

Pinedale Memory

Decoration Service of July 9, 2023

As a Pinedale memory I thought we might spend a few minutes thinking about Rev. Dr. Ernest Bott who is buried in our cemetery and for whom our predecessors created this memorial plaque. Perhaps you noticed Rev. Bott's grave in the cemetery where I have placed Canadian and Japanese flags in his memory?

Ernest Bott was born on the farm at the corner of Concession 4 and sideroad 18, just down the road and the property originally purchased by what has become the Molenaar Enterprise. In my time the farm was owned by Frank and Annie Troop. Annie was Ernest's younger sister.

Ernest married Edith Clark in 1921 and they immediately left for Japan to serve as Methodist missionaries. The respect Ernest earned is perhaps best told in the words of Hugh Kinleyside who was the Canadian ambassador to Japan at the time. Kinleyside wrote from New York after Ernest's death in 1951:

"Of all the missionaries – Canadian or other – that I knew in Japan, it seemed to me that he was doing in many ways the most important and valuable work. Apart from the more conventional missionary activities, he was engaged actively, continuously and wholeheartedly in trying to improve the lot of the people in the slum districts.... I'm sure that Dr. Bott did more than any of us to make the name of Canada known, respected and even loved among the common people of Japan. [He was] a person of complete integrity, of great human wisdom and of unflagging industry [and] was also a gentle, kindly, humorous and courageous man. His selection as one of the two foreign missionaries chosen to go back to Japan in the early post war days was a tremendous tribute to his personal as well as his official qualities. His life was one of the finest contributions that Canada has made to the cause of understanding and decency in international affairs."

The Botts were one of the very few foreign families who were not interred by the Japanese during the war but due in large part to the respect for his work, lived under the protection of Japanese friends until they were repatriated to Canada about 6 months after the outbreak of the Pacific War. When the war was over, while still in Canada, Ernest led the Licensed Agencies for Relief in Asia which was an organization set up by the Churches of North America. During this time he was an active voice against the Canadian Government plan to deport Canadian citizens of Japanese descent back to Japan. As you probably know, Japanese people in British Columbia were interred in Canada during the war. They were forcibly removed from their homes and placed in camps that had to be a pre-determined distance from the B.C. coast. The fear was that they would assist Japanese forces in the invasion of Canada. After the war, the displaced persons were not allowed to return to their homes in B.C. They were given the choice of settling near the internment camp or returning to Japan.

Perhaps the best measure of Ernest Bott can be found in his own words in a letter he wrote on the subject, August 5th, 1945:

“Every Canadian Japanese who goes to Japan after the war will be a living demonstration of the fact that Canada is neither Christian nor democratic and that Canada’s signature on the United Nations Charter guaranteeing justice for minorities is a hollow mockery.”

This son of Pinedale was unafraid to speak the truth to power.

The Japanese people have shown their respect and appreciation for Rev. Dr. Bott by naming a Children’s Residence built in Tokyo in 1957, The Bott Memorial Home. The Home continues to house children ranging in age from 2 to 18 and just recently, Habitat for Humanity Japan reports conducting minor repair, interior painting and the planting of a garden in the back yard.

To paraphrase a common sentiment, Canada and the World need more Ernest Botts.