

# County Historical Society Features Treasured Items From Residents In WWI Exhibition:

By Bill Jeffway

As part of the “2018: Year of the Veteran” initiative, the Dutchess County Historical Society (DCHS) has launched what is in some ways a traditional exhibition of photographs from the era, those of extraordinary local photographer and WWI veteran Reuben Van Vlack. In most ways, however, the exhibition is fundamentally different, offering a “people’s exhibition” through the inclusion of items shared by county residents during the year.

The 11-panel traveling exhibition is called “Over Here, the Yet-to-be-told Stories of Dutchess County’s Men, Women and Children During the World War 1917 to 1919.” Launched in May at the FDR Presidential Library, it is set to be presented at towns across the county. A continually updated schedule for the locations is at [www.DCHSNY.org/overhere](http://www.DCHSNY.org/overhere).

As DCHS has reached out to county residents, either through program presentations, or news articles like this, in return, residents have rewarded us by sharing many, many personal items from the time.



*Some of the many items that county residents have brought forward during the “2018: Year of the Veteran” campaign to tell the stories of relatives and friends who served in WWI. The items have been either donated to DCHS, or loaned to DCHS to copy and publish as digital image.*

Some of those items are donated to DCHS, but the majority are not. Individuals are able to offer a new category of gift to DCHS, a “digital image gift.” This allows DCHS to feature the digital image, but allows the individual or family to retain what might be a very personal object.



*Longtime DCHS member Cora Mallory Davis, shown attending the opening of the “Over Here” exhibition at FDR Presidential Library in May, was delighted to identify two draftees who were marching to the Poughkeepsie train station in this 1917 photo. This allowed DCHS to match the photo with a newspaper article which led to the identification of others.*

There are instances, however, where the owner wishes to donate the items outright so they can be professionally preserved and archived. An example of this being a set of historic recruitment, bond drive and Red Cross posters in delicate condition. They, too, are digitally reproduced and are part of a permanent, or at least open-ended, exhibition of items online at the DCHS website [www.DCHSNY.org](http://www.DCHSNY.org).

The response and range of contributions has been very exciting. Some people, upon reflection and prompted by the “2018: Year of the Veteran” concept, have asked around and discovered things they did not know their family or historical society had. Others are finally having a chance to put something they have treasured as a family for generations in a “safe” and visible place for now and future generations.

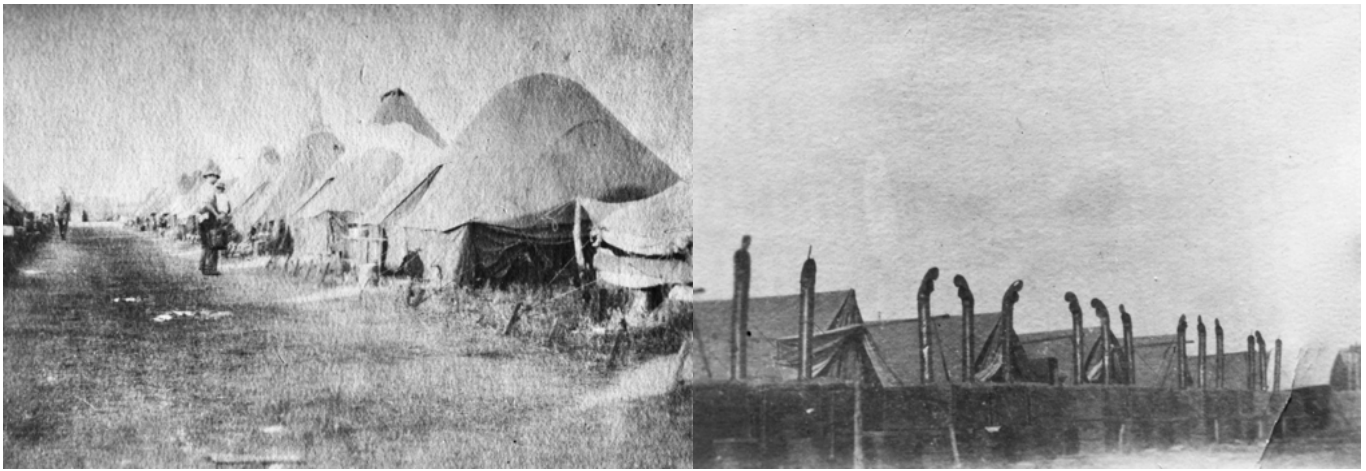
The full range of exhibition methods are the travelling exhibition of 11 panels, a permanent online exhibition organized by topic and by town, the 2018 DCHS Yearbook will feature of photo essay. Dutchess County Clerk, Brad Kendall and his team have made the display cases on the ground floor of the County Office Building (the DMV) available. As a result, DCHS is managing a rotating exhibition of contributions of primarily local objects, with some DCHS or county components. The items currently featured belonged to the late Daniel H. Chase, a veteran from the East Fishkill, loaned temporarily from the East Fishkill Historical Society and curated by Rick Soedler. Those items are also featured online at in the “by town” exhibition.

The DCHS permanent online exhibition and information about is more traditional components are on our website [www.DCHSNY.org](http://www.DCHSNY.org) and Facebook group [www.Facebook.com/DCHSNY](http://www.Facebook.com/DCHSNY)

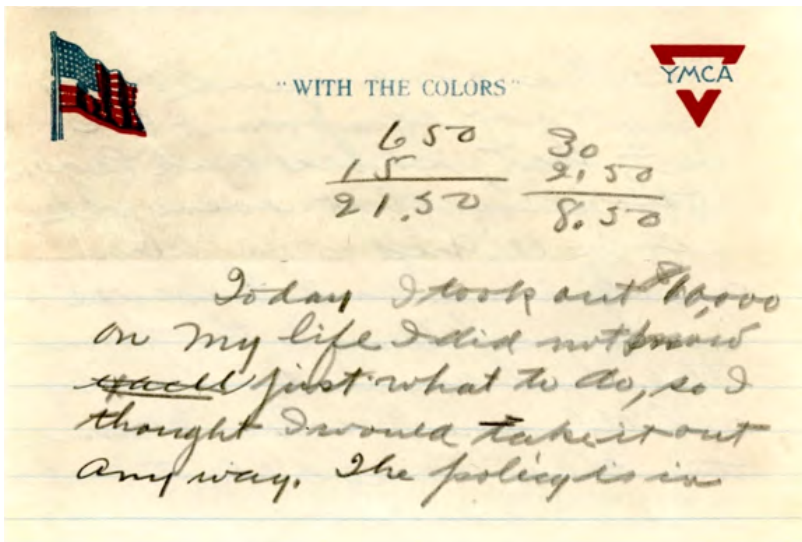
*Combining a photo from the county collection with a photo from an individual can tell a more powerful story. The identity of the man in the photograph on the left from the DCHS collection of Van Vlack photos, was unknown. Once identified as Poughkeepsie resident Sebie Bostic, and shared with Bostic’s grandson, Larry Magill, in return DCHS received the digital image shown at right. As companion photos, they beautifully reflect the transition from relaxed civilian to sharp soldier.*







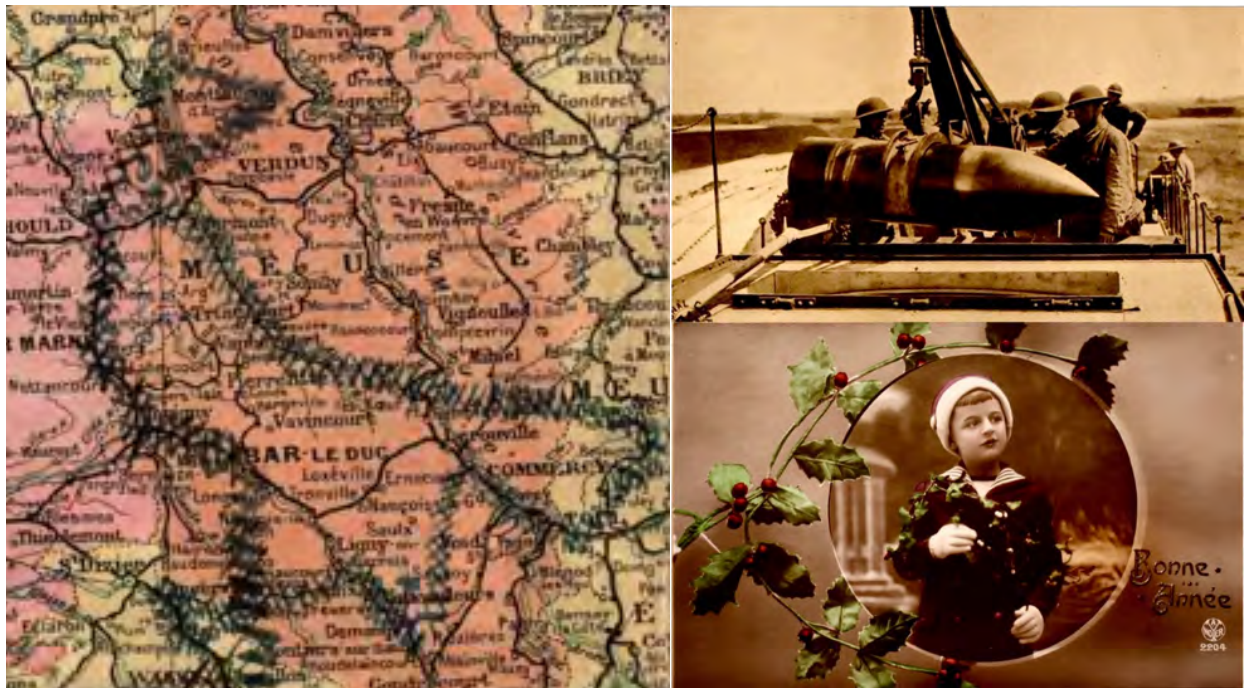
Photographs provided by Rhinebeck resident Sharon Sherrod that her grandfather, Edward Brenner, took during his service as a baker in WWI, contrast beautifully with the very formal and very public photos of Van Vlack, offering an informal, very personal look at day to day life and work.



A letter from a Dover soldier just entering service written to his mother is full of reassuring words. But he writes that he has taken out a \$10,000 life insurance in her name. Calculations at the top show him adding up two deductions from his monthly \$30 paycheck, specifically \$6.50 for life insurance and \$15 he promised to send to his mother. The calculation top right shows the soldier will be left with \$8.50 per month.

A review at the New York State Archives of correspondence between the State historian and local historians from the early 1920's offered a great deal of information. However, a file for Milan was labelled "photograph not identified." Several days after seeing this, coincidentally, DCHS received the photograph on the right from the family of Milan veteran Ralph L. Fulton. In return, the NYS Archives shared a letter of personal testimony from Fulton they had on file that the Fulton descendants, the Norton family, were not aware of.





*The precise train route of Pine Plains WWI veteran Lester Whitney covers his entire route in France from landing at Brest to heading to the front. He annotated postcards along the way, and images he collected range from the powerful and aggressive to the most gentle: a Christmas Postcard from France. Digital image gifts from the Schmidt family.*



*DCHS is working to feature presentations related to veterans done by individuals such as one done recently DCCHS local Vice President for Clinton, Craig Marshall, above, who spoke of his Vietnam service, in uniform. Presentations done by DCCHS board member Betsy Strauss for Amenia, and DCCHS VP for Rhinebeck David Miller are in their respective town online exhibitions at [www.DCHSNY.org/over-here-by-town](http://www.DCHSNY.org/over-here-by-town).*