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FEATURE

Memorializing Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae

Civic Commemoration and the 100th Anniversary of “In Flanders Fields”

DEBRA NASH-CHAMBERS

Abstract: In 2015 Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae's hometown of Guelph, Ontario and the nation will memorialize McCrae and commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the writing of his poem “In Flanders Fields”. The poem was penned on May 3rd, 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres following the death of his friend Lieutenant Alexis Helmer. His poem was the inspiration for the use of the poppy as an international symbol of remembrance. John McCrae was a multi-dimensional man with a complex personal history. McCrae died overseas on January 28, 1918. This year's civic celebrations will pay tribute to McCrae—soldier, poet and physician.

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up your quarrel with the foe:
To you with failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.¹

PENED BY LIEUTENANT-Colonel John McCrae on 3 May 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres, and later published by *Punch* magazine in London, England in December 1915, these three poignant, haunting verses comprise the poem that became one of the most widely known poems of the First World War. In his impressive monograph *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, Jonathan Vance succinctly notes the impact of the poem. He states: “John McCrae, the proud son of Guelph, Ontario, was thrust to the forefront of Canada’s war myth.”² In “We Throw the Torch” Alan R. Young notes that McCrae’s poem “stuck in popular memory”³ and became a feature of remembrance ceremonies. To this day, the wearing of poppies is a ritual of remembrance of past wars and the sacrifices of those in uniform. The national commemorative importance of the poem was underscored when a verse from McCrae’s poem was chosen to be engraved in the Memorial Chamber of Ottawa’s Peace Tower.⁴ The year 2015 marks the 100th anniversary of the writing and publication of McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” (IFF). McCrae—soldier, doctor, and poet—and his three famous verses will once again be thrust into the national spotlight. Guelph’s beloved son and his poem “In Flanders Fields” will be memorialised and commemorated in a series of civic events beginning in May 2015 and concluding in December 2015.

In the televised *Heritage Minute* dedicated to McCrae and titled “In Flanders Fields,” the companionable, intelligent, and attractive

¹ Reprint of “In Flanders Fields” in “In Memorium, Lieut. Col. John McCrae,” a eulogy by John MacNaughton from the McGill University memorial service for McCrae, *The University Magazine*, February 1918, 245, McCrae Papers, McCrae House, Guelph, ON.

² Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble, Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 199.

³ Alan R. Young’s comments from “We Throw the Torch” cited in Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizon’s: Local Responses to Canada’s Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 307.

⁴ Young cited in Rutherford, *Ibid.*



Portrait of John McCrae ca. 1914. [Guelph Civic Museums M1968X.354.1.2]

McCrae is portrayed by well-known Canadian star of stage and film, Colm Feore.⁵ Unfortunately, the original televised version of the vignette identified McCrae as being from Montreal, alone. Guelphites sent in protests and the spot was redubbed to include the statement that McCrae was born and raised in Guelph.⁶ The script writer and producer not only overlooked the true early history of McCrae, they seemingly were unaware that his family home on Water Street in Guelph was adjacent to a war memorial and commemorative garden dating from 1946. McCrae House, the monument and the gardens are under the conservatorship of Guelph Civic Museums (GCM) and the city of Guelph. The exterior of the McCrae home has been restored to circa 1872 when McCrae was born in the house. Collectively, they comprise a National Historic Site.

Even in the current century, each year over a thousand visitors, many from overseas, visit McCrae House and the memorial gardens and join the commemoration of the man and his poem. Each November, remembrance services are held with the war memorial

⁵ The *Heritage Minute* can be viewed at www.historicacanada.ca/content/heritage-minutes/john-mccrae.

⁶ The letter campaign was discussed at the 9 September 2008 Board Meeting of the Guelph Historical Society. Debra Nash-Chambers, President, chaired the meeting.



John McCrae ca. 1903. [Guelph Civic Museums M1968X.436.3]

as a focal point of the solemn occasion. Students from the John McCrae Elementary School down the street join veterans, members of Guelph's John McCrae Legion, military cadets, civic officials, and the general public for the outdoor Remembrance Day service—rain or shine. The solemnity of November at the National Historic Site suits not only McCrae's status within Canada's mythology of the First World War, and the respect due to all who died and all who served, it is befitting the memorialisation of a staunch Presbyterian from a proud military family. In contrast, in summer the memorial gardens are host to museum programs for young and old ranging from teddy bear picnics to weekly performances by the Guelph Pipe Band. The repurposing of the historic site over the calendar year would intrigue Guelph's favoured son as he was a *bon vivant* with a celebrated sense of humour. In his eulogy tribute to his friend, John MacNaughton recalled McCrae's fun loving nature. "Full of humour he was always ready for enjoyment himself, highly capable of ministering to the gaiety of others" and "fond of all things worth while [sic]."⁷

⁷ MacNaughton, *The University Magazine*, 242.

John McCrae was a multi-dimensional man with a complex personal history. Following his demise in January of 1918, The *Guelph Herald* regaled his many attributes and interests. The newspaper paid tribute in the following way.

Dr. John McCrae was an unusual man, possessed of a strong mind, had a keen sense of duty, a Patriot in every sense of the meaning of the word, a brainy man, one who led a clean life, whose example could be an example to others: a brave man and one who would not hesitate at anything which he knew was right, the Dominion of Canada and the British nation could ill afford to spare him at this time.⁸

John McCrae's sense of duty shaped his medical career. He interrupted his medical training to join fellow Guelph volunteers overseas during the Second Boer War. Despite having established a successful civilian medical career upon his return to Canada in 1901, he returned to active military service with immediacy when war was declared in 1914.

As a surgeon and soldier McCrae understood the horror of war, so to perceive his famous poem as merely a glorification of war is to oversimplify the poem and the man. The Honourable William Winegard, former Member of Parliament and a decorated naval veteran, has warned Canadians not to forget that McCrae was a humanitarian when reflecting on McCrae's military service and "In Flanders Fields."⁹ Lieutenant-Colonel Michael McKay of Guelph's 11th Field Regiment agrees. Those attempting to understand McCrae should appreciate that "[h]e saw the human side of the war and the First World War was quite tragic."¹⁰ McCrae, an asthmatic subject to the rigours of life on the frontlines for over three years, died from pneumonia at Boulogne, France on 28 January 1918. It is important to ponder several questions to fully appreciate the personal journey that led McCrae to become not only Canada's most celebrated soldier-poet, but an internationally remembered figure immortalised by a revered poem. How did John McCrae, from a small city in Ontario,

⁸ An undated obituary tribute to John McCrae from the *Guelph Herald*, Scrapbook of David McCrae, McCrae House, Guelph, Ontario.

⁹ "‘McCrae Statue Should Inspire Youth’, Soldier-poets hometown wants to recognize son," *Guelph Mercury*, 2 May 2014, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

become such an important figure in our national metanarrative of military service and commemoration during and following the Great War? Why was a doctor with a reputation for brilliance and with a distinguished career in Montreal so wedded to military service?

On 3 May 1915 when McCrae composed “In Flanders Fields” he held the rank of Major and was second in command and Brigade Surgeon, 1st Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery. One of the best sources for information about McCrae’s upbringing in Guelph and his military service in 1915 is an unpublished manuscript written by C.L.C. Allinson titled “John McCrae, Poet, Soldier, Physician.” Allinson was first in command as Brigade-Sergeant, 1st Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery and he recalls watching McCrae writing “In Flanders Fields.”¹¹ McCrae suffered the loss of his friend Lieutenant Alexis Helmer “at the height” of the Second Battle of Ypres and a grieving McCrae was inspired to create his poem in response to Helmer’s brutal death.¹² Allinson dedicates his own manuscript to Helmer “without whom ‘In Flanders Fields’ would not have been written.”¹³ His account recognises the McCrae family’s importance to the early history of Guelph. He also provides important insights into the tradition of military service passed on from David McCrae to his son, John.

David McCrae furthered his *caché* as important man in the community when he joined the 47th Foot, Lancashire Regiment in Hamilton in 1865 while a Fenian invasion was anticipated. Earning a second class officer certificate, David McCrae was qualified to join Guelph’s Wellington Rifles as a drill instructor in 1866. McCrae rose to the rank of Captain. David McCrae had an enduring connection to the military in Guelph. Leo Johnson notes in his *History of Guelph, 1827–1927* that in 1878 David McCrae commanded a second section of the Ontario Agricultural College-based Ontario Field Battery.¹⁴ Years later, Major David McCrae and the Ontario Veterinary College supplied horses to the volunteer forces that served in the Boer War. Even at age seventy-one, David McCrae showed his dedication to service. Allinson offers that McCrae organised the 43rd

¹¹ C.L.C. Allinson, “John McCrae, Poet, Soldier, Physician” unpublished manuscript, n.d., Hugh Guthrie Archives, Guelph Civic Museum, “Introduction,” v.

¹² Ibid., and “Dedication.”

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Leo A. Johnson, *History of Guelph, 1827–1927* (Guelph: Guelph Historical Society, 1977), 302.



Studio portrait of David McCrae (centre) ca. 1870. [Guelph Civic Museums M1991.9.2.155]

Battery Canadian Field Regiment in 1916 and went to France with the regiment where he was not allowed to proceed to the front “to take in its battles.”¹⁵ In his nostalgic retelling of these events, John MacNaughton said that the elder McCrae “would have fain gone to fight himself if he had been of an age to do so. He did raise a battery and took it over to England. But he was too old—over seventy. He sent his bright boy with his full consent and blessing.”¹⁶

Given his father’s history, it is not surprising that fourteen-year-old John McCrae first courted his own dedication to the military as Cadet-Lieutenant McCrae in Guelph Collegiate Vocational Institute’s Highland Cadets. The following year he became a bugler in the Wellington Rifles. His affiliation with the Guelph battery continued after his enrollment in a Bachelor of Arts degree program at the University of Toronto at age sixteen. At age eighteen, John McCrae was a gunner and three years later received a commission in the Artillery as a Second Lieutenant in Number 2 Battery of Provisional 1st Brigade, Field Artillery, Guelph.¹⁷ On campus in Toronto, he joined “K” Company of the Queen’s Own Rifles achieving the rank

¹⁵ Allinson, “John McCrae,” 2.

¹⁶ MacNaughton, *The University Magazine*, 237.

¹⁷ Allinson, “John McCrae,” 10.

of Company Captain of the Varsity Company in 1892 at age twenty. When the Second Boer War began, he delayed his medical studies and volunteered to serve overseas. McCrae sailed from Canada in February 1900 with other Guelph volunteers in the "D" Battery organised in Ottawa. Lieutenant McCrae was in charge of Number 2 Section and he was respected by his men. MacNaughton reflected that his friend "became a soldier and a good one. Joining our overseas troops of that time, as a Lieutenant of Artillery, he saw a great deal of service at Belfast, Lydenburg, and some eighteen other places, won the Queen's medal with three clasps, and rose to the rank of Major commanding the 16th Battery in the Canadian Field Artillery. He was a brave, capable, and highly intelligent officer."¹⁸ Lieutenant-Colonel McCrae was a doctor serving in the artillery when he went to war in 1914 so it was just in the last two and a half years of his life that he served as a Lieutenant-Colonel in the Canadian Medical Corps.¹⁹

Obviously, McCrae's military interests were not exclusive career interests. He pursued university studies in Toronto from age sixteen to twenty-one except for a brief, ill-fated sojourn teaching at the Ontario Agricultural College in Guelph for a year. His teaching prowess in this non-military environment was dismal and atypical. McCrae excelled as a leader in the military and in Montreal he was respected as a gifted, insightful teacher in the realm of medicine. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Natural Sciences, McCrae started a medical degree at the University of Toronto that was completed in 1898. Like his elder brother, Thomas, he established an exemplary medical career. In 1898 the younger McCrae accepted an internship at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland before taking up a fellowship in Montreal. He began a Governor's Fellowship in Pathology at McGill under Professor J.G. Adami in 1901 upon his return from the Boer War.²⁰

In Montreal, McCrae served as resident pathologist at the Montreal General Hospital in 1902 and became a member of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons in 1904 when he was an associate in medicine at the Royal Victoria Hospital. He later became a physician at the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Infectious Diseases

¹⁸ MacNaughton, *The University Magazine*, 239.

¹⁹ Allinson, "John McCrae," v.

²⁰ Allinson, "John McCrae," 30 and an undated newspaper clipping titled "The Late Lt.-Col. John McCrae," McCrae Family Scrapbook, McCrae House, 3.



The Clinic at Alexandra ca. 1908. John McCrae is far right, looking down at his patients. [Guelph Civic Museums M1968X.436.1]

in 1908 and then a lecturer in medicine at McGill in 1909. Until 1911, McCrae served as a visiting professor of pathology at the University of Vermont and travelled to Vermont by train once a month. Not content with these accomplishments, the tireless Dr. McCrae worked as a pathologist at the Montreal General Hospital and operated a private medical practice.²¹ A published poet since 1894, McCrae also authored medical articles documenting the 1908 scarlet fever outbreak in Montreal for the *Montreal Medical Journal* and *The Maritime Medical News*.²² In 1912 he co-authored a pathology text with Dr. Adami. Biographer John F. Preston notes that McCrae also wrote submissions for the *American Journal of Medical Abstracts*.²³ All these responsibilities were set aside when the Britain and Canada entered the Great War in 1914.

John McCrae was in England when war was declared against Germany in 1914 and he made arrangements to return to Canada

²¹ A detailed study of McCrae's early medical career is provided in John F. Prescott's *In Flanders Field's, The Story of John McCrae* (Guelph: The Guelph Historical Society, 1985), Chapter Four and Chapter Six.

²² John F. Preston, *In Flanders Fields: The Story of John McCrae*, 52.

²³ *Ibid.*, 69.

and enlist as quickly as possible. After training at Valcartier in Quebec, he went to war as a surgeon in the 1st Brigade Artillery. He was age forty-one at the time and his medical skills were needed on the battlefield. He was at the Second Battle of Ypres in Belgium as it raged on from 22 April to 25 May 1915. After suffering a tremendous loss of men and artillery, the forces under McCrae's medical purview were relieved from their position on the banks of the Yser Canal "after seventeen days of Hell."²⁴ During that time, McCrae assisted the artillery operations when needed in addition to his medical responsibilities.²⁵ McCrae's compatriots at the front, including Allison, witnessed the death of Lieutenant Alexis Helmer on 2 May 1915. The gruesome death of his friend not only inspired McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields," it marked a significant change in McCrae's once buoyant demeanor in the face of the realities of war. Little was left to bury when Lieutenant Helmer took a direct hit from an 8-inch shell.²⁶ The next day John McCrae, soldier, physician, and poet, penned "In Flanders Fields." It would be seven months before the poem was published in *Punch* and McCrae's international renown would begin.

McCrae's war service continued but changes came shortly after the events of 2–3 May 1915. Exhausted and disheartened, McCrae faced a new challenge in June 1915 when he became a lieutenant-colonel at Number 3 Canadian General Hospital. For the first time, McCrae left the artillery to serve exclusively in the medical corp. When he arrived at the Number 3 Canadian General Hospital operated by McGill doctors and nurses at Boulogne-Sur-Mer it was an outdoor tent facility at the mercy of the elements. The move to an abandoned Jesuit College in 1916 made his working conditions more manageable but the long hours, his asthma, and the illnesses treated in addition to battlefield injuries took their toll. He was appointed consulting physician to the 1st British Army on 24 January 1918,

²⁴ MacNaughton, *The University Magazine*, 244. Tim Cook notes that the casualties from the Second Battle of Ypres "shocked Canadians" and quotes Reverend W.D. Herridge of Ottawa's characterisation that it was a "baptism of blood." Tim Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher: The Sensational Wars of Sam Hughes and General Arthur Currie* (Toronto: Allan Lane, 2010), 99.

²⁵ This fact was discovered by Linda Granville when she was researching her book on McCrae. See *Remembering John McCrae: Soldier – Doctor – Poet* (Toronto: North Winds Press, 2009), 20.

²⁶ Preston, "In Flanders Fields," 95.

just four days before his death from pneumonia. Lieutenant-Colonel McCrae was the first Canadian to receive this honour.²⁷ He is buried in the cemetery at Wimereux, France.²⁸

Much of the story of the poppy as an international symbol of remembrance, and the role of “In Flanders Fields” in facilitating commemorative activities in Canada and many other nations, came after McCrae’s death. McCrae died a bachelor dearly loved by his family and friends. In 1919, a collection of McCrae’s poems titled *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems* became an intentional best seller and provided insights into the psyche and imagination of the author of “In Flanders Fields.” Soon, the poppy was a symbol of remembrance approved by the American, British, and Canadian Legions. Canada and Britain held their first Poppy Day on 11 November 1921, a year after the United States.²⁹ On Memorial Day 1919 a column called “Peggy Shippen’s Diary” in the *Philadelphia Ledger* reported that us President Harding was about to “adopt the Flanders Fields poppy as the symbol of loving gratitude to our dead” and to the memory of “soldier-poet of Canada, Colonel McCrae. For he is immortalised in associating the poppies that grow in Flanders Fields with the blood of the noblest among nations.”³⁰ In Canada, the reading of “In Flanders Fields,” or the singing of a choral arrangement of the poem, is the cornerstone of Canadian Remembrance Day observances in Ottawa and across the nation. However, the poppy now pays tribute to all Canadian war service post-1914.

Bev Dietrich, Curator at the Guelph Civic Museums, has an extensive knowledge of McCrae’s personal history and how his famous poem and his memory have been honoured in Canada and internationally. She notes that two women were instrumental in the poppy becoming an internationally recognised symbol of commemoration. In the United States the Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy Fund was inaugurated in 1919 by Moina Michael after she read a copy of McCrae’s poem in the *Ladies Home Journal*.

²⁷ See “John McCrae,” in *Canadian Encyclopedia*, available at <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/john-mccrae/>.

²⁸ Dietrich, “John McCrae,” 62.

²⁹ Bev Dietrich, “John McCrae and McCrae House: Keeping the Faith for Those Who Died,” *Historic Guelph, The Royal City XLV* (2006), 56.

³⁰ Clipping of “Peggy Shippen’s Diary” dated Memorial Day 1919 from the *Philadelphia Ledger* in Jeanie Matthew McCrae’s Scrapbook, McCrae House, Guelph, Ontario.



John McCrae on his horse Bonfire, ca. 1916-1917. [Guelph Civic Museums M1968X.358.1]

Michael was attending a conference of Overseas War Secretaries on 9 November 1919 when she saw the haunting images of the fallen hovering above a field of poppies and crosses that accompanied the reprint of the poem.³¹ It inspired her to pen one of the many “reply poems”³² written in response to McCrae’s poem.

As she was completing the poem, three conference delegates appeared at her desk with a cheque for \$10 for her having arranged her accommodation. She told them that she would use them to buy 25 poppies and explained

³¹ Dietrich, “John McCrae,” 55; a pamphlet copy of the images reprinted in the *Ladies Home Journal* can be found in the scrapbook collection of print records related to the late John McCrae kept by his aunt, Mrs. Jeanie Matthew McCrae, McCrae House, Guelph, Ontario.

³² The scrapbooks kept by McCrae’s aunt Mrs. Jeanie Matthews McCrae, and his father, David McCrae, are bulging with pamphlets and newspaper clipping about John’s death and the impact of his poem. Many amateur poets wrote so-called “reply poems” in response to “In Flanders Fields” and John’s demise that were published in Canadian and American newspapers. The official Canadian response poem by Frederick J. Scott (Canon F.G. Scott, C.M.G., D.S.O., Senior Chaplain C.E.F.) was written in Quebec in December 1920 and titled “The Unbroken Line.” It accompanied McCrae’s poem on commemorative pamphlets for *Wear the Poppy* campaigns in the 1920s. The “official” American response poem was “America’s Answer” by R. W. Lillard dated 1918. Like Scott’s “reply poem,” it accompanied McCrae’s poem on commemorative fliers distributed in the United States.

why. The Flanders Fields Memorial Poppy fund was born and Miss Michael devoted all her spare time to her campaign. By 1920, the American Legion passed a resolution to endorse the movement to have the poppy adopted as the memorial flower of the American Legion.³³

Similarly inspired by the poem, a French woman named Anne Guerin organised French widows and orphans to make artificial poppies for sale to earn money for their support. In 1921, Madame Guerin travelled to London, England to ask the British Legion to purchase their poppies. At first, the Legion purchased the French poppies but in time disabled British veterans were employed to make artificial poppies in support of the annual British poppy campaign.³⁴

McCrae, himself, has been memorialised at the Canadian War Memorials in Ottawa and at Vimy Ridge in France: Belgium pays honour to McCrae and his poem in many ways. There is a Flanders Fields American Military Cemetery in Waregem, a copper plaque was placed in St. George's Memorial Church in Ypres to the memory of McCrae and the Canadian Medical Corps, and in this century a new museum called the "In Flanders Fields Museum" has opened in Ypres. Following the First World War, stained glass windows were installed at places dear to McCrae: McGill University, the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, the University of Toronto, and St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Guelph.³⁵ The Honourable Hugh Guthrie, Canada's Solicitor-General and local Member of Parliament spoke at the installation of a tablet dedicated to Lieutenant-Colonel McCrae at the Guelph Collegiate. Guthrie declared that "the pen is mightier than the sword" and that John McCrae's poems are recited at recruitment meetings and patriotic campaigns "and have done a great deal to help men see their duty."³⁶

Another local commemorative venture was the conversion of the home where McCrae was born into a museum. McCrae House was a residential home that did not come up for sale to allow a public purpose until 1965. In 1983 conservatorship of the home was rescinded by the Birthplace Society and assumed by the Guelph Civic

³³ Dietrich, "John McCrae," 55.

³⁴ Ibid., 56.

³⁵ Ibid., 64.

³⁶ Clipping from the *Guelph Mercury*, "Unveil Tablet to Memory of Soldier-Poet," n.d., in Jeanie Matthews McCrae's Scrapbook, McCrae House, Guelph, Ontario.



The John McCrae House, Guelph, Ontario. [Author]

Museums. In 2004, it was officially plaqued as a National Historic Site. Curator Bev Dietrich asserts that “McCrae House continues to hold the torch in remembrance of John McCrae and those who died in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and Peacekeeping efforts today.”³⁷

This year Guelph and the nation will celebrate the 100th anniversary of “In Flanders Fields.” The civic task force charged with planning next year’s events includes historians, city staffers, Guelph Civic Museums’ staff, and several members of the Guelph Civic Museums’ Advisory Committee. The objective is to carry the torch by reflecting on all facets of McCrae’s life as well honouring his poem. The task force wants to “heighten the awareness of and appreciation for John McCrae and his Guelph roots” during the 2015 festivities.³⁸ In addition to smaller scale events and projects, two major showcase events are planned: the redesign of the interior of McCrae House on Water Street and the installation of a new statue of McCrae on the grounds of the Guelph Civic Museum on Norfolk Street. The bronze statue will stand at the crest of a newly designed landscape concept

³⁷ Dietrich, “John McCrae,” 65.

³⁸ Task Force Objectives and 100th Anniversary Marketing Plan, “In Flanders Fields” Commemoration, Guelph, Ontario.

for the hill below the museum. The statue is funded by private donations and it represents the sculptor's vision of McCrae when he was Major John McCrae, second in command and brigade surgeon, 1st Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery, in May 1915 when he wrote "In Flanders Fields."³⁹

The 100th anniversary of "In Flanders Fields" has facilitated the long awaited redesign and development of the dated display space within McCrae House. While the exterior of the museum is true to the decade of McCrae's birth, residents after the McCrae family have not preserved the interior. The second floor research space has adapted to the state of the house in the 1970s and in addition to being cramped, it presents accessibility issues. McCrae House was closed in December of 2014 for extensive renovations. Bids have been completed for the redesign of the interior which will include opening up the second floor of the house. All work needs to be completed for the official launch of the 100th anniversary celebrations at McCrae House on weekend of 2–3 May 2015. The project will cost in \$250,000 and BaAm Productions tendered the winning bid for the project. Daily teas and a commissioned theatrical production will utilise the gardens to the rear of McCrae House in the summer of 2015. Playwright Don McCrae was chosen to write the play to be staged outdoors. The play will be a feature of the inbound group travel initiative offered by Tourism Guelph in conjunction with a group travel company. A proposed 2015 partnership with a group travel specialist will facilitate an outbound excursion to France and Belgium to visit Canadian forces battlefields and First World War commemorative sites.

At home, a second signature event is scheduled to take place on 19 June 2015 when the bronze statue depicting John McCrae composing "In Flanders Field" is officially unveiled in Guelph with pomp and ceremony. A twin statue will be dedicated on the grounds of the Artillery Headquarters in Ottawa in May 2015. The Ottawa statue campaign is a project adopted by artillery units across Canada. Lieutenant-Colonel Michael McKay of Guelph's 11th Field Regiment is on the local fund raising committee led by the Honourable William C. Winegard. No tax dollars will be used for the commissioning and

³⁹ Fund raising pamphlet for A Citizens of Guelph Initiative prepared by the Fund Raising Committee for the Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae Statue, Honourary Chair, the Honourable William C. Winegard, P.C., O.C., PHD.

installation of the Guelph statue. In addition to encouraging private donations from adults, the fund raising committee has encouraged school children in Guelph to each donate a nickel so they have a stake in the commemoration.⁴⁰ Overall, Dr. Winegard's committee needs to raise \$250,000. Among the adult donors, the more generous givers will receive commemorative gifts ranging from a copy of the book *In Flanders Fields* by John F. Prescott for those who donate \$250 to a limited addition *maquette* of the statue signed by the artist, Ruth Abernethy, for those donating \$10,000 or more.⁴¹ The local fundraising program is going well. The redevelopment of the landscaping around the designated site for the statue installation has also met with a positive start with shovels in ground in October 2014.

Landscape Architects Brook-McIroy (csl) provided the design for the \$750,000 redevelopment of the hillside leading down from the Guelph Civic Museum patio to Norfolk Street. Cedar Springs Landscape Ltd. has responsibility for the actual construction. An angled row on row design captures the imagery of the crosses row on row in the poem "In Flanders Fields." The design also provides clear sightlines up the hill to the location of the statue. A species of service berries will dominate the rows traversing the hill. A decision was made to use native plantings and "a wide range of different wild flowers will be planted on the hillside potentially providing a colourful meadow-like display and pollinator habitat all season long."⁴² Rodger Tschanz, a professor of horticulture at the University of Guelph and a Museum Advisory Committee representative on the landscaping committee, reported that the "hardscape (flat area covered with artificial turf) immediately adjacent to the statue will have concrete poppy designs impressed into the surface. In addition there will be some programmable gardening areas between the statue and the Civic Museum that will allow planting of a fairly large swath of poppies."⁴³ Hopefully, the red *Remembering Flanders Fields* daylily propagated by Guelph grower Dr. Gilbert Stelter will be incorporated into the museum's garden plans.

⁴⁰ "McCrae Statue Should Inspire Youth, Soldier-poets hometown wants to recognize son," *Guelph Mercury*, 2 May 2014, 1.

⁴¹ Guelph McCrae statue fund raising pamphlet.

⁴² Correspondence re: the Landscape Committee reports from Rodger Tschanz, 20 October 2014.

⁴³ Ibid.



John McCrae ca. 1912. [Guelph Civic Museums M1980.114.29]

In addition to these big budget enterprises, smaller scale public events are planned for 2015. They include a juried art show at the GCM, poetry contests offered with the assistance of the city's prospective 2015 poet in residence initiative, educational programs for local schools, walking tours, and a downtown illumination project. The 2015 volume of the Guelph Historical Society's journal will be dedicated to the year 1915 and the legacy of McCrae and his poem. On a more whimsical note, the IFF Task Force has been in contact with the producers of *Murdoch Mysteries* to suggest that an actor provide a cameo visit from McCrae in the 2015 season. A host of community partners are submitting proposals to tie their events to the official calendar for the 100th anniversary celebrations.

Recently, Tammy Adkins, GCM manager, announced that a very important IFF Task Force project met with success. An application was submitted for John McCrae to be inducted into the Canadian Medical Hall of Fame in 2015. He will be one of six new members in April 2015. Bev Dietrich of GCM and McCrae biographer Linda Granfield partnered with representatives of the Ontario College of Physicians and Surgeons to draft the successful application. Strict criteria needed to be met. "Canadian Medical Hall of Fame Laureates are individuals whose outstanding contributions to medicine and the

health sciences have led to extraordinary improvements in human health. Their work may be a single meritorious contribution or a lifetime of superior accomplishments.”⁴⁴ The posthumous award to “Dr. John McCrae MD, MRCP, LCol *Guelph, ON, Montreal, QC*” will recognise that he is one of six persons honoured for “contributions on the national and international stages have been transformative to patient care, health systems, education and research.”⁴⁵ The inductee profile for McCrae provides a lengthy, integrated profile of his civilian and military careers. It recognises that McCrae “was one of the best trained physicians of his generation and his research advanced our understanding of tuberculosis, scarlet fever, nephritis and lobar pneumonia”⁴⁶ McCrae “was known for his commitment to literature and the humanities.”⁴⁷ His profile continues stating:

Dr. McCrae served as an artillery officer in the South African War. The First World War saw his return to military service where, as a medical officer, he faced casualties on a scale that is unimaginable today. Following the battlefield burial of a friend and fellow soldier from Montreal on May 2, 1915, he wrote *In Flanders Fields* which gained international recognition and led to the use of the poppy as the symbol of remembrance. Before his tragic death of pneumonia in January 1918, LCol McCrae served for three years as the chief medical officer of the No. 3 Canadian General Hospital (McGill) and was the first Canadian appointed consultant physician to the British Army.⁴⁸

Guelph and the nation will memorialise Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae and commemorate the 100th anniversary of the writing of his fabled poem. It is fitting that the statues chosen for remembrance in Ottawa and Guelph do not glorify war as McCrae, himself, acknowledged the tragedy of war in his poems.⁴⁹ McCrae is depicted on a stump looking pensively at the poem in his hand. He is not in

⁴⁴ Press release sent to Bev Dietrich, Curator, GCM, “re: the 2015 CANADIAN MEDICAL HALL OF FAME Inductee Ceremony to be held in Vancouver, BC on Thursday, April 23 @ 5:00 pm,” press release dated 7 October 2015.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ As a soldier and a military doctor McCrae faced the horrific realities of war. His poem “The Anxious Dead” ponders the human cost of war while “Disarmament” extolls the virtues of peace.

full military dress and the humanity of McCrae is evident. The statue evokes all aspects of his complex personal history—soldier, physician, and poet.⁵⁰

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debra Nash-Chambers teaches in the Department of History and in the North American Studies Program at Wilfrid Laurier University. She received her PhD from the University of Guelph and her interest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century history of Guelph began with her graduate research. For the past decade she has been very active in heritage and public history initiatives in Guelph and area. She has published a number of articles related to her research interests in family, power brokerage and the changing demographic and spatial environments of Guelph, Ontario. In 2006, she collaborated with co-editor Elysia De Laurentis on the public history retrospective *Remembering Pilkington Township: Lives, Loves and Labour*. She is the vice-chair of the Guelph Museums Advisory Committee, a member of Guelph's "In Flanders Fields" at 100 Commemoration Task Force, and serves on the editorial board of the Guelph Historical Society's journal *Historic Guelph, The Royal City*.

⁵⁰ Photograph of a *maquette* of the statue on the Guelph fund raising pamphlet.

