

■ **OP-ED:** Holiday corrects years of historical oversight

# Renaming civic holiday celebrates legacy of Sir William H. Hearst

**MATTHEW SHOEMAKER**

Special to the Sault Star

On Monday, August 3, 2015, for the first time, Sault Ste. Marie celebrated Sir William H. Hearst Day on the holiday formerly referred to as the Civic Holiday. Some people have asked what the point of naming the holiday Sir William H. Hearst Day was and the answer is a simple one: civic pride.

Sault Ste. Marie is proud of its past and its place in the history of Ontario and Canada. We rightfully honour people of significance like Dr. Roberta Bondar, Francis H. Clergue and many others. Honouring these pioneers is the Sault's way of acknowl-

edging citizens that reach beyond our local borders to impact the province, the country and in some cases, even outer space.

However, for years one of Sault Ste. Marie's most eminent residents was overlooked. Sir William H. Hearst had nearly no local recognition and that was an historical oversight that needed to be addressed.

Hearst was first elected Member of Provincial Parliament for Sault Ste. Marie in the election of 1908. In Hearst's second term, he was appointed Minister of Lands, Forrest and Mines, and he doubled Ontario's size by negotiating the addition of the District of Keewatin to Ontario.

Hearst ran and won a third term in June 1914, under the premiership of James P. Whitney.

However, within months of the 1914 election, Premier Whitney died and Hearst was chosen by the provincial caucus as the new leader and Premier. At the time, the praise for Hearst was unreserved. The Sault Star on October 2, 1914 stated that "Every man in Algoma takes Mr. Hearst's election as a personal compliment." As Premier, Hearst was revolutionary by today's standards.

By the end of his first and only term as Premier, women had the right to vote; Ontarians no longer had the right to drink liquor; conscription,

which Hearst strongly supported, helped the allies win World War I, and soldiers were returning home to a job-placement bureau that put 24,000 troops back to work.

However, Hearst's strong support for conscription and prohibition cost him at the ballot box. In 1919, his government was thrown out of office in favour of the United Farmers of Ontario, which won their only election in Ontario history. Hearst even lost his own seat in Sault Ste. Marie.

Though he left office abruptly in 1919, many of Hearst's achievements have withstood more than 100 years of changes in government and ideology. Hearst made a lasting impact

on Ontario by enfranchising women and this alone is deserving of recognition. Recognizing Hearst by naming our Civic Holiday Sir William H. Hearst Day is a simple way to recognize the Sault's connection to some of the most pivotal decisions of the early 20th century.

We wear our civic pride proudly in Sault Ste. Marie, and honouring Sir William H. Hearst is simply another way of showing that pride. I hope everyone enjoyed the Sault's first Sir William H. Hearst Day.

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