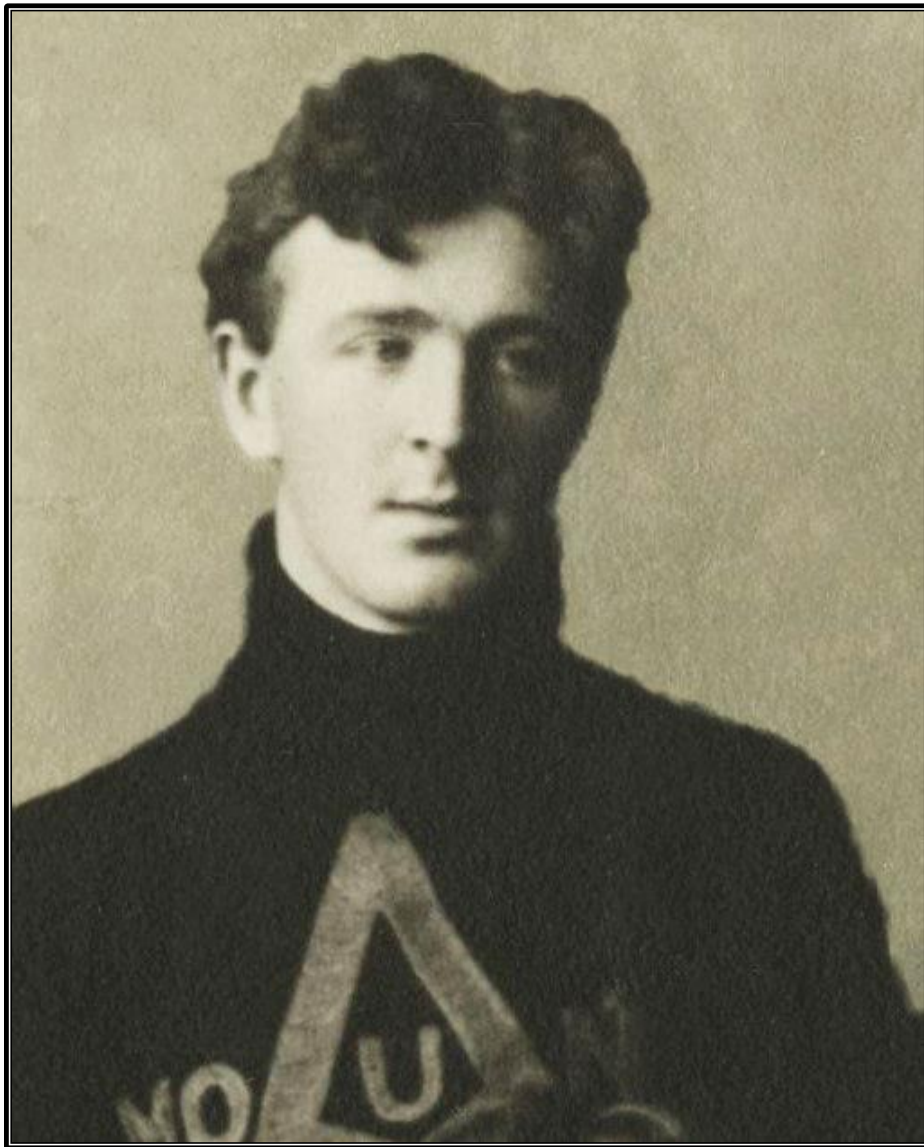


GOWER REMEMBERS

Second Corporal Robert Wilson Adrain

(1886-1961)



Robert Adrain wearing his football jersey at Mount Allison, 1908.

“Not aw’d to duty by superior sway.” (Epithet for Adrain in the McGill University Yearbook, *Old McGill*, Class of 1910)

Robert Wilson Adrain was born in St. John's on May 05, 1886, the son of Amelia Percy and John Adrain. A Scotsman by birth, John Adrain (1850-1931) immigrated to Newfoundland while still a young man, most likely in the mid-1870s. He married Amelia Percy of St. John's some time before 1879, when their first child, William Brodie, was born. Sadly William died on April 24, 1881, just one year and four months old. There were four other children born into the Adrain family, two of whom died quite young: Emma Graham (1881-1935); Helen (1883-1930); Charles Percy (1884-1885); and Jeannie (1888-1892). The family attended Gower Street Methodist Church, occupying pew 13 in aisle D for many years.

John Adrain was a tailor by trade. He first appears in St. John's city directories in 1885-1886, when he is listed as a tailor and clothier, operating a tailoring business at 174 Water Street and living on LeMarchant Road. It is from around that time that advertisements for his establishment begin appearing in local papers. He was committed to quality and service and made quite a name for himself in St. John's. In the Christmas Eve edition of *The Evening Telegram* for 1904, there is a very complementary testament to his abilities: "*One of the most reliable tailors on Water Street is Mr. John Adrain. He is a public benefactor in as much as he keeps the prices for making suits down to a reasonable figure. His long experience guides him in the selection of the very best materials in tweeds, cloths, etc. His work is always turned out satisfactory to his customers in cut, style and finish, therefore, his customers never leave him for clothing unless they require a winding sheet. Amongst the resolutions for the New Year, one may do worse than include the following: 'give an order for a new suit to Adrain'.*"

Amelia Adrain, in addition to bearing and caring for six children, was involved in various church and philanthropic endeavours. She was also an accomplished pianist and lent her talents to many social events. Her sister, Melvina, married the Hon. James Angel, who had established and guided the Newfoundland Consolidated Foundry Company for many years. He

was also one of the founders and a life-long supporter of George Street Methodist (later United) Church.

Young Robert attended the Methodist College, where he exhibited skills in many areas. In the school year-end report for 1898, he was in the top half of his class in English, Arithmetic & Algebra, Euclid (Geometry) & Mensuration, Book-keeping and French. He graduated sometime around 1903-1904. The next few years are a mystery but at the beginning of the 1906 school year he had enrolled in Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick, where he studied engineering. After two years at Mount Allison, he transferred to McGill University in Montreal, graduating in 1910 with a Bachelor of Science degree. It was while he was at Mount Allison that two of the letters in his last name were transposed and for the remainder of his life, in many official documents, he was known as Robert Adrian.

As well as his demonstrated scholarly abilities, Adrain exhibited his prowess on the sports field. Undoubtedly he played on various sports teams while a student at the Methodist College, but it was not until he had graduated from there that he began to receive notice and praise in local papers, playing for the Feildians in the inter-city leagues. On September 15 and 29, *The Evening Telegram* recorded his participation on the Feildians cricket team; on January 30, February 06 and 12, 1904, on the Feildians hockey team; and August 08 and 17, 1907 and August 05, 1909 as one of the Feildians football (soccer) teams. While at Mount Allison he was a member of the university's football team for 1907 and the hockey team in 1908. That sporting life continued at McGill where he played on the rugby team and the football team.

After completing his degree at McGill University, Adrain decided to try his luck in the United States. On July 18, 1911, he arrived in Philadelphia from St. John's aboard the SS *Carthaginian*. He appears to have spent several years there, as he married Tillie Edna Annie Symons, a native of that city, in 1914. Not long after their wedding, they moved to

Detroit, Michigan, where they resided at 1714 East Grand Boulevard. It was from there in the Summer of 1917 that Adrain travelled to Windsor, Ontario, where, on June 13, he enlisted in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, number 2006417. Interestingly, he listed his permanent address as Windsor, while that of his next-of-kin, his wife, was still in Detroit. Later in the war, she relocated to 81 McDonough Street, Brooklyn, New York.

His Attestation Paper indicates that at the time of his enlistment, Adrain was 5 feet 10 inches tall, weighed 150 pounds and had a 34-inch chest, which could expand to 36½. He has a fair complexion, with blue eyes and light hair. His occupation was listed as a mechanical engineer.

Adrain did not go overseas until February 1918. In the interim he was assigned to the Canadian Engineers at their training depot in Toronto. He also spent time at St. John's Military Hospital in Quebec. He was first admitted in late October 1917, with a perforation of one of his ear drums and an enlarged prostate gland. Following several days of treatment, he was released, but was re-admitted on November 10, 1917 with myalgia. It was found to be mild and he was released the following day.

The SS *Missanabie*, a Canadian troop ship, left Halifax on February 05, 1918 for the United Kingdom. Adrain and his contingent were on board. The crossing took approximately ten days. He was taken on strength at the Canadian Engineers Training Depot at Seaford in East Sussex on February 17, where he remained until May 21, when he was posted to and taken on strength with the 2nd Canadian Engineers Reserve Battalion (CERB). On June 24, he was taken off strength with the CERB, sent to France and taken on strength with the Canadian Engineers Reserve Pool as Reinforcement. Nine days later, on July 02, he was posted to the newly-formed 6th Battalion of the Canadian Engineers. On September 20, 1918, he was appointed Lance Corporal in the field with the Canadian Engineers and on November 03, 1918, he was promoted to Second Corporal, a rank that no longer exists, but at the time was used within British and Canadian Engineers Regiments. Persons holding that rank

wore the same rank chevron as Lance Corporals but were full non-commissioned officers.

Adrain saw some but not a great deal of action during his short time in France. He was back in England by early Spring 1919 and sent to Witley in Surrey, where the Canadians had a base camp. It was from there that he was struck off the strength on May 16 before leaving England for Canada. He was discharged and demobilized in Ottawa on May 29. At the time he listed two places of residence: 396 Water Street, St. John's, or Brooklyn, New York.

Where Adrain spent the years immediately following his discharge is unclear. Early in 1920, he did travel to New York City from St. John's on board the *SS Rosalind*, arriving there on January 29. He made a similar trip on the *Rosalind* arriving in New York City on September 07, 1922, which indicates that he did return to St. John's on occasion. By 1925 he was living at 172 William Street, Orange, New Jersey; the following year he was domiciled at 335 Park Avenue, Rutherford, New Jersey. Two years later, he is living at 21 Delafield Avenue, in Rutherford. Living with him is his wife: not Tillie Symons, whom he had married in 1914, but a new wife, Cora May Wheatley. What happened to Tillie is a mystery!

Cora May Wheatley, born October 22, 1879, was the daughter of Hannah Flexer and John Wheatley. She had previously married William H. Solon of Connecticut, on July 03, 1902; he died August 13, 1907. How she and Adrain met or when they married is unclear, but it appears to have been some time around 1927, since she does not appear with him in the 1926 Rutherford city directory but does appear in the 1928 one.

The mystery grows, as in the 1930 United States Federal Census, living with Robert and Cora is seven-year-old Betty J. Waters, who was identified in the census form as their adopted daughter. They do not appear to have had any children of their own. Then, less than four years later, on January 28, 1934, Cora Adrain died of chronic valvular heart

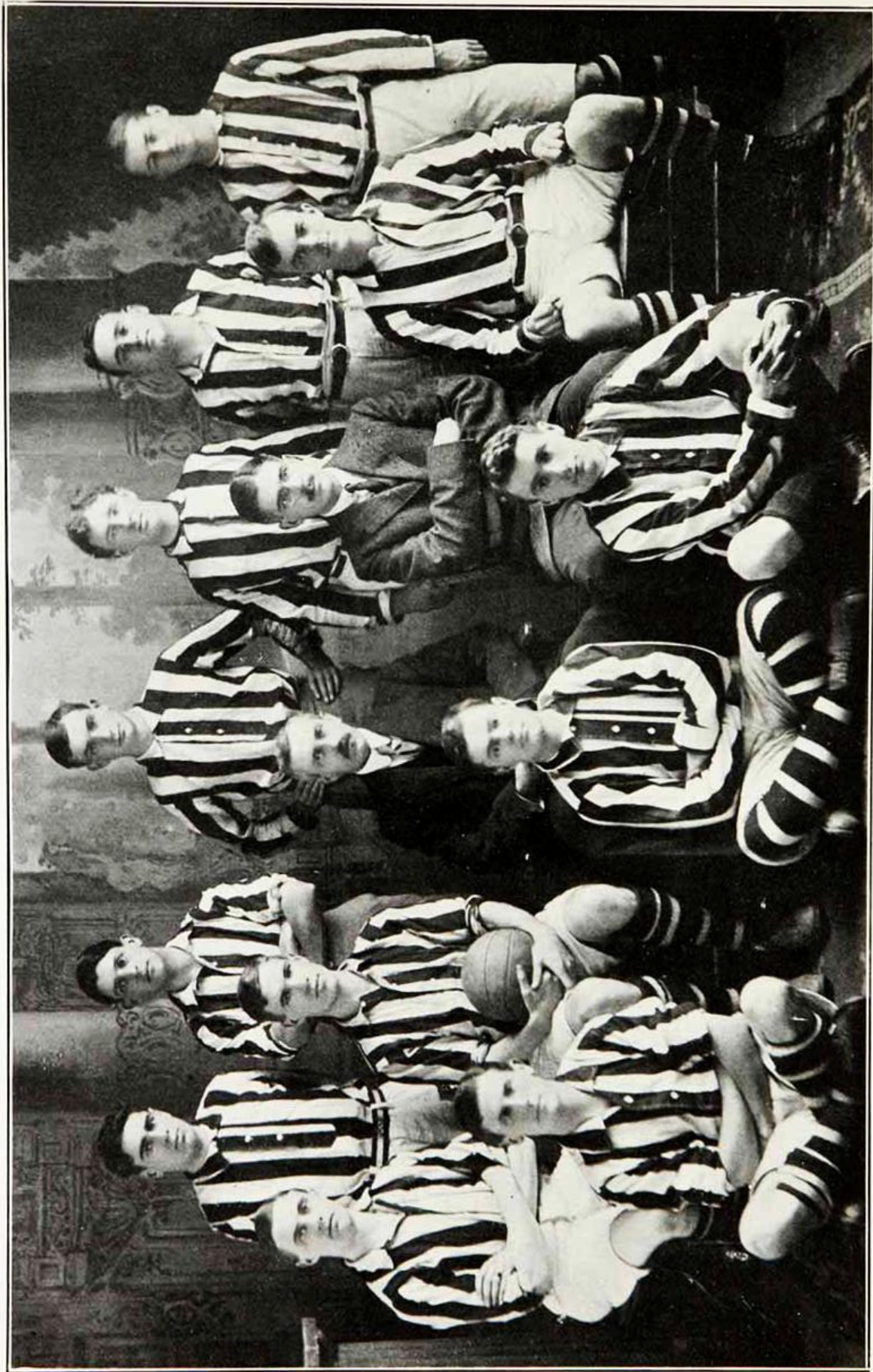
disease. Her death certificate states that she had been sick since February 1932.

The 1930 US Census gives Robert Adrain's occupation as a salesman of pumps. In 1942 he completed the required Draft Registration Card for the United States Government. On it, he states that his employer was Dean Brothers Pumps Inc., 92 Liberty Street, New York. He further states that he lived at 301 Hemlock Street, Roselle Park, in Union County, New Jersey. And the name of the person who will always know his whereabouts is listed as Elizabeth M. Adrain, also resident at 301 Hemlock Street, Roselle Park. The mystery continues!

Very little additional information has been uncovered about the life of Robert Adrain. He did make a United States Social Security Life Claim on August 29, 1955. Six years later, on November 14, 1961, he died in Danville, Montour County, Pennsylvania, and was buried in the Odd Fellows Cemetery there. He had been predeceased by both his parents and all his siblings. Only one of his siblings, Emma, who had married Reuben Horwood of St. John's, had children. Consequently, when Robert Adrain died in 1961, he was the last of the Adrain family of Newfoundland.



The Cap Badge of the Canadian Engineers



McGill Association Football Team

H. G. HATCHER. E. RALSTON.
 A. S. BUTTENSCHAW. R. W. SCOTT, CAPT.
 H. ROUTLEDGE.

R. ADRIAN. M. J. COHEN. A. T. COWLEY.
 F. G. M. WILLIAMS, PRES. E. B. ARCHIBALD.
 J. E. BISSETT. A. G. HATCHER

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.