



## **Brief History of the Royal Military Colleges Club of Canada(1)**

The Royal Military College opened its doors to the first eighteen cadets in June 1876. In the ensuing 130 years over 24,000 Canadians have had some form of military college experience and are qualified to become members of The RMC Club of Canada. In 1884, four years after the first class graduated, the first steps were taken to form an alumni association. This effort, initiated by two members of the first class at the College, #7 L.H. Irving and #6 S.J.A. Denison, resulted in the inauguration of the RMC Club in March 1885.<sup>ii</sup> Subsequently in 1898, The Club was incorporated under the Statutes of Ontario.

**Purpose.** The aims of The Royal Military Colleges Club of Canada, as laid out in its constitution are: the bringing together of its members for mutual benefit and support; the encouragement and maintenance of that camaraderie which has always existed at the colleges, and the advancement of the welfare of its members, the cadets and the Canadian Military Colleges generally<sup>iii</sup>.

**History:** The history of The Club has never been formalized, but the initial aim of the promotion of the college's interests as a whole have remained at the core of its efforts from the very beginning in 1885. Some of the highlights from our history are:

**1885:** The club was formed with the first President #7 LH Irving. Since that time 104 ex-cadets have voluntarily provided leadership to the Club for at least one year (11 people served a two year term while #299 Col Lamb was President for six years from 1914-1920)

**1886:** The first annual dinner was held in Ottawa – the rather magnificent menu of eight courses is reproduced on page 66 of Vol. 1 of *As You Were*. The tradition of The Roll Call, which continues today in The Old Brigade, began in June **1906**.

**1891:** The RMC Club “Proceedings” were first published thanks to the efforts of #47 E.F. Wurtele. This was the predecessor of The Review, the Log of HMS Stone Frigate, the Club Newsletter, and now Veritas. The production of the Review provides an example of how the Club has often worked as part of, and in direct support to, the College.

**1919:** The club decided at the AGM on 14 June, 1919 to erect “ a suitable memorial gateway” in memory of those ex cadets who have laid down their lives.....”. A total of \$65,247.67<sup>iv</sup> was raised covering the complete cost of The Arch. This was a very significant amount of money to raise particularly considering that the total number of ex

cadets at that time was 1336. Work began in April 1923 and the Arch was officially unveiled on 15 June 1924. It is interesting to note how the Memorial Arch touches the alumni of RMC. The campaign by The RMC Foundation to raise funds to re-furbish the Arch in **2001** was oversubscribed, raising \$800K against a target of \$450K!

**1920:** The Commandant, Gen MacDonell, authorized Professors Bridger and Gelley to publish a biannual review. Starting life as an information publication to keep alumni up-to-date with activities at the College and among their classmates, in later years it did double duty as the graduation yearbook. While the content was shared between the cadets and the Club, the magazine was sponsored and edited by members of the College staff, and published by the Club. It is also noteworthy that for many years the Registrar was also the Secretary Treasurer (now Executive Director) of the Club. Professor Bridger, the head of the English Department edited and published The Review from its inception in 1920 until his retirement from RMC in 1949. His decision, supported by the Club to continue publishing The Review throughout the war years when the College was closed was instrumental in maintaining the spirit of RMC, a key element in the mustering of support to re-open RMC in 1948. One result of those efforts was the continuation of the Annual General Meetings and annual dinners throughout the war<sup>v</sup>

**1942:** The Club accepted the decision that the last class at RMC for the duration of hostilities would be the one graduating in June of 1942, on the clear understanding that the College would re-open immediately after the war. The explanation provided to the President of The Club by an ex-cadet and former Commandant, #749 Gen Crerar included “ Also I am convinced that after this war is over, and the time comes for the re-constitution of the Battalion of Gentlemen-Cadets, that those who will then be charged with the responsibility of the successful re-establishment of the College, will not fail in the task that will be theirs”.<sup>vi</sup> With the graduation of the last class in 1942, a total of 2828 Gentlemen Cadets had attended RMC since its founding in 1876.

**1943-48:** The Club began its work to have the College re-opened for cadets in 1943<sup>vii</sup> when the President of the Club, wrote to the CGS, LGen Stuart. This was followed in March 1944 by a direct approach by 1141 W.H O'Reilly to the MND. Neither of these elicited a positive response, but they did help maintain the momentum of the effort among the ex-cadets. Discussion concerning the fate of RMC was included in all of the DND post war re-structuring debates and they culminated in the formation of the Chesley committee of eight officers<sup>viii</sup> whose task was to determine how officers should be produced for the post war active force. This committee recommended that all military officers be trained through civilian universities and the facilities at RMC should be used for other training. The Club reacted in December 1946 when a deputation, including the then President D.W. McKeen approached the Minister who confirmed the rumours. The Kingston Branch then led a letter writing campaign by all branches to try to reverse this decision and this was followed by the establishment of a special committee led by #1230 Col S.H Dobbell.<sup>ix</sup> At a meeting with the CGS at NDHQ on 3 April 1946 the committee successfully convinced Gen Foulkes that a special non-military committee be appointed to look into the subject. This resulted in the creation of The Lett Committee chaired by Brig S. Lett. After considerable manoeuvring and debate on all sides, the Dobbell

Committee was permitted to present a brief to outline the Club position. The arguments presented in this 40 page brief resulted in a recommendation to the Minister to re-open the College. The final announcement was delayed by changes within the cabinet, but was made official in April 1947 when the MND announced that RMC would re-open in September 1948 as a tri-service College. (It was also decided that Royal Roads would continue to function, but that it would also become a tri-service institution.) Everyone who has benefited from the RMC experience since 1948 owes a huge debt of gratitude to Professor Bridger, whose efforts at The Review kept the RMC idea alive during the war years, the members of the Dobbell Committee, and indeed all the members of the Club during that critical period immediately following the war.

**1949:** After some debate the Club decided to commemorate the fallen from the Second War on two bronze plaques located on the flanking plinths of the Arch. These tablets were unveiled by the Governor General on 15 September 1949. Names of those lost in Korea and on peacekeeping and other military operations have been added as required.

**1950:** This was a momentous year in the development of the RMC Club with the inauguration of the Old Brigade, a name coined by the then Commandant #1137 Brigadier D.R. Agnew. The latter arranged for a group of pre-1900 graduates to have rooms in the Stone Frigate for that weekend.<sup>x</sup> Each year thereafter all those celebrating 50 years since they entered one of the military Colleges are inducted into the Old Brigade. This organization, with their unique berets and ties, always has the Right of the Line on reunion weekend memorial parades. Of singular importance is the tradition begun in **1987** to have members of the Old Brigade present the College cap badge to the First Year cadets, on the reunion parade, which has now been renamed the First Year Badging Parade.

**1961:** Le Club des Anciens du CMR de St Jean was created under the leadership of #3803 P.J.M Morin. This Club had the same aims as the RMC Club and contributed a great deal towards the success of CMR de St Jean. In 1993 the Club des anciens conducted a steadfast campaign to counter the political decision to close the College. While this effort did not bear success, it is safe to say that its efforts were a positive influence on the re-establishment of a preparatory year on the Campus at Fort St Jean.. In 1996 the decision was made to merge the two Clubs and ‘rapprochement’ was officially achieved in 2001. La Fondation des anciens du CMR was formed in the mid-80s and continues to raise funds to support the preparatory year class on the campus and other CMR related activities on the campus at Fort St Jean.

**1966:** The RMC Club created The RMC Club Foundation, with common membership, initially to support reserve entry (RETP) cadets. Subsequently, with the steady reduction of the DND budget, which now supports only the RMC core curriculum requirements, the Foundation has provided funds to support a wide variety of College activities designed to assist the Commandant and his staff to help the cadets achieve the “margin of excellence” that is the hallmark of a graduate of the College. The RMC Foundation with its own Board of Directors and Panet House staff has successfully raised over \$ 8 million

during the past 40 years with 80 percent of those funds being contributed directly to College activities.

**1985** La Fondation des Anciens du CMR was formed under the leadership of 12406 Pierre Ducharme. This organization continues to raise funds to support the preparatory year on the campus, a museum dedicated to the history of Fort St Jean as well as other CMR related activities on the campus at St Jean.

Over the past 120 years the Club has strived to be a partner with the Commandant and his staff to create the best possible experience for cadets so that RMC can continue to produce excellent leaders for the Canadian Forces, and indeed, for Canada. This partnership is evident through the provision by the College of office space, and other services to The Club and Foundation, which is reciprocated through their support to the cadets, their efforts to assist in recruiting suitable candidates for the College through the Red and White Programme, and the provision of significant funds to the various programs at RMC to help attain the margin of excellence.

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<sup>i</sup> . The information in this article has been gathered from *CANADA'S RMC, A History of the Royal Military College*, Richard A. Preston, The University of Toronto Press, 1969, *As You Were! Ex cadets Remember Vol 1 & 2*, edited by R.Guy C. Smith The RMC Club of Canada, The RMC Reviews 1920 – 1952, various minutes of the RMC Club Executive and Annual General meetings which are available in Panet House.

<sup>ii</sup> The handwritten minutes of this first meeting are available in the office of The Executive Director of The Club.

<sup>iii</sup> While slight changes have occurred over the years, this aim remains substantially unchanged from the one produced in that first meeting of The Club in 1885.

<sup>iv</sup> According to an inflation web site \$65,000 would be the equivalent of \$768,000 in 2006. It looks like they got a pretty good deal when they built the Arch – I think you would be hard pressed to get it designed and built for that price today!

<sup>v</sup> Over 100 ex –cadets attended the annual dinner in Ottawa in 1943.

<sup>vi</sup> He is also quoted in Dec 1941 “ I am confident that The RMC Battalion of Gentlemen Cadets, which will be re-born after this war is over will typify in the future all the best College tradition we have known in the past”.

<sup>vii</sup> A detailed account of this period can be found on pp 308-323 of *Canada's RMC*, and a full report by the chairman of the RMC Club committee, #1230 Col S.H. Dobell can be found at p 20 of The RMC Review, 1947, which has been reprinted in *As You Were, Vol 2*, pp214-222.

<sup>viii</sup> four of the members of this committee were ex-cadets.

<sup>ix</sup> The members of The Dobell Committee were restricted to the six branches closest to Ottawa. They were: – Chair 1230, S.H. Dobell (Montreal), members – 1841 D.G. Cunningham (Kingston), 803 J.V. Young (Hamilton), 1625 J.D. Watt (Ottawa), 1379 H. Mackenzie (London), 1860 N. Kingsmill (Toronto) and 1542 E.W. Crowe (Montreal).

<sup>x</sup> The group included 503 J.Leitch, 297 Pousette, 467 McLennan, 386 Hunter and 565 Bishop. The first Old Brigade dinner was served in the Senior Staff Mess at a cost of \$5! (*As You Were*, Vol 2, p306).