

OLD PHILMONT #18 – Veterans
By Charles R. Nichols

The word ‘Veteran’ means to me anyone who ever served our country in the Armed Forces in any capacity. It’s not defined by what you did, where you did it, and when you did it – you still gave some time out of your life for a larger cause.

It seemed to me I should write this article by writing about our recent major wars in some kind of order.

Keeping in mind that this article relates to Philmont, the appropriate starting would seem to be the Civil War. Earlier wars have such a dearth of local sources of information as to make it almost impossible to account for our Village’s history in them.

There are literally thousands of books about our Civil War, but not one about Philmont’s place in it. The information here comes in researching the veterans of that war, and their place in the first national Veterans Organization, the Grand Army of the Republic – GAR. The GAR was organized first in Illinois in 1866 as a state group, and spread to be a national group with departments and posts in all states. Starting in 1871 with 30 thousand members through the 1890 high of 408 thousand, it was, and continued to be for many years, a formidable political entity influencing laws to help and protect veterans.

The GAR post in Philmont was formed on the 17th of September 1879 as the Byron Lockwood Post #118. Lockwood, who was born in 1838 in Martindale, and was a lawyer, enlisted in September 1862 in the 167th NY Volunteer Infantry, later consolidated with the 159th NY. He was a 1st Lt. in Company G of this regiment until his death in the battle of Irish Bend, La. on the 14th of April 1863. Several members of this post were veterans of the 128th NY – the Columbia County regiment. The national GAR held meetings in various cities – different each year – called encampments.



The local Philmont photo I have found is shown here and judging by the apparent age of the men it was taken in the 1890's. The location is about in front of the present park on Main Street. The building in the right rear was destroyed by the Mill Fire across the street. There is no particular monument to the veterans of this war in Philmont. There was a proposed development at the end of Columbia Ave., complete with flag pole, as a memorial to these men, but besides appearing on some title searches, seems to have died. In July 1962, Columbia County held a Centennial Commemoration at the Hudson Fish & Game Club. A copy of the invitation is shown here.



The next little problem the United States had was the Spanish – American War. Again, there are many books about the War in general, but little information about its effect on Philmont. Started in 1898, the President, McKinley called for 125 thousand volunteers. New York was to supply 12 Infantry Regiments and 2 Cavalry Troops. The war was about done in 1899. I say about because the war became a local affair with the natives of some of the properties we occupied as a result of the war. The veterans of this war also created a national organization, called ‘United States War Veterans’, to distinguish them from the Civil War veterans. I don’t know if they had a group in Philmont, or if they did where they met. There was one individual living in the village that I know served in this war. His name is Roscoe D. Ives. He enlisted 2 May 1898 at New York City to serve two years, mustered in as private in Company A, 71st New York Infantry Regiment. Mustered

out with the Company 15 November 1898 at New York City. He later volunteered in World War I. The photo shows Ives in later years.



Two other names turned up in researching World War I as having prior service in the Spanish American War. Herman Zimmerman and Charles Johnson – I don't know what units they served in.

World War I is easier from a researcher's point of view. The standard method of communication was writing, generally in newspapers, and clipping news articles was widely done. The Great War, as it was christened, started in 1914, with the United States declaring war on 6 April 1917. That same month the Philmont Home Defense League was formed with 94 members. They met and drilled regularly. The County Home Defense League was formed in Hudson. In July of 1917 Company F, 10th Regiment was sworn in with 9 Philmont men included. By August 1st exams were being given to draftees, and on the 3rd, Company F left Hudson. The newspapers had no restrictions concerning privacy so every list of men who were drafted, examined, accepted or rejected was printed in full, and when in service, no problem telling where they were in the US or overseas.

A military census was taken in 1917, compulsory military registration in May of 1918. This latter list contained 141 names from Philmont.

By 1918 War fund benefits were happening in the Village – Strand Theatre; Knights of Columbus; United War Service; YMCA; War Thrift; Red Cross, and appeals to the businesses in Philmont. There were War Stamps, War Bonds – Liberty Loan. These latter were tax free, and paid 3 ½% interest !

In 1918 also the mills in Philmont were ordered closed for 5 days, then 10 Mondays. The High Rock helped the workers by paying them 58% of lost wages. There is a list of businesses ordered to close each week at 6 pm on the first 3 nights, and 8 pm on the last 3 nights for the months of January and March.

On the 14th of October 1918, there was to be an exhibit of war material on 5 flat cars parked on the Philmont siding. Interestingly, there is no further mention of this, and it certainly should have merited a column in the paper if it indeed took place !! Perhaps the Armistice coming on 11 November 1918 is somehow the reason.

In 1919 the collection of records of veterans was undertaken and resulted in the book "Columbia County in the Great War", and since it gained wide distribution, is easily found today.

In May of that year, a 'Whippet Tank' was brought to the village to demonstrate what a modern war machine could do. The photo was taken at the end of Maple Avenue.



The Homecoming Celebration was held on 20 September 1919 and the gathering is shown in the photo below. The Honor Roll shown was a temporary one, and was replaced later by a bronze plate on stone, also shown.





The program for the celebration was interesting and busy – 1 pm welcome at ‘Victory Plaza’ at which the welcoming speech was given by J. Lasher, and a medal (shown back and front) given to each service person; 3 pm Ball Game at Bidwell Park, and a Sparring Exhibit, and a Wrestling Match; then 6 pm dinner at the Crusader Club; and a film at 8 pm at the Strand Theatre featuring showing the Columbia County boys leaving Hudson.. Then, at 9:30 pm a block party – a very full day !!



The veterans of this war also created their own organization, the American Legion, which through the 1920's and 1930's gained much political power. This organization endures to this day.

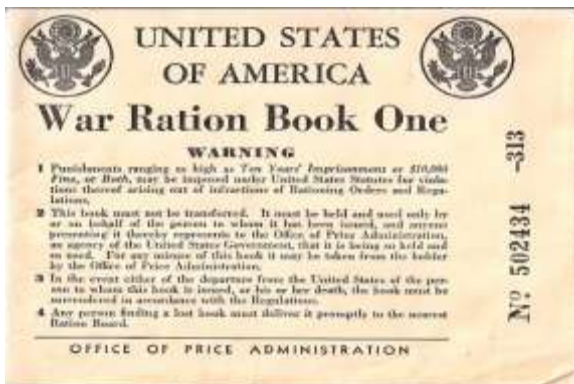
Twenty three years later, the United States was involved in another World War, WW II beginning with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on 7 December 1941.

After 7 December 1941, the country mobilized quickly, the draft was reinstated much like WW I and during the next 4 years millions of men and women were inducted. The story of the war was captured on film by both military and civilian photographers. Unlike the First World War, a strict censorship was imposed on all regarding military movements.

The village of Philmont did its part. A Philmont Civilian Defense Council was created with headquarters at the Village Hall. The defense was primarily against air attack. The individuals organized under the Chairman, John J. Walker were designated either 'Warden' or a 'Director', depending upon the job. There were Fire Wardens; Air Raid Wardens; Engineering Warden; Messenger Warden; Publicity Warden, and more.

The areas of concern for various wardens were delineated, all phone numbers were listed, and the physical area the various people were responsible for was spelled out. For example, there were 'watchers' for store houses, and mill roofs and interiors. The village was divided into 4 sections with a set of wardens for each, and a headquarters for each. For example, Section #1 had a Fire Warden headquarters at Harders Store, and Air Raid Warden Headquarters at the Vanderbilt Hotel. Section #2 had a Fire Warden headquarters at Palen's Store; Air Raid Warden headquarters at the Legion Hall. Section #3 had both Fire Warden and Air Raid Warden Headquarters at Palen's Store. Section #4 had a Fire Warden headquarters at the Crusader Club, and an Air Raid Warden at Ball's garage.

To help the defense effort, volunteer air plane spotters were used to track air traffic over certain areas. Philmont had such volunteers and they used the green houses of Harold Anderson in Mellenville so the watchers could get out of the weather and still scan the sky ! The volunteers had an arm band to identify them. One is shown in the photo below. While the efforts directed at defending against Air Raids seem quaint and foolish in today's world, at the time it was not considered far fetched, and it had another important effect – it served to make people at home feel that they were part of the fight !



While the civilian population had a bit of rationing in the First World War, World War II had very strict and rigorous rationing. Many staples of life were in short supply since the armed forces had a priority in procuring these things. The Government Office of Price Administration controlled the War Ration effort. Coupon, books (like the one shown), stamps, tokens, and seemingly endless forms to deal with were part of the effort. People who were cheaters or black market dealers were dealt with severely.

Home canning of meat, as well as fruit and vegetables, making soap, and making do with worn out things were part of the norm. In the country more of us, even in Philmont, raised chickens, hogs, vegetables, etc. for barter. We considered ourselves more fortunate than the city dwellers !

The 'War Years' were long and hard. When the war ended, the village had a Homecoming Celebration much like the one in 1919. On September 14th, 1946, as the newspaper has it, the entire population of Mellenville, Harlemville and Philmont turned out to honor over 300 returning service men and women. Nine didn't return.



The program started with Devine Services, and continued with speeches by various dignitaries. After this Philmont Service Medals as shown in the photos were presented. After that, a clambake by the Crusader Club with entertainment. Later, at Victory Plaza, band concerts.



Later this year, the work on the Village of Philmont World War II Memorial Field, creating a ball park on the land below the Crusader Club was started and finished in 1947.

Following World War II, the conflicts – in the Far East, Korea and Vietnam, and now the Middle East were treated by the public in very different fashion, perhaps because the public saw something of it every day. With Korea there was newsreel footage on the television, in later conflicts on news shows on television. Korean veterans returned to public indifference, and Vietnam veterans were actually berated for fighting.

Veteran's monuments serve a really necessary function – to bring to the attention of the children growing up the cost of the freedom they enjoy. The phrase 'Freedom isn't Free' is one they should remember.



The two monuments in the Main Street park show the WW I veterans on the left, and the right stone is for all veterans. This one was originally intended to be for WW II veterans, but the cost of a plate showing all those veterans was considered too much. This stone is shown in the next photo at the time of unveiling.



While the ball field below the Crusader Club between Main Street and Church Street is a memorial itself to the veterans of Philmont, there is also a black stone with the names, and wars, of those who died in service in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam as well as one who died at sea in 1992. This stone, dedicated on 8 November 1997, is shown in the next photo.



Also on the Memorial Field is a World War II cannon – a 105 Howitzer. Located at the Main Street end of the field, it is a memorial to all veterans, and many were on the committee. The dedication was 4 September 2004.



Korean veterans have few monuments to their service. The photo showing the memorial to men killed in action is one, and there is one in the Courthouse Square in Hudson. The KWVA (Korean War Veterans Association) was instrumental in having route 9H in Columbia County designated as the ‘Columbia County Veterans’ Memorial Highway as a memorial to all veterans.





Every one should remember another quote “ALL GAVE SOME—SOME GAVE ALL”

Charles R. Nichols
Korea 1951 - 1954