

Walking from Belleville to Toronto could take a week, if you want to try out the route taken by the late W. Allan Dempsey, who set out on foot as a courier to deliver a message from Belleville to Toronto in April, 1924.

But then Dempsey was not just any person with an interest in recreational walking. He took his sport very seriously. He had won the annual walking contests at the Belleville High School Field Day for three consecutive years before venturing on this mission to Toronto. The media of the day described his appearance as "a clean-living Canadian youth, clear of eye, and the picture of health." That, and the fact that Dempsey was a descendant of the United Empire Loyalists of Irish origin, appeared to have made him the perfect choice for depicting the drama of the old style of letter delivery of his ancestors. After the American Revolution, his ancestors arrived and farmed the land for four generations in Prince Edward County where he lived till he died in the early 1990s.

Dempsey's, who was only 17 at the time of his trek to Toronto, job was to hand deliver an invitation from Belleville's Mayor, W.C. Mikel, to the mayor and members of Toronto City Council; the premier of Ontario, the Hon. G. Howard Ferguson, and members of his cabinet; and to the acting Lt.-Gov. Chief Justice Sir William Mulock, to attend the celebrations of the 140th anniversary of the settlement of Upper Canada by the United Empire Loyalists.

The celebrations were to be held in Belleville the

week of June 16, 1924. On his way to Toronto, he was also to distribute invitations to the mayors of cities and towns, as well as reeves of villages, and the council members of the municipalities, through which he was going to pass.

At 9:20 a.m. on the morning of Monday, April 21, Dempsey set out for Toronto. Smartly attired in his cadet uniform, sturdy boots and Glengarry cap, he carried with him a metal box containing the official invitations and souvenir post cards.

It was noted that by noon that day he had covered about 18 kilometres and arrived at Trenton, to be honoured as a guest of the local Rotary Club. By the end of the day, he was in Brighton and stayed there with his friends till the next day. On Tuesday afternoon he walked 10 kilometres to Colborne, where he visited a former Prince Edward County family. His next target was Cobourg, which he reached around noon. On reaching Port Hope, that evening, he supped with the mayor of the town at a local hotel.

Finally, on Saturday evening, April 26, 1924, Dempsey arrived in Toronto. The next day he

delivered the invitation to the premier of Ontario. The Mayor of Toronto, W.W. Hiltz, officially greeted his arrival at the City Hall on Monday April 28. Mayor Hiltz accepted the delivered invitation and made a promise to attend the Belleville celebrations with a few members of his council.

Having completed his mission, Dempsey took a train back to Belleville. Mayor Mikel of Belleville, Mayor Blakely of Trenton, several aldermen and other city officials met him at the station.

Dempsey brought back with him a letter from Toronto's Mayor Hiltz, addressed to Mayor Mikel, which read, as quoted by Nick and Helma Mika in their book Belleville, The Good Old Days, "... If Cadet Dempsey is a sample of the boys you have in Belleville and the Belleville High school, your city has reason to be proud of your young men."

It is not known whether the mayor and the city council of Toronto and the premier of Ontario were able to make it to the celebrations in June that year.

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