

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

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1940s Memorial Days recalled sacrifices
by Joe Getty

Memorial Day ceremonies of 50 years ago took on special meaning for Carroll countians. With the events surrounding World War II occurring throughout the decade of the 1940s, the sacrifices of war were ever-present in the minds and lives of our local residents.

Traditional Memorial Day parades and services in the Westminster Cemetery were held each year during the 1940s in Westminster. A parade with children decorating the graves was a tradition continued since 1868, when Mary B. Shellman organized the first Decoration Day ceremony.

During the 1940s, the Westminster memorial services were arranged by Carroll Post No. 31, American Legion, and presided over by J. Albert Mitten, former post commander. A year-by-year look at Memorial Day ceremonies 50 years ago taken from 1940s issues of the *Carroll County Times* is provided below:

1940 – More than 2,000 people attended, one the largest crowds ever to assemble in the Westminster Cemetery for a Memorial Day service. Dr. Fred G. Holloway, president of Western Maryland College, was the speaker. There were two new items. A new broadcasting system purchased by the Carroll Post was used for the first time. In addition, a wreath laying ceremony was begun: “An impressive part of the service and a feature new this year was the placing of memorial wreaths at the mound. As the organizations were called, a representative stepped to the microphone and spoke briefly, then placing the wreath. The following 18 organizations responded: Burns Post G.A.R. (from the Legion); the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliary, 29th Division Association, Mayor and City Council, Westminster Boys Scouts to the memory of Mary B. Shellman, Girl Scouts, Fire Department, the Masonic Lodge, Knights of Pythias, Uniform Rank, Independent Order Odd Fellows, Loyal Order of Moose, Women of the Moose, Soroptomist Club, Rotary Club and Kiwanis Club.”

1941 – Following the parade, the services were held in the High School auditorium because of the inclement weather. J. Albert Mitten was general chairman for the day. Rev. Lowell S. Ensor, pastor of the Westminster Methodist Church, was the speaker. He used the sentence “All these died in Faith” from the 11th chapter Hebrews as his subject for the address. A highlight was the local unit: “Approximately sixty members of Company H, 115th Infantry, commanded by Captain James Morris and Lieutenant John W. Fringer returned for the occasion. They had three pieces of motor equipment mounting heavy machine guns. They were welcomed heartily along the line of March.”

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1942 – There was a large turnout for the parade despite the gasoline rationing and tire shortage. A number of new organizations formed as part of the wartime effort participated including the Minute Men, Company C of the Maryland State Guard, Red Cross Motor Corps and the Civil Air Patrol. The Rev. J. Edmund Lippy, pastor of St. Paul's Reformed Church, gave the address urging "the American people to dedicate their lives to the task facing them, and do their part towards the preserving of Liberty, Freedom and Democracy." Following the service, poppies were placed on the marked graves of veterans and flag presentation service was held at St. John's Catholic Church.

1943 – The number of spectators was noticeably less due to travel restrictions. J. Albert Mitten presided over the exercises which were broadcast over a sound truck amplifier. After representatives of the organizations placed the wreaths, a silent tribute to departed comrades followed and then introductory comments by Lawrence B. Fink, commander of Carroll Post No. 31, American Legion. The Rev. Elwood Falkenstein, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, presented the address.

1944 – "The day took on an added significance when men in uniform of the armed services, some who have seen action on the field of battle in the present war, mingled with veterans of past wars...The address was made by Dr. Lester A. Welliver, president of Westminster Theological Seminary. Dr. Welliver carried his audience back about three thousand years to the time when the twelve tribes of Israel built a memorial, the twelve stones to commemorate the twelve tribes. He spoke of the rich heritage we have received from our Christian fathers and the founding fathers of America and he urged all Americans to express their deep gratitude of the terrific price paid for this freedom by seeing to it that we do not lose the peace after we shall have won the war."

1945 – After the parade and invocation, "roll call followed with the several military, civic, patriotic, fraternal and service organizations responding by placing a memorial wreath at the base of the mount. One floral piece was in memory of Captain John W. Fringer from his wife and three children. Captain Fringer gave his life in Germany on March 12. The Rev. James A. Richard of Gamber, pastor of the Patapsco-Freedom Methodist charge, was speaker of the day."

1946 – "In the cemetery where similar (Memorial Day) services have been held each year since 1868, there rests about one hundred dead from the wars: the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, War Between the States, Spanish-American War, two world conflicts, and recognized minor campaigns...The Rev. John R. Cooper, rector of the Church of the Ascension gave the address. The National Anthem was played, the volley was fired by Company C, Maryland State Guard, and the program closed most impressively. As the massed colors were brought to attention, the vast audience stood with bowed heads as taps were sounded by bugler Eugene Frock."

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1947 – The parade included many men who had seen service in World Wars I and II who were in line with the service organizations. In addition, hundreds of small children walked in the parade carrying flowers and flags. “The address was by the Rev. J. Edmund Lippy, pastor of St. Paul’s Reformed Church, who took as his subject, ‘This is My Country,’”

1948 – The *Times* article included a photograph of the American Legion colors at the head of the parade. “The parade was delayed for a period, due to the sudden death of Oscar Sell, Taneytown, who was a member of the Westminster Band, and was in the march. The band withdrew out of respect to their deceased member.” The address was by Rev. Eugene C. Woodward, pastor of the Westminster Methodist Church.

1949 – The address was presented by the Rev. J. Edmund Lippy, a pastor of St. Paul’s Reformed Church, who spoke on “America – Worth Living For.” After the traditional parade, services, and wreath-laying ceremonies, a special memorial was dedicated: “The parade units then retraced their steps to the City Hall plaza where ceremonies of dedication of a shaft to Carroll’s dead in the two World Wars was held. Mayor Joseph L. Mathias, on behalf of the City of Westminster, presented the plaque and monument of the Gold Star Mothers, which was accepted by Mrs. Horace Greenwood, president of the Carroll County Chapter. Mr. Mitten made the introductory talk, the Rev. Lippy made appropriate remarks and prayers were offered by the two ministers. In raised letters on the bronze tablet are the names of Carroll’s sons who gave their lives in World War I and II. The setting for the monument is in the City’s flower garden just east of the City Hall.”

Photo credit: Ken Koons photo

Photo caption: Angela Bowersox and 5-year-old Eileen Korn place flags at veterans’ graves during the annual Memorial Day celebration at the Pleasant Valley cemetery Sunday. A parade, music from William F. Myers and Sons band, readings, prayers and singing were part of the ceremony.

Photo credit: Courtesy of Ronald Magin

Photo caption: Veterans march up Main Street during the Memorial Day Parade in Westminster in 1946.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Historical Society of Carroll County, John Byers collection

Photo caption: Memorial Day color guard from the late 1940s.