



Orders of the Day

The Publication of the Association of Former MLAs of British Columbia

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April 2016

Government House volunteers win the battle of the brush



Legend tells us a less than complimentary aside delivered by Prince Philip spurred former Lieutenant Governor David Lam to embark on the reclamation of the 36 acres of gardens and grounds that surround BC's Government House. That ongoing challenge would take an army of volunteers. Today, the 450 members of the Friends of Government House Gardens Society maintain and plan the gardens, raise funds, guide tours and run the Tea Room, archives and costume museum. Volunteers train and work on Tuesdays and Thursdays mixing and mingling with bus tours, wedding photo sessions and local dog walkers. Read the full story with pictures starting on Page 4.

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Orders of the Day is published regularly throughout the year, and is circulated to Association members, all MLAs now serving in Legislature, other interested individuals and organizations.

Material for the newsletter is always welcome and should be sent in written form to:

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The Association of Former MLAs of British Columbia is strictly non-partisan, regardless of members' past or present political affiliation. Founded in 1987, the Association was formally established by an Act of the British Columbia Legislature on February 10, 1998.

Orders of the Day was conceived, named and produced in its early stages by Bob McClelland, former MLA and cabinet minister, following his retirement from office. Hugh Curtis ably helmed this publication up through May 2014.

Thank You and Miscellany

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From the Editor's Desk

Veteran communications guru David Brown passes

Right on our deadline Grace McCarthy informed us of the passing of David Brown, a much respected communications advisor in the days of the Bennetts. She fondly remembers him as "the one who always wore the perfectly tailored three-piece suit." Back in the day if you saw a red 1960 Cadillac Eldorado convertible parked in the precincts, David was close by.

David's daughter Louise Eto tells me her dad was "very humble and would be extremely appreciative that you are notifying his colleagues of his passing." I am hoping that some of those colleagues like John Plul, George Lenko, and Dave Laundry will send us some of their recollections so we can do a proper tribute in our May issue.

David died March 20th at Sechelt Hospital after a brief stay. David, a widower of wife Alicia, is survived by Louise, son-in-law Paul and grandchildren Brandon and Alexis. Donations in lieu of flowers are welcomed by the Canadian Cancer Society, BC SPCA or the CHILD Foundation. At David's request there will not be a funeral; however, a celebration of life will be held at a future date to thank his dedicated neighbourhood friends who enriched his retirement years in Secret Cove and made it possible for him to remain at home until days before his passing.

On a happier note: The British Columbia Legislative Internship program (See Page 10) is celebrating its 40th anniversary with an alumni weekend starting at 7 p.m. Friday, April 22nd in the Lower Rotunda of the Parliament Buildings with an Opening Reception hosted by the Honourable Linda Reid, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. That will be followed by a private reception at the Victoria Event Centre (1415 Broad Street). The Reunion Banquet begins at 6 p.m. Saturday, April 23rd at Government House. Jessica McDonald, President and CEO of BC Hydro and a 1991 BC Legislative Intern, will provide the keynote address.

2016 Association Dues

It's that time again. Dues for 2016 are due.

Annual membership in the Association is \$60 and that includes the subscription fee for *Orders of the Day* (OOTD).

Fans of OOTD who are not Association members should send in a cheque for \$40 to remain on the newsletter subscription list.

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The gardens at Government House

If Prince Philip could see them now ...

By Kate Thompson
Special to Orders of the Day

Government House lore has it that Prince Philip once told then-Lieutenant Governor David Lam that the grounds of Government House in Victoria looked like a rubbish "tip."

As a consequence, in the early 90s, Lam donated his salary and tapped friends and supporters to help make his vision of a restored official residence a reality. Volunteers were recruited to reclaim the overgrown woodlands and formal gardens covering the 36 acre site. Today, the 450 members of the Friends of Government House Gardens Society maintain and plan the gardens, raise funds, guide tours and run the Tea Room, archives and costume museum for a walled gem that head gardener Val Murray calls "Victoria's Stanley Park."

Volunteer coordinator Nairn Hollott smiles at the memory of 65-year-olds pulling thick blackberry from the cliff side and reclaiming a pit full of burnt leavings from the 1957 fire that destroyed the original house. After more than a decade of pulling weeds and rebuilding garden walls and walkways, much of the acreage has been reclaimed and opened to the public.

The grounds are open to the public from dawn to dusk. Volunteers train and work on Tuesdays and Thursdays mixing and mingling with bus tours, wedding photo sessions and local dog walkers.

Hollott and society president Brian Rogers estimate the average age of their 230 gardeners is between the late 60s and early 70s.



Seated: Friends President Brian Rogers and Coordinator of Gardening Volunteers Nairn Hollott. Standing: Val Murray, Head Gardener.

New recruits work in each garden for a minimum two-hour shift on Tuesdays or Thursdays, literally learning the routines from the ground up. They are an eclectic bunch: Retirees like the United Church Minister from Lethbridge gathering up wind debris out of the brush; local residents who have downsized their own gardens and miss getting their hands in the soil; and other long-time residents like the "cookie lady" who lives across the street and bakes goodies for the volunteers.

Rogers laughs at the notion of any "politicos" digging in the gardens. "We have to draw the line somewhere," he quipped.

Most have heard about the day former premier Gordon Campbell came by to drop the writ at the same time loads of manure from a Saanich equestrian school were being dropped off for the rose gardens. It was an irony that neither the gardeners nor the assembled media failed to notice, but Rogers says the media "were kind to us, they let that one go."

Hollott remembers former Lieutenant Governor Iona Campagnolo appearing with a bucket and hand tools dressed for gardening. And, the current LG, the Hon. Judith Guichon, joins the volunteers for small gatherings in the gardens.



Waterfall and Japanese garden

continued on Page 6

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The Friends can always use more help. Deer proof plants and fencing aren't cheap. "Our budget is \$30,000 a year. We would take a million (in trust) if we could get it," says Hollott. Interest from a million in trust would help purchase the tools, plants, materials and equipment needed to maintain the existing gardens and continue with further restorations. There is a trust in place and additional funds come from Society membership fees, plant sales, postcard sales and other fundraising activities.

Government House is very generous, Rogers says. It shares revenue from concerts on the lawn and the sale of snacks and half of the income from the Tea Room.

The Society gets a non-profit discount from local nurseries. Members bring prized peonies, primulas, iris and other deer proof plants to transplant in this garden oasis while other plants are grown on site and extras are sold.

The vegetable garden can't grow enough produce to satisfy all of the dining needs of Government House; however, it does provide fare for small dinners and the greens for the Tea House salads. The kitchen uses herbs from the garden and honey produced on site. The chef turned last year's apple crop into cider. And, the designer flower garden supplements professional floral arrangements.

Government House contracts the mowing, leaf blowing and annual planting. The volunteer gardeners



use hand tools to maintain the various gardens, build pathways and work with the Garden Management Committee to plan, restore and preserve the grounds.

Rogers is enormously proud of the work the Friends have done over the years, reclaiming 22 wooded acres from broom, blackberry, ivy, holly, and St John's Wort; restoring formal gardens and building new additions and pathways. "It wouldn't be the way it is without our volunteers," he says.

Sometimes all we need is a little help.



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The day our government collapsed

by Jim Hume

"As (Lieutenant-Governor Thomas R. McInnes) was admitted to the chamber all the members left immediately with only the Speaker and the Premier remaining... After a few moments the Lieutenant-Governor recovered his aplomb, read his speech, left the chamber with boos and catcalls (from the public gallery) resounding in his ears; 28 February, 1900, was a memorable day in Victoria for the whole customary constitutional establishment had collapsed. Respect for authority was gone and discourtesy to the Lieutenant-Governor (had become) the accepted code of conduct." (From Portraits of the Premiers (1871-1952) by S.W. Jackman)



Thomas Robert McInnes

The events leading to total collapse, albeit briefly, of constitutional government had their beginnings a few days earlier when Premier Charles Augustus Semlin lost a vote in the Legislature, his second such loss in almost as many months. The defeat set the rumour mill swirling quickly through the Legislature that Semlin would be forced to resign, to forfeit the Premiership to another member "who would have the confidence of the House."

Semlin moved quickly into damage control. To have any hope of forestalling royal dismissal he needed open confirmation that despite the most recent set-back he could still command majority support in a Legislature unrestricted by party loyalties. (Prior to 1903 MLAs were classed as Government supporters, Opposition, or Independent members without reference to political party affiliation). Semlin needed a majority commitment from at least 20 of the 38 MLAs to demonstrate that, while he may have lost a relatively minor vote, he was still better able to muster majority support than anyone else and was still the favoured Premier.



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He had until only a few hours to do his lobbying and persuade the Lieutenant-Governor to resist the temptation to fire the Premier and dismiss his government.



Charles Semlin

Around 11 p.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 1900, late night denizens of Victoria would have spotted a group of well-dressed men heading up town from the Legislature. If they were knowledgeable they would have recognized Premier Semlin as the group trudged over to the Hotel Driard on the

south east corner of View and Broad. The identities of all the individuals in the group remain unknown. And we can only guess they were heading for the Driard because they wanted to convene in private, or because they needed a little "Dutch courage" before confronting Lieutenant-Governor McInnes with their request for a reflective pause before banishing Semlin from the Premiership.

All MLAs were well aware of McInnes' penchant for flexing his constitutional muscle, and none more so than Premier Semlin. When McInnes dismissed Premier John Turner (MLA for Victoria) from office in 1898 he informed Turner that he had "become convinced that yourself and your colleagues are no longer endorsed by the electorate and have not the confidence of the Legislative Assembly." He then asked Semlin to take over as Premier.

An intrepid, unknown, reporter for The British Colonist informed readers it was shortly after 11 p.m. that Semlin and his supporters "were driven to Government House" to meet with McInnes and that two hours later around 1a.m. "returned to their hotel and all were happy." They felt they had convinced McInnes to "await any contemplated action until a vote of confidence might be taken" in the Legislature.

When the House convened some eight hours later Semlin was handed a letter from McInnes rejecting Semlin's new coalition and probably containing the "lost confidence" words used when he dismissed Turner two years earlier. The headline in the Colonist (Feb. 28, 1900) was bold but simple: SEMLIN'S EXIT. The Legislators voted 22-15 to condemn the Lieutenant-Governor's action - an unprecedented rebuke to the Crown.



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In the debate prior to the vote Capt. John Irving (Cassiar), a government supporter, was critical of McInnes' timing. He reminded the House that two months earlier McInnes had been made aware of Premier Semlin's precarious control of the House "and at that time he should have acted to put an end to their misery." Irving paused then added ominously. "But his Honour didn't want to, he was waiting for his opportunity...." Shouts of "Order, Order" and demands for withdrawal filled the chamber.

Contritely Irving asked the Speaker "will I have to take those words back." The newspaper report says "the Speaker nodded affirmatively" and Irving responded "Well, I will, but I said it anyhow – and I meant it, too."

A few minutes later he returned to his critical theme implying that the Lieutenant-Governor was playing a calculated power broker game. The protest was immediate from Joseph Martin, the man McInnes had asked to form a new government. Martin called it "a direct insult to the Queen."

"Then I'll apologize to the Queen," snapped Irving.

There was never any published charge that McInnes or Martin had acted improperly but Prime Minister Wilfrid

Laurier quietly replaced McInnes with Sir Henri-Gustave Joly Lotbiniere from Quebec, and Joseph Martin, the Premier hand-picked by McInnes, survived only 106 days before resigning after leading the Liberal party to defeat in 1903.

There was a weird but welcome end to the day when the "customary constitutional establishment collapsed" and for a few hours British Columbia teetered on the edge of chaos. At adjournment Henry Helmcken, MLA for Victoria, proposed a message of praise and thankfulness be sent to Queen Victoria "and her Generals" for recent victories in the Boer War. The Colonist tells us the Assembly unanimously endorsed the resolution then "enthusiastically joined together in singing God Save the Queen and cheers for her gracious majesty."



(You can follow Jim Hume's wordsmithing adventures at www.jimhume.ca.)

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BC's Legislative Interns:

A new generation will watch government up close

By James Lawson, PhD
University of Victoria

As Members of BC's Legislative Assembly think ahead to general elections in May 2017, a new cohort of highly effective young people are preparing for six months of legislative and ministerial work, starting next January and continuing well into June.

While the overlap of the 40-year-old BC Legislative Internship Program with the provincial election period will mean some creative scheduling for program organizers, the interns of 2017 will experience some of the electoral cycle's most exciting months.

Many former MLAs will recognize the internship program and the special qualities of its freshly minted university graduates. Interns differ from political aides because they serve as reliable non-partisans for the duration of the program. They also differ from legislative pages and guides because of the significant support roles they often take on, both in caucus research units and inside government ministries.

A third pillar of the program is educational with orientation sessions at the Legislature early in January and bi-weekly seminars for the duration of the program. Educational travel typically completes the program including packed visits to Parliament Hill in Ottawa and to the Washington State Capitol.

Interns also cooperate with one another throughout as the program's informal ambassadors, building understanding and support for it within the Legislative Assembly and beyond, and typically hosting other internship programs during official visits to Victoria.

For some program alumni, the internship has opened opportunities for more permanent work in public affairs. But for many of those whose careers take other paths, the internship proves equally valuable. Through the caucus and ministerial postings, the interns see up close how new policy initiatives are developed, how BC's often-intense partisan environment turns them into legislation, and how the resulting laws return to the public service for implementation. This sets the program apart from other public-sector co-op or work-study opportunities.

BC's Legislative Internship Program is funded by the Speaker of the BC Legislative Assembly, and its Program Director, Karen Aitken, is based in the Parliamentary Education Office. The program is simultaneously an academic endeavour with substantive input from the province's post-secondary institutions. The program's current Academic Director, Dr. Patrick J. Smith of Simon Fraser University, collaborates with Ms. Aitken throughout the year.

The internship selection process tends to attract university graduates with an affinity for public affairs. The application process for the current 10 positions is rigorous, with an eye to high academic qualifications, excellent work skills, and sterling personal character. All these qualities are valued in these sensitive work environments, for which interns are required to take an oath of confidentiality.

To find out more about the program and to recommend it to potential candidates go to www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/Pages/Legislative-Internship-Program or contact the Parliamentary Education Office (250-387-8669).



The 2016 Legislative Interns, left to right: Alex Dauncey-Elwood, Heather Clifford, Mikayla Roberts, Michael McDonald, Robert Hill, Jamie Cook, Kate Ryan-Lloyd (Deputy Clerk & Clerk of Committees), Megan Parisotto, Rowan Laird, Chardaye Bueckert, David Macauley.

George Abbott looks back:



In 1976, the inaugural year of the BC Legislative Internship Program, George Abbott (long hair and moustache at the head of the table) meets with fellow interns in the Hemlock Room at the Parliament Buildings.

George, now a much respected former legislator, quips: "I'm pretty sure this is a photo of an FLQ cell circa 1970."

It was an honour to be part of the inaugural group in the Legislative Intern Program in 1976.

Dr. Walter Young had worked hard for a few years to get it off the ground and I suspect the launch year was a little tougher than he anticipated.

Dave Barrett had unexpectedly called a general election late in 1975 and we arrived in the midst of the turnover from NDP to Social Credit governments. Emotions were raw and the mood was fractious, even by Legislature standards.

We were assigned caucuses by a draw, rather than by choice as today. I think there was some puzzlement on both sides of the House as to who we were and what should be done with us in terms of useful assignments. Today, assignments are well established and structured but there was a lot to be learned all around in 1976.

Happily the program survived a few bumps and has been a fixture of the spring session of the Legislature for 40 years.

For me, the Legislature has been like the Eagles' "Hotel California": "You can check out but you can never leave."

~ George Abbott



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This just in ... women out-work men

ISLAMABAD, PAKISTAN (The Express Tribune)
– Despite having just 20 per cent representation in the Pakistani parliament, female lawmakers initiated nearly half of the agenda in the upper and lower legislative houses in the past year.

Women have a combined strength of 89 members in both houses of parliament. There are 70 female lawmakers in the National Assembly of 342. In the Senate, there are 19 female legislators of 104 members.

But these 89 women have proved their political capabilities and competence are superior to their male counterparts and their interest in parliamentary business is undisputedly unmatched.

From executive oversight through questions and calling-attention notices, to motions on issues of public importance and private member legislation, these female parliamentarians have contributed actively in the legislative business throughout the current term.



Pakistani Parliament

A comparative analysis of the orders of the day of the National Assembly between June 1, 2015 to February 26, 2016, and the Senate between March 12, 2015 and March 11, 2016, reveals that women contributed to more than 44 per cent of the agenda – almost three times the proportion of their representation.

According to the study by the Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN), women in the National Assembly sponsored or contributed to almost 60 per cent of the agenda during the reporting period.

You can't duck criticism in Brazil

SÃO PAULO (Reuters)
– If any symbol captures the anger of upper-middle class Brazilians who have taken to the streets to protest against President Dilma Rousseff, it is a giant yellow duck.



The 12-meter-high duck presides over Sao Paulo's Avenida Paulista, Brazil's economic nexus. The duck has also hit the sands of Copacabana Beach, a prime place to see and be seen in Rio de Janeiro.

Brazil's business leaders have adopted the duck to fight what they describe as the economic quackery of Rousseff, a leftist who is facing growing pressure to quit and who is struggling to pull the economy out of its deepest recession in 25 years.

"Enough of paying the duck," said Paulo Skaf, president of the Federation of Industries of the State of São Paulo. "To pay the duck" in Brazilian Portuguese means to unfairly pay for someone else's mistakes. The term's origin is unclear but the saying is common enough for the federation to employ it against what it sees as the failures of Rousseff's administration.

Leaked memo: Kazakhs fight leaks

KAZAKHSTAN - Kazakh officials and their visitors have to leave their smartphones at the door of government buildings in line with a new policy aimed at preventing leaks of sensitive documents, states a memo leaked to Reuters news agency.

The memo cites "increasingly frequent cases of confidential information being leaked through the WhatsApp mobile application" and instructs public servants to use only basic mobile devices with no cameras or Internet access, government sources told Reuters.

Leaked documents regularly appear in Kazakh media and recent examples include memos on privatization plans and state-owned companies' budget revisions related to steep currency devaluation.

Len Norris



"Income tax day always ruins his disposition for a whole year..."

An invitation to donate to the Hugh Curtis Memorial Fund

The Victoria Foundation looks forward to receiving donations to the Hugh Curtis Memorial Fund from all of Hugh's well wishers and friends.

By phone: Call 250-381-5532 to make a donation by credit card directly via the Victoria Foundation.

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- Click to indicate whether you want to donate now or monthly and you will be taken through the steps to make your donation.
- In the section for designation of your gift, click on the drop down menu to select the Hugh Curtis Memorial Fund.
- You may pay with VISA, MasterCard, American Express, Interac or through a PayPal account.
- After you pay for your gift, CanadaHelps.org will send you an online receipt.
- There are several privacy permissions available. If you choose to include your name and address in the information which is sent to the Victoria Foundation, the Association will be pleased to acknowledge your gift.

If you have any questions about how to make a donation to the Victoria Foundation, please contact Sara Neely, Director of Philanthropic Services, at 250-381-5532 or sneely@victoriafoundation.bc.ca

Member News

Please send news about your activities to oold.afmlabc@gmail.com for the next newsletter.

Where Are They Now?

Each issue we ask a former Member of the Legislative Assembly a series of questions. What drew them to public service; what lessons have they taken away; and, most important, what are they doing now.



In this issue we put Anne Edwards in the hot seat. She served as the NDP MLA for Kootenay from 1986 to 1996. She was the first female Minister for Energy Mines and Petroleum Resources in the government of former premier Michael Harcourt.

1. What prompted you to seek public office?

I grew up in a political family. I married a political husband. Even two of my sons ran for office.

I did not belong to a political party while I worked as a journalist, full term or freelance, but when I worked at the local college, my colleagues recognized my political interests. When Premier Bill Bennett announced "the Restraint Program", they and a core of local activists talked me into running, offering me their strong support in the mechanics of the project.

2. Which political figure most influenced you?

My dad was a diehard Tory, a friend of John Diefenbaker. All Diefenbaker's best qualities were clear to me, and I admired what he did. But, I also admired Lester Pearson. When I first worked in media - in Saskatchewan - Tommy Douglas was premier, and he joined the cast of significant politicians. Later in life, I got to know Pauline Jewett, whom I admired for her abilities, her common sense and her sense of humour.

3. Was it hard making the transition from private life to public life?

Not particularly. I was ready to move on from the college and most of my working life I'd been covering politicians, interviewing them for newspapers, radio and television. I was familiar with many of the issues that

politicians wrangled. My youngest child had just left home, so I enjoyed the new aspect for my life.

4. What was your biggest challenge returning to private life?

Booking my own airline tickets! Well, no. But, I recognized some of the luxuries of the support MLAs have, particularly those of us who serve in cabinet.

5. What was the biggest lesson that has stuck with you since being an MLA?

How hard it is to govern well. Take the infinite variety of the people involved, the parties they form, the places they represent, the interests of many organized groups, and put that together with those who want much but give little, those who give and give, and those who believe somehow they deserve a well-adjusted world no matter what they offer - and you have hard work ahead.

One specific I learned was that involving as many people as possible is the hardest way to manage difficult problems, and it is the best, if not the only, way to reach real compromise/solution.

6. Tell us a bit about your active or part-time professional interests?

I am, essentially, a writer. I worked in reporting and editing most of my life. When I was a college instructor, I taught literature and communication. As an MLA - well, you know.

Since I left office, I wrote a book, wrote the main body of another, edited a newsletter, and have contributed to various writing projects.

7. Finally ... pet projects? Hobbies?

My activities revolve around history and community organizations: for example, I still work with outreach programs of the Columbia Basin Trust. I sometimes knit while I watch TV so I have something concrete to do. And I have regular lunches or coffees with good friends.

The Association welcomes Douglas Horne

Orders of the Day is pleased to welcome **Douglas Horne** as a new member of the Association family.



First elected MLA for the riding of Coquitlam-Burke Mountain in 2009, Doug was re-elected in 2013. He resigned his seat in 2015. He served as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier. He has also served on the Provincial Treasury Board and the Legislative Review Committee, and was Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government

Services, Deputy Chair of the Select Standing Committee for Public Accounts and a member of the Select Standing Committee for Children and Youth.

Doug was appointed Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Assembly in June 2013. In addition, he was Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole, Chair of the Committee of Supply, a member of the BC Local Government Elections Task Force, a member of the Special Committee to Review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and a member of the Special Committee to Appoint a Merit Commissioner.

Before entering politics, Doug was Managing Director and CEO of Maple Leaf Studios Ltd., a leading international design and production studio that created innovative and engaging experiences for international themed attractions, world fairs and expos, visitor centres and destination resorts. He was instrumental in the success of the British Columbia – Canada Place (the log house) during the 2006 Winter Games in Torino, Italy.

Letters

To OOTD:

I am very pleased to enclose my cheque for continued subscription to one of the very best publications available.

I am now retired from the practice of law - but not from enjoying political discourse and reminisces.

Cheers,
Michael Coleman,
Duncan

Brian:

Keep up the good work!

Thank you,
Olga Ilich
Richmond

Dear Brian:

Please find my cheque for my 2016 dues along with my completed survey. I enjoy keeping up with my former colleagues via our informative newsletter.

Keep up the good work.

Brian Kerr,
West Vancouver

Dear Brian:

Time it is, to offer our thanks for the Association and for the superb newsletter, and some extra to be applied wherever it may be needed.

Special thanks for your publicity regarding the passing of Norm Levi. Without what you did, I am afraid it would have gone into oblivion unnoticed. As it is, Lorne had someone comment about Norm in the waiting room of our ophthalmologist in Trail - a man who had no connection with Norm other than interest.

As it was, he got a good sendoff from his friends, and a recognition of the place Beth held in his life.

Thank you.

Yours truly,
Frances Nicolson,
Nelson

We welcome your letters - you can mail them to:

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Victoria, B.C. V8N 6J3

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The “Khaki Election” of BC’s WW1 hero

By Jack Silverstone
Executive Director (just retired)
Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians

When I first became aware of the extraordinary military and political career of Lieutenant-Colonel Cyrus Peck and read the book *Cy Peck, V.C., A Biography of a Legendary Canadian* by his son Edward Peck, I was intrigued by the notion of someone being elected to the House of Commons while out of the country; in this case while serving on the battlefield during the First World War.

I discovered that the federal election of 1917 was sometimes referred to as a “khaki election” and, in all, eight members were elected under the Unionist or Liberal banner while serving overseas. In addition to Cyrus Peck, who was the only sitting member of Parliament in the British Commonwealth to be awarded the Victoria Cross, at least two other names stand out as Canadian firsts, albeit unhappy ones:

Lt.-Col. George Harold Baker, to whom there is a monument in Centre Block, was elected as a Conservative member for Brome, Quebec in 1911. He volunteered for active duty while retaining his seat in the House. Unfortunately he was killed at the age of 39, making him the only sitting Canadian MP who died in action during the First World War.

Lt.-Col. Samuel Sharpe was a lawyer and member of Parliament, first elected in 1908 in what is now Ontario’s Durham region. He served overseas, seeing action at Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele, all the while maintaining his seat in Parliament. He was re-elected in absentia in 1917, making him the only MP returned to the House of Commons while serving on the battlefields of Europe. He survived the war, but died soon after in sad circumstances at a Montreal hospital.

In this khaki election, military personnel were given the right to vote, regardless of their period of residence in Canada, by virtue of the Military Voters Act of 1917. A military voter would cast his ballot for the current government or the opposition. If the constituency in which the voter resided at the time of his or her enlistment was specified, that was where the ballots were counted. Failing this, the governing party would assign the vote to a riding.

The Military Voters Act along with the 1917 Wartime Elections Act had an important impact on women’s voting rights in this country. These two pieces of legislation enfranchised women who were British subjects and on active service for Canada and women who were British subjects ordinarily residing in Canada who were on active service for Great Britain or an ally, (including Aboriginal people) all until demobilization.



Cy Peck

Also included were women who were related as a wife, widow, mother, sister or daughter of a person in the military, who served or was serving with Canada or Great Britain, but again only until demobilization. These women were given the right to vote as a result of these wartime measures prior to the Act to confer the Electoral Franchise upon Women, which took effect in January 1919.

(Editor’s note: Lieutenant Colonel Cyrus Wesley Peck was a teenager when his father moved the family to New Westminster from New Brunswick in the late 1800s. When First World War began Peck was in Prince Rupert working in a salmon cannery. In 1917, he was a soldier candidate elected in the khaki election as a Unionist for the riding of Skeena. In 1924, he was elected to the BC Legislature representing The Islands for the BC Conservative Party. Following his political career he was appointed to the Canadian Pension Commission until 1941. He died in 1956 at age 85 and is buried at New Westminster. His Victoria Cross is displayed at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.)