

This Week in Saratoga County History

Edinburg's WWII Soldiers and Gold Star Mothers

Submitted by Priscilla Edwards September 25, 2024

Priscilla Edwards has served as Edinburg's town historian since 1986. For over thirty years she has written monthly articles for the town newsletter, which have recently been published in a book, "My Mountains, My People." Priscilla is also a co-recipient of the Saratoga County History Center's 2024 Public History Award.



Rhoba Ferguson Robinson

The year 2024 marks the 85th anniversary of the beginning of World War II. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, with Great Britain and France declaring war on Germany on September 3rd. Italy declared war on Great Britain and France on June 10, 1940. Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 and Japan had occupied all of French Indochina by July 26, 1941. On December 7, 1941, Japan launched an attack on our US fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii - "a day that will live in infamy". President Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941.

The next four years would change peoples' lives forever. In that time 300,000 Americans gave their lives for our country. Men were called to duty by the draft board which had been established by the Selective Service System.

The town of Edinburg had 40 young men and 1 woman signed up to go to war. The Batchellerville and Fox Hill communities gave far more than their fair share of men to serve.

A partial list included Donald Barney, Albert Bills, Andrew Colson, Erwin Conklin, Jack Deming and brothers, Donald and Kenneth Edwards; Foster Edwards, Claude Farrington and brothers, Clifford, George and Herbert Jensen; LaPort brothers, Bert, Fred, Joseph and Oscar, as well as George Mason and John Olmstead - 18 in all from just Fox Hill and Batchellerville.

The rest of the 23 enlistees were from other parts of town. These men were Scott Downing, George Ferguson, Harry Frasier and brothers, Elwin and Erwin Geelan; Edward Green, Warren Hill and brothers, George and Lewis Jenkins; in addition, Floyd Knowlton, Keith Mudge, Robert Nourse, Ralph Olmstead and the Robinson brothers, Leland, Marshall and Ralph; also Channing Rockwell, Leslie Sauve, Howard Simpson and brothers, Luther and Joe Stockwell, and last but not least, Leonard Tryon. The only woman to enlist from Edinburg was Slava Malec, daughter of Marie and Alois Malec. Slava's family had come to this country in 1911 from the old country. Her sister and brother - Lessie and Jaro - were born in Germany but Slava and her sister Grace were born in the US. Did her family's feelings about Germany and Hitler have any bearing on Slava's decision to support the USA?

Of Edinburg's 42 service people, 2 lost their lives - George Ferguson and Leonard Tryon were killed in action.

After World War I, it became a custom in this country for families of servicemen to hang a banner called a "service flag" in a window of their homes. These flags held a star for each family member in the United States Armed Forces. A blue star represented living service members and a gold star represented those who had lost their lives.

I well remember as a child seeing one of these Gold Star banners in the window of our neighbor, Rhoba Stockwell Ferguson Robinson. Rhobie was the mother of George Ferguson, who had joined the army in 1943 at the age of 21 and was killed in action January 1945. Rhobie was a hard worker - widowed twice - spending hours each day sewing on gloves to add to the income from her small farm.

Rhoba Ferguson Robinson was Edinburg's Gold Star mother often riding in the Decoration Day - now called Memorial Day – and the July 4th parades in Northville.

The war ended September 2, 1945 in Tokyo Bay on board the battleship, US Missouri, when the Japanese signed the formal surrender document.

It became a custom in many towns across America to display an Honor Roll board - usually in the center of town - listing all the service people from that given community. Edinburg was no exception.

In the mid-1940's the shop class teacher at Northville Central School was Mr. Mendenhall, who lived on the lower end of Sinclair Road. He constructed of wood Edinburg's Honor Roll Board. It stood for many years at the 4-Corners. At some point it was taken down and stored in the old highway barn, now our Rural Museum. In 1991, when the barn was being cleaned out in preparation for the museum, the Honor Roll was re-discovered. The late Fred Trudy gave it a face lift and it was hung in our Nellie Tyrrell Museum. A few years ago, two more names that needed to be added were discovered. The Historical Society commissioned sign maker George Bailey of Edinburg to make a new sign. George donated all of his time and materials to creating the new Honor Roll, which is beautiful. Thank You, George! It is on display at the Nellie Tyrrell Museum.

Thank you and God Bless to all servicemen and women - past and present - for all that they have given for the United States of America!