

## **Heritage Burlington Meeting**

7pm, July 10, 2019 – Rm. 247 City Hall

Good evening members of Heritage Burlington. My name is Ed Keenleyside, author of the 2017 book “We Were Just Doing Our Bit”, which put faces and personalities to the 82 fatalities etched into the Burlington Cenotaph. Over five years of research for that book led me to several conclusions about our military history. Perhaps the most obvious, was that very little had been written (or was generally known) about the contributions and sacrifices of our men and women in uniform. For example, of the 82 inscribed names there were several mistakes on the WW1 and WW2 inscribed lists. There was also virtually nothing written about how the Cenotaph came to be, who was involved in its design, installation and maintenance, let alone who actually owned it. Thus, began my two-pronged action to address what I saw as an important issue. My mission to right the wrongs, resulted in onsite corrections to the WW1 and WW2 Cenotaph names, which were completed for Remembrance Day 2018. Concurrently, I began to write a new book – “An Illustrated History of Burlington’s Cenotaph”, which

covered the history of the Cenotaph from the early days of WW1 to the present.

During the 40 years that the Cenotaph overlooked Lake Ontario in Lakeside Park, later renamed Spencer Smith Park, at least three noticeable changes took place. Within days after the Cenotaph was unveiled on April 9, 1922 by Canada's Governor General, trees were planted as a backdrop to the proud memorial. Two questions had to be answered – What kind of tree should be used? and - How many trees should there be? The first was easy – as one of Canada's national symbols, maple trees were chosen. A recollection of our military contributions made on the Western Front, was needed to decide the second question. While virtually all men joined the Army, the Canadian Expeditionary Force took part on three fronts – the foot-soldiers in the trenches, the Navy and Merchant sailors on the North Atlantic and the little-known contribution of men in the air. Therefore, the citizens War Memorial Committee had three silver maple trees planted to commemorate our land, sea and air forces.

The next noticeable change to the Cenotaph was the installation of a steel railing, which was more for appearance than security, since it was only about three feet high. The third change came on Remembrance Day in 1947 with the addition of a commemorative plaque to cover a WW1 poem on the front of the memorial. This listed the 44 fatalities – 43 men and one woman. Unnoticed was the change of ownership of the memorial – the four remaining members of the original citizen's organizing committee handed over to the town Council the perpetual care of the monument along with the balance of funds left in their account. In 1962 the town decided to move the Cenotaph to the small parkette at the corner of Ontario and Brant Streets, beside the recently opened new town hall. I'm sure this move added prestige to the new municipal headquarters.

But back to the three maple trees... Once they were planted, no one gave them much notice, except to admire their growing size. Once the Cenotaph was moved in 1962, the steel railing was removed from the west-end location on our waterfront park. There was no attempt to move the three maple trees –

perhaps because of their size. Over the years the original lakefront location became a distant memory.

In October 2017, one of the three maples was cut down. When I contacted the city to enquire why it was removed, I learned that no one knew when it had been planted or why. I began to encourage the city to plant a sizeable replacement maple tree so that it might continue to recognize the military contributions of all three groups of Burlington's citizens in uniform. This spring (2019) that new maple was to be planted. I'm still waiting for that promised tree. Perhaps it might become a part of possible Cenotaph Centennial celebrations in April 2022. In order that the history and heritage of the original Cenotaph location and the significance of three special maple trees be remembered, I am asking for your active support in installing a suitable plaque where the memorial once stood.

Thank you for the invitation to speak to you this evening. I have tried to provide an overview of this important page of our history, but my sparse description is just the tip of the iceberg. We have much more to be proud of. Thank you.