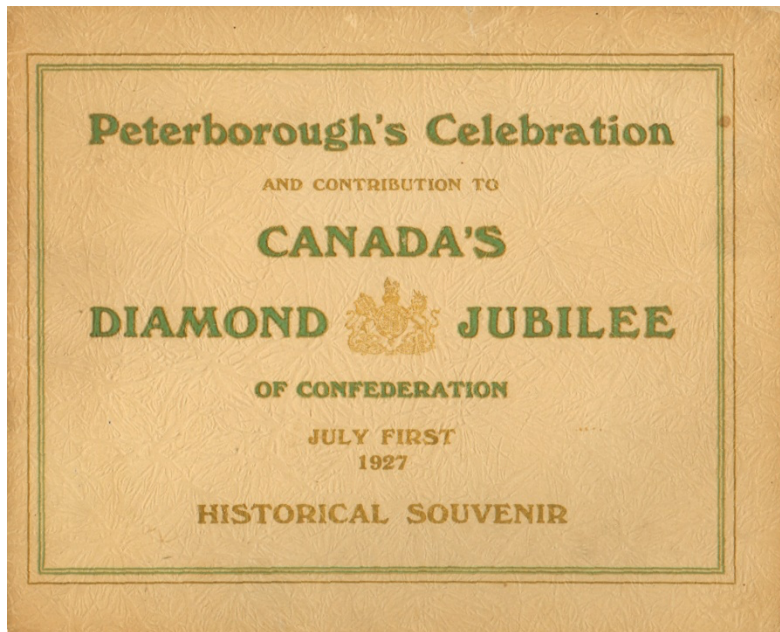


Canada's Diamond Jubilee in Peterborough



There have not been many occasions when local people published a retrospective of an event with a view that the souvenir would inspire good planning for future events. When Peterborough celebrated Canada's Diamond Jubilee on the long weekend beginning 1 July 1927, Fred Craig, from the Peterborough Examiner, pulled together a book that probably was used by local people planning subsequent events. Local historians have cherished the book because it captures a moment in time, now 97 years ago. More than that, though, it helps us understand what people then thought was important about Canadian and local history.

This excerpt reveals the importance of the Robinson emigration in local recollections of the history of Peterborough in Canada.

.... Fred Craig penned the foreword for the 1927 historical souvenir. He claimed that while no town matched the ambition and reach of Ottawa's great show, Peterborough was the most ambitious and successful of the smaller towns and cities. He gives full credit to Dr W. T. Holloway, a local dentist and mayor during 1926 and 1927. But he, too, was amazed at the response over a period of four months from the general public, and "the painstaking efforts of a host of hard-working committees." He felt the response to the call for volunteers had been unprecedented. Even now, it is unclear why the community response was so great. But Fred Craig hoped that in future events, the work of this event would be a guide for subsequent successes. It certainly seemed to have been closely followed by the organizers of Peterborough's belated centennial in 1929, which also dovetailed with the unveiling of the war memorial. Fred O'Grady created a similar structure for the Homecoming '75 celebrations marking the 125th anniversary of the Robinson settlers of 1825. The organization of 1927 reminded me of the efforts made for a great homecoming in 1903, and I notice that Francis H. Dobbin seemed the main organizer in 1903, 1927 and 1929.



Mayor Holloway—Turning the First Sod of the New Collegiate Wing, July 1st, 1927

.... By mid-March 34 of 64 organizations had responded positively and a variety of committees were set in motion for a three-day celebration. These early committees included finance, procession and parade, decorations, music, evening sports, Sunday, children, fireworks, grounds and privileges, publicity, bonfires, athletics, and community dancing. The local clergy looked after Sunday services and there were committees for advertising, for the production of the pageant. The Council of Women handled all the details for the pageant. The committee hoped to make money by charging admission to the fair grounds, for the pageant, and the procession and for the vaudeville program brought in from New York. Some revenue could come from fees. There was no public subscription, no formal program in which merchants would feel obliged to advertise, and no effort to sell souvenirs and badges. The budget committee planned to spend \$5,000; expenses came to \$8,000 and City Council covered the committee's losses. According to Fred Craig, the objective had been to create one occasion that people would remember as when "all had participated to fullest satisfaction." Partly, this satisfaction was tied to the sacrifices people made, and partly it was in the enjoyment of the activities. One highlight added early was the decision that all the school children should process the length of the parade route.

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The parade started at 1 p.m. It stretched for one and a half miles, and no traffic moved on the main streets. The parade began at the newly-named Confederation Park (formerly Central Park) and entered the Exhibition Grounds (later known as Morrow Park) and did a full circle of the half-mile track, past the grandstand. Thousands of school children marched, and there was an amazing range of floats and bands. The parade was a mix of the old and the new, with arches over the street at several points, but also having floats that were mobile and moved along the parade route.

....

Some of the floats are pictured in the historical souvenir. Without exception, the means of locomotion was disguised by bunting or decorations. Canadian General Electric had what it called a float train, which was eight small floats representing the provinces from New Brunswick west and Yukon. Dawe Pearson had a Nova Scotia float tied to Longfellow's Evangeline. Peter Hamilton Company had a team of oxen pulling an ancient hay wagon, which apparently matched someone's idea of Saskatchewan. The Knights of Pythias had a team of Belgians pulling a colourful covered wagon, for Alberta. The tractor pulling the train was covered in Union Jack bunting. The Red Cross float, titled "Still Serving" was draped with white bunting with maple leaves and crosses, and looked like a boat. DeLaval featured a huge milk bottle and the slogan, "Say it with milk." Canadian Woolens Limited looked like a two-ton truck covered with bunting, and with a flat bed for the huge loom. Barrie's Limited, a local furrier with stores in the west, celebrated early fur traders in historic costumes; at least two were dressed as Indian fur traders. The William Hamilton Company's float was a salute to pulp and paper production, which it billed as "Canada's greatest manufacturing industry." Hamilton's had been making equipment for saw mills and lumber camps for seventy years. McDonald's Lumber captured a sense of the lumber camp with a tent, a stump puller and lots of boughs. The Peterborough Examiner picked up the pulp and paper theme, too; its float, titled "From Forest to Press" had five women and two men, all well-dressed. Peterborough Cereal Company was a truck with no bunting but noting the "progress of the milling industry." Another float featured lumbermen. The Quaker Oats float had an attractive miniature water-powered grist mill with a flower garden in front. The Peterborough Horticultural Society had a roadster festooned with bright flowers. Peterborough Floral had a delivery truck covered with bunting and garlands of flowers. Goodfellow and Welch, the Post Office, the Peterborough Girls Church Society and White's Cycle and Sports had floats, as well. The Peterborough Utilities Commission [PUC] had a model of their Aylmer Street works. Howson's Garage had a Chevrolet thoroughly decorated in red, white and blue, the prevailing colours in the parade. The YWCA float, with lots of white bunting, had a woman dressed in white. Bell Telephone had switchboard operators presiding over a miniature city with huge telephone receivers. The Peterborough Conservatory of Music float seemed grounded in clouds, and had characters from a fair tale, perhaps Sleeping Beauty.

A few floats had historical themes. The Peter Robinson Chapter of the IODE float on the landing of the Peter Robinson settlers had a reconstructed boat such as had been constructed for negotiating the Otonabee from Rice Lake to Peterborough. ...

There were a few Peterborough people dressed in 1867 garb. The Douro float had ten men who had been living in Douro in 1867, and one who had not. ...

Marchers dominated the parade for most of its length. The school children from several schools processed in school uniforms; those from King Edward School had maple leaf hats; some from other schools wore caps. The Salvation Army's boys band played as they marched. There was also a contingent of school cadets in army uniforms. Major Fred Hills was the grand marshall for Peterborough's Pipe Band, with the 4th Battalion Canadian Machine Gun Company.

Those at the grandstand were able to see the vaudeville acts, and the entire parade. Elsewhere, people were able to admire the airplanes flying overhead....

On both Friday and Saturday evening, the pageant consisted of a series of skits about key moments in our history and was interspersed with a variety of songs and music. The Fathers of

Confederation were represented by local people dressed to match the 1867 appearance in the famous painting by Robert Harris. This was followed by fireworks, and then a remarkable Musical Tattoo with several bands and torch bearers.

On Sunday, there were several church services, and the gates to Nicholls Oval were dedicated. In the evening, an estimated 10,000 people were at Victoria Park for a festival of song led by the Jubilee Chorus and by the bands of the Peterborough Rangers and the Salvation Army.

Consider as well how people chose to represent their history. Fred Craig says that the local committees took their lead from Ottawa. When Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King gave an address to the nation, his words were heard coast to coast by radio. That was a first. Canada was becoming responsible for its own foreign policy, and the feeling was that Canada was really a nation, and that somehow we had earned that right on the battlefields of the Great War. That was a first. There was a fascination with firsts, as evident in the representations of Erikson, Columbus and Champlain. The parade captured these ideas quite well, and the technical quality of the floats was very high. Motorized vehicles had replaced the horse and hay wagon, and everything was covered with bunting. The floats replaced the frozen arches. And yet the horses were there, and there were four arches.

With the presence of elaborate floats, this was Peterborough's first modern parade. But the parade was about history both in the theme and the style. But people of that day would have remembered earlier circus parades, military parades and calithumpian parades such as that of 1894.

.... The fifth tableau was from Peterborough. Captain Charles Rubidge and Peter Robinson were shown in 1825 conducting a lottery for the choice of lots for the Irish immigrants, known as the Robinson settlers. This was a surprise to me as Howard Pammett's careful work on the subject suggests that Peter Robinson and the local surveyors selected the lots for the Irish settlers. There were also many people who asked for different locations and again it was Robinson who selected the lots. However, American history provides some stories of land lotteries and land races, such as the land rush in Oklahoma. Of course, sometimes people prefer dramatic stories. The part of Peter Robinson was played by Walter Sutton, while Captain Rubidge was played by Dr. N. H. Sutton.....

This was an incredible event, with a cast of hundreds and an equal number of people involved in costumes, directing and set designs. Surprisingly, it was repeated on the following evening. This was quite an accomplishment as people quickly realized. It is not clear who was responsible for the historical story lines, and there may have been different writers for each of the tableaux. They probably worked from the pertinent volumes of the Makers of Canada series, which were in the Peterborough Public Library, where de la Fosse was the librarian. Combined with the other aspects of the Diamond Jubilee, this was a spectacular moment in local history, possibly without equal.