



The Hole in the Wall, circa 1920s/1930s. Historical photo looking east through the CPR underpass on Highway 2 in Newcastle. Photo: Don Brown collection.

The Newcastle Cement Block Factory

A Dutch immigrant family's four-decade legacy at the eastern gate of Newcastle

By Don Brown

For over a century, everyone entering Newcastle from the east has passed through "the Hole in the Wall"—the CPR railway underpass constructed in 1912 when the Canadian Pacific line cut through the village. This concrete arch beneath the railway embankment became Newcastle's unofficial eastern gateway, a landmark known to every resident.

Just beyond the Hole in the Wall, where Highway 2 (King Avenue East) emerges into open land a Dutch immigrant family built a business that would serve the community for four decades. But the story of Newcastle Cement Block didn't begin at that familiar location on King Street – it began in a barn basement in the village itself.

From war-torn Netherlands to a Newcastle barn

Simon Biersteker and his wife Grace (née Wagenaar) were part of a massive wave of Dutch immigration to

Canada following the Second World War. The Netherlands had been devastated – German forces had deliberately destroyed dykes, flooding vast tracts of farmland. The country faced both physical ruin and severe overpopulation.

Between 1947 and 1954, approximately 94,000 Dutch immigrants came to Canada under a bilateral resettlement agreement between the two governments. While the earliest arrivals were predominantly farmers, by the mid-1950s the wave included skilled workers and entrepreneurs—people who would start small businesses in their adopted communities. Ontario, particularly the areas around Toronto, became a popular destination.

In October 1950, Simon and Grace Biersteker, along with their five children – Annie, Simon Jr., Claude, Dick, and John – purchased an old barn on Mill Street North at Monroe Street in partnership with Andy Wagenaar. The barn had belonged to Frank Gibson, who had lined its



The original barn on Mill Street North where the Bierstiekers and Wagenaars lived and Newcastle Cement Block began in the basement. Photo: Paddy Duncan

interior with cardboard to store apples and produce before the Durham Growers Co-operative was built in 1951. The two families converted the barn into separate apartments, with the Bierstiekers living on the west side and the Wagenaars on the east.

The family's connection to the Dutch Reformed community remained strong throughout their years in Newcastle; son Simon Jr. would marry Lois Kleinsteuber at the Rehoboth Christian Reformed Church in Bowmanville in 1966.

From JASCO layoffs to a basement business

Simon Biersteker found work at JASCO (James Anderson Smith Company), a major Newcastle employer that manufactured jewellery and silverware cases and known locally as "the Box Factory." It was there that Simon met a young man named Lambertus "Bert" De Bruin. Before long, Bert had married Simon's daughter Annie.

In 1953, layoffs at JASCO forced both men to consider their options. Bert had previously worked in Cochrane, Ontario, where he had learned how to make cement blocks. The two men decided to start their own business, right there in the basement of the Biersteker barn on Mill Street. They called it Newcastle Block.

The partnership divided naturally: Bert made the small concrete blocks, mostly for residential use, while Simon

took to the road selling them. Both men quit their jobs at JASCO and committed fully to the venture. In those early days, the operation was as basic as it could be. Bert built molds from scrap lumber and initially mixed cement by hand in containers before they could afford a proper mixer – making blocks one at a time on the south side of the barn.

Growing the Business

By 1955, the business had outgrown its barn-basement origins. Simon and Bert purchased land severed from the Bandstra farm at the east end of Newcastle, on the north side of King Avenue East, just beyond the Hole in the Wall. They constructed new buildings and later expanded by purchasing the old "Honey Hollow" restaurant on the same property. In 1958, Simon and Grace built a new bungalow on the west side of the business.

Save the date!

NVDHS Annual General Meeting
Saturday, March 28, 2026, 11 a.m.
Historical Room, Newcastle Community Hall

Followed by show & tell and lunch

An ad from 1994 featuring an aerial photograph shows how the operation had grown over four decades. The factory building sat at the northwest corner of the property, where raw materials – sand, gravel, and Portland cement – were mixed with water and formed into blocks using molds and vibration-compression machinery.

Graham Creek ran through the middle of the property. A large yard east of the creek held row upon row of curing blocks, while the reception office, warehouse, and retail showroom faced Highway 2.

Newcastle Cement Block

Factory, Graham Creek, The Yard, Office Warehouse, Display Products, Highway 2

Serving Newcastle and Area Since 1954
Large Displays of Patio, Brick and Stone

We Supply:

- Interlock for patios and driveways
- Curbs and garden edging, flagstones
- Retaining walls • Natural and Angel Stone

732 King St. E., Hwy. 2, 1 mile east of Newcastle Village

987-4444 ©
1-800-263-1913

"No Dice": Simon Biersteker's character

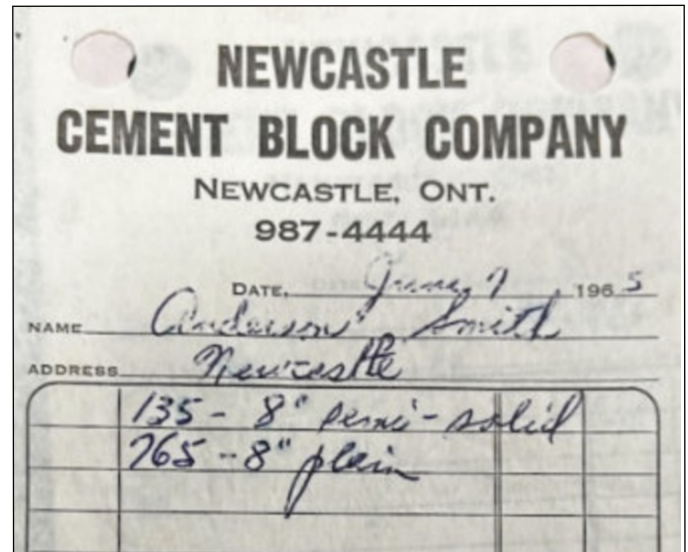
A small notice in the January 1961 edition of the Bowmanville Statesman offers a glimpse into Simon Biersteker's personality. Under the headline "NO DICE," the newspaper reported that "Proprietor S. Biersteker of Newcastle Block was most unhappy with the New Year's Greeting advertisement we inserted in our most recent edition."

The offending advertisement had depicted the company's blocks as dice, with "1961" on the cubes and "Good Luck" in large letters. Simon was not amused. He "suggested that his firm was not in the gambling business, nor did his customers gamble when they bought blocks from him." The newspaper promised that "a more subdued and appropriate advertisement appears on the Newcastle page of this issue."

It's a small moment but revealing: a businessman who took his product and reputation seriously, and wasn't shy about saying so.

Fire and explosion: trials of a family business

Operating an industrial facility brought hazards. In June 1971, fire broke out at the Newcastle Block plant on King Street East when a forklift truck caught fire. The local fire department responded, and damages were estimated at



A 1965 receipt from the Newcastle Cement Block records shows an order from JASCO – the very company where Simon and Bert had once worked – for 135 eight-inch semi-solid blocks and 765 eight-inch plain block likely destined for renovations at the box factory as the company expanded in the 1960s.

\$3,000—reported to the newspaper by Dirk Biersteker, one of Simon's sons working in the family business.

Simon Biersteker Sr. died in early 1972 at the age of 65. The business continued under the ownership of Bert and Annie De Bruin.



A photo from the *Canadian Statesman*, August 1, 1979 shows the damage to Newcastle Cement Block following a propane gas explosion which badly injured owner Bert De Bruin.

Seven years later, tragedy struck. On Saturday, July 28, 1979, a propane gas explosion ripped through a building at the plant. Bert De Bruin, then 46 years old, was leaving the building when he heard the furnace start up but fail to ignite. When he returned to investigate, a propane leak in the main supply line caused an explosion that collapsed part of the structure.

Badly burned, De Bruin managed to escape through the boarded-up door and crawled nearly 100 yards to where his family could hear him calling for help. He was taken by ambulance to Bowmanville Memorial Hospital, then transferred to the burn unit at Scarborough General Hospital with third-degree burns to 40 percent of his body.

Newcastle Fire Chief Jim Hayman estimated damage to the building at over \$30,000, with the affected portion requiring complete rebuilding. The furnace had been repaired just the day before by a Toronto firm. Despite the severity of his injuries, Bert De Bruin survived—by the following morning, his condition was listed as stable.

Later years and legacy

The business continued to serve Newcastle and the surrounding area through the 1980s. Advertisements from this period show an expanded product line: not just cement blocks, but interlock pavers for patios and driveways, curbs and garden edging, flagstones, retaining walls, natural and angel stone, quarry tile, brick, fireplace materials, and even air-tight wood stoves. One of the longest-serving employees was Cornelius Mostert from Orono.

In 1987, Bert and Annie De Bruin sold Newcastle Block to Bennett & Wright Mechanical Contracting. A management buyout in 1997 brought owners Wanson

and Jane Chung. The site at 732 King Street East continues to operate today but has changed ownership several times in recent years.

Grace Biersteker, Simon's widow, lived to see the new millennium. She passed away on October 23, 2003, at the age of 95, surrounded by a large family—18 grandchildren and 47 great-grandchildren. Her funeral was held at Maranatha Christian Reformed Church in Bowmanville, and memorial donations were directed to the Knox Christian School Building Fund, reflecting the family's continued connection to the Dutch and Christian Reformed community that had welcomed them to Canada half a century earlier. Annie's husband Bert De Bruin died at the age of 90 on December 1, 2022, leaving 16 grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren.

The old barn on Mill Street North where it all began still stands. For over a quarter-century it was owned by Fred Wybenga. In the attic, a track with pulleys that once raised hay into the upper loft remains, a quiet reminder that this modest building was the birthplace of a Newcastle institution.

The Newcastle Village and District Historical Society welcomes additional information, photographs, or memories of the Newcastle Cement Block Company and the Biersteker & de Bruin families. Please contact the Society at the Newcastle Community Hall or via info@newcastlehistorical.ca.

Sources: Canadian Statesman newspaper archives; NVDHS Archives; Myno Van Dyke, "The History of Newcastle Block" (2015); obituaries; and historical research on Dutch-Canadian immigration.

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Newcastle Cement Block Co. Ltd. office building with company signage, circa 1980s

Local Heroes – Part 7

By Paddy Duncan with Brian Wilson

We continue this series with this question: Can the residents of a small village community make a significant, positive contribution to the world? We think they can - consider this Newcastle resident.

From Newcastle to the world: the life of Bishop Charles Henry Brent

Charles Henry Brent was born in Newcastle in April 1862, the third of ten children of Reverend Henry Brent, long-time Anglican rector in Newcastle, and Sophia Francis Brent. He would become one of Newcastle's most influential exports, shaping the world ecumenism movement, Christian missions and education in the Philippines, and the beginnings of international drug control.

Census records suggest the family first lived in a rectory

attached to Trinity Church, built in 1840 near what is now St. George's cemetery at Hwy 2 and Hwy 115. A photograph captioned "First Rectory," hanging at St. George's, is thought to depict this house. Trinity Church and the house are gone; St. George's on Mill St. replaced Trinity in 1859.

Reverend Brent became the first incumbent of St. George's parish in 1854 and served for 42 years. The house across the street at 285 Mill was built by Daniel Massey in 1856, sold to Reverend Brent by his son Hart Massey in 1872, so Charles no doubt lived there for at least part of his childhood. It was acquired as the church rectory in 1896 after Rev. Brent's death, though is now once again a private home.

Charles Brent attended public school in Newcastle, then spent two years at Trinity College School in Port Hope, graduating in 1881. He proceeded to Trinity College in Toronto, then an independent Anglican university, earning an Honours B.A. in classics. He returned to Port Hope to teach classics at TCS while studying privately



The Brent family c1884 L-R: standing: Willoughby, Mabel, Charles and Edith. Seated: father Rev. Henry Brent, Helen, mother Sophia, Margaret and Maurice. Sons James and Herbert and daughter Ethel all died in early childhood and are buried in St. George's cemetery with their parents.



Bishop Charles Henry Brent Photo: photographer unknown ©National Portrait Gallery, London with permission

for ordination. He later wrote, “I do not recall an instant of my life when I aspired to any vocation excepting that of the Ministry, but on one brief occasion when I faced the possibility of becoming a musician. As a boy at school the Ministry seemed to me the one vocation worth considering...were I again on the threshold of life I would choose as I have chosen.”⁽¹⁾

Ordained deacon in 1886 and priest in 1887, Brent found no openings in Ontario and went to Buffalo, New York, serving briefly at St. John’s and St. Paul’s/St. Andrew’s Mission, and receiving his MA from Trinity College. A liturgical dispute over altar candles led to his resignation. “I did not set such store by the candles as I did by my rights as a priest.”⁽²⁾

In 1888 he moved to Boston, living and working with the Society of St. John the Evangelist (the Cowley Fathers), and becoming a naturalized American citizen. Placed in charge of St. Augustine’s Chapel for West Boston’s African American community, he spent three years with the order. Though he never took vows, he credited the monks with teaching him to live “an ordered and disciplined spiritual life.”⁽³⁾

In 1891 Bishop Phillips Brooks appointed him assistant minister at St. Stephen’s Church in Boston’s impoverished South End. Under Brent and Father Henry Torbert, the once-abandoned parish flourished, and they developed a parish house, settlement house, rescue mission, and lodging house.

While in Boston Brent embraced the Social Gospel, which sought to apply Christian ethics to social problems such as poverty, inequality, racism, alcoholism, crime, child labour, poor schooling, and war. Brent’s “theology of social reform” was based on the commandments to love one’s neighbour and to love God. In his first book, “With God in the World” (1900) he wrote that “God never considers men apart from, but always as part of, a great social order—a social order that is not a concourse of independent units, but a body instinct with life, a society which is not an organization but an organism.” Love of neighbour therefore extended to all humanity, a conviction that guided the rest of his life.

After Torbert’s death in 1901, Brent briefly served as rector of St. Stephen’s. On October 11, 1901, the Episcopal Church’s General Convention elected him first missionary bishop of the Philippines, recently acquired by the United States after the Spanish-American War. Of the 7.5 million inhabitants, roughly ninety percent were Roman Catholic, with Muslim Moros in the south, Igorots in northern Luzon, and non-Christian Chinese communities in Manila.

President William McKinley described annexation as tied to his religious faith, believing it wrong to return the islands to “Catholic Spain” or grant self-rule, but best to “educate the Filipinos, and uplift them and civilize and Christianize them as our fellow-men for who Christ died.” This led to the Episcopal Church constituting the Philippines as a missionary district. Brent also believed that if the Filipinos were properly trained and educated, they would adopt Western customs and become good Episcopalians. Many Protestants viewed Catholicism as hierarchical and superstitious, even a threat to democracy. Brent, however, opposed converting Catholics, lamenting in 1908, “when will Christians learn that proselytizing from other Christian churches is...hateful to our Lord.”

During seventeen years in the Philippines, Brent built the Episcopal Church, focused missions on non-Christian groups, and worked to end the opium trade. Before departing the US, he fundraised, studied the country (when first elected, he and friends had to hunt for the Philippines in an atlas) and met with William Howard Taft and President Theodore Roosevelt. Personally, he endured heartbreak: a woman he loved declined his proposals, finally writing to him in 1904 that someone else had come into her life, after which he immersed himself in work, remaining celibate, a choice that later deepened his loneliness.



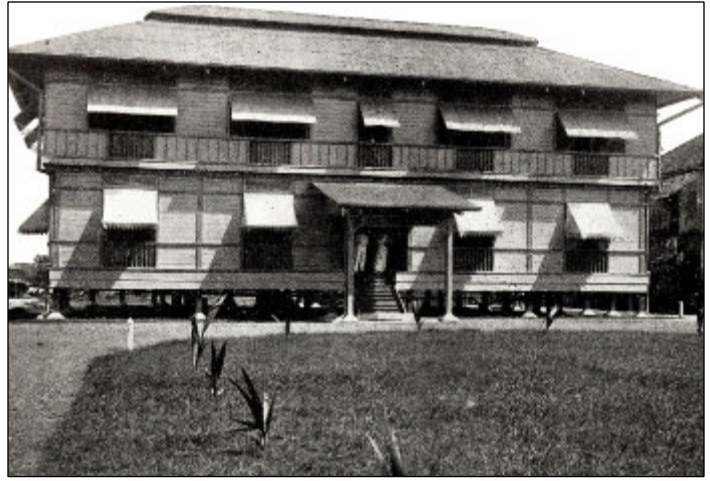
Entrance to St. Luke's dispensary (free clinic) in Barrio Trozo, Manila c1903.

In Manila, Brent set to work. Using some of the funds he'd raised in the US, he constructed a cathedral seating 1,000 and a parish house with extensive recreational facilities. He served as first president of the University of the Philippines in Manila. Guided by the theology of the social gospel, he founded a settlement house in the slums outside Manila out of which grew an orphanage, clubs for children, a dispensary that became St. Luke's Medical Centre, and St. Luke's Church. In (cooler) Luzon he established a summer camp and two schools: the Easter School for Igorot boys (now the K-university Easter College) and a school for English-speaking children that became the Brent School, still an elite institution.

Seeking peace with Muslim Moros (including a gang of pirates) in the south Philippines after centuries of conflict, Brent visited them without a military escort and gained some measure of their trust. When the Episcopal Board declined to provide funding, he raised money privately from friends in the US to found the Mission of the Holy



Charles Henry Brent monument in Philippines. Photo: Andreo Bonaco



St. Luke's Hospital, Manila, c1909 with 30 beds and expanded to 52 beds in 1910.

Trinity in Zamboanga. By 1914 it included the region's only hospital and a settlement school for Moro women and girls; in 1916 he added agricultural schools to encourage stable livelihoods from farming over piracy.

Opium had remained legal under Spanish-era narcotics licensing continued by the US after the 1898 annexation of the Philippines. Brent called opium "the greatest evil in Filipino society." Serving on the three-man commission that ended legal sales in 1908, he later served as chief commissioner of the American delegation to the 1909 International Opium Commission in Shanghai. This work made him an international figure and statesman – in 1912 he was the chair of the American delegation to the International Opium Convention at The Hague, which adopted the first international drug control treaty.

Repeatedly elected to American dioceses, including Washington and New Jersey, Brent declined the elections to continue his work in the Philippines and internationally. Though disillusioned by the Catholic Church, he became a leading advocate for Ecumenism, and it was to become a major focus of his work for the rest of his life. "The unity of Christendom is not a luxury, but a necessity. ... It is absurd to aim at a united mankind, or even a united Christian civilization, and to be content with a divided Church." At the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, frustrated by avoidance of discussion of the doctrinal differences between churches, he proposed a conference on "faith and order." The Episcopal Church adopted the idea unanimously, and J.P. Morgan pledged \$100,000 towards the conference.

By World War I Brent was internationally known but in fragile health, having suffered repeated heart attacks. Leaving the Philippines in 1917, he took up an even more stressful post, becoming Chief of Chaplains of the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe, and known as the "khaki-coloured bishop," often functioning as a



Army and Navy Chaplains who officiated at the burial of An Unknown American Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery, November 11th, 1921. Left to right: Chaplain John T. Axton, D.S.M., Chief of Chaplains, U.S.A.; Dr. Norris S. Lazon, Chaplain at Large, U.S.A. Right Rev. Charles H. Brent, D.S.M., Senior Chaplain American Expeditionary Forces; and Chaplain John B. Frazier, Supervisor Chaplains Corps, U.S.N.

goodwill ambassador and mediating between U.S. and British leaders. While overseas he was elected bishop of Western New York and took up residence in 1919.

His diocese shared him with global responsibilities: as a member of Harvard's board of overseers, delivering the Duff Lectures in Edinburgh (1921), as a member of the



Historical marker for Bishop Charles Henry Brent located on the east side of St. George's Anglican Church on Mill St., Newcastle.

League of Nations Advisory Committee on Narcotics (1923–24), chairing the Sub-Committee on International Affairs at the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work in Stockholm (1925), as “titular Chancellor” of Hobart College in Geneva, NY, and serving as Bishop-in-Charge of the American Episcopal Churches in Europe (1926–28). Many of these duties required long sea voyages, further reducing the time spent in his own diocese.

In August 1927 the First World Conference on Faith and Order met in Lausanne with 406 delegates from 108 denominations, electing Brent presiding officer. It culminated seventeen years of preparation and would eventually lead to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. He urged delegates to “learn to fellowship with one another, to listen sympathetically, and to open themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit,” calling it a first step toward restoring “the true catholic church.” On August 29, 1927, he was featured on the cover of Time magazine in recognition of his work on behalf of the church.

Returning to the US after the conference, Brent spent several weeks in Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. He later returned to Europe, staying in London at the US embassy as a guest of the ambassador. He preached his final sermon at Canterbury Cathedral in November 1928 and represented the Episcopal Church at the enthronement of Cosmo Gordon as Archbishop of Canterbury in December.

In March 1929 he set out on a trip accompanied by his physician but died in Lausanne on March 27. He was buried at Bois-de-Vaux Cemetery. His epitaph reads in part: “A soldier of Christ, A servant of Humanity, An Apostle of Christian Unity.” Brent is remembered on the church's calendar on March 27. He also is the author of a prayer for mission that is part of the widely used Morning Prayer service in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Though not an original theologian, Brent left a lasting mark through ecumenism and international drug control.

Three years before his death he wrote, “For three things I am deeply grateful—that I am Canadian born and bred, that I had a mother who for character and spiritual culture was the peer of the best, and that a country rectory, where my father served for forty-two years, sheltered my young days. From my Canadian breeding I got that fine, just discipline, which held within bounds a nature that could easily have gone on the rocks; to my mother's wise and loving influence I owe all the good that is in me; and it was my father's long rectorate in the little village where I was born that burned into my soul the high value of stability.”⁽⁴⁾

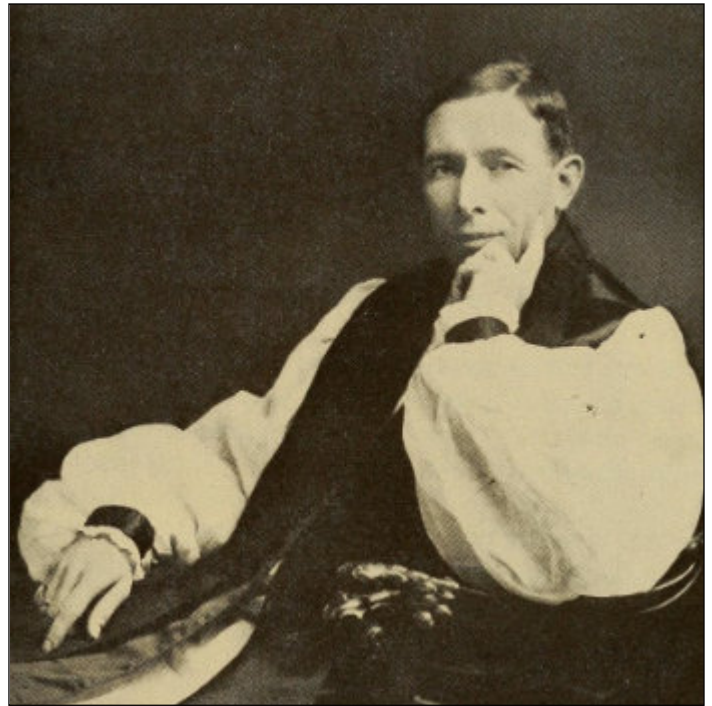
From Newcastle, Canada, to the world stage, Brent carried that stability and conviction into a life of service that still resonates today.

Footnotes:

1. "Trinity College School Record October 1946-August 1947"
2. Eleanor Slater, "Charles Henry Brent: Everybody's Bishop" (Morehouse Publishing, 1932),
- 3., 4. Alexander C. Zabriskie, "Bishop Brent: Crusader for Christian Unity" (Westminster Press, 1948)

We hope that you have enjoyed this series on our "local heroes." All of these people from Newcastle, in their different ways, worked for peace, harmony, and simple human decency. Most never knew one another. They did not act as a movement or under a single banner, but each made a positive difference.

You likely already know that Newcastle is a special community in which to live. But its story reaches further than its boundaries. Through the character and convictions formed here, Newcastle has helped make Canada—and the wider world—just a little better.



Bishop Charles Henry Brent c 1917. Photo: Brown Bros.

Remembrance Day in Newcastle - a history

By Myno Van Dyke

In 1923, the Newcastle Community Hall, donated by Chester Massey, was officially opened. Mr. Massey was involved in the planning of the building, and he insisted that there be a "Reading Room" within the hall to honour the "departed heroes." This area, located at the south entrance, would have large stone tablets installed on the west and east walls with the names of the Newcastle area soldiers lost in World War 1 (1914-1918).

Armistice Day was first observed in 1919 by the British empire, when there were calls for some sort of commemoration to mourn the dead and honour all who had fought in World War 1. Canada had paid a particularly high price – almost 10% of the over 620,000 men and women who had joined the armed forces had died. It was a heavy toll for a country with a population of just 7.8 million.

For two years, Armistice Day was observed in Canada on November 11. In 1921, an act of Parliament declared that Armistice Day would occur on the Monday of the week in which November 11th fell. Between 1921 and 1931, Thanksgiving and Armistice Day were combined holidays – which confused the public and angered veterans of World War 1 who didn't want to see a solemn commemoration combined with a joyful harvest celebration.



Newcastle Cenotaph, 1963, shortly after its dedication. Photo: Don Brown

In 1931, Armistice Day was officially renamed Remembrance Day and fixed to November 11, and Thanksgiving was proclaimed annually by Parliament – often on the second Monday in October (it wasn't until 1957 that it was permanently moved to that date). On

November 19, 1931, the "Newcastle Independent" section of Bowmanville's Canadian Statesman newspaper reported on the first, impressive Remembrance Day service in Newcastle held on November 11. It was held at the Newcastle Community Hall, organized by Clarke and Newcastle members of the Bowmanville branch of the British Empire Service League. (The British Empire Service League officially changed its name to the Royal Canadian Legion in 1960.)

The service was planned and arranged by Newcastle resident and local Legion representative George Meadows, with assistance from Reverend George H. Mason, the Rector of St. George's Anglican Church in Newcastle.

A parade was formed at 10:30 a.m. at Mill Street South and Robert Street. Participants included the Durham Regimental Band, led by Milton Tamblyn, the Wolf Cubs (led by Scoutmaster Jack Elston and students from Newcastle Public and Newcastle High Schools marshalled by Principals Coyne and Rodger.

The parade marched north on Mill Street from Robert St. and stopped in front of the Community Hall on King. Upon their arrival a large crowd had formed in front of the Community Hall and observed George Meadows place a large wreath of remembrance on the tablet just inside the main doors. Also placing wreaths was E.C. Hoar who represented Durham Lodge (Lodge 66 of the Freemasons) and H.C. Bonathan, representing Newcastle Village Council. Following two minutes of silence, the Last Post was played by the Bandmaster Milton J. Tamblyn.

The audience and participants then all moved into the main Hall where the ceremony was presided over by the Newcastle Reeve, W.F.(Frank) Rickard. In his remarks, he stated that the Remembrance Day Service was not just for Newcastle but also for all of Clarke Township, including Newtonville, Kendal and Orono. He also stated that it was the plan to alternate yearly the Remembrance Day Service with Orono and Newcastle.

Several local clergymen also participated. Rev. W.J. Smythe, (Orono United Church) did the benediction, Rev. Thomas Wallace from Newtonville read scripture from Revelation 7, Rev. F.H. Mason (Orono Anglican Church) led the prayers and Rev. W.P. Rogers (Newcastle United Church) delivered the address. Then, George A. Coyne, a World War 1 veteran and Principal of Newcastle High School read out "slowly and distinctly" the names of the fallen soldiers.

From Orono District: Donald R. McDonald, George Openshaw, Robert E. Patton, Frank Shipway, A.M. Stuart,

Oscar George Snowden (note- this was misspelled for many years as his surname was actually "Sowden"), A. Malcolm Stewart, H. Roy Simpson, George Charman, Lyness A.M. Henerey, James A. Little, Wilfred G. Hoy, Clayton B. Andrus, Arthur Barnard, Lionel Douglas Bowen, James Brown, Fletcher A. Cain, Stanley Collins, Samuel G. Glanville, Leland W. Hooper, Ernest D. Rowe, Wm. Lownie, Rowland M. White, Fred Pearson.

From Newtonville: James W. Brown, Reginald Barton, George Henry Noden.

From Newcastle: A.P. Bloom, Eric Arthur Coulson, Percy Cecil Gomme, Frederick William Gibson, G. H. Howard, William Wallbridge Jose, W.E. Lockhart, D.G. Law, D.W. Parker, G.E. Simmons.

After reading the names, the room went completely silent and then the Durham Regimental band played Handel's Dead March from "Saul." Rev. W.P. Rogers spoke about the themes expressed in Colonel John McCrae's famous poem "In Flanders Fields," reminding the attendees that it was essential for everyone to apply themselves to ending all war and preventing war in the future and that in honouring the soldiers, war itself was not glorified. Mrs. Matthew (Mary) Brown of Glenwood Cottage (1440 Church Street in Newcastle) had placed a large bouquet of artificial poppies and unthreshed oats on the table at the Memorial Library (now Newcastle Village & District Historical Society) for the week of Remembrance Day.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s services were held on November 11 in the Newcastle Community Hall, with wreaths laid at the memorial tablets at the entrance to the Hall, and all students from both the public school and the high school continued to attend and participate in the ceremony. By the mid 1950s, casualties and veterans of WW1, WW2 and the Korean War were being honoured. In 1958, George Meadows was still involved - acting as Marshall. Note: in the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, Remembrance Day was at least some of the time, a school holiday for some school boards in Ontario, including those here in Newcastle, as evidenced by letters to the editor complaining about the practice. In Ontario now, schools are required to remain open and hold assemblies or ceremonies to observe the day.

In late 1961, Newcastle decided they wanted an outdoor Cenotaph to honour the fallen soldiers from the area. A Cenotaph Committee was formed, led by Doug Walton, Councillor Fred Couch and Sam Brereton. The cenotaph would be erected on the west side of the Community Hall and was estimated to cost \$2200. Over the next two years, the committee held numerous fund-raising events to secure enough funds, and construction of the granite

structure began in the summer of 1963. The dedication ceremony took place on July 20, 1963.

All ex-servicemen were asked to line up at the Community Park (now called Joseph Atkinson Park located beside the current Newcastle Library) and be prepared to march together to the west side of the Community Hall. Port Hope residents, Brigadier L.N. Carr of Port Hope along with Frank R. Hills of the Royal Canadian Legion unveiled the new Memorial Cenotaph with the inscribed names of the soldiers from Newcastle who were lost. A large crowd attended along with local government officials Russell Honey, M.P., Alex Carruthers M.P.P, Newcastle Reeve Douglas J. Cunningham and local Warden Earl Walkey. Rev. Basil Long from Orono United Church and Rev. D.R. Dewdney from St. George's Anglican Church in Newcastle participated as well.

This past year (2025) was another extremely well attended Remembrance Day with many similar features to the previous Remembrance Day services, including many members of the Royal Canadian Legion (Bowmanville Branch) with Doug Walton's son Randy representing the Legion. Our "Padre" retired Major David Saunders continues to give an inspiring and heartfelt address each year. Newcastle Public School had many students march from the school to the Cenotaph to participate and learn how important it is to acknowledge and remember our brave soldiers.

Elliott Tremeer didn't play the "Last Post" and "Reveille" for 2025's Remembrance Day but his granddaughter, Maitlyn, did a wonderful job. As in previous years, local politicians, service club members, business groups and volunteer organizations all carried wreaths up to the cenotaph. In the former library at the Community Hall, the Newcastle Village & District Historical Society had a



display honouring the local soldiers and lots of artificial poppies on the tables. Mary Brown would have been pleased.

**Thanks to Newcastle resident Sydney Symak (who is finishing her degree in architecture at Waterloo) for sharing her research on our cenotaph for her final thesis).*



Remembrance services in Newcastle now take place outdoors on November 11, in front of the Community Hall and Cenotaph just west of the building.



Newcastle Cenotaph, November 2025.

Mark your calendars!

NVDHS General Meeting - Wednesday, April 29, 2026, 7 p.m.
Newcastle Community Hall

The family behind the novel: The Farncombs of Newcastle

Katherine Le Gresley, author of the *The Lightkeeper*

Come and hear about the Farncomb family of Ebor House and the influence they had on the town of Newcastle and beyond.

Free admission



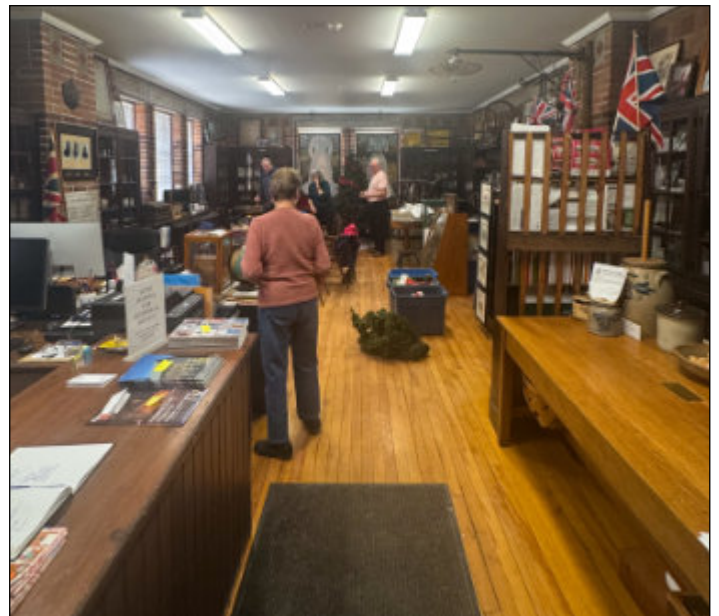
The Farncomb family settled in the Newcastle area in the mid-1800s. Like most families of their time, the Farncombs were very community oriented and dedicated themselves to helping to develop the town and faithfully serve the people in it. Their steadfast influence was felt from the workings of the harbour to the building of St. George's Anglican Church and the establishment of the town pharmacy. One of the Farncomb boys grew up to become the much loved and respected town doctor while another took on the rectorship of the Anglican church. The other Farncomb boys also pursued careers in medicine and the church.

Dora, however—the only daughter in the family—perhaps had the most far-reaching impact of all. She became a nationally known and cherished author with hundreds of articles and three books to her credit. Notably, she also had a strong impact on Newcastle itself through the establishment of a young men's social

club. For many years after her passing, the group of men affectionately known as “Dora's Boys” spread throughout neighbouring towns and cities, where they became dedicated and influential members of the communities in which they settled.

Katherine's talk will look at the life of the Farncomb family from their arrival in Newcastle to the passing of daughter Dora in 1938. It will particularly focus on the lives of the members of the family who played the most influential roles in the history of Newcastle including Frederick (the chief customs officer at the harbour), Alfred (the town doctor), John (the rector of St. George's Anglican church) and Dora (the author). These, together with their wives and children, are the characters readers will recognize from her 2022 historical novel, “*The Lightkeeper*,” which explores the joys and tragedies of the Farncomb family through the eyes of Dora Farncomb.

NVDHS in action...we've been busy!



A big thank you to our generous donors!

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Newcastle Village and District Historical Society

The Newcastle Village and District Historical Society was formed by a group of citizens in 1981 to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the former Village of Newcastle and its immediate environs. Today, we have an extensive collection of artifacts, documents and photographs and offer help with research into the history of the area, including its businesses and families.

We are located in the former public library in the Newcastle Community Hall. We have permanent and special displays in the historical room and are open to the public twice a week. We are a registered charity, supported by our members, local sponsors and donors, with some additional assistance from the Town of

Clarington and the Government of Canada (Canada Summer Jobs). We welcome all new members and donors!

20 King Avenue, Unit 3, Newcastle, Ontario, L1B 1H7

Open: Tuesdays & Saturdays, 9:30 a.m. to noon

Website: newcastlehistorical.ca
Email: info@newcastlehistorical.ca

Individual, family and corporate memberships are available for \$15-30/year. Memberships may be purchased or renewed on our website, in person or by mail.