

"The First Armistice Day"

Carroll County Times article for 11 November 2001

By Jay A. Graybeal

Americans have observed Veterans Day since President Eisenhower declared the holiday in 1954. The observance, however, dates to the end of the First World War in 1918. That war ended with an armistice at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. Armistice Day was observed from 1918 to 1953.

The Historical Society of Carroll County held its annual dinner meeting on the first observance of the renamed holiday in 1954. The evening's program included speakers from around the county who described the public reaction to the announcement that the war was over. Harry J. Starr of Westminster recalled:

"Notice was received early Monday morning, November 11, 1918. Immediately bells began to ring and whistles to blow and the stores of the town were closed. No one was in a humor to do any buying. A County meeting in the interest of the UNITED WAR WORK Campaign was called for the evening but it was decided to combine the two events and have a PEACE parade starting at 7:15 p.m. from Belle Grove Square, which was led by a truck with a large bell announcing its coming. There were many attractive features of the parade and among them the Hampstead fire truck decorated with flags and bunting and clanging their fire bell. Denton S. Gehr had a truck with two mounted bells and there were bands playing popular war music. Many of the trucks and autos had placards expressing the feelings of their owners, most of them consigning the Kaiser to a place where a shortage of coal does not cause inconvenience.

The parade, which was a great success, ended on Willis & Longwell Streets and the occupants went to the Armory, which was already filled to capacity. The ushers tried in vain to reserve seats for those in the parade but the crowd that came early made this impossible. Every seat was taken and every inch of standing room was taken and hundreds were unable to get in the Armory.

Mr. George K. Mather called the meeting to order and named Guy W. Steele, Esq. as chairman. Mr. Steele asked the audience to stand and sing 'Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow,' led by Dr. Woolsey. Rev. Chalmers W. Walck offered an invocation after which Dr. Woolsey led the audience in a number of patriotic songs. And did they sing. Mrs. Henry M. Kimmey was at the piano. Mrs. Edward G. Little and Walter L. Zepp and others sang several solos.

Mr. Steele made a short address and introduced Judge Heisler of Baltimore, Md., and after more singing by the audience, Dr. Philip Cook was introduced and gave an interesting address telling of scenes and experiences during six months with the Y.M.C.A. in France.

The meeting was closed with the singing of the 'Star Spangled Banner' by Sheriff Thomas McNulty of Baltimore and the benediction by Rev. J. W. Fields of Union Bridge.

That evening the firm of Sharrer, Gorsuch & Starr stuffed a suit and labeled it THE KAISER, which was loaded on one of the trucks and later burned on the campus at Western Maryland College."

Mrs. Robert Myers described the instantaneous holiday that erupted in the town of Mt. Airy:

“November 11, 1918 in Mount Airy, Carroll County, Maryland began just like any other dull and dreary November day. The flu epidemic was virulent enough to be causing grave concern; war news was discouraging, and the false armistice had quenched all optimism. The sky was hazy and overcast and the air was raw; not good working weather in our agricultural community, but the best kind of weather to indulge in a visit to our neighboring towns and cities for some shopping and general recreation.

So eleven o’clock of that well-remembered day found many of our citizens out of their home town. Where ever we may have been, our emotions of joy on hearing the pealing of the bells, shrilling of the whistles, and the growing exuberance of the gathering crowds are a never-to-be forgotten memory! The War at last was over. Peace was on its way—our problems were all over, or so we thought in the wild gaiety of the hours that followed!

The school children, too, were wildly exited, not to mention their pretty young teachers whose sweethearts were suddenly and miraculously safe from the Kaiser’s bullets, free to leave the trenches and surely be home for Christmas, or, oh happy thought, maybe Thanksgiving! School was dismissed for the balance of the day.

One of our local firms, the Peoples Lumber and Supply Company, had just purchased a MACK truck. They sent the truck to the school. The children and some of their teachers boarded the truck and were transported through the Main Street of our town, horn blowing, the children waving their arms and crying aloud their joy at this Armistice period of World War I, the War that was to end all Wars.

Scattered showers put an end to further town celebrations, although many of our citizens joined the parading mobs in Baltimore.”

The “false armistice” mentioned by Mrs. Myers had occurred a week before and had caused disappointment for many residents. The unrestrained celebration following the real armistice more than made up for their disappointment.

Military personnel also celebrated the end of hostilities. Westminster native Lt. Hugh Latimer Elderdice, Jr., a field artillery officer in a frontline unit recalled. “But then came the Armistice. Anything that would burn or explode was set off that night, every pistol, rockets, flares etc. Also anything that would make a noise was in full operation.” The last day of the Great War would be long remembered by those who fought or served on the home front.



Lt. Hugh Latimer Elderdice, Jr. of Westminster was fighting at the front in France when the Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Miss Dorothy Elderdice, 1971.