

Cavalry Saddle Tree, 1890, with Mooretown Connections

I spotted this article while doing research on an entirely different topic. I was intrigued because of the Canadian cavalry saddle tree's connection with Mooretown. Lt. Col. George Stewart of Courtright, Ont. (who is the gr-gr-grandfather of Dave Pattenden, current Chair of Heritage St. Clair) was responsible for organizing the Mooretown Mounted Infantry in 1866 and 1870 to combat the threat of Fenian invasions from the United States.

The Mooretown Mounted Infantry Company of the 27th Lambton Battalion of Infantry continued until May 31, 1872 when they were re-organized as No. 3 Troop of the 1st Hussars Cavalry Regiment with headquarters in London, Ont.

-- Ian Mason, member, Heritage St. Clair

John Leistra sent these photos to the Waterloo Historical Society Facebook page as a message. His connection to Waterloo Region and the building of the saddle piqued my interest. John answered my questions and agreed to have the story in the newsletter. He can be contacted via Facebook Messenger for more information about the project. – Marion Roes, Editor, Waterloo Historical Society Newsletter

This 1890 pattern 2 Canadian Cavalry saddle tree was a barn find near Mooretown and is being refinished and rebuilt as a Saddle of Remembrance for the First Hussars Cavalry Troop. The project is dedicated to the memories of those who died in the horror of war. This saddle is being prepared for the November 11, 2017 Remembrance Day Parade in Sarnia. It will be on a horse that is led, not ridden, for he is the Lone Charger, a caparisoned horse representing all of those who lost their lives in combat. There is a lot of symbolism tied to the various pieces of equipment on the horse.

The First Hussars participated in the Boer War in South Africa, World Wars I and II. They sent many volunteers to the Afghanistan War (2001 to 2014). From 1981 to 1985, I served in the Regiment as an armoured crewman and attained the rank of Corporal. I have helped to conserve some of the artifacts of the First Hussars Museum in London that are used during static displays by the Cavalry Troop. As Quartermaster and Saddler of the First Hussars Cavalry Troop, I help with equipment procurement, construction and maintenance.

There is a tie to Waterloo Region. The work is being done by two descendants of Christian (1734-1810) and Maria (Scherch) Erb (1734- 1814). I am one, and the other is Ivan B. Martin who is Old Order Mennonite. The connection with Ivan came about when I was searching for someone to rebuild some of the Troop's saddles. His was one of several Wallenstein-area harness shops I visited and he agreed to make the repairs and make new copies of WW I cavalry equipment. We have a mutual understanding that nothing he makes is intended for use in combat. Neither the saddle nor the First Hussars Cavalry Troop exists to glorify war – the First Hussars Cavalry Troop is a living extension of the First Hussars Museum.

I grew up in a Dutch Reformed community and at the age of 40 began the hunt for my heritage. One of the things that people in the Dutch-Canadian community like to do is find out how one person is related to another. We call it "Dutch Bingo." Knowing that there are many Pennsylvania Mennonite pioneers in my family tree, I decided to play Dutch Bingo with Ivan and his wife Mary. It turns out that Mary is a 5th cousin to me and Ivan is a 7th cousin. I am also a Gr- Gr- Gr- Grandson of John Negley Meyer [Waterloo Region Hall of Fame] and his wife, Mary Wenger who are buried at Martin's Meetinghouse Cemetery in Waterloo.

The saddle is being constructed by Ivan and myself, and he has put a lot of passion into this project. With over 20 years of experience in making horse harnesses and repairing saddles, he is very creative and skilled.

The leather strap with the heart shape is a breast collar. It attaches to the front of the saddle and to the girth strap. The new breast collar will have a First Hussars brass crest on it. The seat leather has been cut and is being shaped and I will soon be back in Ivan's shop when the seat will be stitched together and attached to the saddle tree. At the next work session, Ivan will cut the components for the breast collar and bridle. Then I will hand stitch the seat components and install the seat onto the saddle tree.

-- John C. Leistra

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<https://www.whs.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2017-Newsletters.pdf> . Accessed Oct. 23, 2023.



The tree refinished



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