

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CURATOR

November
2022



In Remembrance

On the “eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month” in 1918, hostilities on the Western Front of World War I officially ended. This Armistice or Remembrance Day has been observed every year since. To honour our soldiers, I would like to share stories that are connected to the museum’s military collection.

Donated from the families of local soldiers, the museum has the privilege of caring for WW1 uniforms, medals, plaques and more.

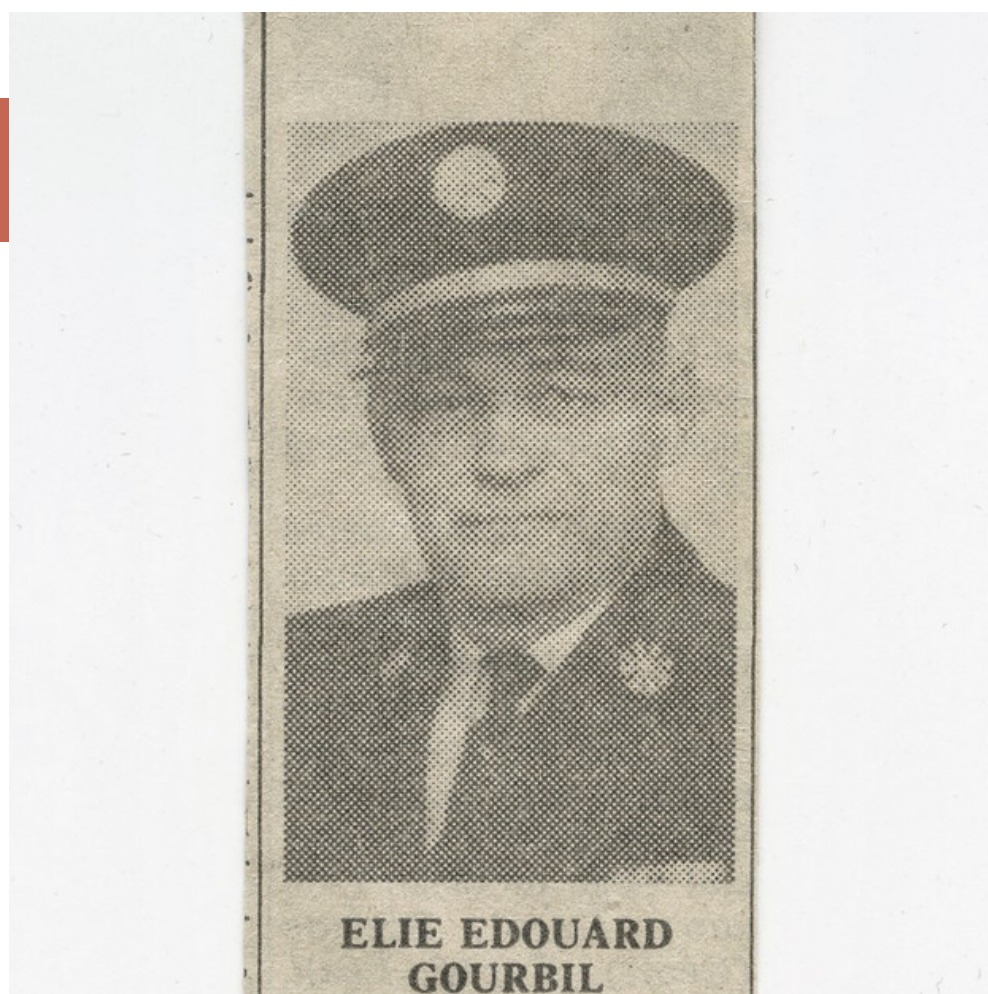
Alfred Marie Jean Valmont was born in France in 1877, he joined the French Army Infantry in 1897, and served in World War I with the 355e Regiment. His regiment fought in the battles of the Ourcq, Aisne, Verdun and Avre. Valmont died in a trench near Verdun in February 1916 at the age of 38 years old. In 1909, he married Marie Eugénie Gaspard. The couple had three children, Gabrielle, Agnès, and Jean-Marie, the latter born in 1913. Marie passed away in 1921, leaving their children orphaned and designated as war orphans, officially known as “Wards of the Nation.” In 1928, the children moved to Canada with their aunt Maria and established themselves in Saint-Boniface. The family safeguarded this uniform for a hundred years until one of Jean-Marie’s children donated it to the museum in 2016.



The second complete uniform from WWI in our collection belonged to Elie Edouard Gourbil. He was born in Chile in 1897 to French parents and moved to Canada in 1902. When Gourbil turned 18 in 1915 he applied to enlist, however, the army denied his initial application because of frailty due to his small stature of five feet three inches, and his light weight of 98lbs. They also deemed his flat feet unfit for combat. Determined to join the army, he found another recruiter who agreed to let him join, on the condition that he exercised to gain weight. Later that year, he joined the ranks of the 22e Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, famously known as “The Vandoos.” Gourbil participated in all the major battles of the last two years of the war: Vimy, Passchendaele, Somme, Amiens, Arras, and Cambrai, among others. He stayed in Germany with the occupation forces before returning to Saint-Boniface at 22 years old.



Gourbil went on to work for the Fire Brigade in Saint-Boniface for 43 years, until he retired as Deputy Fire Chief in 1962. During that time, he married Rose in 1924 and had two children. After his retirement, he became a member of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires and was president of the Union Nationale Française for five years. He retired from the workforce at the age of eighty-nine and passed away at ninety-four years old.



This next story is about pieces of a uniform, and a variety of medical instruments. Dr. Louis-Donat Collin was born in Quebec in 1881. The family moved to Saint-Boniface, Manitoba the following year. He studied at the St. Boniface College, the University of Ottawa and in Paris. He graduated from the University of Montréal in Medicine and became a surgeon at the St. Boniface Hospital in 1913. Collin joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1915, where he served in the Canadian Army Medical Corps for the 6th Canadian General Hospital of the 28th Battalion as a Medical Officer. At the end of the war, he stayed in Europe to help in French hospitals during the Spanish Flu epidemic. He received the French Service Medal in recognition of his efforts.



Dr. Collin returned home in June 1919, and married Rose Mary Doolittle in September 1919, whom he met during his service. She served in the same hospital as a Nursing Sister for the Canadian Army Medical Corps. He went back to work at the St. Boniface Hospital, where he worked until he retired in 1948. He was known to be a very dependable person: “He was so punctual that one could set his watch by seeing Dr. Collin on his way to the hospital.” He developed techniques to increase the speed of surgeries and perfected his techniques for intubation and tracheotomy. Other doctors often called him to perform these procedures on diphtheria-stricken children because of his speed and exceptional dexterity.

In 1931, he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada, then became a member of the Council of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba, and from 1934 to 1936, he was a member of the Board of Governors of the University of Manitoba. During his career, he financed the costs for postsecondary education in Medicine of eleven young men from St. Boniface, including Dr. R. A. Jacques who wrote Dr. Collin’s eulogy for the St. Boniface Hospital monthly newsletter, describing him as “a tireless surgeon.”



War Medals are globally recognized symbols of honour and bravery, recognizing a soldier's participation in battle or war, or the sacrifice they made for their country. These three medals are always issued as a set:

- The 1914-1915 Star awarded to all allied troops who fought in the first two years of the First World War
- The British War Medal awarded to all officers and soldiers of the British Empire who served overseas during the First World War.
- The Victory Medal awarded to all fighting forces, civilians, and others employed in military hospitals who served during the First World War.



After the end of the First World War, families of British Empire soldiers who died during the war were issued The Next of Kin Memorial Plaque. Also known as the “Dead Man’s Penny,” the engraved name of the fallen soldier appears on the front of the five-inch bronze medallion. This Memorial Plaque commemorates Roger Chartrand, a young man from Winnipeg who served with the Winnipeg Grenadiers and died in action in early 1918. As requested in his will, this plaque was issued to his mother, Annie.



Though all the stories in the blog today are about the First World War, there have been many wars before and after, where many Canadians lost their lives. November 11 may have started to honour those who fell during the First World War, but it now honours all those who fought in the many wars that Canada participated in. We take this day to honour the sacrifices they made to protect those who could not defend themselves, as well as defending their country.



These medals and uniforms, as well as a few more artefacts, will be on display throughout the month of November.

Lest we forget.