

GOWER REMEMBERS

Lance Corporal Donald McLaren Fraser

(1895-1977)



“The marginally noted N.C.O. has notified me that he has an opening in civil life, and would like his discharge as soon as it can be conveniently carried out. / Will you kindly arrange? This N.C.O. has given exceptionally good and expert service in connection with Mil[itar]y Service Board, and latterly in the general work of the Dept.” (Letter to Major Robert H. Tait, Depot Officer Commanding, from Major Cluny Macpherson, Depot Medical Service, December 30, 1918)

Donald McLaren Fraser¹ was born in Grand Bank on March 06, 1895, the second of three sons and third of four children of Tryphena Harris and the Rev. George C. Fraser. The Rev. Fraser was a native of Seaton Sluice, Northampton, England, having been born there on October 20, 1854. He came to Newfoundland in 1883 as a Methodist minister and served in Petites, St. John's West (George Street), Bonavista, Exploits, Trinity, Grand Bank, Blackhead and Twillingate, before his early death on June 05, 1902, at the age of 47. Tryphena Fraser was a member of a long-established Bonavista family. She met George Fraser and married him during his time as the Methodist minister in Bonavista. She was almost 13 years his junior (born March 13, 1857) and died at an equally early age in 1917.

In addition to Donald, the Fraser family consisted of older brother, Harry Boyd Ashbury (1889-1955), sister, Mary Willard Ruth (1893-1974) and younger brother, Wallace McKinley (1899-1902), who died at age three of meningitis.

Fraser received his early education in the Methodist schools in the various communities in which his father served. After his father's death in 1902, his mother moved the family to St. John's, where they lived at 15 Prescott Street, and Donald attended the Methodist College. While at the college, in 1910, as a member of the Intermediate Grade, he was one of six recipients of the \$25.00 Jubilee Scholarship awarded by the Council of Higher Education. The other recipients were Eleanor Mews (Methodist College), James Trebble (Bishop Feild College), and Edward Crawford, Harold Barnes and Patrick Keating (St. Bonaventure's College). Fraser also won a \$4.00 prize for Chemistry.

¹ The family surname is sometimes spelled Frazer.

His scholarly abilities were evident in many fields. In December 1911, *The Evening Telegram* issued a challenge to its younger readers: find as many words as possible from the letters contained in the four-word phrase “Reliable Drinks are Best” and win a \$5.00 prize sponsored by Greene & Co., the distributor for this product. Fraser, then 17, was declared the winner on December 30, having found 2,011 words.

Upon graduating from the Methodist College, Fraser began work with the St. John’s branch of the Bank of Nova Scotia as a clerk. He remained with the bank, in various positions until he enlisted in the Royal Newfoundland Regiment some five or six years later.

Fraser’s older brother, Harry, had attempted to enlist in the Newfoundland Regiment on two separate occasions, the first on December 04, 1914. Had he been successful, he would have been part of the second contingent, which went overseas in February 1915. However, on this attempt, and a later attempt, he was declared to be medically unfit, the severity of the varicose veins in his legs causing him to be at risk both for marching and for spending long periods of time standing.

It was Donald, the younger of the Fraser brothers, who eventually joined the Regiment. He did so on April 17, 1918 at the age of 23. According to his Attestation Paper, he was 5 feet, 6½ inches tall, weighed 125 pounds, with light hair, blue eyes and fair complexion; he had two scars on his left arm. He listed his occupation as an accountant, and gave his sister, Mary, as his next of kin. He was assigned to C Company and given Regimental number 4465.

Fraser spent all of his 289 days of service with the Regiment stationed in St. John’s, working first under Major Cluny Macpherson at the Military Service Board, and later with the Department of Militia, the government entity responsible for the Newfoundland war effort. On

August 17, 1918, he was promoted to Lance Corporal and, on September 07, he was transferred to F Company.

Major Macpherson, the Regiment's Director of Medical Services, was quite impressed with Fraser. On November 20, 1918, he wrote to Major Robert H. Tait, Officer Commanding the Depot in St. John's, recommending that Fraser be promoted to Corporal. He wrote "*Since the marginally noted man has been attached to this department he has given exceptionally good service in connection with the work on the Military Service Board.*" Tait's response, dated December 03, 1918, denied the request, citing Fraser's relatively short period of service, and pointing out that he was "*junior to many Overseas N. C. O's of the rank on Depot Strength and also to recruits in training for overseas service.*"

A second letter to Tait from Macpherson, dated December 30, 1918, sought immediate discharge from the Regiment for Fraser, because he had a job offer from the private sector. In that letter, he repeated his recommendation that Fraser deserved a promotion to Corporal.

Fraser's discharge from the Regiment did not take long: on January 02, 1919, he appeared before the Civil Re-establishment Committee, where he stated that his plan was to return "*To work as a bank clerk*". The Committee recommended that he be given a clothing allowance of \$60.00. His discharge and demobilization came into effect on January 30; his discharge certificate number was 667.

Upon discharge, Fraser returned to his previous employer, the Bank of Nova Scotia. He remained there until April 1921, when he moved to the law firm Squires and Curtis as Business Manager. The senior partner of that firm was Sir Richard A. Squires, who was also Prime Minister of Newfoundland at the time. The junior partner was Leslie Curtis, whose

father, the Rev. Levi Curtis, had been minister at Gower Street Church from 1896 to 1899. Squires, Curtis and Fraser all attended Gower.

His change of employment provided two very interesting challenges for Fraser. He found the financial records at the law firm to be in a terrible state, one which he had to try to rectify. The other thrust him into the Newfoundland political scene. In the May 03, 1923, general election, Squires and his Liberal Party were returned to power with 23 of 36 seats in the Newfoundland House of Assembly. Less than three months later, Squires was deposed by a group of his Cabinet ministers, led by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, William R. Warren. On July 23, these ministers forced Squires to resign because of allegations that had recently come to light of misuse of government funds prior to the election. Warren was sworn in as Prime Minister and his administration engaged a British barrister, Thomas Hollis Walker, to conduct an inquiry into the allegations against Squires and others. This inquiry had the power to subpoena witnesses, one of whom was Fraser, in his capacity as the Business Manager for Squires and Curtis.

Fraser's testified before the inquiry on January 14, 1924. In response to questions from the Commissioner, from Attorney General Warren, and from Squires' lawyer, William R. Howley, Fraser explained that the firm's books when he assumed the position were in "*appalling condition. Describing the desk which he took to be that of the accountant, the witness said it was piled a foot high with all sorts of memoranda.*" (*The Evening Telegram*, January 14, 1924) He was not able to shed a great deal of light on the allegations, although he was able to inform the inquiry that Squires had a number of bank accounts to which he, Fraser, had no access.

Even though he advised the Hollis Walker inquiry that he had no legal training when he entered the employ of Squires and Curtis, Fraser did begin such training during that decade. He completed several years of

articles and passed the requisite courses to allow him to be called to the Bar of Newfoundland on June 27, 1928.

It would appear, however, that Fraser did not practice law in Newfoundland. On September 20, 1928, less than three months after his call to the bar, he arrived in New York City from St. John's on board the SS *Silvia*. New York City would remain his primary residence for the remainder of his life. While there is no indication that he was called to the Bar of New York, he did work for Dewitt Lockman & Dewitt, a New York City law firm, in all likelihood as an accountant. He made regular visits to family in St. John's throughout the 1930s, usually during August and September. He also travelled to England at least once, in 1935.

On April 12, 1940, Fraser applied for naturalization as an American citizen. In 1942 he completed the US Government's Draft Registration form. In it he gave his place of residence as the Shelton Hotel at 49th Street and Lexington Avenue. He listed his life-long friend, Fraser Bond, of 51 – 5th Avenue, as the person who would always know his address. Fraser Bond was the son of the Rev George Bond, who was twice minister at Gower Street Church (1874-1876 and 1883-1886). Fraser Bond was named for the Rev. George Fraser, who had been a friend of his father. It has been claimed that Donald Fraser and Fraser Bond were involved in an committed relationship for much of their adult lives.

In addition to his other talents and abilities, Donald Fraser was an acclaimed singer, and for many years was a member of the Gower Street Church choir, where he was a part of the bass section. *The Evening Telegram*, for April 11, 1925, reported that he was one of a quartet, who performed "From Thy Love as a Father" from Gounod's *Redemption*, as part of a recital of Passion Week music at Gower, on the previous day, which was Good Friday. The quartet, which also included Miss S. Moore

(soprano), Mrs. L. R. Curtis (alto) and Mr. F. Wylie (tenor), was commended for the harmonization of its voices.

Fraser also acted on the stage on at least one occasion: On November 01, 1923, he was in the cast of a play entitled "Gentlemen Boarders", staged by the Women's Home Missionary Society at the Anglican Synod Hall and featuring Fraser, Herbert Russell, Mrs. H. Outerbridge and Mrs. H. LeMessurier.


Donald Fraser's brother Harry died in St. John's on October 04, 1955, at age 66, leaving his wife, Stella, and his daughter, Ruth Eaton and her family. His sister Mary had married James A. Cochrane, one-time principal of the United Church College in St. John's. After Cochrane's death in 1947, she joined the staff of Memorial University as a professor of Classical Languages. She died at Hoyles Home on December 15, 1974, at age 81. Donald died at New York City on January 14, 1977, also at age 81. His remains were brought back to St. John's and he was buried by the Rev. George LeDrew of Gower Street Church on February 12, 1977, with interment in the General Protestant Cemetery.

This advertisement appeared
in *The Evening Telegram*
for January 04, 1912.

"Reliable Drinks are Best."

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ST. JOHN'S,

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PRIZE IN THE "RE-
LIABLE DRINKS ARE
BEST" CONTEST.



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On Sunday, November 16, 2014, Gower Street United Church initiated a program of commemoration that will last for approximately four to five years. On roughly every second Sunday through to the end of 2018, a brief write-up on one of these individuals, similar to 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 begin our 203rd year as a faith community.

If you know of any relatives of these servicemen and women please contact Bert Riggs at briggs@mun.ca or at 726-6169.