

MAYOR'S CHAIN OF OFFICE

In presenting the Mayor's Chain of Office to the Town of Fort Erie, it was felt that some historical background information should be noted to appropriately convey the significance of some of the medallions, and history of the former municipalities.

In designing the medallions, it was further decided that for the most part, each one should have local history to appropriately identify major achievements which have contributed to the establishment of the Municipality.

The "Old Fort"

The present "Old Fort" in its refurbished condition is the third location of the Fort. On January 9, 1804, approval was granted to construct the Fort at its present location. Previous to this, the original "Old Fort" was constructed in 1764 on the river bank north of the present Fort. This Fort served for some 15 years when it was destroyed by large masses of ice driven ashore by a furious storm. A second Fort was begun a short distance southward, again on the river's edge directly in front of the present site, which lasted until February 5, 1803 when it too was destroyed by ice during another severe storm.

The present "Old Fort" served appropriately through several American raids. In 1908 the Niagara Parks Commission began the development and maintenance of the park land around the Fort. The Fort itself was left in ruins until 1937 when restoration was commenced jointly by the Provincial and Federal Governments. The Fort was restored to its most famous period (1812-14) and was officially opened on July 1, 1939.

The International Railroad Bridge

The heavy volume of railroad traffic over the suspension bridge at Niagara Falls dictated the need for a second railroad bridge to alleviate the congestion of rail traffic at Niagara Falls. In 1857 negotiations commenced in the Dominion Parliament and the New York State Legislature to provide Charters for the construction of the bridge. In 1870, \$1,500,000.00 was finally raised in England for the project and final permission had to be obtained from London, England and Washington, D.C., before work could begin. A Charter was granted to the International Bridge Company to construct a bridge affording rail movement, and it named the Gzowski-MacPherson Company as builders. The erection of this bridge was a major engineering feat because of the strong currents in the upper Niagara River and the drastic fluctuations of the river level due to the influence of Lake Erie.

In spite of the obstacles presented, the bridge was constructed and officially opened for rail traffic on November 3, 1873. In those days all locomotives were wood burning and the first wood burning locomotive that crossed the bridge was the "Scotia".

With the opening of the International Bridge, a rail terminus was established and it is felt that this fact is the main contributor to the ultimate establishment of the community as it was then called "Bridgeburg".

The Peace Bridge

With the advent of the automobile at the turn of the century, great possibilities were opened up on both sides of the Niagara River. The City of Buffalo, New York, was flourishing and on the Canadian side west of the Old Fort, much virgin land extended along the golden shores of Lake Erie awaiting development.

The earliest date recorded where prominent businessmen endeavoured to form a Company for the construction of a vehicular and pedestrian bridge was 1908. However, many obstacles were apparent and with the outbreak of the great war in 1914, more important things occupied the minds and the time of the organizers of the "Peace Bridge" and for 5 years the project lay dormant.

However, following the war, in 1919 again a group of prominent businessmen banded together to approach the American Congress to appoint a Bridge Commission. Following this appointment, a special Bill was passed at Albany, New York, creating The Buffalo and Fort Erie Bridge Company, while similar legislation was being introduced in the Canadian Parliament. Different formations of the Bridge Company ensued over the following years and finally the first bonds were issued on June 2, 1925 to commence raising the monies required for construction. Approximately \$4,500,000.00 was raised in total for the construction and on August 17, 1925, ground breaking ceremonies took place and construction began toward opening of the bridge by the Spring of 1927. On March 13, 1927, the first cars officially crossed the bridge. On June 1, 1927, the bridge was opened to public traffic. On Sunday, August 7, 1927, the Peace Bridge was officially opened and the dignitaries included the Prince of Wales and Vice-President of the U.S.A., Charles G. Dawes.

Village of Crystal Beach

The Village of Crystal Beach was incorporated in 1921. The Village crest symbolizes the famous Crystal Beach Amusement Park, swimmers on the beautiful shore of Lake Erie and the Ferry which operated between Buffalo and the Village of Crystal Beach.

Few people realize that the Crystal Beach Amusement Park was originally started in 1889 as a religious assembly ground. The founder, the late John E. Rebstock, identified the purpose of the Park for the spiritual and mental uplift of the common people and the central theme was to be relieved by a few side show attractions.

In 1890, at the suggestion of a party of prominent City of Buffalo officials, Mr. Rebstock named the place "Crystal Beach", for the clear water and beautiful sand. It was also in this same year that the first ferryboat commenced operation between Buffalo and Crystal Beach. The name of the first vessel was the "Dove" and she was followed by a long list of succeeding vessels over the years. The last vessel to operate was the "Canadiana" and this ferry service was terminated in 1957, the main reason being the large volume of automobiles entering Canada via the Peace Bridge.

Township of Bertie

Prior to the War of Independence, what was then The Township of Bertie was Virgin Territory, being so maintained by treaty between the British and their Indian allies, the Iroquois. With the Declaration of Independence in 1776, a great many of the Loyalists moved to Canada giving initial settlement to what was then Bertie.

The figures 1850 noted on the upper part of the Crest, is the year that the Township of Bertie was incorporated as a Municipality.

The mounted horseman with green jacket and buckskin trousers designates Butler's Rangers which operated out of Fort Niagara, harassing the forces of Independence, and assisting the United Empire Loyalists to Fort Niagara, from where they could cross to Canada. When the treaty was signed in 1783, the Rangers were disbanded. Many of these Rangers settled in Bertie Township, being granted substantial parcels of this Crown land, as recognition of their services. The names of members of the Rangers are still common in the area today. In more modern times, the horse is representative of the Township of Bertie since the Fort Erie Race Track known far and wide, has been located therein, since 1897.

The symbols at the right are the sun, the lake and the sand beach designating the Summer appeal of this area, bounded as it is by the Niagara River on the East and Lake Erie on the South, wherein lie some of the lake's finest sandy beaches. The north shore of Lake Erie is called the "Sun Parlour" of Ontario in the Provincial Tourist Brochures.

The guns and cannon balls in the lower part of the Crest represent the Battle of Ridgeway which occurred in 1866.

Township of Willoughby

The Township of Willoughby was also incorporated in 1850. However, the Municipality did not have an official Crest and as a Centennial project in 1967, all of the school students were invited to submit their ideas of what the Township Crest should be. The winning Crest was designed by Bridget Glynn and Louanne Sherk of St. Joseph's School. The Crest, surrounded by Willoughby leaves, bears the cross of Ontario at the top and the four parts of the shield depict a cannon for the part the township played in wars along the frontier; corn and the deer depicting the rural and agricultural nature of the municipality and the section at right is a weave which forms part of the Crest of the Municipality of Willoughby in Lincolnshire, England, after which the locality was originally named.

Town of Fort Erie

The original Fort Erie is really the history of the development of two border villages at the head of the Niagara River growing up side by side for over 50 years with no apparent line of demarcation and then amalgamating. The old Fort Erie dates its venerable history from 1764 when it was established as a British Military and Trading Post. The Village of Fort Erie was incorporated in 1857 with the first Council meeting held on July 13th of that year.

Approximately one mile to the north, the International Bridge was completed in 1873 and a small community of settlers unofficially named their community "International Bridge". Also during this time, some residents called the community "Victoria" in honour of the Queen. The first formal meeting was held in Kensington Hall on December 31, 1894, with the purpose being to hold nominations for a Council. Kensington Hall still remains as a private residence and is located on the northwest corner of Niagara Boulevard and Phipps Street. International Bridge remained in existence until April 10, 1895, when it was incorporated as the Village of Bridgeburg. In 1916 it was re-incorporated as the Town of Bridgeburg. The two communities continued to grow side by side and on January 1, 1932, amalgamated for form the Town of Fort Erie.

In 1969 the Provincial Government enacted Bill 174 which was an Act to establish the Regional Municipality of Niagara which became effective January 1, 1970. This Act re-defined the municipal limits of the Town of Fort Erie to that which we know today, namely encompassing the former Town of Fort Erie, the Township of Bertie, the Village of Crystal Beach and the southerly 1,000 feet of Willoughby Township and northerly to the Niagara River to include the community of Douglastown.

The present Town Crest is the same as was formerly adopted by the old Town of Fort Erie. The Council elect for the new Town of Fort Erie as established under the Regional Municipality of Niagara Act, approved of retaining this Crest as the emblems were symbolic of major accomplishments of the area. The upper portion of the Crest shows the mighty Niagara River separating the United States from Canada. More specifically identified is the International Railroad Bridge and the Peace Bridge joining together two great nations and in particular, the City of Buffalo, New York and Fort Erie. The lower left design depicts the "Old Fort" and the lower right portion is the Maple Leaf - the National Emblem of Canada.

About the Donors

The donors of the Mayor's Chain of Office, Mr. and Mrs. John L. Gibson, have expressed their desire to remain in the background regarding this presentation. It is their desire that the Mayor's Chain of Office be presented to the Town of Fort Erie in recognition of their many enjoyable years as residents within the municipality.