

Leila PETTIGREW

NOMINEE: Leila PETTIGREW

MEMBER SPOUSE: Don PETTIGREW, #1982 (D)

DETACHMENT(S): Thedford Detachment September 15, 1964 – June 1, 1967
Forest Detachment June 1, 1967 – March 1, 1969

NOMINATOR: Carl PETTIGREW, #11827 (son)

SILENT PARTNER STORY

Leila Pettigrew is the spouse of Staff Sergeant Don Pettigrew (D), who spent his career in southwestern and eastern Ontario before finally settling in Thunder Bay after he was promoted to Traffic Sergeant (Staff Sergeant) in 1984. Don retired in 1992.

His wife Leila and family accompanied Don at each posting during his OPP career. On June 1, 1959, Don started his career with the OPP in London, and was transferred to Lucan Detachment in 1961. From 1964 to 1969, Don was posted to Thedford/Forest Detachment.

At the time, Thedford was a one-man posting, situated on County Road 79 (formerly Hwy. 79) in Lambton County. It is 20 kilometres north of Highway 402, situated about halfway between London and Sarnia. The village had begun life as a Grand Trunk Railway stop and continued as a gathering spot for local farmers and in support of a small lumber mill. In 2006, Thedford had a population of 822 people. Today, a plaque at the entrance of the town heralds it as the “Onion Capital of Canada,” and it is a designated place within the municipality of Lambton Shores.

Leila and her three daughters and two sons accompanied Don to Thedford. The small hamlet had few services or support, and they lived in the house provided by the local saw mill to aid attracting police officers to the small village. While stationed at Thedford, Leila had a third son, bringing their total to six children.

Being a one-man detachment, Don worked and responded to calls alone. He would often be called out to the local watering hole known as the Dirty Dog Saloon, when soldiers from the nearby army base at Camp Ipperwash, near Kettle Point, came into town to wash the dust from their throats. They often interacted with the local farmers and lumbermen. Having good community support at the time was paramount to the survival of the lone officer and meant the entire family had to tow the OPP line, led by Leila, of course.

Leila supported Don and worked in the office daily in any way she could. During Don's post at the detachment, the police office located in the local town hall was shut down so Don moved the office into the family home. While it was common for people to come to their house, the change greatly increased traffic at their doorstep. Members of the public often came to the house to see the area Constable for police matters, as well as for child rearing tips and general life advice.

Leila always welcomed people in and would put on a cup of tea. No one was ever turned away at the door. Leila would take phone calls and messages and pass them to Don when he returned from patrol. Many locals did not want to call the neighbouring office to have their call radioed to Don.

When it was time to go to court, Don would load up and head for Sarnia, often giving rides to some of the people he charged, who had no other means to get there. On at least on one occasion, he even paid the fine of a young man who was going to have to spend thirty days in jail for public intoxication. The young man had teared up as he realized he would be in jail over Christmas, so Don paid his fine and drove him home. With their own six children to buy Christmas gifts for, Leila may have had an opinion about the jester, but if she did, she kept it to herself.

Don was the last officer posted to Thedford and moved his family a short distance away to Forest when the office closed. The citizens of Thedford soon showed up at his new door and would often call in and ask for him. If he was not at work they would wait or just come in the house for tea with Leila and the children.

Don's career continued with three more postings until they ended up in Thunder Bay. Leila followed Don to each posting without complaint. While all of the towns they lived in left memories, the years in Thedford remain special for the whole family.

About Thedford

Thedford is located 20 kilometres north of Highway 402, situated about halfway between London and Sarnia. The village had begun life as a Grand Trunk Railway stop and continued as a gathering spot for local farmers and in support of a small lumber mill. In the 1960s soldiers from the nearby army base at Camp Ipperwash, near Kettle Point, frequented the drinking establishment in Thedford. At the time Thedford was a one-member posting, situated on County Road 79 (formerly Hwy. 79) in Lambton County. In 2006, Thedford had a population of 822 people. Today, a plaque at the entrance of the town heralds it as the "Onion Capital of Canada," and it is a designated place within the municipality of Lambton Shores.