

(by Bill Stevens – this is a slightly edited version originally published in the June 2002 Newsletter)

Albert's parents John and Susan (Tate) Coombs came from England to York County and lived there for over 60 years. In 1871 Albert was born on the family farm near Richmond Hill, Ontario on April 2, 1871. He attended public schools in Richmond Hill and in 1888 graduated from high school at the age of 17. He attended the University of Toronto, receiving a B.A. (with honours) in Classics in 1892, followed by an M.A. in 1895. Albert began a long career in teaching in 1892. In 1897 he received a Bachelor of Paedogogy degree.

Also in 1897 he married Beatrice Elliott of Richmond Hill, who died in 1948. They had 5 children. Alice who died 1920; Adele, a nurse; Margaret of St. Catharines; Madeline, a nurse in the R.C.A.F., of Leaside; and Jack, who was a Srgt. Pilot in the R.C.A.F. and lost his life overseas in 1942.

Between 1895-1899 he was principal of the Richmond Hill High School. In 1899 he became the principal of Newmarket High School and held that position until 1909. While in Newmarket he served as Alderman.

In 1909 Albert moved to St. Catharines and became principal of the St. Catharines Collegiate Institute and Vocational School (in the building which is now the Folk Arts Center, and formerly Robertson School on Church Street). He was principal there from 1909 through 1923.

Albert was noted for his promotion and part in the organization of the first Boy Scout Troop in Canada in St. Catharines. In

January 1909 a group including Coombs, William Griffiths and Harris Neelon, who became the first Scoutmaster, organized the first troop of Boy Scouts in St. Catharines that was officially recognized by Baden Powell in a letter dated Dec. 22, 1909. This is mentioned on page 308 of The Scout newspaper of July 9, 1910 (the Official News and Notes of the Boy Scouts, headquarters 114-118 Victoria St. London, Eng., S.W.). The newspaper also indicates there are already six patrols. A photo of a very early camp held at Hick's farm in Port Dalhousie exists. The charter was received in 1910 from Baden-Powell of London, England, in Toronto where he was opening the Canadian National Exhibition. Albert was involved in Scouts for 16 years and was Vice-President of the first Provincial Boy Scout Council in Ontario in 1910 and afterwards appointed Commissioner. At the end of his term, he was given a warrant as Permanent Boy Scout Commissioner. It is from this connection that he derived his nickname "Scout".

During World War I, he was a Captain in the 19th Lincoln Regiment.

In 1923, he stepped down as principal of the Collegiate and became the Classical instructor, a position he held until he retired in 1935.

Albert was a Freemason and was a Grand Senior Warden of the Grand Lodge of Canada in Ontario and Grand Scribe N., in the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons. He was a Past Master for over 50 years and was a member of Temple Lodge. He received both the 50-year Masonic Jewel and the Past Masters Jewel. From 1927-1953 he held the office of secretary of the St. Catharines Maple Leaf Lodge, and was member for over 46 years of this

Lodge. He was also secretary of Mount Maria Chapter, Royal Arch Masons for many years.

During 1930 he was an officer of the Grads Basketball team, which that season reached the Canadian finals in Vancouver. Also in 1930, he wrote *The History of the Niagara Peninsula and New Welland Canal*, published in 1930 and reprinted (and enlarged) in 1950. He also wrote a *History of the Niagara Peninsula Sanitariums*.

After a 43-year teaching career, he retired on pension from the Collegiate in 1935. That same year the King honoured him when he attended at Buckingham Palace to receive the Silver Medal in commemoration of their Majesties' Silver Jubilee. In 1935 he also ran unsuccessfully for the Liberal Party in the federal election. Following his retirement, he taught at Ridley College and in addition, became an examiner at Normal College for 3 years. He sought a seat on St. Catharines City Council and was successful, serving as an Alderman for 6 years from 1940-1946.

In the late 1940's, the Ontario Historical Society met at St. Catharines, and Mr. Coombs was one of the local hosts of the meeting. In 1950, after several years of being defunct, Albert's interest in history prompted him to become involved in the reorganization of the Society. Albert became the first President of the Lincoln County Historical Society. He subsequently was made the honorary president of the Lincoln County Historical Society. Another member who became President of the Society, G.M. Lampard, QC, was a former pupil of Mr. Coombs.

His interests were varied. He was president of the Classical Association, he belonged to the Royal Canadian Legion, he

played lacrosse and raced bicycles. In later years he took up lawn bowling and for several years he was President of the St. Catharines Rowing Club in 1925 and 1926. He assisted in the Juvenile Court of Revision in St. Catharines. He had a large non-denominational Bible Class in St. Catharines and was a member of the Anglican Church.

Albert resided at 197 Church Street where he passed away on Wednesday, January 9, 1957. (His wife died 10 years prior to his death). His burial took place in Old Cemetery Section J, Division 40, west ½ Lot 3, Grave #4 Victoria Lawn Cemetery, St. Catharines. His death was announced on the front page of the Thursday, January 10, 1957 edition of The Standard and under the headlines were the following words "Noted local Historian, educationist and author .." Survived by daughter Adele at home; Mrs. Arnold (Margaret) Grimshaw of St. Catharines; Mrs. N.W. Mealing (Madeline) of Ottawa. He rested at Hulse and English Funeral Chapel, service at St. George's Church. At the time of his death, Mrs. George E. Montgomery, then president of the Lincoln County Historical Society said: "Mr. Coombs was a valuable member of the organization. We all had the deepest respect for him and are very sorry he has left." Mayor John Smith remarked that Mr. Coombs was one of St. Catharines great citizens.