

The Fairbridge Chapel

HONOUR ROLL SCROLL

By Ron Smith

Introduction

Over the past three decades the Chapel Society has kept members of the Fairbridge Canada Association up-to-date on the many projects undertaken at the heritage site through a column in the *Gazette*. On almost every occasion they have dealt with projects to maintain the site—namely the Chapel, school house—herdsman's home and grounds.

This column will be a little different, it is about a surprise found and the story behind a story.

As many readers are aware there are a number of memorial plaques and scrolls within the Chapel. This includes four that are in memory of those Fairbridgians who served in the Canadian Armed Forces both during World War II or joined the services after the war including those who participated in the Korean conflict.

In July it was noticed the frame around the "For King and Country" scroll that is located on the rear wall of the nave was in very poor condition and needed replacing. It contains the names of 93 Fairbridge students and staff who enlisted during World War II including Norman Alsop and Thomas Kemp both losing their lives in 1944 and Jim Lally who spent almost two years as a prisoner of war.

The scroll was taken to the E.J. Hughes Art Gallery in Duncan for re-framing and have a boarder mat incorporated which enlarged the size of the framing. In addition, ultra-violet glass, which will stop the scroll from fading—going yellow—was used. And as you will read a little further along in this story there was a *surprise!*

The 'For King and Country' Memorial Honour Roll Scrolls

For many years no one knew who made the scroll or when it was installed in the Chapel. As the Planning Director for the Cowichan Valley Regional District in the late 1970's into the mid 1980's, I worked very closely with Bellamy Properties the Victoria firm that re-developed the Fairbridge home site. As part of their new plans the CVRD purchased both the Chapel, and had the company relocate the school house to a small half acre historic site. Part of this transfer of ownership included a number of artifacts such as the Honour Roll Scroll, which, for about 10 years, were stored in the CVRD office vault. It was only after the heritage site was acquired by the Fairbridge Chapel Heritage Society in 1988 that these plaques and scrolls made their way back to the Chapel.

Recently, after examining the scroll in greater detail I noticed the letters A.J.C. at the bottom right corner. By chance, a few months later, while walking past a store that specialized in military memorabilia on Government Street in Victoria I noticed a similar scroll in their front window. When speaking to the owner I mentioned there was an almost identical one in the Fairbridge Chapel but did not know anything about these scrolls. He immediately said that they had been created by A.J. Casson, a member of the Group of Seven near the end of World War II.

Evidently there were different scroll designs prepared by A.J. Casson when he was the chief designer for the Toronto silk screen printing firm, Sampson-Matthews Ltd. He had joined the company in 1926 rising to be Vice President and Art Director by the 1940's. It was during World War II that the company got behind the war effort producing posters such as the highly praised "*Give Us the Tools and We Will Finish the Job—Help Finish the Job—Buy Victory Bonds*", in 1941. They also re-printed, enlarged silk screen prints of paintings done by many famous Canadian artists such as A.Y. Jackson, Tom Thompson, B.C. Binning, Lawren Harris, Emily Carr, A.J. Casson and others. It was the largest public art project in Canadian history. These large high-quality silk screens were sent around the world to every Canadian military unit and government offices to boost moral during the war and eventually posters went on special tours to the USA, Russia and Europe. After the war many copies ended up hanging in various businesses such as Eaton's Department Stores and every Bank of Montreal branch throughout the country.

Other Works by A.J. Casson

In 1984 the Canadian Pacific Railway ordered new streamlined passenger train sets including 18 cars—often referred to as the “Park Car” for the rear of the train and named each after a national or provincial park. A.J. Casson was commissioned to paint the walls of the “Mural Lounge” in the *Algonquin Park* car. Unfortunately, this car is not part of the 14 remaining park cars of VIA Rail, the corporation that took over the passenger business in Canada in 1978, since the car is leased to the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum in Chattanooga and used for their Hiwassee Premier Service. Fortunately, VIA Rail removed all murals from the trains in 1987 and are now preserved in The Canadian Science and Technology Museum in Ottawa.

While working for Sampson-Matthews throughout the week Casson would take weekend trips around southern Ontario to paint, often capturing the beauty of the many small towns and rural agricultural scenes. He also painted northern Ontario’s empty forested lands and remote villages in the Canadian Shield often with other members of the Group of Seven. Most of his paintings were done in water colours and now hang in the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Hart House (University of Toronto) and many others public galleries.

A.J. Casson, a resident of Toronto, joined the Group of Seven in 1926, was born in 1898 and died in 1992; age 93. He was a member of the Order of Canada as well as a number of art organisations such as the Ontario Society of Artists, the Royal Canadian Academy and the Canadian Group of Painters.

The Fairbridge Memorial Scroll

Getting back to our story. The Fairbridge Chapel Memorial Scroll contains the names of 82 students and 11 staff. This is the one that was re-framed this past summer (2018). When the Duncan gallery began working on the project, staff were very surprised to discover a second scroll tucked behind the other one. No one was aware of its existence—until, well, now. When I called to see if the Honour Roll was in the new frame they said yes it was finished but had something else to show me, namely a second Honour Roll scroll. This one only has 68 names.

From what can be surmised the Fairbridge Farm School had purchased the first one, which also has different notations at the very bottom. Likely the calligrapher was unaware that there had been so many students enlisting from such a small rural Vancouver Island school and thus miscalculated the spacing. A new scroll was ordered and calligraphy started again.

This incomplete scroll will be kept by the Society, as it is part of our history, and from time to time, such as reunions or other special events displayed for all to see.

A Special Memorial Service

The *Cowichan Leader* reported that on January 9, 1948 a special Friday service was held in the Chapel. With Col. H.T. Logan and his wife present a plaque “framed of B.C. fir to match the panelling of the chapel’s interior, was unveiled in memory of Lt. John Elmo Murray Logan who died from his wounds at Falaise, France in 1944. “It was placed just to the left of the honour roll of Old Fairbridgians and staff members who fought in the war and is now permanently housed in the chapel.” Thus, it seems that the Honour Roll Scroll was already in the chapel prior to this service.

By then, many Fairbridge students who had come to the farm school between 1935 and the end of the Second World War had left the school but in the same *Cowichan Leader* article there was mention of the recently held Vancouver reunion with about 50 Old Fairbridgians from around the province attending.

