

A Visit to Whitby, Ontario Last Home of Leslie McFarlane

by David Baumann

571 words

Although I live in southern California, I spent this past week in Ontario, Canada for a conference in Windsor. Having the opportunity, I went two days early to see the countryside. On Wednesday, I suddenly realized that I was about twenty miles from Whitby, a relatively small town east of Toronto, and remembered that this was where Leslie McFarlane spent his last years and where he died in early September 1977. I decided to go there and discover what I could. First I called the general information number for Whitby to learn where he was buried. The helpful person on the end of the line referred me to an old-timer who runs the archives, but he was on vacation. A second referral sent me to the public library. Another helpful person looked up the records and told me that McFarlane was buried from the Town Funeral Home.

When I pulled into Whitby, it was easy to find the funeral home where two gentlemen went out of their way to pull up their old, pre-computer records. A thick folder with the name LESLIE McFARLANE came out of a stack of others from 1977. Inside were not only the records of the arrangements but also about ten single-spaced typewritten pages that were a summary of an interview with McFarlane that had taken place shortly before he died. It contains a huge amount of information about the Hardy Boys. It was not indicated who had done the interview or for what purpose. The fellows at Town offered to make me a photocopy of this material—and offer, of course, that I gladly accepted. One of them also volunteered the information that the Anglican priest who had conducted the funeral, although retired for ten years, was still a local resident. He provided his telephone number. I called and made an appointment to see the man in the early afternoon.

While I waited, I went to the Whitby Library. In the Canadiana section was another folder with a lot of news articles about McFarlane. I made a photocopy of that file too. A plaque in the children's portion of the establishment, honoring their local author, was out for reframing so I couldn't see that.

Then I went to visit the Rev. Jack Roney. He remembered the funeral from a little more than 26 years ago, but couldn't tell me much about McFarlane. He said that he was an Anglican but not active in church attendance. He did recall, however, that his son Paul had looked McFarlane up and had several visits with him in the 1970s. Jack provided his son's telephone number.

When I finally reached Paul, he graciously told me how he had learned in 1969 that McFarlane was the author of the original Hardy Boys and that he lived ten blocks away. He called him up and was given permission to pay a visit. Over the next few years he made a number of visits and got several of his Hardy Boys books signed. Paul described

McFarlane as being “grandfatherly, warm, glad to receive visitors and talk, and civic-minded.” As if that weren’t enough, Paul emailed me scans of the autographs McFarlane had given him.

All in all, it was a great experience, even if I didn’t find McFarlane’s final resting place—records at the Town Funeral Home indicate that he had been cremated and his son Brian had reposed the ashes in Ottawa.