

**WEST ROXBURY POSTS 167
AMERICAN LEGION**



Engraved on a 36" x 30" brass plaque that weights about 50 lbs. is the following inscription;

1917

1919

**TO OUR COMRADES WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY
IN THE WORLD WAR, WEST ROXBURY POSTS 167
AMERICAN LEGION**

THOMAS HENRY MARTIN
WALTER C. MAERTINS
DONALD A. CAMERON
FRANCIS K. QUINN
CHARLE S. TOY
BERNARD HICKS

ANDREW J. MACDONALD
WILLIAM N. STRACHAN
EDWARD J. FERSON
WALTER R. KUBLI
HAROLD S. KEEFE
ALBERT F. HABEL

ANNA K. WELSH



It was found in the basement of the Theodore Parker Church when staff and church members were cleaning out a room where Post 167 met for about 15 years. It was originally set into a puddingstone rock located in front of the American Legion Post 167 at the corner of Centre St. and Quinn Way. In 2000 the plaque along with their flag and several documents, were donated to the West Roxbury Historical Society.

The United States entered the “Great War” on April 6, 1917 after the sinking of the Lusitanian. Though this was not the only reason it proved enough public outcry that Woodrow Wilson, who had promised to keep us out of the European Conflict, felt this country could no longer stand by. Over the course of the next two years 4.3 million men and woman would be mobilized to take part in the war effort. The United States would lose the lives of nearly 126,000 men and woman, 235,000 wounded, about 5,000 MIA’s and over 43,000 from the Spanish Flu. The pandemic, which swapped across the world, claimed an estimated 30 million lives worldwide with an estimated 675,000 Americans.

The American Legion Post 167 was established in 1919 shortly after the end of World War I. At a July 4, 1919 rally many of the recently returning Veterans talked about the need for a West Roxbury Post, such as the Adams Post established the year before in Roslindale. The Adams Post was named in honor of Irving W. Adams, the first Massachusetts man killed in World War I. A committee was named and the approximately 485 local veterans were invited to join. They held their early meetings in local social halls or the library hall.

The Town of West Roxbury had built Westerly Hall shortly after it’s incorporation in 1852. It was a three story wood building that had served as a town meeting place, an elementary school and housed the West Roxbury Free Library. In 1874 when West Roxbury annexed to Boston the first floor became the Boston Public Library, West Roxbury Branch and the second floor was used for kindergarten room.

The building became out dated and no longer met fire codes for a public building. The West Roxbury Citizens Association had championed the effort to appropriated funds to build the new Library. On July 20, 1921 Mayor Andrew J. Peters signed the contract to build the new library. Architect Henry M. Seaver, a life long resident of Bellevue St., designed the Georgian style building. To maximize light and too give greater scale to the building he incorporated the large domed windows as well as a sky light over the circulation desk in the center of the library. In 1923 The City of Boston completed construction of a new library, next to the old Westerly Hall.

The city no longer needed Westerly Hall and sold the building to the American Legion Post 167 for one dollar. As part of the purchase agreement the building was to be moved within 30 days of the transfer of the books to the new building.

The Legion purchased the land on Centre St. from Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandies, who may have inherited the land from an aunt that lived in West Roxbury. It took five days for a team of horses to move the building about 75 yards down Centre St. and place it on the new foundation built by post members. Local architect Oscar Thayer, who lived at the corner of Bellevue St. and Linnet St, volunteered his service to make design changes as well as structural improvements The build had major renovations including steel beams, new walls an addition for a kitchen area, electricity and plumbing. A Candle Pin bowling ally was installed in the basement, which was very popular with

the members. On April 19, 1923 the building was dedicated, among the guest of honors were Vice President Calvin Coolidge and Governor Channing H. Cox.

Post 167 was an active organization with as many as 300 members, including 7 surviving members of the “adopted” Gettysburg Post 191, G.A.R. They established a marching band in 1930 and they sponsored local parades on Veterans Day and Memorial Day. They held Memorial Day services at the Westerly Burial Grounds diagonally across the street from the hall. They were also committed to honoring their fallen peers by having plaques posted at prominent intersection and dedicated as a “Square” in their honor. They visited patients at the newly established VA Hospital on Spring St., and supporting the national organization’s effort to get more and better benefits for returning veterans was a high priority.

On Memorial Day 1925 the bronze plaque, set in a slab of Roxbury puddingstone, was dedicated. How the names were chosen is not clear since several of the men lived in Roslindale and are listed in the Local Draft Board, Division 23 as Roslindale residents. Who are these twelve men and one woman listed on the plaque?

Using available documents such as Massachusetts Birth Records, Federal Census and the records kept at the City of Boston Veterans Services I have attempted to compile a glimpse of these twelve men and one woman.

Thomas Henry Martin was born April 15, 1890 the second son of Michael, a painter and Helen, both born in Boston. They lived at 175 Gardner St. Thomas was a plumber with the J W Zehring Co. 183 Essex St. Boston. He enlisted into the Regular Army in December 1917 and transferred to the 814th Aero Squadron in St. Paul Minn. where he died October 12, 1918. Cause of death is not listed. He may have been a victim of the Spanish Flu since in the month of October alone an estimated 200,000 Americans died from the flu.

Andrew J. MacDonald was almost 30 years old, married and working for E. Fleming & Co. 116 Main St. Cambridge as a foreman when he was inducted into the Army. He was living at 19 Elmwood St. (now Joyce Killmer Rd.). He was a Sergeant with the 119 Fire Arms Battery F in France as part of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) when he died from his wounds on October 23, 1918. There is a plaque at Centre St. & Spring St. in his honor. His son Andrew Jr. died in World War II and there is a plaque in his honor at Centre St. and Hastings St.

Walter Charles Maertins the second son of Gustave and Sophia was born in 1897. They lived at 27 Aldrich St. Roslindale when he enlisted in the US Navy on April 6, 1917. Upon completing basic training he was assigned to the USS Kearsarge until early January 1918 when he was transferred to Pensacola Fla. until September 27, 1918. He was then assigned to New London Conn. And on October 2, 1918 he was admitted to the Naval Hospital and died the following day, likely another victim of the Spanish Flu. There is a plaque in his honor at the intersection of Belgrade Ave. and Walworth St.

William N. Strachan, born January 27, 1891, the son of Douglass, a baker from Scotland and Ellen born in England. His birth record has his middle name as Douglass. He was

born and raised in Hyde Park, which was an independent town until 1914 when it annexed to Boston. At the time of enlistment he was living with his brother on Pleasant St. (now Westmont Ave.). He was single, 30 years old and working as a machinist for the "Steam Railroad" when he joined the army December 24, 1917. He was a Private 1st Class stationed at Fort Barron, Texas with the Air Ship Flying Squadron at the time of his death November 9, 1918.

Donald A. Cameron was born in Boston on December 13, 1895. He was the son of William, a harnessmaker for a street rail company, born in Scotland and Susanna born in Ireland. They lived at 44 Anawan Ave., West Roxbury. He worked at Dodge Auto Co. Beacon St. Boston as an Auto Repairman. On August 4, 1917, 21 years old, he enlisted in the National Guard. One month later he was activated into the Federal Army and arrive in France in September 1917 as a member of the 9th Mass Infantry of the 101st Infantry until his death October 4, 1918. The intersection of Beech St., Anawan Ave and the West Roxbury Parkway is named in his honor.

Edward J. Ferson, whose first name was Edgar, was the born in 1899 to Edgar Sr., a baggage master for the railroad and Margaret. They first lived on Summer St. near the Spring St. crossing. They lived at 470 LaGrange St. West Roxbury at the time of his enlisting in the National Guard on April 1, 1917 at 18 years old. He was activated to Federal Service in August 1917. He had arrived in France as part of the AEF in March 1918 with the 55th Artillery Battery until his death January 2, 1919. He has plaques located at both Centre St. & LaGrange St. and Centre St. and St. Teresa's Ave.

Francis [Frank] Kevin Quinn was born August 23, 1896 the son of John, an Accountant for the City of Boston and Margaret, both born in Boston. They moved to 299 Temple St. in the early 1900's. Some documents list him as Francis and others as Frank. He was the third of four children. He is "Reported Dead" in June 5, 1917 West Roxbury / Roslindale Draft Board Report. There is no available record of his military service listed with the City of Boston Veteran Services. The plaque located at Centre St. and Quinn Way, named for him.

Walter R. Kubli, born in Boston in 1891, the son of Rudolf and Mary L. who had immigrated from Switzerland in 1883. Rudolf was a laborer in a rubber factory in Boston. They had seven children and Walter was their fifth child. The Draft Board records list him at 96 Carroll St, (now Carrolton Rd.) West Roxbury. Their house was located at the end of the street where West Roxbury, Dedham and Hyde Park met. He is also not listed in the City records. There is a plaque located at Washington St. & Grove St.

Harold S. Keefe, born May 11, 1896 the son of John T., a manager for an express company, and Mary, both born in Canada. At the time of his birth they lived on Wachusett St., Roslindale. His father joined the Boston Police Force after 1910. He lived on Mt. Vernon St. at the time of his enlisted in the National Guard July 5, 1916 at 20 years old. He was transferred to Federal service in March 1917. He arrived in France in early September 1917. He was wounded in early June and died on June 27, 1918. There is

a plaque located at Centre St. & Beech St.

Bernard Hicks, born at 1589 Tremont St. Roxbury, January 4, 1892, the son of Mealier, a carpenter and Annie, both born in Newfoundland. He was a pin boy at a bowling ally when he was inducted into the Army on March 6, 1918. What his association to West Roxbury is unclear since his family lived in Brighton until the mid 1920's. He attended Aviation School at Fort Kelly Texas and was assigned to the 116 Aero Squadron Air Ship in June 1918. He died December 12, 1918. Cause and location is not listed.

Albert Frank Habel, born in Boston in 1893 the son of Alfred, a lineman for NE Telephone, and Minnie Habel. They lived at 12 Gould St. He was mechanic at Charles Green, East Dedham when at 24 years old he enlisted in the US Navy. On December 11, 1917 he reported to the Navy Air Station Bay Shore Louisiana. He was transferred to the Navy Air Station in Virginia in September 1918 and died there in an accident on February 23, 1919. There is a plaque in his honor at the corner of Spring St and Gardner St (now Bro. Hernen Way).

Charles S. Toy was born in New York in 1893. He was the third of four sons of Samuel H., a neckwear salesman, and Jennie Toy. Charles was a 24 years old clerk in a real estate office in Boston living with his parents at 118 Beech St., Roslindale when he enlisted in the National Guard on May 7, 1917. In August he was transferred to Federal Service. On September 23, 1917 he arrived in France with the Massachusetts 102 Calvary Squadron Co A.

He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross "For extraordinary heroism in action at Marcheville, France, September 26, 1918. He remained with the wounded, under a sudden counterattack by the enemy, and with the fire of his rifle prevented their falling into the hands of the enemy"

Cited in Paragraph 11, G.O. 488, Headquarter, 26th Division AEF October 16, 1918.

"For exceptionally meritorious service and gallant conduct during the operation of this Division against the enemy at Marcheville on September 25th and 26th 1918. Under terrific enemy artillery bombardment lasting for nearly twenty-four hours and under intense machine gun fire and in fierce hand-to-hand conflicts with grenades, rifle, pistol and bayonet, these officers and soldiers accomplished their mission and broke up four counter attacks." One week later he was killed in action on October 23, 1918. There is a plaque located at Centre St. and Mt. Vernon St.

Anna K. Welsh was born in Canada in 1893, the daughter of Eugene, a proprietor of a hardware store, and Mary. She was their only daughter of five children; they lived at 18 Westover St. On June 1918 at 25 years old Anna was appointed to US Army Nurse Corps. She was sent to France in August where she was assigned to field hospitals and for 6 months she was assigned to the Contagious Disease Hospital. On April 29, 1919 she died from "fracture of base of skull", there is no explanation of what caused the accident. There is no plaque for her.

During the late 20's and 30's the membership increased with peace times veterans

and World War I veterans that moved to West Roxbury. Following World War II membership increased to over 1000 members. There were other veteran organizations, such as the VFW, that attracted the World War II, Korean and Viet Nam veterans.

As the demographics of the area changed many of the older members moved to the suburbs. By the early 1960's there was a decrease in active members, there was no more marching band just a color guard participating in parades. The building was falling into disrepair and being used less and less each year.

In the early 1970's the building became a frequent victim of vandalism and small fires. Then on the night of July 6, 1975 there was a large fire that caused enough damage for the city to condemn the building. The next month vandals once again broke into the building and destroyed many of the records and artifacts that had been collected over the years. The city inspectors then demanded that the building be torn down.

The remaining few members looked for a new location and chose the Theodore Parker Church Meeting Hall as their new location until the attendance was so small they went to a luncheon format that met at the West Roxbury Pub. There are now two remaining members Richard Currin, Post Commander and John Mertheh.

When you see the plaque around West Roxbury remember these represent the sacrifice these twelve men and one woman as well as all the "comrades who gave their lives for their country". If you know more about these veterans please let me know by phone 617 327- 6331 or e-mail at bmurphy@wrhistory.org