

Saint-Lambert Cenotaph

A monument to a city's proud history

Catherine Brigden

How many people walk past the statue of soldier in Mercille Park every day without even giving it a second glance? Few are probably aware that the 90-year-old monument was crafted by one of the country's most illustrious sculptors and designers—one whose work we carry

around in our pockets every day—or that it was dedicated by a Canadian general many still consider to be the country's greatest military commander of all time, or that it pays tribute to the fallen sons of a city that had one of the highest enlistment rates in the nation for both world wars.

When the Great War broke out in 1914, more than 300 of Saint-Lambert's

young men—a remarkable 10% of the city's total population at the time—enlisted for active military service overseas. By the time the fighting was over, 60 of them had lost their lives on the battlefields.

In July 1919, eight months after the war had ended and with Saint-Lambert still grieving the loss of so many of its sons, a committee of citizens came together to plan a fitting tribute to those who had made the ultimate sacrifice. The committee's 21 members, who included then mayor Edward Fergus Gordon, city engineer Ernest Drinkwater, municipal councillors, citizen benefactors and veterans—and General Sir Arthur Currie, who had been Corps Commander of the whole Canadian Army in North West Europe, as honorary president—decided to erect a Saint-Lambert Soldiers' Memorial. A vote was held and

Mercille Park was chosen as the site for the new monument.

The following spring, the City commissioned the Thomson Monument Co. of Toronto and its chief designer, the German-born Canadian sculptor and coin designer Emanuel Otto Hahn, to build the monument for the sum of \$10,000—the equivalent of \$100,000 today.

Hahn, one of the leading sculptors in Canada at the time for war memorials and civic monuments, would later go on to earn greater notability as the designer of the Canadian dime, with its Bluenose schooner sculpted on the back, the 25-cent piece with the caribou head, and the old silver dollar coin depicting the iconic voyageur canoe scene.

In January 1922, Hahn delivered Saint-Lambert's monument, which features a life-like bronze statue of a World War I soldier, rifle in hand, climbing over a parapet, with sandbags by his feet, carved into the granite base. Engraved on the monument are the names of the 60 fallen heroes and maple leaf, sword and Victorian cross emblems. Under the main block were sealed in a field gun brass cartridge case a list of the names of the men in whose memory the monument is erected, a copy of the dedication, the names of the committee members,

City councillors and clerk, a summary of the proceedings that brought the monument into existence, and the ballot papers from the vote for the site. On the ground surrounding the monument are six large blocks indicating the names of the World War I battle sites.

That summer, on July 9, the Saint-Lambert Soldiers' Memorial Committee donated the monument to the City and an official inauguration ceremony, presided by General Sir Arthur Currie, was held in Mercille Park. According to a news story that appeared in the Montreal Gazette the following day, the ceremony drew about 3,000 citizens from Saint-Lambert, other South Shore municipalities and Montreal.

In his speech, General Currie stated that it was "a touching demonstration of how a few can serve and be of such great benefit to many thousands. It is well that you should in this manner perpetuate the heroism of those who gave their lives that you might live."

Today, the Saint-Lambert Cenotaph, as it is now known, also includes a black granite plaque—erected in 2007 to replace the earlier one stolen from the monument—to honour the 72 Saint-Lambert citizens who lost their lives in World War II (1935-1945).

Cérémonie du Jour du Souvenir
11 novembre 2012

La cérémonie du Jour du Souvenir à Saint-Lambert aura lieu dimanche le 11 novembre à 14 h dans le Parc Mercille. Le défilé partira du stationnement de la Maison Desaulniers, 574 rue Notre-Dame. Les citoyens de la Ville de Saint-Lambert

sont cordialement invités à se joindre aux membres de la Légion royale canadienne pour se recueillir et prier à la mémoire de nos combattants morts au Champ d'Honneur.

Remembrance Day
11 November 2012

The Remembrance Ceremony in Saint-Lambert will take place on Sunday, November 11, at 2 p.m. in Mercille Park. The parade will form up in the parking lot behind

Maison Desaulniers.

The citizens of the City of Saint-Lambert are cordially invited to join the members of the Royal Canadian Legion for remembrance and prayers in the memory of those who died in the service of our country.

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Proud to wear a poppy

Alison Digby O'Brien

Alison Digby O'Brien was born and raised in Saint-Lambert and now makes her home near Dublin, Ireland.

Every year, for as long as I can remember, I have proudly worn a poppy on my coat from Halloween to November 11. For me, the poppy is a symbol of what so many young men and women gave up for the life that I have today.

When I was little and in elementary school, I can remember lining up in the main hallway at 11:11 on the 11th of November, proudly wearing my poppy on my clothes and observing a minute of silence. It really didn't mean very much at that age.

In high school it got a little more formal; there was an assembly in the auditorium, and there would be a sole trumpeter and a line of veterans—I'm sure led by Mr. McLean, one of the most senior teachers in the school.

I think the fact that by the time I graduated from high school I was the same age of many of the men who had given their lives at war—whether they wanted to or not—was starting to make me appreciate our veterans and develop a new respect for the date as well.

After high school, through university and working in the hospital, I continued to purchase my poppy from the veteran on the corner, at the grocery store or in the shop—normally several times a season because I often lost them or left it on another coat. The opportunity to look into the eyes of someone who had witnessed horror that

I couldn't imagine and say thank you—whether for simply the poppy or what they had given up to stand there that day—made it important enough for me to keep buying them.

And then the depictions of the various war situations started to become popular in the cinema: Saving Private Ryan and the opening sequence, which left me nauseous and in tears, was hard to fathom; television series like Band of Brothers brought you inside the lives of the young men and their experiences. It was hard from then on to think of Remembrance Day and not see a few of those images and imagine what they had witnessed.

To this day, I wear my poppy, even here in Ireland. Granted, I don't have the same yearly experience of buying my poppy over and over; instead, I keep it safe and pull it out at Halloween every year. I have a spare—somewhere—and have added a small Canadian flag as the pin to make it that little more secure. This way, I have less chance of losing it as it would be much harder to replace.

I wear my poppy with pride, with the memory of the very young men—now younger than myself—who stepped up when they may not have wanted to, did not understand what they were to experience, and gave so very much for the people of today. My pride is not political. It's neither pro-war nor propaganda; it's a recognition to men and women, young and old, that what they went through means something to me every day—but especially on November 11.

La mascarade se poursuit
jusqu'au 7 novembre

Le vernissage de l'exposition Mascarade est tombé à point, le dimanche 28 octobre, pour ajouter de la couleur à une journée plutôt grisâtre.

Exposition de circonstance pour l'artiste-peintre Marie-Andrée Leblond, Mascarade se poursuit à la galerie Le balcon d'art jusqu'au 7 novembre prochain.

Née le 6 juin 1978 à St-Jean-sur-Richelieu, elle fait son entrée définitive sur le marché de l'art à l'âge de 19 ans, peu de temps après avoir remporté le

prix du public du Printemps Art-Visuel de Brossard, qui lui a permis d'attirer l'attention de la galerie Clarence Gagnon.

Marie-Andrée Leblond a commencé à s'intéresser au dessin dès l'âge de douze ans et a débuté son apprentissage de la peinture à l'huile vers quatorze ans, en autodidacte. Après un diplôme en arts visuels au cégep du Vieux-Montréal, elle poursuit ses études en illustration au Collège Sallette.

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