



# VICTORIA HIGH SCHOOL Alumni News

B U L L E T I N

S P R I N G 2 0 1 2

## Trees of Remembrance, Avenue of Sacrifice

Two articles by Dr. Barry Gough  
(VHS 1956 and staff member 1964-1965)



Planting Vic High's memorial maple trees, April 1917

On 20 April 1917, just after the Battle of Vimy Ridge, fourteen maple trees were planted on the

grounds of Victoria High School, flanking both sides of the Vining Street entrance. Because of their

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## The Kitchener Memorial Oak



Kitchener Memorial Oak in 2012

On 20 April 1917, the Kitchener Memorial Oak was dedicated on the grounds of Victoria High School on Grant Street, midway between Fernwood and Camosun. One of the great heritage trees of Canada and the Commonwealth, it was planted to commemorate the life of Field Marshal Earl Kitchener of Khartoum. He was a British Field Marshal well known for his Imperial campaigns, and one of the most famous and highly decorated soldiers of his age.

Horatio Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916), First Earl Kitchener, was born in Ireland into a military family and given a military education. He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1871, fought in Egyptian and Sudan campaigns, and became famous in 1898 when he led a Nile expedition that overwhelmed Mahdist forces at Omdurman. He later served in South Africa and India as Commander-in-Chief of British forces

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New memorial maple trees planted and rededicated in the fall of 2011

role as the first and one of the longest-lived avenues of memorial trees in Canada, the story of the Vining Street maples is an important part of Canadian military history.

Three teachers and 53 students of Victoria High School died on the fields of France and Flanders in the Great War of 1914-1918, now called the World War I. Many others came home maimed, crippled, or suffering battle exhaustion, shock and psychological injury. The school took pride in its eleven military crosses and seven military medals, and female students served in nursing units. Yet from the very first, it mourned every casualty as the loss of a flower of its generation. The war memorials in Vic High's entry hall and the photographs of the fallen in the school Archives tell of heroic and

unselfish sacrifice in the cause of Canada and the British Empire, who with the Allies fought against Imperial Germany and the Central Powers, leading finally to the Armistice of 1918.

At the time the trees were planted, the war was far from over: 19 months of hard fighting lay ahead, and victory and peace were by no means assured. But Victoria High School, the city and the province did not wait until the Armistice of 1918 to memorialize the fallen. The Second Battle of Ypres, in Flanders, Belgium, was on minds of those who followed the war and recorded our school's losses. The desperate and heroic actions by the Canadian Expeditionary Force at Ypres earned it universal respect and undying fame. On that occasion, the enemy used poison gas on the battlefield for the first time. The Germans commenced their assault on 22 April 1915, with high losses on both sides. By battle's end the 1st Canadian Division had suffered 6000 killed.

To commemorate the second anniversary of Canadian sacrifice in the Second Battle of Ypres, the closest Friday to the date of this battle was selected to plant the Vining Street maples. The date was 20 April 1917. The Women's Canadian Club, who donated the trees, also organized the ceremony. Active in the planting and dedication were Principal A.G. Smith, the School Board, and the school's Cadet Corps. Music was supplied by the 5th (BC) Regiment Band, now known as the 5th (BC) Field Regiment Royal Canadian Artillery Band. A combined schools choir under Mr. Pollard sang out "O Canada." A musical piece called "Canada's Song of Freedom," with words composed by



Cadet Inspection Day on the Vic High grounds, May 1920

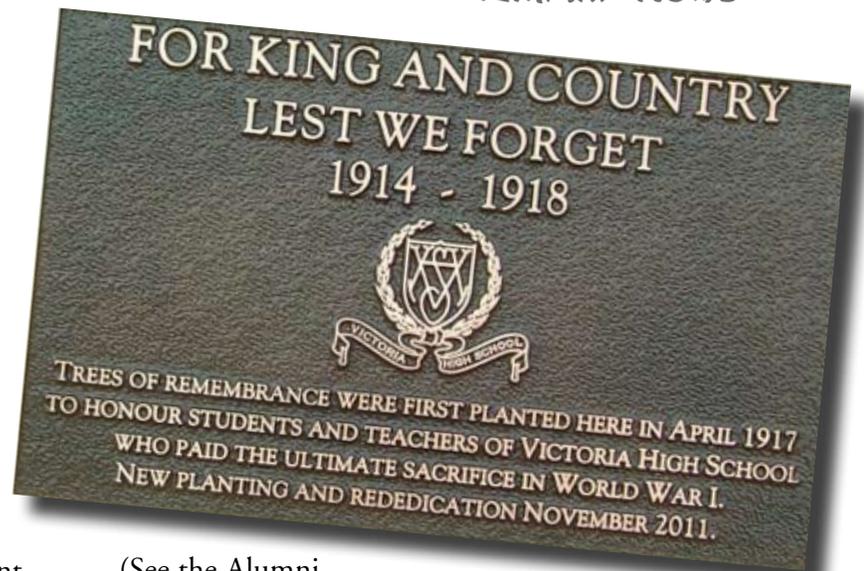
Wellington Dowler, was planned but finally not performed because the heavy, wet weather kept many choristers away.

Prominent in planting the memorial trees were Mrs. Margaret Jenkins, a School Trustee; H.C. Brewster, Premier of British Columbia; John Cochrane, President of the Canadian Club; and Miss Burris, President of the University Women's Club. The school's staff and students all attended, as did Lieutenant-Governor Sir Francis Barnard, with the High School Cadets forming his Guard of Honour. Nearly 2500 braved the elements for the ceremony, which was concluded with another dedication: the Kitchener Memorial Oak, planted nearby on Grant Street (see p. 1).

The Reverend Captain Campbell, the Military Chaplain, delivered the invocation. A local newspaper reported his words as "thanking God for the beautiful country in which they were privileged to live, a country in which all enjoyed civic and religious liberty. The Empire had held unswervingly to the principle of contending against tyranny, despotism and oppression. Might the day soon come when war might cease and matters of international dispute be settled in other manner than by the sword." The drapery of mourning, he said, was spread in many Victoria homes. The dear ones mourned had given life for the freedom of mankind, and he hoped they would "uplift the future generations by the memory of their sacrifice." Then he turned his attention to the trees as living symbols of the victory of life over death. "These trees now being planted would grow up a living memorial to the gallant young men who had passed through the High School and gone on to death in championing so great a cause." They were, he said, an example of sacrifice not to be forgotten, but to be remembered forever.

That these were maple trees, with their own Canadian symbolism, was not lost on anyone. The *Victoria Daily Times* put it this way: "An avenue of tall young maple trees ... will bear leaf in a few weeks. While they arrest the notice of the passer-by they will suggest to his inward eye the picture of the boy-students who once gathered with their fellow students in this Alma Mater, but who now lie, heroes of Empire, beneath the sod of France [and Belgium]."

In November 2011, another ceremony was held at Vic High to replant and rededicate these memorial trees.



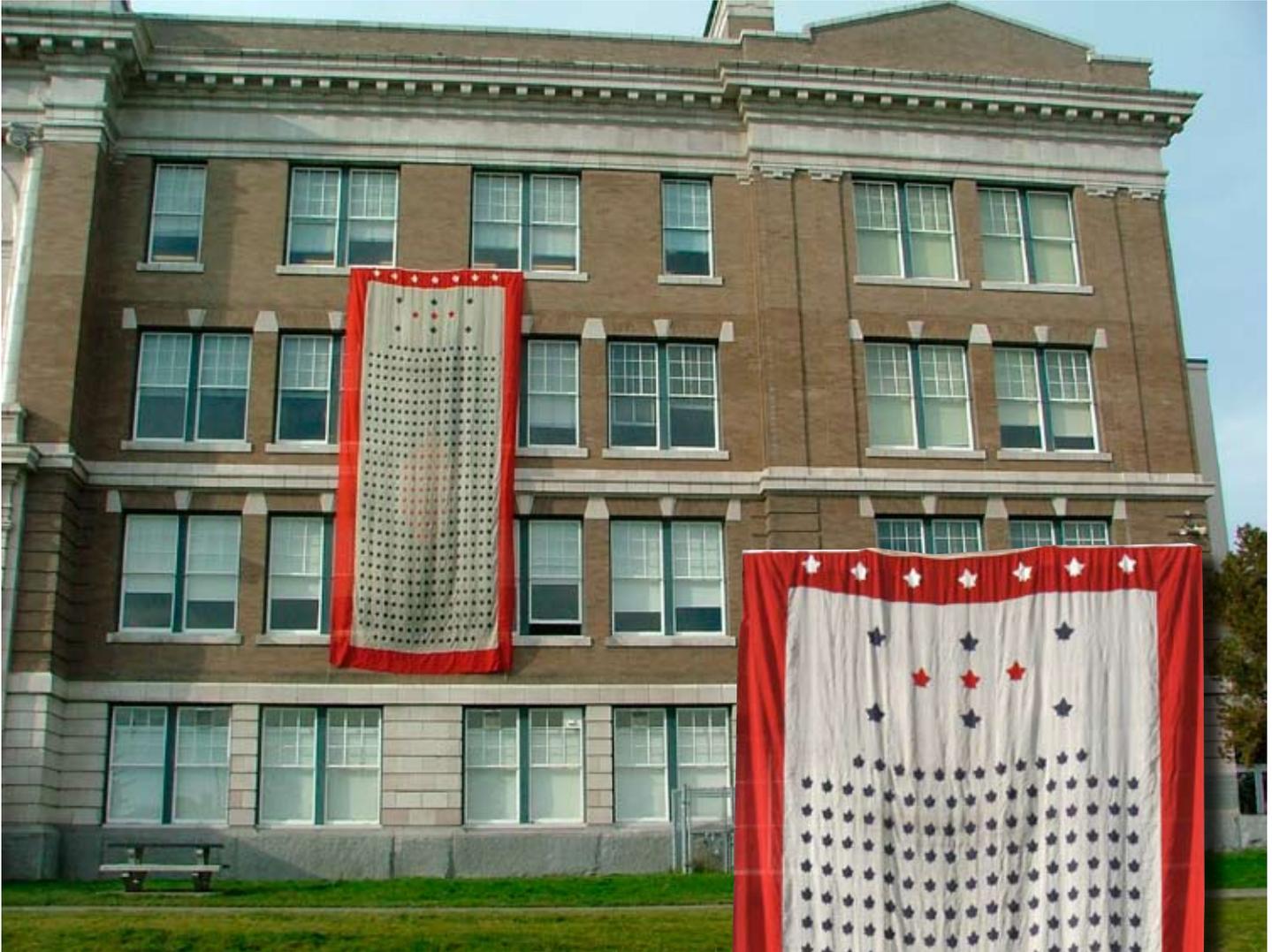
(See the Alumni newsletter, 2012, for story and photos.)

It was a moving community celebration on a brilliantly sunny day, in contrast to the original plantings in 1917. These Vining Street memorial maples have served as a model throughout Canada for other "Roads of Remembrance" and related commemorations of war sacrifices and pledges of peace.

*You can use Google Maps to see the original avenue of memorial maples: search for the intersection of Vining and Fernwood, then click on Street View.*



Cadets lay a Remembrance Day wreath at one of the new memorial maples, November 2011



## VIC HIGH'S MEMORIAL BANNER

*On 10 November 2011, at the ceremony to rededicate the Vining Street memorial maples, this banner was displayed hanging from the east facade of the school, as it was originally displayed in 1920. Originally donated to the school by the Victoria Women's Canadian Club, it remained in storage for many years before being rediscovered and displayed in 2004 and 2011.*

*Each hand-sewn maple leaf represents a Vic High teacher or student who joined and served in World War I. The larger ones represent teachers, and the smaller ones represent students. The red ones represent people who lost their lives in the war, and the blue ones represent those who returned.*



Continued from page 1 (Kitchener)

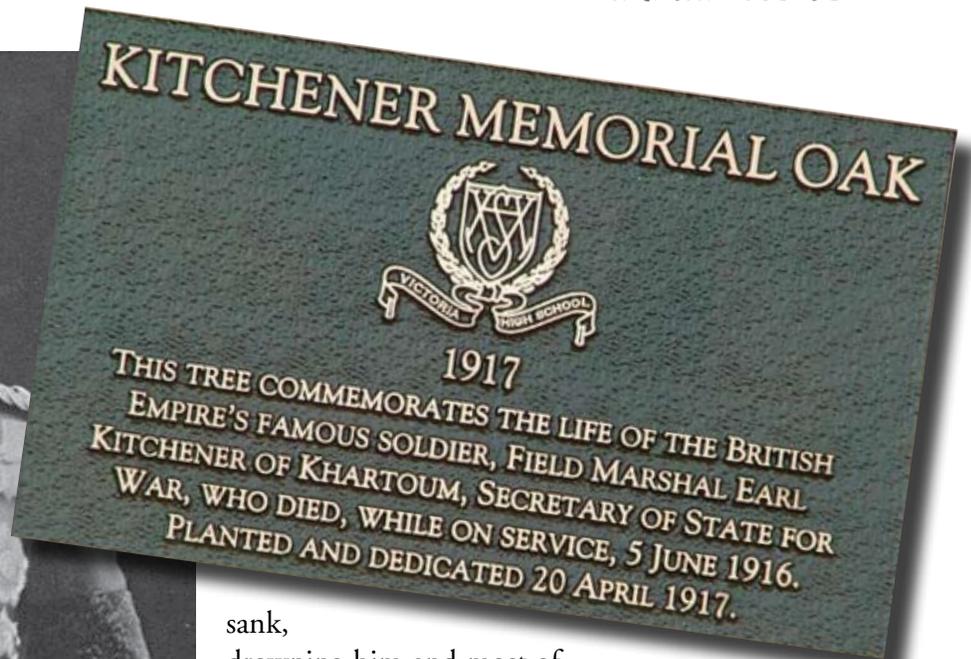


Field Marshal Earl Kitchener

there. He was an indefatigable organizer who understood the necessity of consolidating resources before striking a decisive blow in the field.

In 1914, at the start World War I, Lord Kitchener became Secretary of State for War, and as such was supreme commander of the allied land forces. One of the few men to foresee a long war, one in which Britain's victory was far from secure, he organized the largest volunteer army that Britain had ever seen, and expanded production of armaments and other wartime requirements. Already a famous military figure, Kitchener allowed his commanding presence and luxuriant moustache to be used in a famous recruiting poster: its familiar message "Your Country Needs You" remains an enduring image even today. It had a powerful impact throughout the Empire, including of course in Victoria and throughout Canada.

On 5 June 1916 the British cruiser *Hampshire*, carrying Kitchener to Archangel for military conferences with Russia, an ally, struck a mine off the Orkneys and



sank,

drowning him and most of the ship's company. The death of the Empire's greatest soldier was a stunning blow to the Allied cause in its desperate and not yet victorious struggle against Imperial Germany and the Central Powers.

Of the dedication of the tree, the *Victoria Daily Times* reported: "A little company of Old Campaigners, bearing two standards, gathered round while the Kitchener tree was planted, the band playing 'Rule Britannia.' 'I have the honor to plant this oak in memory of Lord Kitchener, under whom I served in the Egyptian campaign of 1882 and in the Soudan in 1885,' said S.J. Pomeroy, 50th Royal West Kent Regiment, of the British Campaigners' Association, who planted the Kitchener Memorial Oak. The tree was grown and given by Walter Bernie Anderson, of Oak Bay."

In the years since, the Kitchener Memorial Oak has grown to be a venerable giant. It has been designated a Heritage Tree by the Victoria Horticultural Society, and the Vic High Alumni Association helped to create a new plaque that will mark its importance for generations to come.

*These two articles are based on details provided in Peter L. Smith's Come Give a Cheer! One Hundred Years of Victoria High School, 1876-1976 (1976); and "Trees in Honor of Heroes of Empire: Citizens and School Children Attend Impressive Memorial Ceremony at High School," Victoria Daily Times, 21 April 1917.*

**Colour photos by Jim Buchan; vintage photos courtesy of Jack Wallis (VHS '43), Jim Buchan, and the Vic High Archives.**