

A soldier's story: virtual records at DCMA

By Brian Lockhart

They are names inscribed on memorials and cenotaphs around the county, but they are more than just letters etched into granite. Behind each inscription was a person with a story, a family, and a history, although for some that history was just a few brief years on this planet. For many others, they left military service behind them and carried on with different jobs or careers or whatever else life tosses at you.

The story behind all these people that served in the military and conflicts around the globe is being meticulously recorded in the Dufferin County Museum and Archive's Virtual War Memorial.

The Museum gathers as much information as they can about every veteran who lived in Dufferin County and the list dates back over 200 years.

The Virtual War Memorial is available on-line at the Museum's website.

"We have everything from the Napoleonic Wars though to current conflicts," explained Museum Archivist Laura Camilleri. "The listing of our veterans lists anyone who was born, raised, died, lived, worked, went to school, or had any kind of impact in Dufferin County. For example, if we have anything on a Napoleonic War soldier it was probably because they moved here and settled here. We would record here because they lived and died here."

Ms. Camilleri is the Museum's two-dimensional Archivist, meaning she is the expert on and works with written documents, books, photos and other print material.

In the 19th Century, veterans of the War of 1812 were given land grants in the area. Some moved here and settled while others sold the land went elsewhere.

The Archive lists 30 separate conflicts or campaigns in which soldiers served. In addition to actions that are well-known like the First and Second World Wars and the Fenian Raids, there are listings for other conflicts you might have to learn about in the history books.

"Most of our information we receive is through people who live here and are veterans or are family of veterans. We also get information from the Legions and the Library and Archives Canada from their listing of soldiers from the First and Second World Wars. And of course newspapers - they listed all the people that enlisted in the World Wars," Ms. Camilleri explained.

The archives list soldiers right up to the current date.

Some of the stories are of brave and heroic actions, like two local men who served in the legendary Devil's Brigade, while other stories simply list a short life of being born here and dying on a battlefield in somewhere in Europe.

The Museum archives, of course, include genuine artifacts from various periods including a book that details records and photos from when cenotaphs were being planned in the region.

Of special note is a soldier's log book with a bullet or shrapnel hole right through the centre. The book didn't survive the war intact but thankfully the soldier did.

You can view the Virtual War Memorial by visiting the Museum's website at www.dufferinmuseum.com and clicking on the Research link.