

## The Gananoque War Memorial - Remembering Our War Dead

Immediately after the the First World War ended on 11 November 1918, residents and veterans who returned to Canada, began making plans to commemorate the sacrifices made those who had lost their lives. One of the organizers was Frederick Fletcher who enlisted in 1915 at age 38,. He was awarded the Military Medal for Bravery but was returned to Canada after being severely wounded in late 1916 at the Battle of the Somme. Fletcher became the first President of the Veterans of the Great War Association which united with other veteran's organizations in 1926 to form the Royal Canadian Legion. His son, also named Frederick, enlisted at the height of the Battle of the Some and just days after turning age 18. The younger Fletcher was killed 30 September 1918, age 20, just weeks before the end of the war.

The first event to mark the loss of area men occurred in May 1919 when trees were planted in the town park to mark the loss of 58 area men. Among the area dead were brothers Vernor and William Street ages 18 and 21, respectively and killed on the same day, William Dailey age 15, and brothers William and Ellis Gibbins.

In 2017, To mark the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, a maple which grew from seeds taken from a tree growing on the Vimy battlefield in France was planted near the war memorial. Some of the trees planted in 1919 still remain.

Soon after planting the trees in May 1919, Frederick Fletcher and other residents, with the assistance of veterans who had just returned to Canada, began raising funds to erect a memorial in the town park.

Unfortunately, a delay in constructing the memorial meant it was not available for the 11 November 1920 Remembrance Day ceremony and was dedicated on 15 December 1920 at the end of a world-wide epidemic which claimed the lives of about 50 million people. Attending the dedication were over 700 citizens, a large number of them veterans of the First World War and till wearing their military uniforms.

In 1946, just after the end of the Second World War, a new section was added to the base of the memorial to include the names of the 25 area men who had lost their lives and in 2006 the name of Randy Payne, killed in Afghanistan, was added.

We trust that the 2020 Gananoque Remembrance Day ceremony, although on a considerably reduced scale from past years, will honour the sacrifices of all Canadian men and women who served in uniform in war and peace and especially honour those who gave their lives in the cause of freedom.