

GOWER REMEMBERS

Lieutenant Arthur Harold Greaves

(1887-1959)



“The funeral of our late Comrade Arthur H. Greaves will take Place this afternoon at 2:30 p.m. from his late residence, 150 Pleasant Street. All available Ex-Servicemen are requested to attend.

J. W. Goodyear

Secretary, St. John’s Branch”

(The Daily News, February 03, 1959)

Arthur Harold Greaves was born in St. John's on February 14, 1887, the younger of two sons and one of at least seven children of Emma Chesley Woods and Henry Edward Greaves. Three of his sisters died as small children, with only Arthur, his brother Stanley, and his sisters Edna Josephine and Mary Florence surviving to adulthood.

Henry Greaves, was a native of Carrington, Cheshire, England, who came to Newfoundland in the mid to late 1870s. The exact date is uncertain, but he was here in 1879 when, on October 01 of that year, he married Emma Woods. He first appears in St. John's directories in 1890, where he is listed as a clerk at Bowring Brothers. He was still employed there in the 1904 directory, although his occupation had changed to draper.

Arthur attended the Methodist College and upon graduation began working for the Reid Newfoundland Company as a clerk. His brother Stanley also worked there. Perhaps he thought it was a necessity in his chosen profession, but for whatever reason, he successfully completed a course in shorthand dictation from J. M. Sloan of England, achieving 116 words per minute and receiving a proficiency certificate in 1905.

Sometime after 1904 but certainly by 1908, Henry Greaves established a drygoods and wholesale business at 359 Water Street, in partnership with his sons. Arthur worked there until he signed up for the war.

Arthur Greaves enlisted in the Newfoundland Regiment on May 29, 1916. His Attestation Paper lists his occupation as an accountant, working at H. E. Greaves & Sons, Ltd. He was 5 feet 8 inches tall and had a chest expansion of 35 inches. On June 09, just 11 days after joining the Regiment, he was made a Lance Corporal. However, he was not quite satisfied with that entry-level rank. On August 13, 1916, before leaving

Newfoundland for overseas, he wrote to the Governor, Sir Walter Davidson, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Regiment, seeking a commission as an officer. That did happen but not until another ten months had gone by.

Greaves spent his first eight months as a member of the Regiment in St. John's in training and other exercises. He was part of the group of recruits who left St. John's for Halifax, Nova Scotia, on January 31, 1917, on board the SS *Florizel*, arriving there on February 03. It had been discovered while they were still on board the *Florizel* that most of the recruits had contracted measles or mumps. As a result, they were quarantined upon arrival in Halifax and sent to Windsor, Nova Scotia, where they remained until doctors gave the all clear. That was not until the middle of April. Greaves and his comrades finally left Nova Scotia on April 14, on board the SS *Ausonia*, for the United Kingdom. Once there, they were sent to the Regimental training facility at Ayr, Scotland.

On May 18, 1918, shortly after his arrival in Scotland, Greaves was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant, finally receiving the commission he had long desired, and skipping over the non-commissioned ranks of Corporal and Sergeant in the process. In all likelihood, it was a result of this promotion, that he was sent to Greenock, Scotland, for a four-day training course in June, dealing with poison gas attacks, and a 16-day course in July at Troon, Scotland, in bombing techniques. Upon completion of these courses, he returned to Ayr where he remained until December.

Greaves was shipped to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on December 12, 1917, joining the Regiment in the field on December 20. He saw action at Passchendaele, Lys and Bailleul during the late Winter and Spring of 1918. On May 18, 1918, a year after he first received his commission as 2nd Lieutenant, he was promoted to Lieutenant. On June 16, he was granted two weeks leave, which he spent

in England. Back in the Front lines by July 1918, he saw action throughout the Fall at Courtrai, Belgium, the Newfoundland Regiment's last major offensive in the war.

While at Courtrai, from October 12 to October 19, Greaves served as acting Captain. On October 20, his life changed. It is from that date that he was later diagnosed as suffering from shell shock, a direct result of his war service. On October 21, he was admitted to the 14th General Hospital at Wimereux, France, the first of many hospital stays over the next ten months. Eight days later he was transferred to England and admitted to the 3rd London General Hospital at Wandsworth. A Medical Board at that hospital looked into his disability and reported on November 27, 1918 that he *“Had a nervous breakdown after severe strain of constant attacking for over a month. Lost control and remembered nothing for some time, then insomnia and bad dreams.”* The report went on to say that his *“General condition had much improved. Now sleeping well, no dreams. Still stammers slightly and has some loss of power of concentration.”*

On December 05, 1918, he was transferred to Craiglocket War Hospital in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he remained until March 1919 undergoing treatment for his condition and rest. On March 05, 1919, he was moved to Dumblaine War Hospital in Perthshire. There he was subject to a second Medical Board, which reported on July 01. It stated that *“He was in several big attacks and once went two days without food during an advance. A shell exploded near him and he became unconscious for a few hours. He walked in his sleep. He got up looking for machine guns. He was easily excited. Speaking jerky. Memory and concentration were poor. He was generally nervous and perspired easily.”*

This report also addressed his present condition. It found he was *“Improved in every way. Memory and concentration now good. Speaking*

is still jerky but he states he stammered slightly before the war. General nervousness practically gone.”

Two days after this report was issued, he was transferred back to the hospital at Wandsworth, where, on August 05, 1919, a Medical Board declared that he was unfit for further duty. Eight days later, on August 13, he was expatriated to Newfoundland for demobilization. He travelled from Liverpool, England, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the SS *Baltic*, and then on to St. John’s, where he reported to the Regimental Depot on the 28th. Another Medical Board was quickly convened. It reported, on September 02, that he *“Speaks in a jerky way. Very slight tremor in hands. Sleeps fairly well. No dreams. Cannot concentrate thoughts and memory poor. Cannot read more than a page at a time. Pulse 80. Heart good.”* He was said to be suffering from neurasthenia, which was attributed to shell explosion. He was demobilized from the Regiment the following day and placed on the Reserve List for Officers.

The Regimental Paymaster was somewhat confused by Greaves status, however. On October 23, 1919, he sent a letter to the Bank of Montreal in St. John’s, which contained a cheque for \$93.00, with instructions to credit it to the “estate of the late A. H. Greaves”.

Greaves mother had died in 1914, before the war had begun. His father married a second time, to Lydia Whitten, in October 1915. Sometime after Greaves enlisted, his father had closed his business and moved away. Once his son was back from the war, however, he had a change of heart. On November 04, 1919, just months after the younger Greaves returned to St. John’s, the following notice appeared in *The Evening Telegram*: *“NEW BUSINESS Mr. H. E. Greaves who returned by last Sachel is reopening business with his son who recently returned with Ours. Messrs Greaves and Sons are opening business on Queen Street, to the wholesale drygoods, commission merchants and manufacturers agents*

and expect to be ready for business in a few days with a large and varied stock of general drygoods, which have just arrived from the British market.” It was advertised elsewhere in that edition of the paper as “*The Tailors’ Supplying House*” and boasting that it stocked “*Everything from the measuring tape up.*”

Greaves and his father operated that business, located at 12 Queen Street, until the elder Greaves’ death on May 03, 1931. In his will, Henry Greaves left the business to Arthur, who continued to manage it, first at the Queen Street premises, and later at 364 Water Street, until the late 1940s, after which Arthur continued working for some years as a commission agent. He retired in the early 1950s.

Greaves probably suffered from shell shock for the rest of his life, but it did not stop him from being active in his community. He served on the committee appointed to decide on an appropriate memorial plaque for the war deceased of Gower Street Methodist Church. That plaque was unveiled in a special service held at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday, May 21, 1922. It is still located in its original place on the south wall, to the east of the pulpit, in the Gower Street Church sanctuary, an ever-present reminder of the sacrifices of the young men of the congregation who died as a result of World War I and whose names are engraved there. He was also a lifelong member of Whiteway Masonic Lodge in St. John’s. He and his wife Eileen, who were married in the late 1920s, were the parents of two children, a daughter Eleanor and a son Gerard.

Arthur Greaves died at the St. John’s General Hospital on January 29, 1959, just 16 days short of his 72nd birthday. He was survived by his wife and children and by his brother, Stanley, who had moved to Louisville, Kentucky, some 50+ years before. He was buried from his residence at

150 Pleasant Street, with full military honours. The funeral service was conducted by the Rev. Wilfred Woolfrey* of Gower Street United Church. Stanley died less than six weeks later, on March 11, 1959. Eileen, who was twenty years younger than her husband, outlived him by 39 years. She died in 1998 at age 91. As both their children had left Newfoundland some years earlier, her death marked the passing of the last of the Greaves family line in St. John's.

* The Rev. Wilfred Woolfrey was number 09 in the *Gower Remembers* series.

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.