

Sheralee Mitchell-MacEwan

Subject: FW: The Shubenacadie War Memorial 1921 - Forever

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My great grandparents, John and Lelia Courtney, watched as two of their sons - The oldest son, James (Jim) and the youngest William (Billie) A. Courtney boarded a train taking many new recruits to the 1st World War. The railroad station in the center of the village of Shubenacadie was the departure point.

That would be the last time Lelia would see her youngest son, "Billie". Lance Corporal William A. Courtney was killed during the Canadian advance to force back the Germans in the now famous Battle for Passchendalle. Lelia would receive two very articulate handwritten letters delivered to her home on the small dairy farm in Shubenacadie East.

The first letter reported that Billie was missing in action. The last letter received sometime later would sadly announce that Billie had been killed in action on June 1917.

Jim, my grandfather returned a year after the war ended, being confined in a hospital in Europe, until he was able to leave for home, still carrying shrapnel in his body, which he took to his grave with him.

Lelia never recovered from the loss of her youngest son. She was devastated. She stored the letters away, along with other memorabilia in an upstairs room. Nobody was allowed to access her personal memorial - Her place of solace.

My great grandparents were very encouraged when their community rallied together around a plan to raise a cenotaph to memorialize the 19 community men who had not returned home after the War.

It was decided by community leaders to raise funds (\$5,000) to purchase the monument, acquire the "ideal" property from CNR situated in the center core in front of the railroad station - the last place where the community saw these brave men who perished.

The Cenotaph was a sacred resting place where families could mourn their lost love ones taken by the War.

The Cenotaph and the accomplishments of the community was nationally recognized as a model to other small communities, and of how it was possible to band together to create an eternal memorial for all future generations, and to never forget the sacrifices made by our countrymen and women in the pursuit of freedom from anarchy. The Shubenacadie Monument was one of the first two small communities in Canada to erect a cenotaph.

It was a testament to the strength of the community bonding together to honour their lost sons.

If Leila was alive today - just a hint about any illogical plan to relocate Billie's sacred place of rest in his homeland - would have caused her immediate anguish and disbelief.

The community of Shubenacadie and, especially, the descendants of those immortalized on the Cenotaph, are: (1) owed an explanation, (2) an apology, and (3) the return of the monument to its original place of honour at the center core of our historical village, where it was lovingly placed in its prominent location by our thoughtful ancestors.

Respectfully

William (Willie) Courtney

ONE DOCUMENT TO FOLLOW

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