

CFB Chilliwack Historical Society
Seventeen years old - Where has the time gone?
by MWO Jim Harris (Ret'd)



Yes....17 years have passed. But it seems like just yesterday that the former CFB Chilliwack closed its doors. The departure of CFSME, 1 CER and the CME Museum left a huge void in the CME presence in the Chilliwack area. To try to remedy this loss, the CFB Chilliwack Historical Society (CFBCHS) was created at an informal meeting in October 2000 at the Airport Café over breakfast (with pie of course!). In April 2001 we were incorporated as a non-profit society and registered with Canada Revenue. We have been busy ever since as the Society began gathering and displaying artefacts and stories to keep that rich Canadian Military Engineering history alive.

*The Engineer Vehicle Tactical Sign
for WW II (and much of the post-
War era.*

The goals and objectives of CFBCHS focus on the preservation of the history and heritage of the military presence in this Fraser Valley community. A Constitution and Bylaws provide direction and guidance on the preservation and display of relevant military artefacts.

The Canadian Army heritage in the Vedder Crossing area stretches back to the WW II Engineer training school that was established in April 1942. But CFBCHS also remembers the lasting contributions of the Royal Engineers that started in the 1860s during the Canada-US Boundary Survey and the construction of several important road systems including the Cariboo Trail. At that time camps were developed in and around Chilliwack by those early engineers and many of those soldiers were eventually given acreage and settled here - further contributing to the development of local communities.



The Society also helps the public understand the consequences of war. Many of our members and veterans stand as living testimony to that aspect. We speak to those consequences and assist those veterans and their families.

Linking with the local communities is an essential component of our mission and the Society informs the public how, over the years, the civilian and military communities became a cohesive team through cooperation for the mutual benefits.

In the immediate Vedder Crossing area we are building on the outstanding accomplishments of the Canada Lands Company (CLC) as it worked with developers to re-purpose the former Married Quarters community into a new civilian community

named "Garrison Crossing." Our Society provided advice to CLC as it placed 29 historic plaques along the Legacy Walk to depict life as it was from the 1940s through to the late-1990s.

We are very proud of the Society's accomplishments to-date and would like to trumpet some of those initiatives:

- The departure of CFSME, 1 CER and the CME Museum created a huge void in the rich military history of the area. Our Society has been gathering and displaying artefacts and stories to keep that history alive. We currently hold and manage approximately 29,000 artefacts;
- We have informed the local community of its history- often by a focus on the youth. We invite the local schools to annually view our displays over the course of a five-day period and build on "Remembrance" as a theme. The GW Graham School has been with us since the start and provides an excellent student-enacted play with a different theme each year. During this week we also host a Veterans Appreciation Lunch. This year will be the 15th

Anniversary of this very successful programme that is supported by the Department of Veterans Affairs, financing by a grant from BC Gaming, individual donations, and volunteers.

- We are fortunate to be housed with the Masonic Temple at 45905 Hocking Ave in Chilliwack. Our three large display rooms are open to the public, manned by volunteers, and admission is free to the public. Additionally, 39 Brigade has made a trailer in their compound available for our very important work of processing the thousands of artefacts that have been generously donated.
- Canada Lands Company Ltd has been very active in the development of the lands vacated by the Federal Government and they have been extremely cooperative with our society and the local veterans. They were also very generous with funding and donations to support our early years. We, in turn, offered the history and stories of the area for the interpretive plaques along the popular Legacy Walk that meanders through the old 'PMQ Patch' - now known as "Garrison Crossing."
- Another of our notable contributions to the community has been to help connect Canadians with the military history of their loved ones. Our fee: simply repay our kindness forward to a Veteran or the family thereof.
- Our most excellent and informative websites can be visited at: <http://cfbchs.com> and <http://cfbchs.pastperfectonline.com/>

Over the years, monuments have been very high on our priority list – securing them, saving them and restoring these remarkable historical memories that time keeps trying to forget. Some of those restorations and rescues include:



The Cenotaph. Once being considered for relocation into the PMQ area, we asked Canada Lands Company to reconsider and, after several meetings, they agreed to allocate more than ¼ \$ Million to restoring the area. When all was said and done, nearly \$2 Million was spent in a massive restructuring of the area that now maintains the integrity of the original monument and site. Daily visits are way up and we now see over 3,000 every Remembrance Day.



30 CWT CMP Tipper. "Every Sapper Needs a Good Dump", was the slogan for this initiative. We had found an old WW II Canadian Chevrolet Dump Truck that had been built in Oshawa, ON for the Normandy invasion. This one had ended up working at CFB Chilliwack and was then sold to a local logging camp, became derelict, was found rusting away. It was tenderly being brought back to life when it was acquired by our society in a partly rebuilt state. Donations enabled her to be fully restored to running condition and she can be viewed to this date...a beautiful piece of Sapper history that is frequently part of our outreach projects.



The Saluting Base. This structure was originally on the CLC agenda for restoration and they were looking for sponsors when The Retired Sappers became involved and took the bull by the horns. For over a year, CFBCHS supported this initiative, primarily by raising over \$50,000 from the "Sapper Family." These generous donations are remembered on engraved bricks adorning the front of what is now called the "CFB Chilliwack Memorial." CFBCHS has committed to caring for and administering funds for this monument in perpetuity.



Liberator Monument. In 1945 a Liberator Bomber crashed into Welch Mountain in the Cheam Range, killing all 11 British Airmen on board. The initial memorial was discovered to be in disrepair and quite inaccessible. Our society was instrumental in helping the organizing committee erect a new and accessible monument. Besides lots of advice, we organized invaluable CME Sapper contacts who were the driving force behind climbing to the crash site (as many as five times for some), retrieving several artefacts - most notably the airlifting out of an original engine that is now the centrepiece of the memorial. Our sappers laid and poured the foundation for this new memorial.



Sapper Park. One of our current projects is located at the south end of Chilliwack Lake. Nearby was one of the camps that were inhabited by the Royal Engineers involved in the 1860s era USA/Canada Boundary Survey. Here, a derelict monument to Sappers was uncovered and plans are underway to clean and restore it. We have been assured of "Sapper Family" assistance in making and keeping the monument accessible. We are hoping to utilize "QR Codes" on a sign at the other Sapper Park (dedicated to 1CER) on Young Avenue in Chilliwack, giving hikers direction and invitation to visit Chilliwack Lake and hike into that Sapper Park - where another piece of history awaits them.

Doing the Work of a Sapper for the Pay of a Sapper – and loving it!

The CFB Chilliwack Historical Society is staffed entirely by volunteers. Our annual rent is \$6000 and our insurance cost \$2700 annually. It costs nearly \$800 annually for our license of the computer database program "PastPerfect" to host our huge historical collections and photographs. In addition, there are many incidentals - too numerous to mention - that gobble-up our meager funds.

We would appreciate seeing your confidence in our society and its good works by your making a donation. If you choose to donate to our charity please forward your check or MO payable to CFBCHS, 6760 School Lane, Chilliwack, BC, V2R 2C9. All donations of \$20.00 or more will receive a tax deductible receipt and our sincere gratitude.

If you would like to make automatic monthly donations, please visit: <http://cfbchs.com> and click on [Information](#) in the header...scroll down to the box that says "Donate Now" and you will be taken to our page in Canada Helps. A tax deductible receipt will be issued automatically with our thanks.