

Pvt. James Godfrey Pocket Watch

gifted to him by the Township of Mariposa



The Face of Pvt. James Godfrey's Pocket Watch
CKL C2020.001.001

On May 27, 1916, Private James Herbert Godfrey of the 109th Battalion assembled with 34 fellow soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John James Havelock Fee before a large and supportive crowd in Victoria Park, Lindsay. This public gathering marked the beginning of their overseas deployment during the First World War. The 109th Battalion, which drew heavily from Victoria County (now the City of Kawartha Lakes), departed from Lindsay and proceeded to Halifax, Nova Scotia. On July 24, 1916, the battalion embarked on the RMS Olympic, a former sister ship to the Titanic, repurposed as a troop carrier. They arrived in the United Kingdom on July 31, 1916, where they would undergo additional training before joining the fighting on the Western Front.

James Herbert Godfrey was born on February 27, 1899, in Kirkfield, Ontario, to Mary Usher and William Godfrey, a local farmer. At the time of enlistment, James was only 17 years old but claimed to be 19 on his attestation papers in order to qualify for military service. Despite his youth, he served with dedication and distinction throughout the war. He was later transferred from the 109th to the 20th Battalion and then to the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps. His service lasted nearly three years, concluding with his official discharge on May 11, 1919. In recognition of his contributions, he was awarded both the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.

Following his return to Canada, James joined his mother and older siblings in Oakwood, Ontario. In the summer of 1919, as soldiers returned home from war, communities across the country organized commemorations and acts of gratitude.



Engraved 'JG' on the back.



Engraved inside,
"PRESENTED TO
Pte. Jas. Godfrey
BY THE
TOWNSHIP OF MARIPOSA
FOR SERVICES IN THE
GREAT WAR
1914-1918"

. In August of that year, a delegation appealed to the Council of the Township of Mariposa to provide returning servicemen with meaningful gifts as tokens of appreciation. The village of Oakwood responded generously, donating 50 sets of military brushes. Additionally, in a poignant gesture of remembrance, three gold brooches were presented to mothers of soldiers who had been killed in action, and a gold bracelet was gifted to a widow.

A major commemorative event took place on August 27, 1919, at Little Britain Park. Over 1,000 people gathered to honor the service and sacrifices of local veterans. The event began with a grand parade, led by the Woodville Band from the Christian Church. Attendees were treated to speeches, a baseball game, and athletic contests, culminating in the official presentation of gold watches—engraved and gifted by the Township of Mariposa—as well as County-issued service medals to the returning soldiers. Among the honorees that day was Private James Godfrey, who received one of these symbolic gold watches in recognition of his military service.

In the years following the war, James continued to support his family, working on the farm in Oakwood before relocating with his brother and extended family to Yearley, Ontario, where they continued farming. In 1926, James married Mary Greaves in Toronto, beginning a new chapter of his life in the city.

Decades later, under unknown circumstances, the engraved gold pocket watch awarded to Private James Godfrey surfaced at a flea market in Toronto. Recognizing its historical significance, the individual who discovered the watch generously donated it to the City of Kawartha Lakes in 2020, allowing this remarkable artifact—and the story of a young man's service and sacrifice—to be preserved and remembered by future generations.