

ARMISTICE & MEMORIALS OF THE GREAT WAR

By Ellen Knight¹

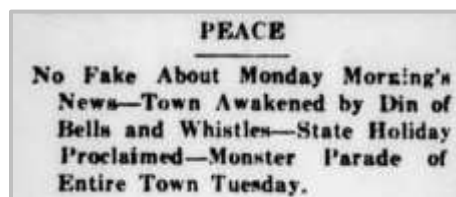
It happened at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month in 1918.

It was the Armistice, the end of World War I.



Scene at Dedication of Town Honor Roll Sunday Noon, and James Hinds of the Public Safety Committee, Who Had Charge of its Erection.

The next morning, shortly after 3 a.m., news that the Armistice was signed hit Boston and spread to Winchester. "The first word of the armistice started the bells and whistles of Boston," *The Winchester Star* reported on Nov. 15, "and the din spread like a prairie fire to surrounding cities and towns. The noise from Boston could be heard here fully a half hour before our own noise makers got into action, and many people were already awake before we started.



On Sunday, Nov. 10, an announcement had "left it certain that our citizens would arise on Monday morning to hear whether the war was finished or not."² On that day, the Roll of Honor "for its sons and daughters in service," predecessor to the current Roll of Honor, was dedicated and was in position for the great celebration on Tuesday. Howard J. Chidley, pastor of the First Congregational Church gave the prayer, asking that "it may be a perpetual reminder of the chivalry of those who counted not their lives dear when their country's call came." Lewis Parkhurst, on behalf of the Committee on Public Safety, gave the dedicatory address.

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"The first real noise in Winchester came at about 3:30 a.m., when a few enthusiastic citizens opened up with fish horns and pistols. A little later an in-going cattle train slipped through with its whistle wide open and its cargo bleating in full accompaniment."

The whistles and alarms from local factories were set going. "Residents in the neighborhood of Swanton Street were plentifully supplied with fire arms, and many thought a real old fashioned 4th of July celebration was on when they let loose, the reports from the guns adding to the din of factory whistles, bells, horns, and cheering." The Town Hall bell was rung at half hour intervals through the day.



Many left their homes and thronged to the town center for newspapers. By mid-day those businesses that had opened were obliged to suspend business since everyone was celebrating. All the schools dismissed at noon. A crowd (*pictured above*) gathered on Manchester Field. "In the evening an effigy of the Kaiser was burned in the square."

After the governor proclaimed the next day a holiday, a citizens' committee was appointed to arrange a patriotic celebration. Thanks to the distribution of flyers by the Boy Scouts, a big parade took place at 2:30 p.m. on the 12th. "Promptly at that hour, the great throng, numbering about 3,000 persons and viewed by probably five times that number took up the triumphant line of march."



The town was decked with flags, and some houses along the parade route were decorated. All manner of town officials and groups marched (*including the hospital nurses pictured above*) and carried more flags while two bands played. Features of the parade were Uncle Sam and the Kaiser walking in his coffin. A hearse made from an express wagon contained another Kaiser's coffin.

On the following Sunday a mass meeting of Thanksgiving to God for Victory was held in the Town Hall.

On its first anniversary, President Wilson referred to November 11 as Armistice Day. In 1921 President Harding proclaimed it a national holiday. For many years afterward people, often holding poppies, observed a minute of silence at 11a.m. in remembrance of the moment, the war, and the fallen. In 1954, after American veterans had returned home from two more foreign wars, Armistice Day was renamed Veterans' Day.

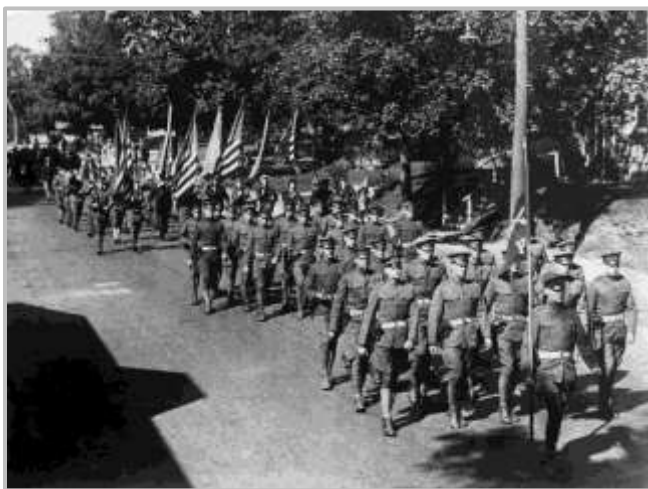


Once the Armistice was signed, it took some time for the men and women to get home from overseas. We planned its Welcome Home festivities for July 4, 1919. In April a Welcome Home arch was built at the entrance to the Common, which they left up at least through one snow storm in 1920.

Town Hall was decked out with bunting, and a huge Welcome Home banner was displayed. The welcome home was a two-day affair with dinner and a dance on Thursday night, when special medals were given to the veterans, and on Friday the 4th, 2 baseball games—Army vs. Navy and Winchester vs. a Cambridge school, then a parade, and fireworks.



Everyone got into the parade—it covered 3.5 miles and lasted 2.5 hours.



Red Cross float



Once the boys had marched home, the observances did not stop there.

In the 1920s, the Town built four new schools. When the one named for William Noonan was dedicated on Sept. 24, 1924, flags were flying, bands were playing, and almost 700 military men marched in a parade to the site where there were speeches, including an address by a member of the North End Improvement Association, which arranged the event. Who was Bill Noonan? Before the war he worked in his father's fish business and lived on Canal St; in the service he was a lowly private. But he was a Marine characterized as courageous, intelligent, and cheerful under trying conditions. The school was dedicated to him in honor of his "patriotic fervor" and so "that the principles of citizenship, freedom, justice, and equality of mankind may prevail."



In 1921, Town Meeting voted to rename the Highlands Playground for Augustus M. Leonard, an office worker who lived on Harvard St., very popular in the town, killed by a high-explosive shell in France, but the dedication was delayed until Memorial Day in 1925. The ceremonies included a parade from the American Legion Home (next to Town Hall) to Calvary Cemetery, with memorial exercises there, and the dedication at the field in the presence of Gov. Alvin T. Fuller.



At the war's end discussion arose about a permanent memorial, in addition to the Roll of Honor. Not until 1924 was a decision both made and approved by Town Meeting—a statue by Herbert Adams.

In the beginning when fervor was still high, "One hundred thousand dollars, two hundred thousand dollars, were sums mentioned on the floor of the Town Hall" but by 1924 a motion to fund the statue with \$50,000 from taxation was defeated at Town Meeting, though a motion carried to set apart a corner of the high school lot and raise the money by voluntary contributions.

When the fund-raising campaign was begun, “it was thought that especially the school children in years to come, seeing the finished work of a great master standing in the midst of our civic center, would feel very much gratified that they had helped to build it.” Eighty percent of the children made a small contribution.

The rest of the fund-raising did not go as planned. It came at the same time as a big campaign for the hospital and fell way short, but Lewis Parkhurst advanced the remaining sum, taking a chance on being reimbursed by the citizens of Winchester. After Parkhurst lost that gamble, he wanted it said that the memorial “was erected by the school children of the town with my assistance.” His “assistance” amounted to over 3/4 of the cost. Whoever did or did not donate, everyone celebrated the memorial’s dedication.

THE WAR MEMORIAL

In 1926, the town held another parade, the route ending at the new War Memorial for its dedication on Oct. 3. The parade route wound from the Legion Home on Washington Street, up to Bacon Street, to Church, to Main, north to Swanton, back to Washington, and finally to Mystic Valley Parkway to end at the corner with Main Street.



The War Memorial dedication parade marching through Winchester center on Oct. 3, 1926

It was a splendid parade, including bands, the massed colors from 13 Legion posts, marchers from the police, Army, Navy, National Guardsmen, American Legion and VFW posts not only from Winchester but also towns as far out as Pepperell, plus the Sons of Veterans, the Board of Selectmen, and the Girl and Boy Scouts. At its end awaited the lieutenant governor, the memorial committee, the sculptor, Gold Star families, and other local notables.

The parade was so long that it set back the ceremonies for an hour. But prior to that, the negotiations for the monument had gone on for so long, they set back the dedication for years.

Once the war was over, discussion sprang up about a permanent memorial. A committee was appointed. Suggestions abounded over the form of the memorial—a library, a new town hall, a stadium, a community house. Not until 1924 was a decision both made and approved by Town Meeting—a statue by Herbert Adams.

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motion to fund the statue with \$50,000 from taxation was defeated at Town Meeting. A motion to set apart a corner of the high school lot and raise the money by voluntary contributions was carried.

Coming at the same time as a fund-raising campaign for the hospital, the memorial subscription effort brought in only 12.5 of the required 50 thousand dollars. Lewis Parkhurst advanced the remaining sum, taking a chance on being reimbursed by the citizens of Winchester.

Thus, the sculptor proceeded to finish the work. The Olmsted firm planned the landscape setting. On Oct. 3, 1926, after the great parade and a ceremony of speeches, music, and three volleys of musketry, before the crowd of approximately 10,000 people, the monument was unveiled.

Not only holding a place in Winchester history, the statue has a place in art and design history. Adams' other commissions include sculpture at the Library of Congress, New York and Boston public libraries, the Vicksburg National Military Park, plus the relief for the tomb of Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, among others. The work of the Olmsted firm is well known, including about 280 parks in the state, including Boston's "Emerald Necklace."



Sculptor Herbert Adams applauded at the unveiling



The Memorial to Humanity and Justice and those who served the cause, unveiled by Mrs. George Neiley, mother of five sons who served in World War I

Since 1926, the statue has stood as a tribute to the men and women who served in the war. As conceived by the sculptor, it memorializes not the glories of war but the cause for which they served, represented by two allegorical figures—humanity and justice.

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Whatever the shortcomings of the process that the statue could symbolize, the memorial commemorates a noble ideal—sacrifice for the community. It is a memorial to the service given by the military, of the lives of those who fell, the gratitude of those who wished to remember them, the gifts of the citizens and the children, and the determination of one who would not let the memorial falter and die.



¹ This article © 2019 is a revision of an earlier article by the author, Ellen Knight, published in the *Daily Times Chronicle* on Nov. 10, 1998. This revision supersedes all previous articles.

² *The Winchester Star*, Nov. 15, 1918.

³ "The Building of the Winchester War Memorial," privately printed booklet.