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NEWS ■ SPORTS ■ BUSINESS

Ceremony to honour Civil War connection

JOHN M. MILNER
Special to London This Week

History buffs will pay tribute to a lesser-known part of London's past Saturday. That's when the graves of Civil War veterans buried in Woodland Cemetery will be the subject of a rededication ceremony with the cemetery's 125th anniversary.

Ontario-based re-enactors from the 116th Pennsylvania and the 49th New York and representatives from Michigan's Austin-Blair camp of Sons of Union veterans will attend. A bronze marker will be placed on each grave. Afterward, the re-enactors will pose for photos and answer questions. Pastor Ernie Crawford of Beth Emmanuel Church will officiate over the ceremony.

Six Civil War veterans are buried in the cemetery. They include George W. Duncan, an escaped slave who joined the Union army and 2nd Lieut. G. W. Pitt,

later one of London's leading citizens.

In addition to veterans buried here, Joseph O'Neil, organizer of the event, says, "(London) also has a direct connection to some of the most famous spots (of the war). There's a Londoner that was killed at the Battle of Gettysburg.

There's a Londoner buried at Andersonville Prison Camp," adding that there are links to John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry and the Underground Railway.

"The American Civil War had a profound effect on our national character because of the money we made (from selling supplies to the Union), and because of the fear of invasion," O'Neil asserts. O'Neil believes the American Civil War "had as much effect on our history as it did on (the United States)."

"Most people don't realize . . . the amazing number of Canadians that fought in the American Civil War," O'Neil says. He adds while "no one's come up with a

firm estimate, John A. Macdonald . . . is quoted as estimating 40,000 people . . . and others say 50,000 people."

Re-enactor Dave Ward of Aylmer asserts "many of us have ancestors or relatives who served" and believes these ceremonies help to "bring attention to the fact that they served."

Ward is quick to remind people "we should thank veterans any time we can" and many Canadians who served in the Union Army did so to abolish slavery.

O'Neil echoes those sentiments, adding "every single person in this city who has ever worn a Stop Racism button or participated in an anti-racism rally should have a moral obligation to show up, because we are honouring men who literally took bullets . . . in fighting a war to end slavery."

The ceremony will take place at 2 p.m. at the Springbank Drive cemetery.