

THE WORLD REMEMBERS

The recent proposal to designate an area of central Kingston as a “valour district” reminds us of the impulse to remember those who perished in World War I. This urge has become more pressing as the centenaries of the terrible war are now upon us.

Kingston has an abundance of war memorials and streets named for battles. Most have stood in our public spaces for decades. City Park features three war memorials with the 1925 Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire monument just across King Street. The green space is dotted with artillery pieces. The new Memorial Wall at the Veterans Memorial Garden reflects a more contemporary mode of commemoration most famously expressed in Washington’s the Vietnam Veterans Memorial: the names of the dead etched onto a human scale, low wall, easily read. The polished stone offers viewers a reflection of their own image as they look at the names of those killed, thus linking past and present. In 2013, the Kingston group PeaceQuest, anticipating WW I centennial commemoration, installed a granite marker beneath a century oak tree in City Park on the United Nations’ International Peace Day. Its bilingual inscription reads “Grieving the tragedy of war, Committed to the promise of peace.”

These markers are just that. Physical objects. They stand in permanent, mute testimony to the war’s dreadful human toll.

With the WW I centenaries now upon us, a unique Canadian-initiated project is offering an innovative and poignant opportunity to commemorate the loss of life in 1914-1918. *The World Remembers* (TWR) is the brainchild of the prominent Canadian actor R.H. Thomson. The Great War claimed five of his great uncles.

TWR www.theworldremembers.org is collecting the names of as many of the WW I dead as it can. At each annual anniversary of the war years, it will display the names on its website. Moreover, the project is organizing cities, towns, schools, faith communities, museums, libraries, communities and veterans groups to display the names using software developed specifically for TWR. Registered organizations will receive the name-display software and technical guides for the projection of the names. They can then be presented on anything from a tablet to a large outdoor wall. The start date for 2015 will be established by July 30 when the name database from participating nations has been completed.

“**The World Remembers** offers a powerful reminder that the Great War was, first and foremost, a human tragedy,” explains Canadian historian Jonathan Vance of Western University. “To see all those names is to appreciate that behind every one of them is a life and a story, one perhaps not so very different from another.”

This world response to a world war asks us to witness the names of all those who died. TWR is about remembrance, education and international understanding. It explains its principles as “**equality, universality and accessibility.**” The power of software allows the display of each man or woman, making the names *accessible* wherever there is an internet connection. The project

will be presented in the languages of all participating nations regardless of language or location, reflecting the *universality* of the approach. *Equality* – after a century there is equality in death.

This citizen initiated commemoration initiative presents the City of Kingston with an opportunity to commemorate the tragedy of WW I while promoting the universal values that underpin The World Remembers. It would complement and, indeed, add to the city's physical memorials. TWR would serve as a dynamic reminder of the tragedy of war in 2015 and on until the centenary of the peace in 1918. It would be a low-cost way of honouring the past while anticipating the years ahead with hope and understanding.