



# ROYALTY, REGIMENTS & REHEARSALS

## The Day the Queen Came to Prescott

By Joan Rupert-Barkley

**I**t was AN EVENT FIT FOR A QUEEN. In 1984, a special committee was set up to organize an event to celebrate Prescott's 150th year of Incorporation and the 200th Anniversary of Settlement. While planning this event, former Mayor Sandra Lawn learned that Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh were also planning a visit to Canada the same year, so she decided to

look into the possibility of Prescott being one of the stops on their visit. Lawn, along with Robin Morris put together a package promoting Prescott. The package, which included coloured pictures of the military pageant, along with documentation about Prescott's Loyalist connections, and a list of medical and security facilities, was presented to the Chief of Protocol. Once

Prescott received approval from the Ontario government through the Office of Protocol, a letter was sent inviting the couple to visit Prescott for Loyalist Days in July 1984.

"We didn't dream that it would really come true," said Lawn.

Then, on February 22, 1984, after several months of waiting, the former mayor along with Robin Morris got confidential word that the Royal Couple would indeed be visiting Prescott as part of their two-week visit to Canada and in conjunction with Loyalist Days that ran from July 14 to July 22. However, Lawn and Morris were informed that no public announcement was to be made until Wednesday, March 7 and they were to tell no one.

Once the public announcement was made, it was determined that there would be an increased amount of organizing, so a separate sub-committee was formed. The Royal Visit Committee was led by Robin Morris. This committee spent countless hours discussing parking, security, agendas and rehearsing how they were to act when meeting the Queen. The Royal Visit was to take place on July 17th. As the day



Former Prescott Mayor, Sandra Lawn escorting Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth on the Royal visit to Prescott, September 27, 1984

approached everything was falling into place.

Then, on July 13, the former mayor received a letter from the Prime Minister's office stating that due to an upcoming Canadian election, the royal visit would have to be postponed. The Queen does not make public appearances in Commonwealth countries during a campaign, so her visit to Canada was postponed until the fall.

This royal postponement created more challenges and extra rehearsals for the Royal Visit Committee. New invitations for the VIP and passes had to be re-issued. The date had to be changed on the medallion for the mayor's chain of office, and a new book had to be purchased for Prince Phillip with a revised inscription date.

However, when the Royal Couple finally did visit Prescott on September 27, it was well worth the wait. Spectators arrived at Fort Wellington around 7:00 a.m., even though the Queen was not scheduled to arrive until the middle of the afternoon. The Prescott Recreational Department provided a bus for many of the seniors. Students from South Grenville District High School, as well as students from the Prescott public and separate schools, were dismissed at noon. They walked to the Fort Field with the supervision of their teachers. Many schools outside Leeds and Grenville also bussed some of their students to the historical event. Many of the students waved flags and wore bicentennial buttons. For the arrival and departure of the Royal Family, approximately 160 Air Cadets from Prescott, Smith Falls and

Brockville formed an honour guard around the parking lot at Fort Wellington National Historical Park.

Children played a big role in the Royal Visit. A 32-member children's choir sang "God Save the Queen" and "O Canada" in 2-part harmony. They also sang various songs before the Queen arrived. The children were dressed in Loyalist costumes.

A Victorian-style bouquet, created by Barb Gilmour, was presented to the Queen by Krista Lee Ann Hare, and the book "King's Men: Soldier Founders of Ontario", was presented to the Duke of Edinburgh by Ian MacDonald. Students in Grades 1 to 4 at the four Prescott elementary schools got the opportunity to enter a draw for a chance to present these gifts to the Royal Couple from the children of Prescott.

The Royal Couple were not the only ones who received gifts. The former mayor was delighted when Queen Elizabeth presented her with an autographed photograph of Herself and Prince Phillip in a leather-bound frame.

Sometime after the event, Lawn received official photos, as well as rough footage of the Royal visit. This footage was eventually edited by Chelsea Beckstead and is now available for viewing at the Grenville County Historical Society, the Forwarder's Museum and Fort Wellington.

"The footage shows the human spirit of the entire event. It demonstrates the warmth and interest of the Royal Couple in our community, the reenactors and our people," recalls Lawn.

According to Lawn, the Duke of Edinburgh was well informed about all the regiments and shared a lengthy conversation with her husband Robert during the military pageant.

Queen Elizabeth and the former mayor shared a laugh when a gust of wind blew Lawn's hat off. The Queen then offered Lawn a tip about hat pins.

After the military pageant was over, the Queen unexpectedly walked out on the field and reviewed the troops. Much to the delight of the soldiers, she stopped to speak to many of them.

"One of the memorable things about the Royal Visit was that our small town demonstrated, literally to the world, that we were capable of doing something pretty special. "I believe this was a truly spectacular and historic event that helped propel Prescott into the 21st century," said the former Mayor.

The little town of Prescott has found its way into the history books! **LH**

**Editor's Note:** This visit was captured and written about specifically in a book "Royal Visit to Prescott": Its Preparation and Staging by Sarah Jane Dumbille (published 1984). Copies of this book for those interested can be purchased at the St. Lawrence Shakespeare office 206 King St W. in Prescott or you can find copies of the book on-line on the internet.