

~HERITAGE CORNER

Information on Township residents who served in world War 1

By Bonnie Stevenson

The World War I exhibit now being developed at the Sombra Museum is a poignant reminder of the many lives that were lost in the "Great War". Over 600,000 Canadians enlisted to fight and 60,000 paid the ultimate price for their efforts.

The former Moore and Sombra Townships, now St. Clair Township, were not spared the anguish of this loss. Allan Anderson, a museum volunteer and member of St. Clair Township Heritage, says a search is now being undertaken by the Sombra Museum to discover the names and stories of township residents who served in WWI. "We want to identify every man and woman who served," he said. "We have been able to find background information through the Library and Archives Canada by getting Attestation papers (enlistment documents)." He says the search is hampered from the fact that many of these documents have yet to be digitized and are not readily available online.

The project has been underway in earnest for a few months, but Mr. Anderson says Sombra Museum volunteer Catherine Bouman has been searching for about 10 years.

So far, the search has yielded information about 250 local individuals. For some, the information is sparse and requires a lot more investigation, and for others, there is an entire story that brings these brave souls alive. The stories are the things that will give these people a voice from beyond the grave. "We want to create a database about who they were, who their families were, where they signed up and where they served," he said. "We'd like a photo, if possible, and a story about them, one that makes them unique from everyone else."

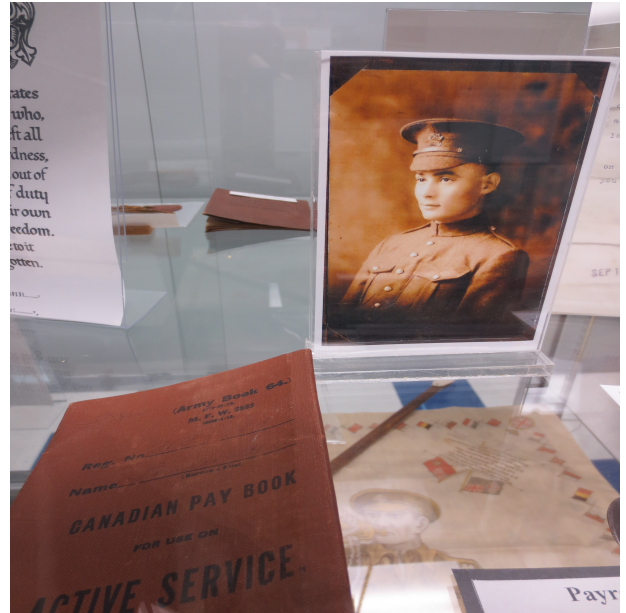
One story that illustrates how interesting a soldier's story can be is to be found in the service story of two brothers - Sgt. Fred Moran and Pte. Gordon Moran. They grew up on a farm in Sombra Township, but after their father died, their mother, a Moore Township woman, moved them back to her childhood community of Courtright.

Fred enlisted in 1915 and served with the 7th Canadian Mounted Rifles. He was injured in Ypres and was on administrative duty the rest of the war. When he returned home, he married, then became a sailor. He lived in Moore Township and died in 1971,

Gordon's enlistment was accomplished during the excitement of a military parade. The soldiers of Lambton County's own *Lambton 149th* staged a recruiting drive that saw them march from Sarnia down to Sombra and back to Sarnia. *In modern terms, this would make it the first St. Clair Trail River Run, only in army boots.*

Sombra Museum seeks WWI items

World War I items, memorabilia or stories are being sought for the Sombra Museums's new exhibit to commemorate the 100th anniversary of "the war to end all wars". Call 519-892-3982 for more information.



Caught up in the excitement of the moment, Gordon enlisted right there. The *Lambton 149th* was a replacement battalion used to replace wounded or dead soldiers in other battalions. During his service overseas with the *2nd Pioneers*, Gordon was a victim of an enemy mustard gas attack. The painful and destructive effects of the gas made it necessary for Gordon to return home to recover in 1917, but he died 10 years later in London from pulmonary tuberculosis. He is buried in St. John's Cemetery in Sombra.

Every person, no matter how mundane a life they may believe they lead, has a good story to tell. Those who fight in the name of their country and for the safety of their families, friends, and neighbours, deserve to be heard even when they no longer have a voice to speak.

The Sombra Museum project seeks to give every WWI serviceman and woman the voice they deserve. Anyone with information about a local WWI veteran can contact Allan at: aander@xcelco.on.ca or call the Sombra Museum at 519-892-3982.

Band organ will herald Sombra Museum opening

The Wurlitzer band organ is coming to the St. Clair Parkway on Saturday, May 17 to mark the season opening of the Sombra Museum. Beginning at 10am, this old beauty will entertain in downtown Corunna before proceeding to Mooretown and Courtright. It will arrive in Sombra at 2pm, where there will be refreshments offered at the museum, and it will end its musical journey in Port Lambton. Don't miss it!

