



# Year of the Veteran

1917-1919

## Bathrick's story underscores changing times ushered in by World War I

*Editor's note: This is part of a year-long series of articles by town, village and city historians about the World War I era as Dutchess County recognizes "The Year of the Veteran" with the Dutchess County Historical Society. If you have information relating to the time around WWI in Dutchess County, call (845) 471-1630 or visit [dchsny.org](http://dchsny.org).*

I came upon the story of Henry Bathrick quite accidentally, while pouring over old local newspapers on the [Fultonhistory.com](http://Fultonhistory.com) website looking for information on Pine Plains during World War I for the Dutchess County Year of the Veteran project. In The Pine Plains Register of Thursday, Aug. 14, 1919, there was a nice article about a homecoming celebration for the Pine Plains veterans being planned for September of that year.

But then a headline about a fatal car crash caught my eye, and like most people, my morbid curiosity drew me to it. As I read on, I realized that the victim had been one of our returned veterans. Henry Bathrick, age 24 and back from the war for only a few months, had been killed in an automobile accident in New York City. Like that of a fallen soldier, his was a life of unfulfilled promise, his sudden death just as heartbreaking and senseless. I was incredibly moved after reading about him and set out to learn more.

The Bathricks were ordinary farmers who had moved to the Mount Ross hamlet in the Town of Pine Plains from the Town of Stanford sometime after Henry Melvin Bathrick was born in 1895. However, as it turns out, Henry Bathrick was no ordinary farm boy, because at around the age of 20, before entering the military, he got a job in New York City as a fire patrolman. Patrolmen were different from firemen in that they didn't work for the fire department, they worked in partnership with it. Patrolmen were civilians underwritten by the insurance industry (in New York City this was the New York Board of Fire Underwriters), working alongside firemen and taking orders from the commanding officer of the fire department. While firemen put out fires, a patrolman's job was to prevent loss of life and property, especially in commercial structures, but it could be just as dangerous.

The New York City Fire Patrol was organized in 1839, predating the paid New York City Fire Department. Henry worked

for New York City Fire Patrol No. 5 at 307 West 121st Street in upper Manhattan. The newspaper says that he drove the fire truck for the patrol. Henry had moved in with New York City Deputy Fire Chief John F. King. Perhaps because of his youth and being so far from home, Chief King took him under his wing. One can almost imagine the chief promising Henry's mother not to worry, they would take good care of her boy. King's son Hugh visited the Bathrick home in Mount Ross on at least once occasion, as well.

As required by law, Henry registered for the draft on June 5, 1917. He was 22. On his registration card he claimed an exemption to help run the family farm. According to the local paper he had already enlisted in New York's Naval Militia in May. On July 16, 1917 he enlisted in the NNV (National Navy Volunteers), which allowed him to be mobilized into the federal Naval Reserves.

Henry did his training at Kingsland Point in North Tarrytown, Westchester County. During the spring target practice of the Atlantic fleet, Henry scored the record for gun pointer of the entire fleet, an accomplishment that his family must have been very proud of since "expert gunner" was engraved on his gravestone. After his training was completed, he was assigned to a transport convoy, the U.S.S. Seattle, Armored Cruiser No. 11.

The Seattle started out in June 1917 as an escort for the first American convoy to Europe and the flagship of Rear Admiral Albert Cleaves. On June 22 she encountered enemy submarines, but her helm jammed. She sounded a warning whistle for the other ships in the formation, which was followed by several tense moments, but the U-boats did not attack. It was later thought that the Seattle's warning whistle had scared them off. The remainder of her service in the war was uneventful.

Henry Bathrick was relieved from active duty in February 1919 and was probably anxious to get back to civilian life and his job with the fire patrol. In early August he visited home and informed his folks he had been transferred downtown, but we don't know if this was something he was happy about or not. On Aug. 12, right after returning to the city, he was involved in a fatal head-on collision while touring around Manhattan with his fiancé and her friend in his new Overland car. According to the Aug. 13 article in The New York Herald,



Pine Plains veteran Henry Bathrick is buried in Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery. Right: The detail of his headstone shows him in his Navy uniform. During World War I, Bathrick served on the cruiser Seattle, pictured below in a news clipping following its return from France. *Courtesy photos*



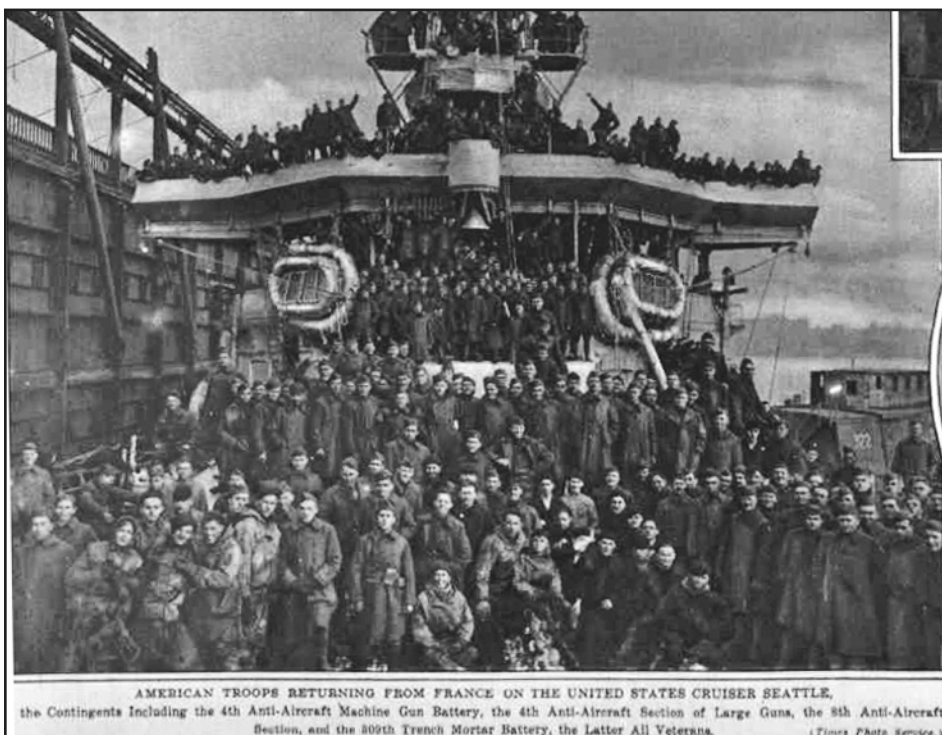
Henry's car flipped twice, the second time pinning him beneath it and killing him instantly. He was in his fire patrolman's uniform at the time of the crash. His two passengers and the other driver survived.

Henry was given full military honors at his funeral, with members of the 3rd Division Naval Militia in attendance dressed in their regulation blue uniforms and white hats. He was buried in Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery.

It is said that World War I ushered in the modern era, not just in terms of how wars are fought but also with significant developments in the fields of technology and science. Society and culture were transformed, and new systems of government emerged while others perished. Like the young soldiers who died from any of several advances in deadly weaponry, including the first large-scale use of poison gas in wartime, Henry's death in an automobile accident, before the benefit of traffic laws and safety regulations we now take for granted, can perhaps be seen as an equally

adverse consequence of this new world order. One hundred years later, we are still trying to come to terms with it.

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AMERICAN TROOPS RETURNING FROM FRANCE ON THE UNITED STATES CRUISER SEATTLE, the Contingents including the 4th Anti-Aircraft Machine Gun Battery, the 4th Anti-Aircraft Section of Large Guns, the 8th Anti-Aircraft Section, and the 809th Trench Mortar Battery, the Latter All Veterans. (Times Photo Service.)

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