



# ROSEVILLE HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## LOOKING BACK AT APRIL BY PAT CHOWNYK

**Our presentation on the Use of Bicycles in Wartime was cancelled.**

### One-Hundred Years Ago

The US entered WWI on April 1917. Suddenly, men between the ages of 18 and 45 had to register for the draft. These are men born from 1873 to 1900. Armistice was declared at 11 a.m. on 11/11/18, marking the end of fighting between Germany and the Allied nations. Although it was only about 18 months, 49 local men died in WWI (see A War History of Macomb County). Many served, returned home and picked up the pieces of their lives. My great uncle, Anthony (Tony Reichenbach) was one of these men. Born in Gratiot Township, he registered for selective service with his brother Joseph on June 5, 1917. He was 23 years old and Joseph was 20. Nearly a year later, in May 1918, the Monitor newspaper calls Tony a “Maker of History” as he and 78 others leave Macomb for training at Camp Custer to serve in the National Army.

Tony served with the 339<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Company K. It was later known as the “Polar Bears” and dubbed by the press as “Detroit’s Own” because most of the men came from the Detroit area. Tony arrived in Europe in September 1918, only to be dispatched with nearly 5000 other soldiers, to Archangel, Russia. They fought through bitter cold (ie 60 below) and harsh winter conditions to protect the allied supplies against the Russian Bolsheviks, who found the environment to be normal. He was wounded in the battle at Seletskoe, Russia on December 30<sup>th</sup>. For this he was authorized, by special order on March 10, 1919 to wear the Wound Chevron on his sleeve. Yes, the Polar Bears were still in Russia after the Armistice, causing the families, editorialists and politicians to lobby for their return to Michigan. When they finally returned via the SS Britannia, arriving on Belle Isle, it was July 3, 1919. Everyone turned out with flowers, bunting, flags, parades and dancing. “Home at Last” was the banner carried to greet them, it was nearly 8 months after war’s end. Tony died in 1929 and is buried in St. Clements Cemetery. Every year on Memorial Day, White Chapel Cemetery holds a service at the Polar Bear Monument where 56 recovered bodies are buried. The purpose is to recognize and thank those troops who paid the ultimate price as well as those who survived this terrible ordeal. Also, for more about Tony and the Polar Bears, visit the special WWI Centennial Exhibit at the Michigan Military and Historical Society (Stephens, east of Gratiot, Eastpointe, Mi) or call 586-872-2581 for hours.

Submitted by Beverly Bishop

### NEW FLAGS FOR WWI VETS AT ERIN GROVE CEMETERY

**Flags.** Soon there will be 21 flags placed at Erin Grove Cemetery to mark WWI veteran graves. April 2017 marks the 100 year anniversary since the US entered WWI.

**1917 Draft.** It was a shock to people when the Selective Service Act passed just 6 weeks after war was declared. You could no longer buy a deferral. Registrations included men from 18 to 45 years old. Some animals, like horses could be drafted too. On June 5, an incredible 154,700 of Detroit area men registered.

**Exciting Times.** A tidal wave of excitement came over the Detroit area. Parades with floats, concerts by the legendary John Philip Sousa band, and an appearance by Theodore Roosevelt punctuated the start of the war. Mr. Dodge ceremoniously gave his yacht to the government for war use. An army tank from a victory battle drove outside of Campus Martius encouraging you to buy War Savings Stamps (10 dollars in stamps guaranteed you a tank ride).

**Heroes All.** After an inspired sendoff, the servicemen experienced a hellish war. Most had no experience in the use of new weapons, tanks, airplanes and submarines and the learning curve proved deadly. Michigan sent 175,000 troops and 500 perished. The men listed below returned home as heroes to a rural Macomb county. The life of each known Veteran buried here is etched on the headstone in dates, or poetry or touching prose. (there could be more in unmarked graves). This testimonial is given for Clifford J. Cox, a private in WWI:

*"Clifford loved to toil the soil, and he could see wheat and corn growing when there was snow on the ground. Blessed are the hands that worked so hard."*

**The Roll Call:** Charles Best WWI PH 1887-1960, Howard Bushey 1891-1966, Clifford John Cox, 1891-1966, William Cunningham, 1898-1952, Maurice J. Dowling, 1882-1963, Willis Grady Farrar, 1887-1959, Clarence M. Finney, 1899-1961, Stief Hilman, 1893-1960, Gus A. Hoffman, 1898-1961, Charles Johnson, unk-1942, Albert J. Kostka, 1892-1957, Henry A. LaCroix, 1889-1958, Charles A. Little, 1894-1946, Arthur McLouth, 1889-1963, Jerry Mercier, 1895-1952, Charles R. Miltimore, 1894-1956, Frederich Pare, 1896-1963, John H. Scheid, 1894-1974, Leon Still, 1900-1949, Lloyd M. Wilber, 1894-1962, Gustav C. Wodtke, 1891-1958.

For more information on WWI visit the Military Museum at Stephens and Gratiot, Eastpointe, Mi., or check out these library sources: Clemens, Elizabeth, 2015 Images of America Detroit in World War I. Arcadia Pub., Leo L. Eddy, 1920, A War History of Macomb County. Michael H. Rice. 2007 DVD. Tour of Erin Grove Cemetery.

Submitted by Beverly Bishop



**THE CLOSING OF ERIN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

The doors will close permanently in June of 2017. The church is located at Gratiot and Common Road, Roseville, Mi. According to the Facebook page, it is merging with another Presbyterian church outside of Roseville. Sadly, it is the second historical church to close this year in our city, following Sacred Heart Catholic Church campus at Utica Road. I have enjoyed Erin’s park-like beauty on Gratiot all my life. Before it goes, take the opportunity to view the stained glass windows, interior architecture, and community celebrations on the Facebook page and at the website “erinchurch.org” or just stop by for a look.

The history as described on the website:

“The church was organized on Sunday, November 12, 1860 by 18 pioneer Christians who formed a new congregation. They met for a while in a small frame schoolhouse until Mr. Thomas Common donated land for the church sanctuary in January, 1861.

A new brick sanctuary was built in 1930 during the Great Depression. This building is now converted to a chapel, library, office and classrooms. The adjacent center section was built in 1956 with offices and classrooms.

The present sanctuary with 500 seats was dedicated in 1967. It has 17 memorial stained glass windows depicting the life of Christ. The church grounds are designated as a Michigan Historical site.”

The Memorial Garden was constructed entirely by the members of the congregation and dedicated in the spring of 2005 to be a dignified resting place for the remains of loved ones and congregation members. The Memorial Garden is a place of remembrance and tranquility. Ashes are not scattered but are inhumed in a designated area adjacent to a lovely garden plot, which is surrounded by nature’s beauty. A lovely memorial plaque contains the plates bearing the names.

Many of the pioneer Christians that organized this church rest in Erin Grove Cemetery. The Memorial Garden has the ashes of at least 15 more locals: Douglas Macallister, Alice B. Lewis, Elinor Mansfield, C. Robert Mansfield, Caroline Y. Mansfield, Helen Stewart, Rev. Joseph MacDonald, Lloyd E. Latham, Lura M. Latham, Howard J. Latham, Bernice C. Martin, Pauline MacDonald, Elizabeth Leavoy, J. Herbert Leavoy, and J. Hernden-Byrnes. May they rest in peace.

Submitted by Beverly Bishop



### UPCOMING EVENTS

### Bob-Lo Steamers: Matriarchs of the Great Lakes



**Presented by Lori Feret**  
**Tuesday, May 16 at 6:30 PM**

Remember when you were a kid?! Well, a part of you still is! Bob-Lo was a Detroit favorite! Ms. Feret is an avid steamer preservationist and aficionado of all things Bob-Lo. Steam back in time with this image intensive talk about the history of Bob-Lo Island as well as the SS Columbia and SS Ste. Claire boats.



### WWII – News from the Homefront

**Presented by: Beverly Bishop**  
**Tuesday, June 20, 2017 at 6:30 p.m.**

While WWII raged on, folks here in the ‘Detroit arsenal of democracy’ did their part to support our troops. Through news reports, this history talk will bring to life the efforts of the metro Detroit home front.

The events are free and all ages are welcome. Refreshments will be served.

Roseville Historical and Genealogical Society  
29777 Gratiot  
Roseville, Mi 48066

**Walter C. Wetzel** (1919 – April 3, 1945) was a United States Army soldier and a recipient of the United States military's highest decoration—the Medal of Honor—for his actions in World War II.

Wetzel joined the Army from Roseville, Michigan in July 1941, and by April 3, 1945 was serving as a private first class in the 13th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division. On that day, in Birken, Germany, Wetzel smothered the blasts of German-thrown grenades with his body, sacrificing himself to protect those around him. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor ten months later, on February 26, 1946, by President Harry S. Truman.



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Roseville RoseFest 2017

June 8-11, 2017 Veterans Memorial Park, Roseville Michigan

This year marks the third anniversary of the Roseville RoseFest since its return to our community in 2013. RoseFest is a 4 day celebration with midway attractions, community fireworks extravaganza, food vendors, concerts in the park and numerous other events. The event attracts nearly 50,000 people. Come join us for fun and good food.



If you would like to receive your newsletter through e-mail instead of postal service, please contact the Roseville Historical Society at [Roseville.RHGS@gmail.com](mailto:Roseville.RHGS@gmail.com), attn: Janice Carter. We will be happy to make the change for you.