

March, 2009

First World War Digitization Project Completed

In late March, 2009, the Archives launched its most recent digitization project, entitled “Elgin’s Great War: Sources on the First World War from The Holdings of the Elgin County Archives.” This project, made possible through the financial support of the Canadian Culture Online Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage, Library and Archives Canada, and the Canadian Council of Archives, provides searchable online access to more than 3000 photographs, documents and objects relating to Elgin County’s contributions to Canada’s First World War effort. The successful completion of this project is directly attributable to the support the Archives has received from Elgin County Council, the Elgin County Museum and our community partners the 31 Combat Engineer Regiment (The Elgins), and is a testament to the excellence of the work of digitization assistant Jan Row.

The project website can be viewed by clicking on the “Explore Our First World War Resources” link on the Archives’ website at www.elgincounty.ca. Highlights include more than 500 portrait photographs of Elgin County soldiers and their families from the Scott Studio fonds, most of which we have been able to link to corresponding records in Library and Archives Canada’s collection of First World War attestation papers.



Corporal Wallace Antill and family, 1916.
Scott Studio fonds, Box 149, N # 6916.

Another highlight is a wonderful series of drawings and letters sent from the front lines in France by the Canadian war artist H.W. Cooper to Ella Lewis, a past executive member of the Elgin Historical Society who at the time of her correspondence with Cooper was acting as a representative of a local service club that had undertaken to prepare and supply care packages for the troops overseas. Cooper served with the Canadian Expeditionary Force at most of the major battles on the western front from 1915 to war's end and his drawings and letters provide a wonderfully detailed account of daily life on the front lines.



H.W. Cooper fonds,
C3 Sh6 B2 F16a.

One of the most rewarding aspects of this project was the overwhelming interest and support we received from local organizations and individuals who volunteered records for inclusion in the project. For example, the Rodney, Ontario branch of the Royal Canadian Legion generously allowed us to include a unique collection of photograph portraits of Rodney-area men who served in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

To add contextual depth and significance to the records digitized for this project, we included a detailed series of education resources focusing on elementary school children which teachers can use to bring the First World War to life for their students using documents and images that tell the story of Elgin County's involvement in and contributions to the war effort. These resources are freely available from the project website and include complete lesson plans and student



activities, along with grade-specific expectations taken directly from the Ontario Ministry of Education curriculum for Grades 1 to 8. Lesson plans in visual arts, drama, language and social studies are available and usually include ready-to-copy student assignments and marking guidelines. The education resources component of the project was designed and completed by Julie Berry, a County resident who is a retired elementary school teacher, artist and award-winning radio documentary producer.

Preserving the memory of the service and sacrifice of Canadians during the First World War, particularly that of veterans, is a matter of paramount cultural significance and importance for Canadians. This record of service and sacrifice is a central component in Canada's cultural heritage, and we hope that our project will in a small way contribute to its preservation and strengthening by digitizing, publishing and interpreting records that reveal the extraordinary depth and breadth of contributions by Elgin County individuals, families, organizations, businesses and governments to Canada's First World War effort.