

Westminster's Great Boy Scout Bike Race of 1932 has historic implications – July 7, 2024

Saturday, October 8, 1932, was a warm fall day with the temperature reaching 71 according to weather records. The United States was in the third year of the Great Depression, and historic changes were about to happen around the world. In November, Franklin Delano Roosevelt would be elected President to the first of his four terms. In Germany, Adolf Hitler would become Chancellor in January 1933.

Most of that was unknown to 15 members of the Westminster Boy Scout Troop between the ages of 12 and 17 who were about to embark on a bicycle race. The troop had 32 members, but just 15 chose to compete in a race to New Windsor and back that day. The race began at 1:30 at the corner of Bond and East Main Street, near where Jeannie Bird Bakery is located now. In New Windsor the riders were to receive a note from an elected official and return to Westminster with it. The finish line was the original Fire Hall on East Main Street. These young men would grow up to be members of the “Greatest Generation.”

The participants are a who's who of the leaders of the town in the 1950s, 1960s, and beyond. They were Paul Bixler, Leroy Day, Marvin H. Ebaugh, Charles Fisher, Francis Fritz, Richard Gehr, John Stoner “Tony” Geiman, Milton Hendrickson, Oscar Hess, Frank Mather, Charles Maus, Thomas Moore, Donald Reed, Robert Scott, and Robert Stoner.

The race results are as follows:

Robert Stoner	1 hour 5 minutes	Charles Fisher	1 hour 8 minutes
“Tony” Geiman	1 hour 9 minutes	Richard Gehr	1 hour 10.5 minutes
Milton Hendrickson	1 hour 13 minutes	Truman Moore	1 hour 25 minutes
Francis Fritz	1 hour 35 minutes	Oscar Hess	1 hour 40 minutes
Marvin Ebaugh	1 hour 42 minutes	Robert Scott	1 hour 42 minutes

While Paul Bixler, Leroy Day, Frank Mather, Charles Maus, and Donald Reed did not finish, world events would play a big role in the future of all these riders.

When the United States officially enters World War II after the attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, many of these young men will serve in a variety of branches of the United States military and see considerable duty overseas. They will win awards, participate in several of the major battles of the war — some will be wounded, and one will die in combat. After the war several will become leaders in their community.

Strangely enough, Oscar Hess, Frank Mather, Charles Maus, and Truman Moore all played soldiers in their French class's play at Westminster High School (Owl Magazine, May 1936).

While Frank Mather and Charlie Maus did not finish this race, they both served during World War II and participated in the D-Day landing on June 6, 1944. Maus led an infantry unit onto Omaha Beach and was awarded a Silver Star for bravery. Mather's unit landed on Utah Beach.

Both survived that day, and both were wounded later in the year and received Purple Heart medals. Frank Mather became a teacher at Westminster High in the 1950s and later a Carroll County Public School administrator.

Leroy Day did not finish the race either, but he went on to serve in the Signal Corps in World War II and participated in the campaigns in Tunisia, Italy, and southern France. Mr. Day became the Westminster Police Chief and served in that role until he retired in 1976.

Charles Fisher went off to war and returned to become one of the leading attorneys in Carroll County. He was very active in the VFW and American Legion, and was one of the strongest advocates for the building of the Carroll County General Hospital in the early 1960s.

Richard Gehr served in the Navy as an aviation mechanic. He was a member of the Westminster Volunteer Fire Company beginning in 1933 and eventually served as its President.

Milton Hendrickson graduated from Westminster High in 1934 and Western Maryland College in 1938. When war came, he joined the Marine Air Corps and was sent to the Asian Theater. He obtained the rank of major but was killed January 10, 1944, when his plane was shot down over China.

Truman Moore went into the Navy right out of high school. He graduated with the Westminster High School Class of 1937 where he was the Sports Editor of the Owl yearbook. Francis Fritz also joined the Navy when the war came and served as a yeoman.

Oscar Hess served in Italy during the war as a radio mechanic. Tragically, he had an automobile accident in August 1941 on the same road to New Windsor where he raced in 1932. Two of his passengers were killed. He was charged with reckless driving and manslaughter but was found not guilty. Donald Reed, a fellow Boy Scout, served as a pallbearer for one of the victims.

Robert Scott was commissioned as an officer in December 1940, and rose to the rank of major. He participated in the Normandy, Northern France, Rhineland, and Central Europe campaigns. Mr. Scott was part of the Bell Laboratory team that used American radar technology with British anti-aircraft guns to provide better protection against German V-1 rockets.

Although W. Carter Stone and Wilson Campbell were not involved in the 1932 bike race, they were members of the Scout troop. Stone was commissioned in 1935 after graduating from Western Maryland College and the United States Military Academy at West Point. He reached the rank of lieutenant colonel and participated in the Rhineland, Ardennes, and Central Europe campaigns. On December 3, 1944, he was wounded and afterward received a Purple Heart. Stories of his courage in the face of the enemy are well documented. Wilson Campbell served in the Navy and was a part of the Philippine invasion fleet.

Carroll County will never forget the contributions of these young men to their country and community.

Guest columnist Steve Bowersox is a Westminster native, history enthusiast, faculty member at Westminster High School, and member of the Historical Society of Carroll County.

Image 1: Credit – Historical Society of Carroll County Caption: Westminster Fire Hall on East Main Street. The unpaved street and horse probably date this photograph to the first two decades of the 1900s.

Image 2: Credit – Submitted photo Caption: Milton Hendrickson as he appeared in his Westminster High School yearbook from 1934. He graduated from Western Maryland College in 1938. His plane was shot down over China in 1944.