



Year of the Veteran

1917-1919

Rhinebeck residents had vital roles in 'The Great War'

Editor's note: This is the second in a year-long series of articles by town, village and city historians about the World War 1 era as Dutchess County recognizes "The Year of The Veteran" with the Dutchess County Historical Society. The articles will appear every other week. If you have information relating to the time around WWI in Dutchess County, call (845) 471-1630 or visit dchsny.org. View the following installment online at dchsny.org/wwi-rhinebeck.

by David Miller

One hundred years ago the world was entering the last year of "The Great War," the war to end all wars. Many events are happening this year commemorating the 100th anniversary of our county's part in the war. This article is about what life was like in Rhinebeck during the War.

The Doughboy statue in the village lists 200 Rhinebeck veterans. Eight men died in the war: Edward J. Bell, Roy T. Crusius, Edward A. Fitzpatrick, Arthur Haen, Alfred W. Lane, George N. Miller Jr., Guy Pindar and Henry M. Suckley. Henry left for France in January 1915, served for more than two years as a French ambulance driver and was killed by a bomb from a German

airship in March 1917.

In April 1917, a Dutchess County home defense committee was formed, headed by the editor of the Rhinebeck Gazette, Jacob Strong. The committee located land that could be put into service growing food for the war effort. The members asked that the growing of food be added to the curriculum of each school and that the newspaper create a weekly column to teach the public "agricultural preparedness."

In May 1917, a three-man committee was formed — A. Lee Stickle, Rhinebeck High School Principle E. C. Pullen and Rev. Francis Little — to build Rhinebeck's corps. The charge was "to find men between the ages of 16 and 64 who were of good moral character and were physically fit." This group could be called upon for a "breach of the peace, tumult, riot or resistance of process of the state or eminent danger thereof." They were to serve as an auxiliary to the National Guard. By the end of the month, 71 men had signed up for the defense corps and held their first meeting at the Starr Institute.

Paying for the war

The U.S. Government had to figure out a way to pay for the war and in June began selling the first liberty loan bonds. Bonds were sold at banks and at the Gazette office. The bonds paid 3.5 percent and were exempt from taxes.

There were five Liberty Bond drives during the war and Rhinebeck exceeded its quota in all of them. You could buy a \$50 bond by making five \$10 payments. The third drive consisted of volunteers rolling a liberty ball from Buffalo to New York City, 422 miles.

At the end of the year, the government came up with another idea to raise \$2 billion in 1918. They decided that Liberty Bonds might be too expensive for some people coming in denominations of \$10 and \$50, so they came up with a budget plan: War Savings Stamps, costing just 25 cents. Individuals were given "thrift cards" with slots for 16 stamps. The completed card would be worth \$5.

As the holidays approached, the Red Cross started a Christmas Seal campaign for 1918. By January 1918,

Rhinebeck residents had joined the Red Cross and Mrs. Vincent Astor was made chair of the newly created Rhinebeck chapter.

Building an army

Plans for the regular army continued. By mid-July, all eligible men in Rhinebeck were assigned draft numbers and the rules for exemption from the Army were announced.

Dutchess County was divided into two districts totaling 396 men. Rhinebeck was part of District 2, from which 215 men were required. Notices were sent out to 430 men to appear before the exemption board. The men were to appear in Millbrook and the town worked out transportation for the men.

They had to have a second call of men to be examined because too many filed for exemptions. Because so many men were getting exemptions, the government revoked all exemptions in November. In March 1918, the Draft Board moved to Rhinebeck. Tracy Dows and Benson Frost were members of the board.

Food preparation

Herbert Hoover, head of the U.S. Food Administration, was placed in charge of increasing food production and preservation to support the war. Since women could not serve as soldiers in the Army or Home Defense corps, they helped with food preservation for the public and our troops abroad.

The important foods for the troops were wheat and meat. So, the public was encouraged to eat vegetables, fruit and fish. The Beekman Arms was recruited to be the Food Administration headquarters and conducted classes to teach women cooking and food preservation.

Backyards, school grounds and ball fields were used to grow food. As the winter began, the country experienced coal shortages and the public was asked to help. The country began mining more coal and people were encouraged to use wood to heat their houses and save the coal for the war effort.

Dying of disease

In 1918, letters from the front and obituaries were printed in the Gazette. Millions died during the war from disease. You have to remember that this was 1918. Most of the soldiers were from small towns and farms,



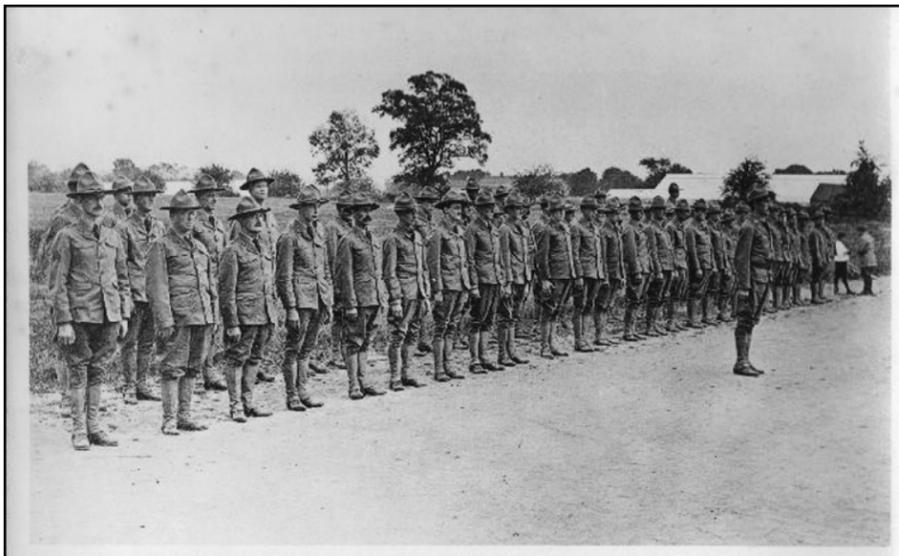
who were now put into close contact with thousands of men under terrible conditions. They were exposed to diseases and they died.

If you got a scratch, let alone a bullet wound, there were no antibiotics and you died. More men died from diseases than being shot. Roy Crusius died from measles in a camp in the United States. Edward J. Bell and Guy Pindar died of pneumonia. Edward Fitzpatrick was actually killed in action.

On Oct. 4, Germany asked for an armistice; the Kaiser resigned and left for the Netherlands, where he spent the rest of his life. Everyone knew that the armistice would be signed at 11 a.m. on 11/11, so Rhinebeck had a victory parade.

This was not the end of the war. It took eight more months for the allies to draft the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed on June 28, 1919. Some historians believe that the crippling terms of the treaty are what lead to the rise of Hitler and next war. So, the next week, on July 4, 1919, Rhinebeck had a second victory party with a parade through the village welcoming home the troops from Europe.

A retired IT manager, David Miller is the chairman of the Rhinebeck Historical Society and chairman of the Village of Rhinebeck Planning Board.



Above: The Rhinebeck Defense Corps in 1917. Right: A Liberty Bond Drive in 1917 involved rolling a Liberty Ball from Buffalo to New York City. It was rolled through Rhinebeck on the way. Courtesy photos

