

Bancroft Remembrance Day ceremony honours war brides



By Bill Kilpatrick

More than 200 people crowded into the parking lot around the cenotaph for the annual Remembrance Day ceremonies and to pay their respects to current serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces as well as those who have been killed while in the service of Canada. This year a special wreath was laid by 98-year-old Edna Armstrong to honour all of Canada's War brides. After the service those in attendance were invited back to the Bancroft Legion for another ceremony to honour Armstrong, who is believed to be one of the last war brides in Hastings County. Armstrong, who was born in 1925 in Christchurch Dorset, England, came to Canada by boat in 1946 with her first son Barry and expecting her second. She settled in New Carlow with her husband Joseph Armstrong where she resided for many years raising her family which included boys and three girls and has now grown to include 18 grandchildren, 33 great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren. Armstrong had to overcome many trials and tribulations while she adapted to life in New Carlow, where she had no running water, no electricity, and no friends. Armstrong endured however, as she learned how to can vegetables and meat, make jams, bake bread, crochet, and deal with the harsh Canadian winters. She fondly recalled how a visit from an in-law, a local dance, or a trip to Barry's Bay would provide much needed relief from the social isolation that she experienced. Armstrong spoke about how during the first winter she woke up one morning and there was a quarter of venison sitting on the table, that was of course killed out of season, but no one ever said a word because fresh meat was a scarce commodity in those days. Armstrong was born in the roaring '20s and survived the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the Cold War, along with a house fire, and her son Barry bringing home a snake of which she was deathly afraid. And not that her early life was difficult enough, Armstrong has also managed to survive the recent pandemic. To say that Armstrong is resilient would be an understatement. The president of the Royal Canadian Legion branch 181 Larry Shattraw, opened the ceremony by

welcoming Armstrong and her family. The first to speak was Kimberly Bishop on behalf of the Hastings Lennox and Addington Member of Parliament Shelby Kramp-Neuman and the government of Canada. Bishop began by stating, "I cannot imagine how terrified you must have been getting on that ship with your little boy and expecting another baby. You must have been terrified. You left your family and your home, and [then] going to New Carlow. I applaud you for that. You're tough stuff. I can't even imagine how you felt, but we are really happy that you made that decision and that you had trust in the process and the love of man that made you know that you were going to have a great life." Bishop then read out the inscription on Armstrong's certificate which stated, "On behalf of the government of Canada it is my honour to recognize Edna Armstrong in grateful recognition of the contributions of the thousands of war brides that have enriched their communities and played an important role in the growth and development of the free and peaceful Canada that we enjoy today. Thank you for representing the war brides that have made North Hastings their home." Mayor of Bancroft Paul Jenkins presented two certificates to Armstrong, one on behalf of the Town of Bancroft and one on behalf of Hastings County. Jenkins said, "We are here to honour all war brides and our very own special war bride Edna Armstrong." Jenkins thanked Don Taylor, and Mary Kavannagh from the Bancroft North Hastings Heritage Museum for bringing Armstrong to their attention. Jenkins went on to say that as he read through the history of war brides he didn't realize that running water and toilets were such a luxury. "We really have to be in awe of the sacrifice and contribution that the war brides made, not just to soldiers, but to the county in general," said Jenkins adding that, "You are very special to North Hastings and I know you didn't live in Bancroft, but we're claiming you today. Thank you very much for your bravery." Alan Woodcox, the chair of the Bancroft North Hastings Heritage Museum board, presented Armstrong with a dozen red roses on behalf of Ed Sturgeon. Armstrong, despite her toughness and grit was showing her softer side as tears of joy ran down her face stating, "This is too much."