

A NEIGHBORHOOD THAT REMEMBERS.

By Robert Williamson

Do you live in the Raleigh Neighborhood? Don't know where it is! It stretches from the Mountain Brow to Fennell Avenue between Upper Gage and Upper Sherman Avenue. According to the Planning Department, the name was assigned to the local subdivision consisting of land settled on by J. Munn. Raleigh may only have been the developer's name but it was perhaps more esthetic sounding than Munn.

The neighborhood has two distinctive features from a geographical / heritage point of view. It is located on the east central Mountain close to the brow and Mountain access routes. Hence it developed early as an important school and residential community. Quite noticeable even today are the distinctive frame homes built expeditiously during the austerity of wartime between 1941-42 to accommodate the rapid influx of war workers to Hamilton's industry. In themselves these wartime homes are a symbol of the role Hamilton played in Canada's heritage.

However, the most striking feature of the neighborhood is its school site, the focal point of the community. Built as a tribute to those who died on WW1 battlefields, it occupied an entire city block at the head of Munn Street. Peace Memorial School, like its counterpart Memorial School in east-end Hamilton at Main and Ottawa Streets, opened in 1919 in what was then Barton Township. For the first three years, part of the school was pressed into service as a military recovery ward to deal with the overflow of recovering wounded at Mount Hamilton Hospital. Then it took in surplus students from S.S. No. 7 Barton School on Upper Gage and was annexed by the Hamilton Board of Education in 1929. Rapid expansion and continued growth after WW II resulted in the addition of six rooms in 1948 and the initiation of morning and afternoon shift classes two years later until eight more classrooms and a gymnasium were added in 1952. But in time, after eighty-four years, age and changing demographics brought closure in June 2003.

Fortunately, thanks to the efforts of the Peace Memorial Citizen's Advisory Committee and Ward 6 Councillor Tom Jackson, the magnificent forty-foot high pillared arch entrance was saved from demolition to become the nucleus of the neighbourhood Peace Memorial Park. While most older communities in the Hamilton area have memorial cenotaphs, none are as imposing as the Peace Memorial portico in the Mountain's Raleigh neighborhood. Its expanded theme is now a tribute to all those who served their country in war and peace during the 20th and 21st centuries.

As you pass through the giant portico and walk down the broad avenue of remembrance, you discover how the legacy of our veterans prevails through the efforts of committed descendants, the North Wall Riders Association, former students and neighbors. There are almost 90 brass plaques dedicated to the service of our veterans presented in a retaining wall tableau.

Some of the places names are familiar: The Somme, Vimy Ridge, Passchendaele, D-Day, Normandy and Korea. I recognized some of the names also: Stan Darch and Jack McFarland, RHLI, Dieppe 1942; Alex Tennant, RCN, Battle of the Atlantic; Earl McAllister, A&SH, Hero of Falaise 1944; Mark Graham, KIA, Afghanistan 2006; Nathan Cirillo, KOD (Killed on duty), Ottawa 2014.

The names and places are there to help us remember our heritage. This is how the Raleigh neighborhood has come to play a most significant role in our Hamilton Mountain Memories.



Peace Memorial Park entrance arch where the former school once stood. *Photo by Robert Williamson.*

Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society held their Remembrance meeting on November 21. Bridget Whittle, McMaster University Archivist talked about the Hamilton Home Front 1939-1945, recalling stories about air raid drills, rescue procedures, scrap metal and paper drives as well as rationing.