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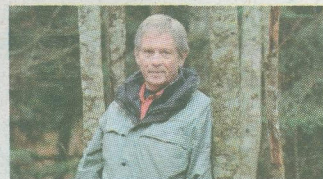
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Watch-ing mystery come to light

Local historian pens report about gold timepieces given to WW1 soldiers

By Kathy Yanchus

CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It was when he actually held one of the antique gold timepieces that Richard Laughton made the promise.

"Actually seeing and holding Private Regan's watch meant it was time to find an answer to the puzzle. I told (his) grandson Ron that I would undertake that task, so that was my commitment," said Laughton, local historian and author of the recently completed research project, 'Milton's Commemorative Gold Watches — A Mystery from the Past'.

Delving into the story of the pocket-watches given to returning First World War soldiers by the town of Milton became an "extension" of Laughton's significant research into both the Canadian and British Expeditionary Forces, in which both his grandfathers served.

This 12-year quest led to further research on the Great War soldiers of Milton, which resulted in many other

• see INPUT on page 2



LEST WE FORGET: Zoe Gottwald, 5, of Milton prepares to lay a wreath on behalf of The War Amps during Sunday's Park. Zoe was injured last year in a riding lawn mower accident that resulted in the amputation of her left leg below 21. Tomorrow's traditional Remembrance Day service will be held at Evergreen Cemetery on Ontario Street at 11 a.m.

Input sought from community in pocketwatch project

• from WATCH-ING on page 1 projects about local soldiers by Laughton, and other members of the Milton Historical Society (MHS), all of which are posted on its website.

It was when Milton Legion member Ron Regan brought in his grandfather's gold pocketwatch that the mystery of its origin put the wheels in motion. While conducting a research report on Private Regan for his grandson Ron, Laughton launched a search for the identity of other soldiers who might have received a gold watch.

The result is a meticulously researched 88-page report, which reveals, among a myriad of other historical data about the mementos, that 118 watches were presented between 1915 and 1922, the largest number of those watches handed out on Dominion Day 1917.

"The research to arrive at the answer to the gold watches covers a period of more than eight years as without the work on the study of the Milton soldiers which was initiated in March 2003, the gold watch project could not have started," explained Laughton.

Prior research meant that he had a massive amount of information already collected on the Milton soldiers of the Great War, he said.

On the gold watch project alone,

Laughton spent about 300 hours.

The report is an intricate chronology of Laughton's painstaking research, itemizing how he managed to compile a list of probable candidates based on criteria established by the council and selection committee of the time.

"If I recall, there were about eight cycles in the 'research loop' as I narrowed down the candidates until I was sure I had them all, and correctly," he said.

The gold watch mystery was an intense research project, he admitted, but not lengthy in terms of the time devoted to Great War research in Canada and around the world.

There are tens of thousands of private researchers working on the preservation of the history of the Great War, said Laughton.

Several side benefits came from his work, such as the creation of an electronic spreadsheet of the 1911 census for the town of Milton, information that is now available to other local historians, said Laughton. "The true significance of the project was the blending of the old and the new. By old I mean the paper records such as the Milton *Champion* archives and the soldiers records from Library and Archives Canada. By new I mean the use of online computer data bases, census information and the ability to create

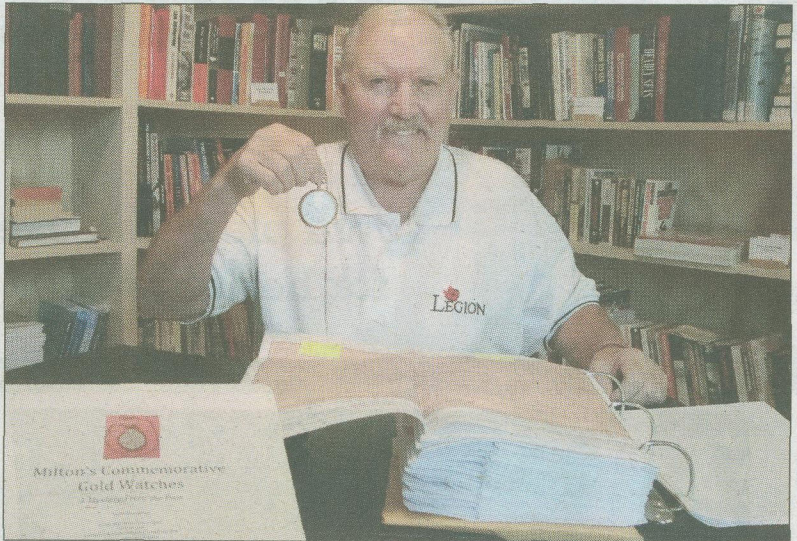


PHOTO BY RICHARD LAUGHTON

Legion member Ron Regan displays his grandfather's First World War gold watch that served as the catalyst for Richard Laughton's 'Milton's Commemorative Gold Watches — A Mystery From The Past'.

electronic spreadsheets to facilitate data management."

This technology wasn't available to the late Stewart Wolf, who tried to solve the puzzle of the gold watches in the 1980s, said Laughton.

Currently, none of the pocketwatches are on display. However, Laughton's hope is that eventually there will be enough watches and interest in the project to have a public exhibit.

Laughton's report is available

online as well in hard copy form at the MHS and the Milton Legion. His vast amount of research material to support the report is currently in his office but will eventually make its way into the MHS archives on James Street.

"We will probably also look at a date to do a presentation of all of the materials, not just to give the final results but to explain the details of the process," he said. "This is not the end of the project but rather the beginning of the public participa-

tion component of the project.

"We need to find out more from the community, particularly from the families of the Great War soldiers. I would not only welcome, but appreciate, input from anyone who wished to review, comment on, or critique this report."

Anyone interested in contacting Laughton or in obtaining a copy of his research report, can do so online or by emailing him directly at milton-soldiers@gmail.com.

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