

## **Project Outline - Fern Blodgett Sunde Commemoration 2018-2020**

At July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2018

For the consideration of the Councillors of the Town of Cobourg, July 23, 2018:

*While we are proposing to honour Fern Blodgett Sunde, what we are really honouring is her trailblazing, spirit of adventure, and service to our country during WW II. In 1918, when Fern was born, Canada was still more than 80 years away from opening sea duty to women on all Navy vessels. How did this young woman end up breaking daunting barriers to serve Allied Forces as a radio operator at sea during the Battle of the Atlantic? We are reaching back into Cobourg's rich history to inspire youth, particularly young women, with Fern's remarkable story. This project could freshly inspire a wave of new cultural work - for instance, why not a book about Cobourg's women of distinction? Cobourg is a community that embraces heritage - it understands legacy, it knows that history is not static, but a living, evolving story. We hope that the Town will welcome and support this commemoration.*

### What is the proposed commemoration?

Life-sized bronze commemorating Fern Blodgett Sunde, a trailblazer during the Second World War's Battle of the Atlantic. It is of national significance, and linked to Cobourg through Fern's formative years, when her dreams of serving at sea were awakened.

Determined to serve her country during the Second World War, she broke educational barriers to become the first Canadian woman to certify as a professional wireless radio operator.

Unlike Canada and Britain, Norway had no rule for or against women serving at sea. Although a young Norwegian captain was a little shocked to find that "F. Blodgett" was a woman, there was a shortage of "Sparks" - wireless radio operators - and he took a chance on the spirited young woman who very much wanted the job. In 1941, Fern became the first Canadian woman to serve as a radio operator at sea, working as an officer aboard a Norwegian vessel in the Allied Merchant Navy during the Battle of the Atlantic. It was incredibly dangerous work - some 3500 vessels were lost at sea, the majority of them merchant vessels. She carried out her duties bravely and well, making 78 Atlantic crossings on the Mosdale. Remarkably, Fern Blodgett Sunde was also the first woman ever to receive the Norwegian War Medal.

Fern opened the door for twenty-two young women, new "Sparks", who followed her to sea.

As for Gerner Sunde, the Norwegian captain who hired Fern, little did he know that he had just met his future wife.

Fern's story is intertwined with the Battle of the Atlantic, and so this monument will also commemorate the Allied Merchant Navy's crucial role in winning that battle.

The project includes a community celebration (unveiling), which will attract visitors and national attention, shining a light on Cobourg's great respect for local and national history.

### **Main goals of the commemoration**

- honour Fern Blodgett Sunde, her wartime service to Canada, and her role in the advancement of women
- honour and educate about Canadian (and Allied) merchant mariners' essential role during the Battle of the Atlantic
- talk about science and technology as a career path for youth, particularly young girls and women
- celebrate with an unveiling event, which will attract citizens, visitors, and positive news coverage
- inspire more public art and heritage activities, using Cobourg's rich history as a springboard to new and engaging projects

### **Educational enrichment**

- the steering committee will also discuss educational components of the project -for example, a classroom-to-classroom or school-to-school pairing between students in Cobourg and Farsund, Norway.

### **Benefits to the community**

- generate pride in community and Canadian identity
- provide uplifting, inspiring example of determination and service for youth
- timeless, classic bronze is a legacy for future generations. Communication formats change over time, whereas a bronze monument remains accessible, conveying its story in the language of visual art
- enhance public space
- offer opportunities for community engagement, and perhaps inspire new cultural works
- support tourism, promote positive image to visitors, who bring direct economic benefits to the community

### **Location**

Town of Cobourg, Ontario. In consultation with Christopher Elliott, Manager of Community Services (Recreation and Culture), two potential locations have been identified. They are at the east end of the waterfront, close to the walking path.

### **When?**

Launch in 2018 (Fern's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday). Public unveiling 2020 (the final year of the Government of Canada's World Wars official commemoration period). Day and month to be determined - possibly early October, which is Women's History Month in Canada. As a public commemoration, it is subject to timelines.

The nature of the unveiling celebration to be determined by the steering committee, in consultation with its community partners.

### **Steering committee and consultation to date**

The steering committee is led by Leona Woods (OCT), a retired secondary school educator (History, English), and a principal for the Halton District School Board (retired). Ms. Woods, who holds a Doctor of Education degree, also served as an adjunct professor at Charles Sturt University, Australia. This year, she was honoured to receive a Cobourg Distinguished Community Service Award.

A former Mayor of Cobourg, Peter Delanty, also serves on the steering committee. A retired educator and principal, he has been a tireless advocate for young people. Mr. Delanty served as Co-chair of the Canada 150 Organizing Committee, and was instrumental in establishing an historical walking tour of Cobourg, and the Rotary Park walkway. Among other honours, he is a past recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award.

Ms. Woods and Mr. Delanty hope to welcome another 2 - 3 citizens to the committee - several have already agreed to assist with the project, on an "as-needed" basis.

The committee has also approached the Cobourg Museum Foundation to request their participation and guidance.

Members of the Sunde and Blodgett families (Norway and Peterborough, respectively) have been consulted, and strongly support the proposed commemoration.

A presentation will be made to Town Council on July 23<sup>rd</sup>; the committee will request the Town's endorsement of the commemorative project, and acceptance of the proposed location for the bronze.

#### **Monument, estimated cost, funding**

This commemoration was initially proposed by Tyler Fauvelle (professional sculptor since 2008, [www.tylerfauvelle.ca](http://www.tylerfauvelle.ca)). Based in Sudbury, Ontario, Tyler also has studio space in Toronto, where his monumental bronzes are cast and finished. Although most of Tyler's monumental work is by commission, he occasionally proposes a Canadian heritage artwork in order to shine a light on a story that deserves broader recognition. (For example, see the Sgt. Francis Pegahmagabow monument on the Georgian Bay waterfront in Parry Sound. The June 2016 commemoration included a very successful celebration.)

A portfolio and letters of recommendation were submitted to the steering committee, and reviewed by Mr. Elliott.

Interested parties are invited to visit the artist's website for more information

For this commemoration, the sculptor envisions a life-sized figure of Fern Blodgett Sunde, featuring large, impressionistic ocean waves, with sculpted reliefs evoking the Mosdale and the Battle of the Atlantic. The style is figurative, and the artwork will be cast in bronze, which is a timeless, enduring material. The monument is meant to be accessible, and engage people of all ages.

The bronze sculpture will cost approximately \$135,000, delivered to the site and anchored to the base. This does not include site preparation, the base (concrete or granite), or any minor landscaping/lighting which might be desired. Consideration needs to be given to a plaque, and to the type and cost of a public unveiling celebration. Depending on the budget, it can be very simple, elaborate, or even part of another community event. Taxes extra, but any non-recoverable portion is normally included in grant budgets.

An experienced grant writer has volunteered to apply for senior government funding (50% from the Federal Government), with the balance to come from the private sector. (The Federal application would be submitted

by the end of August 2018, with a response expected by the end of February 2019.) The nature of the project lends itself to broadly-based fundraising - from women's groups, military/naval community, wireless community, women in business and in education, etc. **The project will not start until a comfortable level of funds raised and pledged has been reached - at least 65% by the end of October 2019**, which will allow another year thereafter to raise the balance.

**Will the municipality be asked to contribute cash?**

No, the Town will not be asked for cash contributions. However, no public funding can be obtained without in-kind contributions by the Town of Cobourg. This could take the form of site preparation, simple concrete pad, and minor landscaping.

Respectfully, we will ask Town Council to endorse the project, approve a location, and to show its support via in-kind contributions.

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