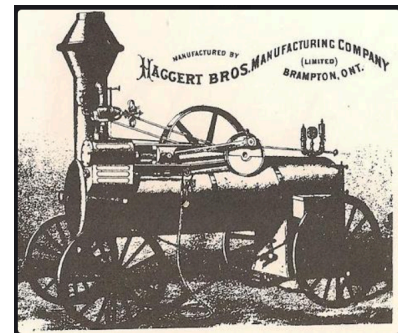
*This piece appeared in slightly different form on [activehistory.ca](http://activehistory.ca).  
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## Brampton's First Mayor (cont'd from page 2)

1876. During the 1800s, the typical term of office for Ontario mayors was one year. The street of Haggert Ave (N & S), located between McMurchy Ave and McLaughlin Rd and off Queen St. W., was named after the family and its importance in Brampton history.

John Haggert was born in 1822 in Eldersley, Scotland near Paisley to Robert and Barbara (Loughhead) Haggert. At the age of 18 (1840), John Haggert moved to New York with his brother Robert. He apprenticed in engineering with Dunham and Co. The Haggert family moved to Canada in 1842 and first settled in Hamilton, Ontario. Robert Haggert passed away shortly thereafter. John Haggert became an engineer on one of the St. Lawrence Steamers before moving to Hamilton and later worked as an engineer in Beamsville.

John Haggert moved to Brampton in 1849 and established the Haggert Brothers Manufacturing Company with his two brothers. The Haggert Company operated a foundry and manufactured agricultural implements. John Haggert ran the company alone from 1866 to 1870.



In 1870, he formed a partnership with his brother-in-law, R. Roderick Cochrane of Fingal, Erin County. Mr. Cochrane joined the firm and opened a branch plant in St. Thomas, Ontario under

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symbol of remembrance" that provided an "opportunity to work for handicapped veterans," and their sale funded the "relief of the distressed."

As the paper reminded its readers, there was still an "urgent need of such a fund." The *Nanaimo Free Press* made the same argument. It urged its readers to "Wear a Vetcraft Poppy on Armistice Day," because the flowers were "visible



## Brampton's First Mayor (cont'd from page 5)

Haggert Cochrane Agricultural Works. In 1877, the St. Thomas Agricultural Works company was purchased.

From the early 1850s to the late 1870s, with the introduction of steam, the foundry expanded until it occupied a full square block in downtown Brampton. The three storey building included Haggert Block which faced Main Street North in the south side of Nelson Street.

sulky & horse rake & Credit Valley stove. The steam engine designs were secured by patents. The



"Cornell Portable Steam Engine" was promoted as the "Best, Strongest, Lightest, Simplest and most Easily Managed in the World." The company won a number of awards in both Canada and the United States for their products. However, as the wheat business moved west, so did the company's market in Peel

house as a Heritage property. This house was built in 1870.

Haggertlea is an example of late 19th century Second Empire architectural design. It has French inspired elegance and charm. It is distinguished by its concave Mansard roof, formal and symmetrical facade, decorative windows and frames, and iron cresting. Other items of note regarding this building are: 3 storey buff brick construction, irregular roof line, ornate bracketed cornice, dentils, sash and leaded glass windows. The estate remained within the Haggert family until it was sold by Emily Haggert in 1944. Unfortunately, not all of the full building survives and the original estate was subsequently parceled

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The Haggert Brothers Manufacturing Company became one of the largest employers in Brampton with 150 employees by 1877 and with the St. Thomas plant, one of the largest manufacturers of agricultural implements in Canada. Business products included steam engines, boilers, the Brampton triple harvester, simple reaper,

County. The company went into liquidation in 1891. The company was later acquired by Mr. J.M. Ross & Sons. J.M. Ross and Company moved to St. Catharines in the early 1900s. The primary factory building of the Haggert company was lost to fire in 1980. The only surviving structure from the business enterprise is Haggert Block at 63-71 Main Street North.

The house of John Haggert or "Haggertlea" is located at 28 Elizabeth St. N. In 2013, the City of Brampton via Bylaw 324-2013 designated the





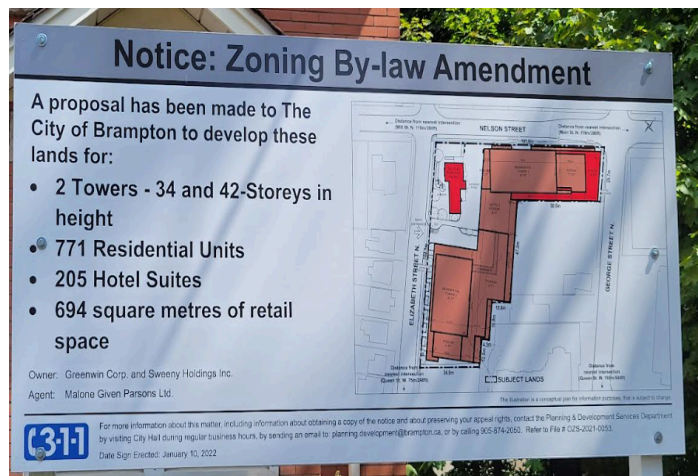
## Brampton's First Mayor (cont'd from page 6)

out for the construction of other houses and commercial buildings.

A recent look at the house and neighbouring properties revealed that they have seen better days.

However, a 2022 Zoning By-law Amendment proposal to develop the area with the building of 2 condo towers, retail and hotel facilities also includes restoration for this historical building. Its location close to the Brampton Innovation District and Downtown Revitalization Projects bodes well for the future of this building.

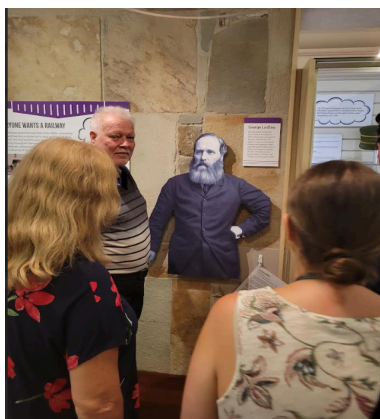
*-Giulia Geraci*





## Member Event: All Aboard - The Railways of Peel

On July 26th, 2025, 25 BHS members enjoyed a private tour of the PAMA exhibition "All Aboard - The Railways of Peel". The tour was led by Dr. Thomas F. McIlwraith, retired Professor of Historical Geography at the University of Toronto at Mississauga. Dr. McIlwraith is a railway enthusiast who researches the history of railroad construction and its impact on society. He is one of the historians who partnered with PAMA to put this wonderful exhibit together. In his introduction to our tour, Dr. McIlwraith described the importance of the railways to successfully move people and goods in the nineteenth century when road travel was too slow and impractical. Interestingly, he pointed out that while the use of the railroads declined after WW2, once again interest and investment in railroads are increasing as a solution to escalating congestion on today's roads. We also discovered that some of the BHS members have a history of family working on the country railways.



**Brampton Historical Society**  
New members are most welcome!

Join us monthly!

Our meetings feature fascinating local history presented by knowledgeable guest speakers.

Meet many other individuals concerned about heritage preservation within our community and region.

All BHS meetings are held on the 3rd Thursday of the month (except July, August & December)

[www.bramptonhistoricalsociety.ca](http://www.bramptonhistoricalsociety.ca)

### Upcoming Events

**Thursday, September 18, 6:30 pm -**  
Cyril Clark Library- **Gregory Klages**, Author/Historian "**Bush Friends All Around: A Ranger's Experience of Early 20th century Algonquin Park**"

**Thursday, October 16, 6:30 pm -**  
Cyril Clark Library- **Adam Bunch**, Author/Creator "**The Toronto Book of the Dead & the City's Morbid Past**"

**Thursday, November 20, 6:30 pm -**  
Cyril Clark Library- **Coral Harkies**, Genealogist, Ontario Genealogical Society

