

Roads of Remembrance

7,000 War Memorials

Canada has more than 7,000 war memorials. They come in many different varieties: stone soldiers, rock cairns, bronze tablets and polished granite obelisks are among the most common. Each war memorial is unique.

London Planetrees along Shelbourne Street
circa 2009, courtesy of Saanich Planning



Roads of Remembrance

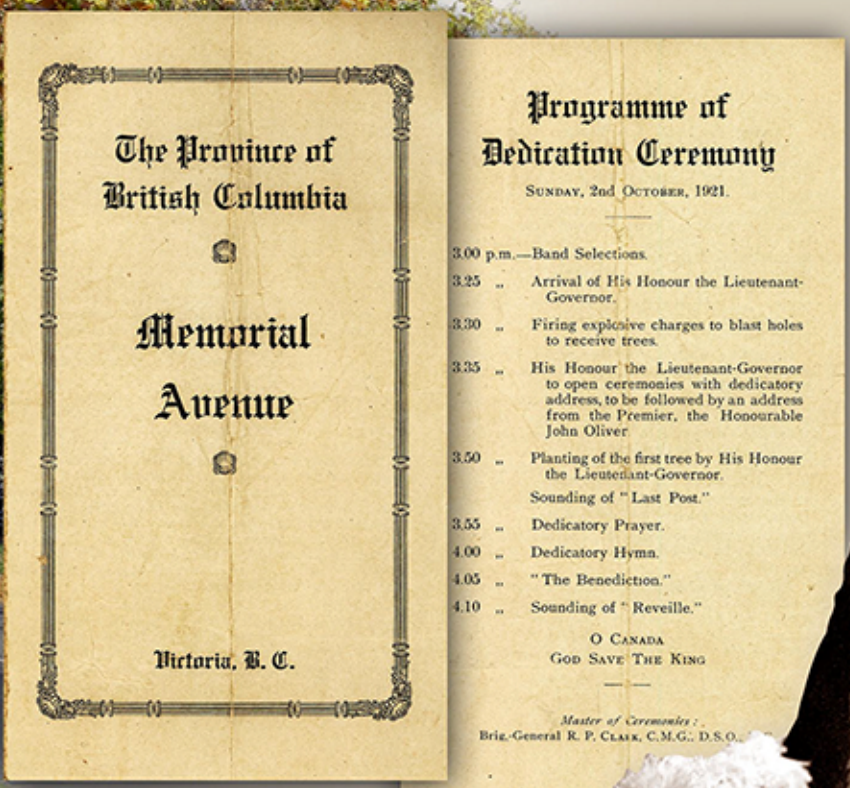
Roads of Remembrance are living memorials: avenues of trees planted to honour those who perished in war. This kind of memorial is not common: there are only seven across the country—from Montreal in the east to Victoria-Saanich in the west.

Thousands of citizens attended the 1921 dedication of Shelbourne Memorial Avenue. More than 1.6 km of automobiles lined both sides of the avenue. Immediately after Lieutenant-Governor W. C. Nichol planted the first tree, a bugler sounded the 'Last Post'. "He who plants a tree plants a hope," the Lieutenant-Governor said. "Old men plant young trees and the fruit of their planting goes to another age."

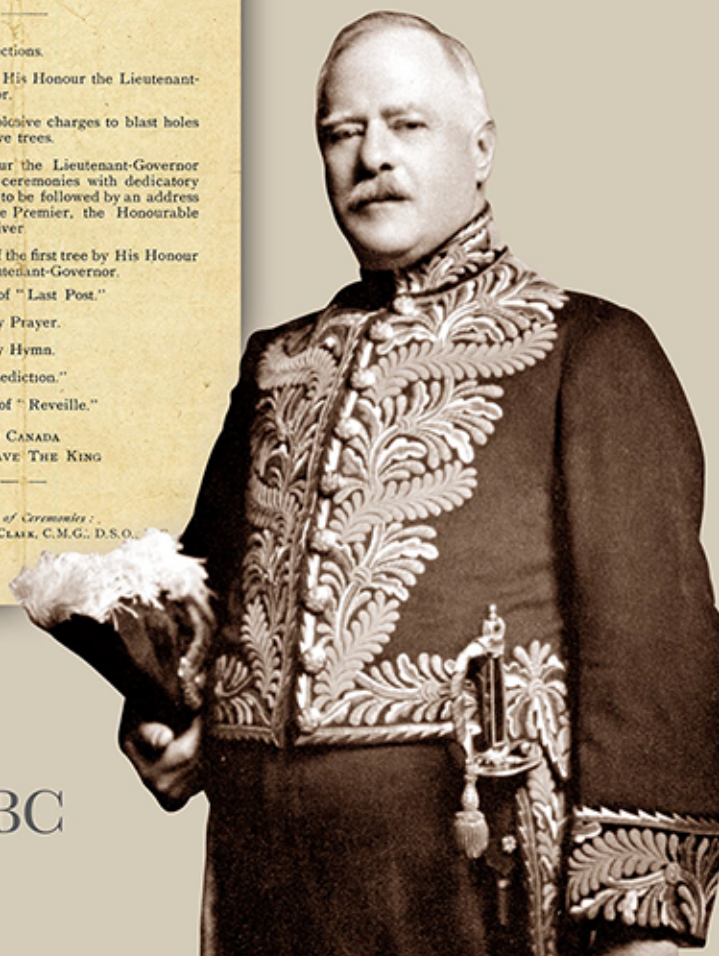
A Unique Memorial

The original intention was that Shelbourne Memorial Avenue should include one tree for every British Columbian who fell in the war. Some 600 trees were planted but that number would prove insufficient: ten times as many men and women of British Columbia died in the Great War (WW1).

Shelbourne Memorial Avenue is unique in three important ways. It is Canada's oldest, first dedicated in October 1921. In no other Canadian Road of Remembrance do original trees still survive and flourish. It is the only one featuring the London Planetree, a variety noted for its hardiness and ability to endure damage and urban pollution. Something else makes the London Planetree entirely worthy as a war memorial: it can live more than 300 years.



Walter Cameron Nichol
12th Lieutenant Governor of BC.
Image B-07815, courtesy of
Royal BC Museum and Archives



THOUSANDS DO HONOR TO FALLEN

Huge Assemblage Witnesses Dedication of Memorial Avenue to Commemorate B.C. War Heroes

More than 5,000 Victorians stood with bowed heads in silent tribute while Memorial Avenue, established in honor of British Columbia's fallen warriors, was being dedicated Sunday afternoon by Lieut.-Governor Walter C. Nichol.

The first tree of the boulevard which will line the avenue was planted during the ceremony by the Lieutenant-Governor, Hon. J. D. MacLean, representing the Provincial Government, spoke, and the dedicatory prayers were led by Rev. M. T. Habersham, president of the Ministerial Association. Bishop Macdonald pronounced the benediction. The event was one of the most impressive within the memory of Victorians.

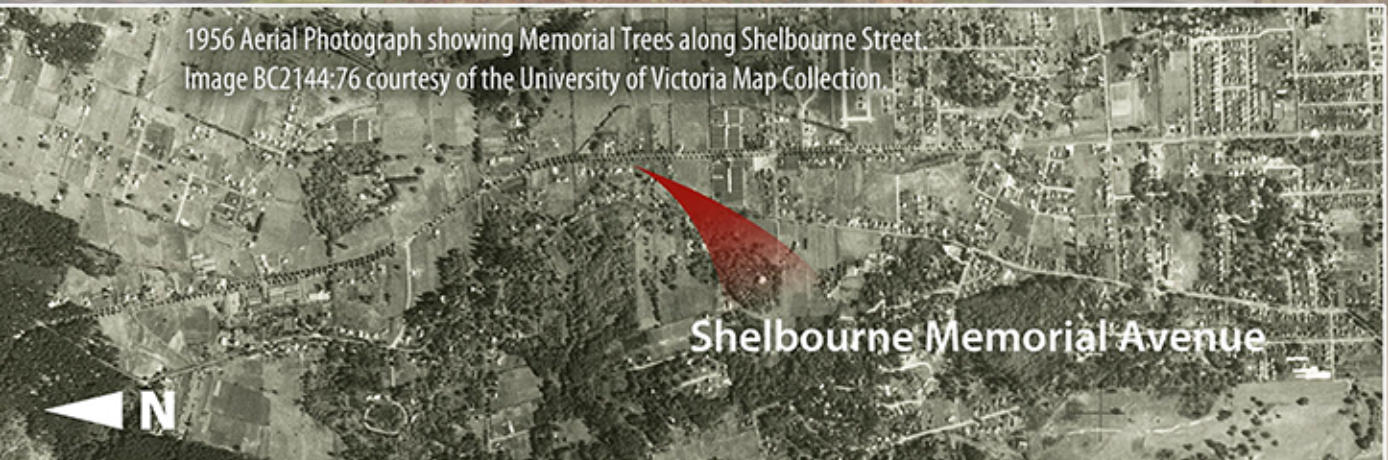
Over two miles of automobiles on either side lined the Mount Douglas portion of Shelbourne Street, where Memorial Avenue is being established. The crowd was so great and necessarily packed into such a small space that some difficulty was experienced in controlling it. Mothers, widows and other relatives of soldiers and sailors who died in the war formed a large part of the assemblage. Jitneys and sightseeing cars laden to capacity made numerous runs from the city, carrying people to the ceremony.

Owing to the great crowd that had assembled it was deemed inadvisable to fire the few shots that had been planned, as a demonstration of how the holes in which the trees are planted are dug.

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"Thousands Do Honor to Fallen",
The Daily Colonist, Victoria,
October 4, 1921

1956 Aerial Photograph showing Memorial Trees along Shelbourne Street
Image BC2144:76 courtesy of the University of Victoria Map Collection



Shelbourne Memorial Avenue

Memorial Avenue Dedication Program,
October 2, 1921, courtesy of Saanich Archives

