

Carroll Yesteryears

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In 1868, Westminster Woman's Poem "Boys in Blue" Praised Union Soldiers

By Mary Ann Ashcraft

Westminster's Memorial Day traditions and Mary B. Shellman (1849-1938) go hand in hand. This column usually includes some aspect of her long life and involvement in patriotic events such as our Memorial Day Parade she began in 1868.

From her teenage years spent on Westminster's Main Street during the Civil War until her death on the Texas coast, Mary felt compelled to honor the brave men who fought in that war every Memorial Day. For a long time, she could only bring herself to support Union soldiers – "The Boys in Blue." Her poetry praised their heroism. Even at the age of 30, when the tense division created by the war began to fade, and some officials proposed Decoration Day (Memorial Day) should honor those who fought on both sides, she wrote the following lines in a poem published in Westminster's *American Sentinel* newspaper:

Then honor the Union soldier,  
Let the honor be his alway;  
We'll give him the crown of laurel,  
And only our tears to the gray.

Many years after writing "The Boys In Blue," Mary wrote "To Old Wilson Post No. 1" in a different frame of mind. Baltimore's first Grand Army of the Republic Post had recently honored her with an associate membership, a rare tribute to a woman. Not only were the ranks of Civil War veterans on both sides now growing thin, but American men were making sacrifices in other wars as well.

Although Mary's home at 206 East Main Street in Westminster occupies an important place in Carroll County history, her body lies in a Texas cemetery where her name and many achievements probably receive little notice. How nice it would be if some day she had a memorial in Westminster Cemetery.

#### "The Boys In Blue"

With throbbing hearts, and tear dimmed eye,  
We watched the ranks go slowly by –  
The brave old ranks, the tried and true,  
We knew them as our "Boys in Blue."  
Though sadly thinned their ranks to-day;  
Our "Boys" they evermore will be,  
Throughout the great eternity.  
Each halting crutch, each crippled arm,  
Had in it some mysterious charm;  
The tattered flag they proudly bore,

Stained with a gallant comrade's gore;  
The friendly smile, camp song and jest,  
The little cross upon each breast,  
The fife and drum the rousing cheer,  
That welcomed gallant comrades here;  
Each touched a tender chord and true  
In hearts that loved "Our Boys in Blue."  
Oh! gallant Sixth, we can't forget,  
It lingers in our memory yet,  
The day you proudly marched away,  
To battle with the boys in gray.  
With form erect and flashing eye,  
You swore to save our flag or die.  
Four bitter years of strife and pain,  
And then "Our Boys" came home again.  
But oh, the ranks were thinned and worn,  
The dear, old flag was stained and torn,  
And comrades that we loved so well,  
Were sleeping where they bravely fell.  
But though the flag was stained and torn,  
Not e'en a single star was gone  
But glittering in their field of blue,  
Proved "Our Boys," were brave and true.  
And as each year goes swiftly by,  
As hands turn gray, and dim the eye;  
As one by one, they go to rest,  
And join the armies of the blest;  
We drop our tears upon the sod,  
And with our tears give thanks to God;  
That men have lived so brave and true,  
As these, our gallant "Boys in Blue."

"To Old Wilson Post No. 1"

We are growing old, my Comrades, together you and I.  
For us the day is dying, the evening shades draw nigh,  
And soon taps will be sounding, as the Sun sinks in the West  
And you and I will answer, and lay us down to rest.

Many years have passed and vanished, since the days of '61  
When the bugle call responded to the sound of Sumter's gun  
And you rallied to the challenge, from hillside and from glen,  
Just as you boys responded, when the Country called for men,  
You too were only boys, when that stirring call was made  
And we know how much you suffered and how great the price you paid.

Those days are but a memory now, the march, the prison cell,  
The picket post, the battle field, where many Comrades fell,  
And you are growing older, your heads have turned all gray,  
And few of you can make the march on Decoration Day.  
You fought the fight, you kept the faith, you hold their memory dear,  
You've decked your Comrades' graves with flowers on each renewing year.  
The evening shades are nearing, your task is nearly done,  
Your ranks are growing smaller, you're passing one by one,  
And soon the last old Comrade, will lay him down to rest,  
Beneath the sod, where daisies bloom the flag above his breast,  
But you will not forgotten be, the sons of Blue and Gray  
Will keep the trust, and bring their flowers each Decoration Day.

And Comrades I am growing old, my work is nearly done  
I soon will reach the borderland, beyond the setting sun  
And when our task is finished, and time shall be no more  
We'll have a grand re-union over on the other shore,  
The Blue, the Gray, the Khaki, when wars and tumults cease  
And rest together in that land, where all is perfect peace.

*Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.*



*Image 1: Portrait of Mary B. Shellman taken in 1877 when she was 28 years old. Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County.*



*Image 2: Mary Shellman received this souvenir palmetto badge after attending an 1899 Confederate reunion in Charleston, South Carolina. She traveled back to Washington by train with a group of the veterans. South Carolina is known as the "Palmetto State." Courtesy of Historical Society of Carroll County.*