

GOWER REMEMBERS

Lieutenant William Lloyd Woods
(1890-1923)



“I have the honour to notify you that the finding of the Standing Medical Board is that you ‘require complete rest for three months, or Sanatarium [sic] treatment.’ If you can furnish me with a distinct understanding or guarantee that you will take such complete rest it will satisfy the Department for the present.”

(Letter to Woods from Dr. Cluny Macpherson, April 14, 1919)

William Lloyd Woods was born in St. John's on September 5, 1890, the older of two sons of Emma Burns and Sidney Woods. In addition to Lloyd and his brother John, there were two daughters, Alice and Clare. His father, one of 14 children of a long-established St. John's family, operated a very successful hardware business for many years. His mother, a native of Cape Breton Island, had a full-time occupation as a homemaker and in carrying out charitable works.

Lloyd attended the Methodist College in St. John's, graduating, it would appear, at the conclusion of the 1907-1908 school year. During his time there he was actively involved debating, assisting in one debate sponsored by the Methodist College Literary Institute (MCLI) in 1905 on the price of fish, which included Captain Abram Kean arguing for the opposite side. He also had an interest in painting, successfully completing a course administered by the Royal Drawing Society at the local School of Art in 1902.

What he was doing in the interim is unclear but by mid-summer of 1909 he was listed as one of the Official Reporters with the Legislative Council, the upper house in the Newfoundland legislature. Later that year, he was appointed as a bookkeeper with the Department of Public Works, a position that he held for several years, perhaps up until he left for school in New Brunswick in 1912.

Woods was quite active in St. John's society during his early working years. A talented singer, he was a member of the choir at Gower Street Methodist Church and performed at concerts and other social events. One in particular was a

concert held at the Methodist College Hall on November 21, 1910, in aid of the Regulus-Golden Arrow Fund, which had been established to assist the families of those lost in sinking of these ships earlier that year. Woods was one of the soloists featured in newspaper advertisements promoting the concert.

He also polished his debating skills, taking part in an MCLI debate held on February 1, 1912 on the topic “Which is the higher goal of the attainment of knowledge or the capacity to achieve?”. Woods was one of the three persons who argued for the capacity side and performed quite well, even though his side lost. In a report on the debate that appeared in *The Evening Telegram* the following day, the chairman, Calvert Pratt, “paid a special compliment to Mr. Lloyd Woods for his brilliant effort in support of ‘energy’.”

Woods was also an avid hockey player and was somewhat the worse for wear for being so. In a game played on February 17, 1911 he “received a blow from a hockey stick that laid open his right cheek, the wound being an ugly one. In a previous game Woods had his left cheek also cut.” (*The Evening Telegram*, February 18, 1911)

In late 1911 or early 1912, Woods left St. John’s for Sackville, New Brunswick, where he enrolled in Mount Allison University. He spent two years there, during which time he became involved in the Oldest Colony Club, a society that had been established in 1910 for students who hailed from Newfoundland. He left there before completing his degree to take part in World War I, enlisting in the Newfoundland Regiment in St. John’s on December 15, 1914, regimental number 660. He embarked for overseas on

February 5, 1915 as part of C Company aboard the SS *Dominion*. He spent the spring and summer of 1915 in training in Scotland before leaving Devonport in the south of England on August 20, 1915 with just over 1,000 other members of the Regiment for the eastern Mediterranean.

Arriving in Alexandria, Egypt on August 31, Woods and his comrades underwent acclimatization in Egypt before being transported north to Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula later in September, landing on the beach at Suvla Bay on September 19. His stay at Suvla was quite short, however, as he was evacuated to the No. 1 Stationary Hospital on the Greek island of Mudros the following day, with dysentery. His affliction was so severe that on October 15 he was transferred to the General Hospital at Gibraltar and at the end of November he was invalided to England, where he spent the next two months at the Beaufort War Hospital at Fishponds, Bristol. He was released from hospital, attached to E Company and reported for duty at the Depot at Ayr, Scotland on January 28, 1916.

Woods spent almost a year and a half at Ayr before rejoining the Battalion in the field on June 14, 1917. On October 9 he received gunshot wounds to the neck and chest in fighting at Broembek during the Third Battle of Ypres. Admitted to the 3rd General Hospital at LeTreport the following day, he was shipped back to England on the 26th, where he spent more time in recovery before reporting for duty at the Depot at Ayr on December 5. On July 21, 1918 he was sent back to Newfoundland for special duty, and remained in that capacity until his discharge on medical grounds on January 14, 1919. During his time in the

Regiment Woods, received a series of promotions, the final being the rank of Lieutenant on May 1, 1918.

The gunshot wounds that Woods received at Broembek were not the major cause of his being declared medically unfit. In the period between his admittance to hospital in the fall of 1915 and October 24, 1922, he underwent 13 separate examinations by the Regimental Medical Board. His medical problems were determined to be pulmonary, including constant coughing with phlegm, noisy or raspy breathing and other indications of tuberculosis but an active form of the disease was never found.

Back in St. John's, Woods found employment with the St. John's City Council in the Engineering Department. It was not long before he returned to post-war activities, including Gower Street Church choir, performing solo at many Sunday services. He was involved in public performing, singing alone or as a member of the musical group the St. John's Octette. He also returned to debating with the MCLI, and was quite active with the Great War Veterans Association (GWVA). In 1919 he commanded one of the three divisions established in St. John's to raise funds for GWVA causes.

His contribution to Gower Street Church was not limited to music. He was one of six veterans who served on the Memorial Committee, struck to commission a suitable memorial to the Gower war dead to be placed in the sanctuary of the church. This group was comprised of the Rev. E. W. Forbes, the minister at the time, the Rev. Thomas B. Darby, W. H. Peters, P. H. Hudson, John Leamon and A.

Soper, as well as Lieutenant-Colonel Dr. Cluny Macpherson, Major Robert H. Tait, Captain Charles R. Ayre, Lieutenant Charles F. Garland, Lieutenant Arthur Greaves and Woods. This committee also planned the Memorial Service that was held on May 21, 1922 at which the memorial plaque was unveiled.

While he was in Ayr in 1917 attached to the Depot, Woods met Jean Barnes Miller, a native of Edinburgh. They were married on July 2, 1917 at Belfast, Ireland, while Woods was on a furlough before rejoining the Battalion in the field. It is unclear when she came to Newfoundland and may not have done so until 1921, as their only child, a son, was listed in the 1921 Newfoundland Census Return as having been born in Edinburgh in December 1920. It would appear more likely that she had come out to St. John's in 1919, gone back for the birth of her child and returned the following year.

That child, christened John Hamilton Woods, was soon to be an orphan. His mother died on January 22, 1922, after taking sick the previous evening. Thirteen months later, Lloyd Woods died as a result of neuralgia in his face and neck. This was probably an aftereffect of the bullet wound he had received in the neck at Broembek. He went into hospital and emergency dental surgery was performed but the disease had progressed too far and his death occurred on Saturday afternoon, February 17, 1923. John Hamilton Woods was raised by his grandparents and one of his aunts. He joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in World War II, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his exploits in the air. He

died in Kingston Ontario in 1998 but his body was interred in Harbour Grace.

Lloyd Woods was buried from his father's house on LeMarchant Road and his body was interred in the General Protestant Cemetery. An indication of the respect and esteem in which he was held by friends and acquaintances alike is evident in the list of those in attendance at his funeral service. In addition to the clergy, officials, choir members and congregants of Gower Street Methodist Church, Mayor Tasker Cook and members of the St. John's City Council and City staff were in attendance, as were members of the Great War Veterans Association and the Freemasons from Whiteway Lodge, of which Woods had been a member for some time and where he was the organist. His fellow masons performed their standard graveside ritual of dropping sprigs of acacia into the open grave atop the casket, symbolizing the purity and endurance of his soul and signifying their belief in his ultimate resurrection and immortality.

On Sunday, November 16, 2014, Gower Street United Church initiated a program of commemoration that will last for approximately the next four years. On roughly every third Sunday from now through to 2018, a brief write-up on one of these individuals, like this one, will appear as an insert in the Bulletin and there will be a reference to that person in the service. In this way we hope to recognize their contribution to the war effort, the many sacrifices they made, some with their very lives, and the debt of gratitude we owe to each of them.

We also hope to learn more about them from their descendants or other relatives, thereby fostering a link between our past and our present as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of this congregation. If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and woman please contact Bert Riggs at briggs@mun.ca 726-6169/864-8303