

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
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Oak tree honored soldier killed in WWI
By Jay Graybeal

Sixty years ago tomorrow, 21 local veterans of the Great War met at the Westminster Armory to form a 29th Division Association Post. Capt. John Magin, former sergeant of Co. C., 112 Machine Gun Battalion and then present commander of Co. H, 1st Regiment, Maryland National Guard, presided over the meeting. The members elected their first officers: president, Capt. Magin; vice-president, Roy Gamber; secretary and treasurer, Allen Rickell; chaplain, Jesse Myers; sgt. at arms, Jesse Long; historian, J. Leland Jordan; executive committee, Edwin Alcorn, Steward Schmidt, Paul Wimert, Peter Samios and George Bell. Nearly all of the charter members had served with Co. C, 112 Machine Gun Battalion in France.

The new post was named the Jerome L. Day Post No. 48 in honor of the only local member of Co. C, 112 Machine Gun Battalion killed in action during the war. Pvt. Day was born in Glenelg, Howard Co., and later moved to Carroll County with his family. He was killed in a German artillery barrage during the Battle of Malbrouck Hill, France on October 8, 1918. He is buried in Romaque Cemetery near Chateau-Thierry.

The purpose of the new organization was "...to care for disabled World War Veterans and help them to regain a place in civil life, to help in local Child Welfare activities, to help in relief activities in time of disaster, to support national defense and World's peace, to promote community growth by the establishment of community centers, libraries and playgrounds, to sponsor and aid the Girl Scout and Boy Scout organizations, to promote Americanism and to assist the Legion in the observance of Memorial Day."

Shortly after the end of the World War, local citizens discussed an appropriate memorial to the war dead and veterans. While the men argued over the respective merits of a memorial hospital or a recreation center, local women took the lead. The Woman's Civic League settled on "The Living Trees," a mile of 150 red oak trees planted along the Old Baltimore Road beginning at Washington Heights. The first tree was planted in honor of Jerome Day in the spring of 1919. The trees were dedicated on July 4 in connection with the homecoming celebration for local soldiers.

The Jerome L. Day Memorial Tree became an issue in July 1958 when State Highway engineers declared that the tree must be cut down for the construction of Md. 97. The headline of the July

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17, 1958 issue of the Westminster *Democratic Advocate* declared "State Will Destroy Memorial Tree." The Day tree was located at the intersection of Malcolm Drive and Old Westminster Pike. Despite deep concerns expressed by members of the historical society and others, the tree was destroyed when Malcolm Drive was widened to connect Md. 97 and Md. 140.

Although Pvt. Day's tree is gone, his memory is kept alive by the current members of the Jerome L. Day Post. On Sunday April 5, the post will celebrate its 60th anniversary. The event will be a reunion for former 29th Division veterans and the writer will present a slide lecture on the 29th Division in the Great War. It will also be an opportunity to look back at sixty years of public service by the Jerome L. Day Post No. 40.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County

Photo caption: Memorial tree planted in honor of Pvt. Jerome L. Day by the Woman's Civic League in 1919. The engraved pediment on the marker read "Immortal oaks to men immortal dedicated Independence Day 1919 in memory of Carroll Co. soldier dead of the Great War."