

Belleville enters second century tomorrow

1878 - 1978

What a party! Plaque permanent tribute to city's rich history

By JIM PALMATEER
Staff Reporter

With cannons blasting in the background and the chimes of the city hall clock tower ringing out the hour, Belleville's history was unveiled in the form of an historical plaque Saturday morning at Victoria Park.

Well over 300 people lined the one lane road into the park for the first official ceremony on the city's 100th birthday. Many were in the hot cumbersome costumes of 100 years ago and some represented the city of today in halter tops and shorts as the brief one-half hour ceremony focussed on the events that lead to the community gaining status as a city December 31, 1877.

Mayor Ben Corke paid tribute to the Hastings County Historical Society, Belleville Centennial '78 and the Ontario Heritage Foundation for the work that went into researching the city's history and having the new historical site dedicated.

"The plaque will be read by many of the thousands of people that come to this park as well as many of our own citizens who will find something out about their own city," Mayor Corke said.

He added that one of his goals in recognizing the historical development of the city will be to have City Hall proclaimed as a national historic site.

Jack Ellis, Hastings MP, told the crowd that the Belleville plaque was one of over 100 such monuments being unveiled across Canada during the celebrations of the nation's 111th birthday.

"No unveiling, however, is as important as the one today in Belleville," Ellis said. "The history of this city rivals anything in Canada."

Hugh O'Neil, Quinte MPP, paid tribute to the many groups that have worked over the years on the centennial celebrations.

"I imagine Belleville 100 years ago must have been as pretty as it is today," O'Neil added.

The Belleville plaque is now one of over 1,000 such historical landmarks across Ontario, Peter Kettlewell, a representative of the Ontario Heritage Foundation, told the gathering.

Participants at the plaque unveiling ceremony also heard an address given by Sen. Billa Flint at the inauguration of the city 100 years ago. Read by Gerry Boyce, chairman of the history committee of Belleville Centennial '78, Flint commented on his early impressions of Belleville following the war of 1812-1814 as a "dirty and dilapidated" town.

Flint settled in the community in 1829 when, he said, the local school was only fit as a pig pen and certainly not to the benefit of young children.

However, Flint saw the changes and by 49 years later when Belleville had grown from Meyer's Creek to a police village and following through as a town and city he was impressed. In his 1878 address, he predicted a brilliant future for Belleville.

Dedication of the plaque was given by Rev. Richard Boehme of Eastminister United Church who said the importance of the city's centennial represents the challenge of the future.



Mayor Ben Corke unveils a plaque at a centennial ceremony held Saturday morning at Victoria Park.