

HKVCA – Ontario Region Report to AGM – August, 2015

I'd like to begin by thanking Mitzi Ross and her outstanding and dedicated team for putting together this terrific convention. Mitzi is really becoming an old hand at this, as she led the charge back in 2009 for the last big convention in Ottawa which set records for attendance!

Since our last convention in Winnipeg two years ago, we've lost a number of our Veterans, including Ken Pifher, Eric Maloney, Flash Clayton, Allison MacDonald and Alfred Babin. These were all outstanding men, just as were ... and are ... the rest of their colleagues. We will remember them.

One of the unfortunate side-effects of these losses is the resulting drop-off in membership of the HKVCA. Since 2011 our membership has dropped by 150, which represents a drop of almost 20%. Of these, 42 were Veterans. And we also lost 79 widows. But our number of regular members also dropped by 29. Fewer members mean fewer people available to carry on the very valuable volunteer work of the Association. I think it's fair to say that in not too many years our membership will have dropped below a critical mass, and we'll find it impossible to carry on.

Some of you may have participated in the online survey we ran a few months ago, which was intended to help us understand the reasons for the decline in regular members. The work to analyse the results is not complete, but hopefully when it is it may suggest how we might stop or even reverse this undesirable trend.

Speaking of volunteers ... our various areas in Ontario have been very busy holding memorial events and get-togethers for their members since our last convention, including the Ottawa area, Kingston and the surrounding area, the Greater Toronto Area and the area surrounding Niagara. These events were all well-attended and enjoyed by everyone who was there.

Our members have also been participants in the Ontario History and Social Studies Teachers' Association's annual conferences in Toronto which bring together high school teachers in those subjects from across the province. And our Ottawa gang has done a great job of representing the HKVCA at the annual Parliamentary Library Teachers' Institute.

Also in Ottawa just a few months ago the Embassy of China held a commemorative event at our Memorial Wall. George MacDonell was the only veteran who was able to attend, and he accepted honours on behalf of all of his colleagues.

And there has been a good deal of printed material emanating from Ontario: one of our members, Howard Raper, has published a book based on the life of Flash Clayton; and George MacDonell has published yet another book, "They Never Surrendered", in late 2014.

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And some late-breaking news: in Toronto, just yesterday a group representing Chinese-heritage Canadians held a commemorative event at the Legislature Building at Queens Park where the Hong Kong Veterans were honoured.

I'd like to take a moment for a special thanks to Lori Smith, who is our Ontario Membership Secretary ... and who is also coordinating the Association's Monument Badge Program. And to Mark Purcell, who has very ably managed our financial books in the Ontario Region for several years now.

The theme of all of this, of course, is that keeping the memory of our Hong Kong Veterans alive takes a good deal of volunteer effort. I doubt that there is a person here who is not convinced that doing this is worth the time and effort.

Thank you to all of our dedicated volunteers, in Ontario and across Canada ... and please step forward to help in any way you make sure we "never forget".

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Babin