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Bridge dedicated in honour of fallen Bancroft police officer



By Nate Smelle

Not thunder, lightning or torrential rain could prevent more than 150 community members from assembling in Cenotaph Park in downtown Bancroft to honour the life and service of Constable Thomas Kehoe on Saturday, July 25. Kehoe served the Bancroft community as a police officer more than 86 years ago after returning from the battlefield where he fought for Canada in World War One. While investigating a liquor violation near the corner of Hastings Street North and John Street in the town of Bancroft he was struck and killed by a drunk driver in 1929.

In recognition of his service to his country and his contribution to the community, the Station Street Bridge crossing the York River in town will from now on be known as the Constable Thomas Kehoe Memorial Bridge. As a gesture of respect, bridge dedications are intended to posthumously recognize police officers who have courageously and unselfishly given their lives in the line of duty "to preserve our free and peaceful society."

The Dedication Ceremony began at 2 p.m. to the tune of the North Hasting Highlanders Pipe and Drum band, who led the guests of honour who would be speaking on this day into the park space where a number of tents had been set up to provide shelter for the audience. In attendance were OPP personnel, members of Emergency Services and the Canadian Armed Forces, the Royal Canadian Legion, OPP Veterans, elected officials, the media, the Ontario Provincial Police Association, members of the community and 40 plus family members of Thomas Kehoe.

Deputy Commissioner of the OPP spoke during the ceremony, reminding the audience of the importance of recognizing police officers, like Thomas Kehoe, who have died serving their community.

?This bridge dedication is an important act of remembrance which will help preserve the memory of a fallen police officer,? he said. ?I did not have the privilege of knowing Constable Kehoe personally, but I certainly know of the important sacrifice he made. Constable Kehoe lost his life on duty long before many of us here were born, but he holds a place of honour and remains one of our own.?

A long list of local dignitaries also came forward to say a few words to pay their respects to the fallen officer. This list included: Member of Parliament Daryl Kramp, Member of Provincial Parliament Todd Smith, Warden of Hastings County Rick Phillips, Bancroft's Mayor Bernice Jenkins, and Kehoe's great grandson Dan Kehoe. Listening to the rumbling in the clouds overhead, Kehoe reflected on the similarity between the sound of the approaching storm and those his great-grandfather Thomas would have heard while fighting in the First World War.

?I am proud and very happy to know that my great grandfather is being honoured here today in such a fine fashion,? he said. ?I am joined here today by many other descendants of Thomas Kehoe's who I know are also proud to see Thomas's legacy live on.? Kehoe expressed his gratitude to everyone who came out to honour his Great Grandfather; sending out a special thanks to Thomas's granddaughter Yvonne Thompson, and his grandson Don Seymour.

?They are the real family historians and I credit them for resurrecting and keeping the story of Thomas's life alive. We owe them both, our gratitude for understanding the importance of Thomas's sacrifice so many years ago.?

While Kehoe was addressing the crowd the looming thunderstorm made its presence known drenching those outside the shelter of the tents, trees and umbrellas. In spite of the nasty weather the crowd remained to hear Kehoe honour his great grandfather.