

The Hnatyshyn State Funeral

A Governor General's Legacy

by Richard Berthelsen

Richard Berthelsen served at Rideau Hall during the Hnatyshyn years and assisted the Family and Government in the funeral plans. He read a lesson at the funeral service.

The joy of the Christmas period was dampened with the sad and unexpected news of the passing of Canada's 24th Governor General (1990-1995), the Rt. Hon. Ramon John Hnatyshyn (1934-2002). Mr. Hnatyshyn died on December 18th of complications arising from pancreatitis, after being diagnosed with cancer in the summer.

As with the serving Governor General, Prime Minister, Chief Justice and Ministers of the Crown, the Government of Canada also accords State Funerals to the families of former governors general, prime ministers and chief justices. Most provinces also arrange State Funerals along similar lines. In each case, the nature of the observances and many of the personal remembrances are unique and reflect both the wishes of the Government and the family. Such was the case for Mr. Hnatyshyn.

Given the time of year and the many travel commitments that had been made, it was difficult for everyone who would have wished to do so to be in attendance. The Governor General had made plans to spend Christmas with Canadian Forces on board HMC ships in the Gulf and travel logistics made it near impossible for Her Excellency to fulfil these



Vigil is kept before the remains of the late Rt Hon Ramon John Hnatyshyn in the Senate Chamber, Ottawa. Wreaths from the people and government of Canada flank The Queen's Tribute, centre.

photo courtesy Dept of Canadian Heritage

important duties and to attend the Funeral. Mrs. Hnatyshyn felt that her late husband, who had always taken the greatest interest in his role as Commander-in-Chief, would have wished Her Excellency to continue. The Crown was therefore represented by the principal Deputy of the Governor General, the Chief Justice (Rt. Hon. Beverly

McLachlin) at both the Lying-in-State and the State Funeral. The Governor General taped a gracious message which was a part of the State Funeral CBC telecast.

The remains of the late former governor general returned for the last time to Parliament Hill on Sunday morning, 22 December. A bearer party, drawn from Sergeants and higher ranks in the Governor General's Foot Guards of Ottawa, carried the remains to the Senate Chamber, where they lay in State for 26 hours before being taken in procession to the Funeral. The Governor General's Foot Guards were chosen as Mr. Hnatyshyn was, immediately prior to his death, Honorary Colonel of the Regiment, and had been, as all Governors General are, Colonel of the Regiment during his service in office. Mr. Hnatyshyn always took the greatest interest in the Regiment and was proud to wear its uniform on occasion.

The Deputy of the Governor General, along with the Prime Minister, Speakers of the Houses, Cabinet Ministers, Senators, MPs, and members of the Diplomatic Corps presented themselves in order of precedence to pay their respects and to offer sympathy to the Hnatyshyn Family in the Senate Chamber. The setting of the Senate was highly appropriate for this Lying-in-State given that Mr. Hnatyshyn's father had been a Senator, and Mr. Hnatyshyn had worked for the Government Leader in the Senate in his first job in Ottawa. The Governor General also performs key constitutional responsibilities in the red chamber as it is there that The Queen's representative is installed into Office, reads Speeches from the Throne, gives Royal Assent and prologues sessions of Parliament. Both Lord Tweedsmuir and General Vanier, who died in Office, lay in State in the Senate.

Members of the public were invited to attend the Lying-in-State on the Sunday afternoon, where Mrs Hnatyshyn, her two sons John and Carl, John's wife

Marisa and Mr. Hnatyshyn's sister, Elizabeth Stephens, received visitors for most of the afternoon. Many people came with warm and funny stories which were so reminiscent of Mr. Hnatyshyn's sense of humour and his approach to meeting people from many walks of life. The family felt that Ray would have wanted them to be there to greet those who came to pay their respects.

The remains of the late former governor general were at all times attended by a vigil party of four: an officer from the Canadian Forces, a member of the RCMP, and a Constable from each of the Senate and House of Commons. This reflected Mr. Hnatyshyn's many roles throughout his life: from Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian Forces, to the relationship with the RCMP who protect and attend the Governor General, and as a parliamentarian for fourteen years (1974-1988). The casket was placed in front of the Thrones where Mr and Mrs Hnatyshyn had presided over many happy and ceremonial occasions and it was surrounded by floral tributes from The Queen, the Governor General and the Prime Minister. The insignia of the honours held by Mr. Hnatyshyn were placed on a pillow on the casket, including Companion of the Order of Canada, Commander of the Order of Military Merit, Knight of Justice in the Order of St. John, his Silver Jubilee, Canada 125 and Golden Jubilee Medals and his Canadian Forces Decoration. These insignia were also carried by a former aide-de-camp to His Excellency immediately behind the casket in the processions.

The Lieutenant Governors, Privy Councillors and members of the Senate and House of Commons were received on Monday morning, along with more members of the public, the media and old friends representing many of Mr. Hnatyshyn's many careers, including service as a Minister of the Crown in two governments and his friends from the

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The Queen with Governor General Hnatyshyn, Parliament Hill, 1992

Hnatyshyn...

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legal profession of which he was a part.

Immediately prior to the departure from the Senate Chamber for the State Funeral, five Aides-de-Camp to Mr Hnatyshyn mounted one of the last vigils as members of the Family including Mr. Hnatyshyn's two brothers, brother-in-law and their families gathered for the last private time with the remains. The Honorary Pallbearers, drawn from law, politics and public service, included a Supreme Court and several other Justices and the former Secretary to the Governor General, Judith LaRocque, as well as the long serving valet to five governors general, Yves Chevrier.

The procession to the Funeral brought together one of the largest gatherings of its kind since the military funeral of the Unknown Soldier or the State Funeral for Jules Leger in 1980. A mounted escort of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police led the procession, followed by a contingent from National Defence Headquarters representing all three services, a 100-person Guard of Honour from the Royal Canadian

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Dragoons accompanied the casket accompanied by the bearer party and followed by the former aides-de-camp. The procession concluded with the Pipes & Drums of Air Command and the Cameron Highlanders of Ottawa, the Central Band of the Canadian Forces and a rear detachment from the Governor General's Foot Guards. The mournful sound of the bell of the Peace Tower tolling the 68 years of Mr Hnatyshyn's life sounded as His Excellency left Parliament for the last time and concluded with the arrival at Christ Church Cathedral. Enroute, the procession passed many sites familiar to Mr. Hnatyshyn including the Department of Justice and the Supreme Court along Wellington Street.

The Cathedral had been the setting for Mr. Michener's State Memorial Service in 1991 and recently hosted the National Service of Thanksgiving for the Life of The Queen Mother at which both events Mr and Mrs Hnatyshyn were prominently in attendance. It is also known as the Cathedral of the Canadian Forces. On this occasion, a large congregation drawn from the national Table of precedence along with many friends and family were awaiting the arrival of the remains. CBC Television provided national coverage of the procession and Service for people across the country. Few will forget the sad sound of the bearer party struggling with the weight of the oak casket up the steep stairs and the click of their heels as they marched in lock step into the Church.

The Bishop of Ottawa kindly agreed to an ecumenical service, the centrepiece of which was the funeral rites of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, in which Mr. Hnatyshyn had been raised. Two readings were given, followed by the

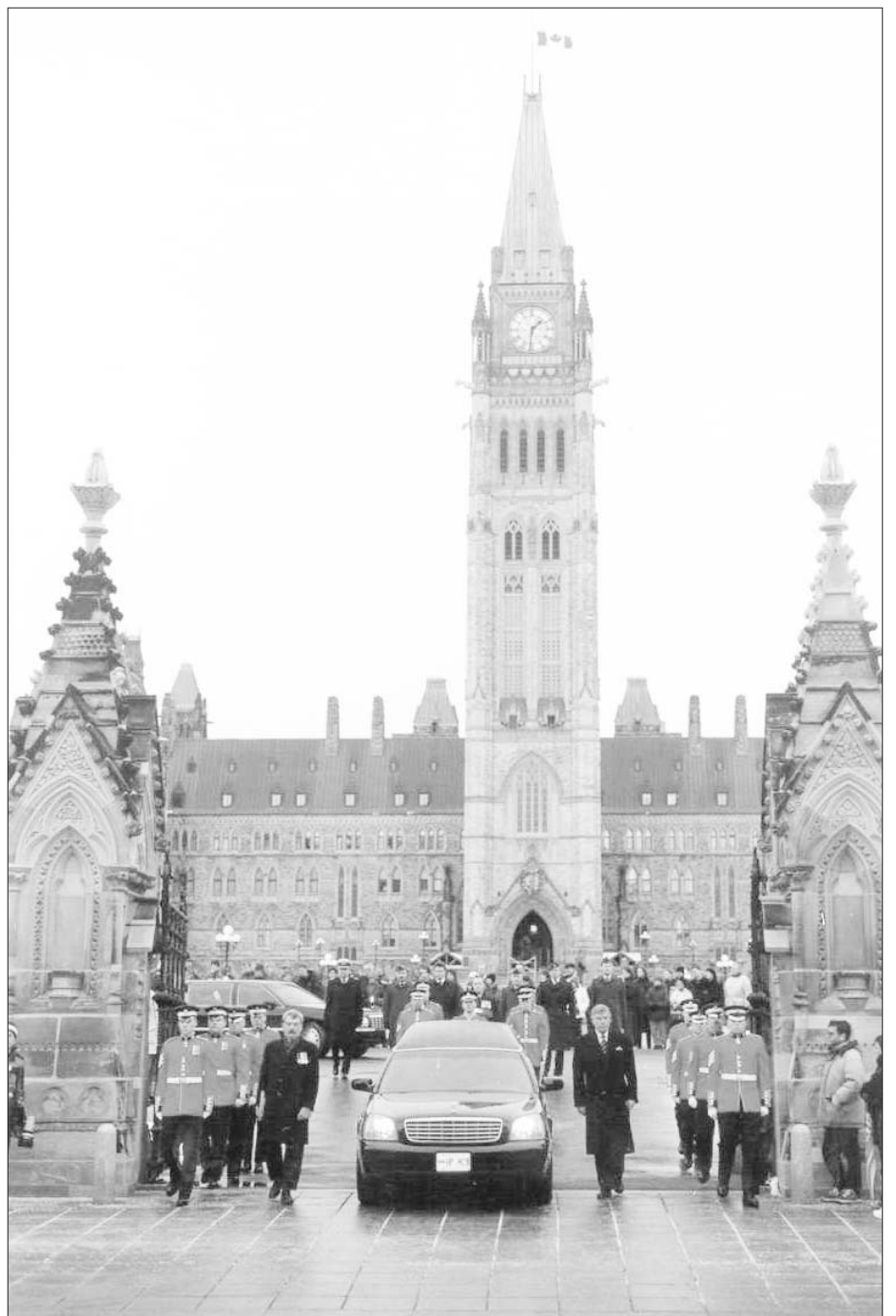
Eulogy in English given by CBC Anchor Peter Mansbridge, who had been a long-time friend of the Hnatyshyns, and in French by Sen. Yves Morin, a noted cardiologist, Officer of the Order of Canada and family friend from Quebec City. The service concluded with readings from many faiths, including Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, United and Anglican prayer leaders and a Mohawk traditional teacher. The haunting music provided by the Ukrainian Orthodox Men's Chanters evoked the sound of the prairies for many and was almost trance like in its power. The Hnatyshyn parents and grandparents would have recognized the rites, but the multifaith participation made the occasion a truly modern Canadian affair. Befitting a representative of The Queen, who had served with great loyalty, the service concluded with the singing of the Royal Anthem.

Many commented that it was refreshing to see the Church filled with journalists and political figures from all parties and all parts of Canada. It is difficult to imagine other circumstances which would bring together a major media figure and a liberal Senator at the funeral of one who had been in the Conservative party. It was evidence of the character of the man as well as the nature of vice-regal office, as one who was so recently drawn from active politics when he became Governor General, demonstrated true non-partisanship through action in his service to the Crown.

As the casket left the church, a 21-gun salute was fired by the Artillery and in a truly Canadian response, a light snowfall began which the pipes which played a lament. Enroute to Beechwood cemetery, the funeral procession proceeded along Sussex Drive past Rideau Hall and the RCMP Stables to the final resting place. A private internment service took place in a field reminiscent of the flatness of the Saskatchewan prairie, where the Canadian Flag which adorned the casket was folded and presented with great ceremony to Mrs. Hnatyshyn by the bearer party. Beechwood is also the setting for the graves of Sir Robert Borden, our 8th Prime Minister who led Canada through the First World War, as well as fellow Saskatchewanite, Tommy Douglas, among others.

Fittingly, a reception was held following the obsequies at the National Arts Centre, site of one of Mr. Hnatyshyn's greatest legacies, the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards, which recently celebrated their tenth anniversary. As Mr Hnatyshyn said himself, this award became an instant tradition which the arts community now takes for granted, but it is relatively new addition. It is a most coveted award and he was very proud of it, along with the award given for voluntarism in the arts in his name.

The Hnatyshyn governor generalcy was warmly remembered by many who attended as well as the media for the personal warmth and humour of the man. But his term also saw important innovations in terms of access to the vice-regal residence, and television coverage of ceremonies such as the Order of Canada from inside Rideau Hall as well as greater media attention to the institution prior to the internet age. The Hnatyshyns maintained a busy pace while in Office and travelled throughout the country frequently, particularly in 1992 for the 125th anniversary of confederation. Rideau Hall itself became the showpiece for visual arts and decorative arts as the Hnatyshyns championed the house as the home of all Canadians and encour-



Ray Hnatyshyn leaves Parliament Hill for the last time, the cortege moving to Christ Church Cathedral as the Flag of Canada flies at half-mast on the Peace Tower photo courtesy Dept of Canadian Heritage

aged donations and historical restoration.

Mr. Hnatyshyn focussed on literacy, on the environment, on volunteers and mindful of the esteem and respect in which he held his own parents and grandparents, seniors. These groups were favoured with his patronage, his time and attention. In addition, the Governor General's International Award for Canadian Studies was established by the International Council for Canadian Studies, the Governor General Ramon John Hnatyshyn Education Fund was set up by the University Hospital Board and Foundation of Saskatoon, as well as the Ramon John Hnatyshyn Award for Law with the Canadian Bar Association. During their time at Rideau Hall, Mr. and Mrs. Hnatyshyn strengthened ties with Canadian youth. They ensured that young people were invited to as many events as possible such as Letters of Credence and Commission. In 1992, Mr. Hnatyshyn hosted a rock concert on the grounds of Rideau Hall focussing attention on the Stay in School campaign and the Canadian Scholarships Program. The concert aired on YTV as "His Excellency's Most Excellent Rock Concert." Summer concerts on the grounds of Rideau Hall became a fixture along with winter parties and a much-enhanced garden party and tour programme which were also legacies of his mandate.

In retirement, Mr. Hnatyshyn was prominently seen by many in Ottawa, as both he and Gerda Hnatyshyn continued to lend their name to worthy causes and

events. The former governor general agreed to present awards that had been associated with him and Mrs Hnatyshyn raised funds for several projects, including the Canadian Heritage Garden at Rideau Hall which opened in the year 2000. They were highly regarded and Mr. Hnatyshyn was legendary for his kind words and openness when he was seen in the streets of Ottawa, in stores, airports, and on the golf course. His retirement from public life into the law firm of Gowlings provided him, for the first time in almost twenty years, a break from official duties and he was enjoying his retirement, his family and friends, in particular his sons as they graduated, grew up and started to develop their own careers in politics and lately in public service.

Ramon Hnatyshyn's life was cut much too short, but it was a life of good fortune and great service to Queen and country. He will be missed – as the funeral programme concluded, "to live in hearts we leave behind is not to die at all."

MEMORIAL DONATIONS

The Hnatyshyn family has asked that remembrances in honour of the late Governor General be directed to the Hnatyshyn Foundation, established to promote excellence in the arts in Canada both by educating the public and advancing the training of Canadian artists. Donations may be made to:

*The Hnatyshyn Foundation
160 Elgin Street, Suite 1810
Ottawa, ON K2P 2C4*