

Wollaston museum receives special donation



Kelly and Todd Young have donated a yard sale find to Wollaston Heritage Centre in Coe Hill. A Royal Union Flag (known as Union Jack in Canada) brought back from the First World War by returning soldier in 1919. It's believed to be a battle flag. / JIM EADIE Special to This Week

By Jim Eadie

There is nothing Aspley's Todd and Kelly Young like better than a good yard sale. Several years ago, the couple stopped at a yard sale near Big Cedar where someone was clearing out a house and some sheds. A dumpster stood nearby to take away anything that did not sell. Rummaging through a steamer trunk in a back shed, they came across a gigantic Union Jack flag.

"I knew it was worth something? it was old," said Todd Young. "I could tell by the construction, and the moth holes in it. The vendor asked me where I pulled it from, and I told him. He shrugged? he told me to take it, or it was going in the dumpster."

Young refused to take it for free, and paid the man \$20.

Asking some questions, the Youngs learned that following the First World War, the flag had been brought back to Canada by a returning soldier from Lakefield named Arthur Earl Webster. The "Jack," as the flag is known in Canada, was the flag under which all Allied soldiers, including Canadians had served during the First World War, and the Youngs were told this was believed to be a battlefield flag.

Lakefield Historical Society (Lakefield War Veterans) has a large file on Arthur Earl Webster. In June 1917, following militia experience, 17-year-old Webster claimed successfully to be 18 years old, signed up for the Canadian Over Seas Expeditionary Force. January 1919 found Webster in Siberia awaiting some action mopping up Bolsheviks insurgents following the end of the war. In April the Canadians were sent to Vladivostok for an operation, but upon their arrival the Bolshevik's had retired, and not one shot was fired. Was the flag carried that day? Nobody knows now for sure.

Webster was overseas at the perfect time, as soldiers were being demobilized and packing to go home, they could now stuff mementos and collectible items in their bags and take them home.

The Youngs thought about their acquisition, and decided to loan the flag to Warriors Day at Coe Hill where it could be seen and appreciated. When the Warriors Days folded, a decision had to be made about the flag.

"We saved it from a dumpster for 20 bucks," said Todd Young. "We saved it, and that's the long and short of it."

"But we shouldn't keep it to ourselves," said Kelly Young. "It should be somewhere people can see it, and appreciate that piece of our history."

As a family, the Youngs have chosen to donate the flag to the Wollaston Heritage Museum. The giant flag (estimate four feet by seven feet) has been placed on display in a large wooden and glass case at the museum in Coe Hill.

"We are really pleased with this donation," said Edith McCaw from Wollaston Heritage. "I think this is really unique, and an interesting part of our history."

McCaw noted that Wollaston Heritage has a small collection of interesting flags. She noted that the museum depends on the

donation of items of historical interest, and volunteers to do documentation, and restorations.

Wollaston Heritage Centre is located in Coe Hill directly behind the liquor store, and is open to the public June 16 ? Sept. 20 Friday, Saturday and Sunday (except Aug. 5) from noon to 4 p.m. Give them a call at 613-337-5705.