

NEW PARK NAME WILL INSPIRE OTHERS, SAYS MAYOR

HERB GARBUTT

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Halton Hills recognized and paid tribute to an important part of its heritage Saturday (Oct. 2), re-naming the park on Dayfoot Drive in honour of Henry Thomas Shepherd.

Shepherd was Georgetown's first Black fire chief, a position he earned after a being a longtime member of the volunteer fire brigade. Shepherd was also a founding member of the Georgetown Legion.

"They lived in a time when the colour of your skin was the sole measure of your worth. The Shepherds faced obstacles and barriers I could never begin to name, yet they thrived," said Melissa King, Shepherd's great granddaughter. "The measure of their worth is the legacy of strength they carved out for future generations."

"This demonstrates the important role he played in the history of Georgetown,"



Shepherd family photo

said Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette. "His accomplishments will continue to inspire for generations to come."

Shepherd's grandmother used the underground railroad to escape slavery and come to Canada with her son John Henry (Shepherd's father). She settled in Georgetown and worked on the farm of Colonel John Murray in Stewarttown as a housekeeper. After her death in 1871, the Murrays raised John Henry.



Top: Melissa King, the great granddaughter of Henry Thomas Shepherd, speaks at the dedication of the park. Left: Georgetown native Henry Thomas Shepherd, Georgetown's first Black fire chief and a military veteran.

Cpl. Darren Kowlessar photos

John Henry married Sarah Hartley, who worked for the Murrays, in 1886. Henry, the second youngest of their six children, was born Aug. 18, 1895.

Shepherd worked at the paper mill with his father and joined the Halton Rifles (which became the Lorne Scots). In 1914, he enlisted in the army.

"At the time of the First World War, young black Canadians were not always welcomed into the military," King said.

Shepherd was one of the few Black servicemen in a non-segregated battalion, serving with the 58th Bat-

alion in France and Belgium. He was wounded twice, but returned to duty each time.

"The freedom Mrs. Shepherd sought for her son would be the very thing her grandchild would serve to protect," King said.

After returning from the war, he stayed active with the Halton Rifles and was promoted to Regimental Sergeant Major, becoming the first Black man to earn the title in Canada. Around the same time, he was named Georgetown's fire chief.

He re-enlisted in the army in 1939, but due to his in-

juries from the First World War, he was not eligible for overseas duty. Instead, he trained soldiers at a camp in Newmarket between 1940 and 1944.

A Globe and Mail article described how trainees held Shepherd in high regard.

"There is no colour line in the Canadian army and the rookies take their orders from Sgt. Mjr. Shepherd as willingly as they would the Colonel himself. They respect him for his enviable war record and for his ability as a training officer and they like him for his bantering good humour."

Shepherd was named a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (MBE).

After the war, Shepherd returned to work at the paper mill and for many years was the parade marshal on Remembrance Day.

The park is located about a block from where Shepherd once lived on Chapel Street.

"This honour means his name and legacy will carry on," King said. "As children and families visit the park, they will learn about this great man and enjoy the same spaces where he raised his family."

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