

historically speaking

THE WAY IT WAS

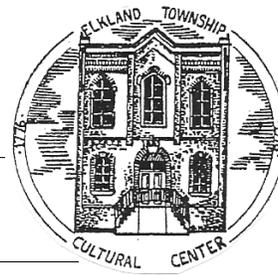
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The Cass City Historical Society met for its annual Strawberry Social on Wednesday evening, June 19th, at the Rawson Memorial Library. A video time capsule of a TV-5 program from 30 years ago commemorating Cass City's 125th anniversary was shown. It was interesting to hear the predictions that were made and to note the actual changes that have taken place in our town in a few short years.

LEST WE FORGET

On Monday, May 27th we again celebrated Memorial Day with a parade to and into the manicured Elkland Township Cemetery along an avenue of flags and behind the Color Guards followed



by our military veterans in their uniforms, the Cass City High School Band, scouting troops and youth sport teams.

At the cemetery the band played our National Anthem and Taps, the veterans fired three rifle volleys, and the names of veterans that had passed away in the past year were read in a roll call with a "Not present sir" response. A prayer and an address were given by Marine Captain Chaplain Stanley Beach, a graduate from Cass City in 1953, and a wounded veteran of the Viet Nam War. It was a very fitting ceremony of remembering our veterans of several wars. Captain Beach and others also

conducted a similar ceremony at the Novesta Township Cemetery.

There are none of our veterans left alive from World War I, and fewer and fewer from World War II, but the memories continue on. Our veterans today are mostly from the Korean, Viet Nam, Gulf and Afghanistan Wars.

Veterans have been organized and represented in our community over the years by the national organizations of The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, VFW.

The American Legion headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana was organized after WWI and Cass City had a chapter in town for years that met in a basement type hall on Main Street. That hall became no longer suitable for rental, and with declining membership and resources the hall was removed and the organization dissolved.

The VFW's roots go farther back to 1913 after the Spanish American war of 1899 and is headquartered in Columbus, Ohio. Its purpose is also to assist disabled veterans, their families, the widows and orphans of veterans. In 1984

a new post was formed here with 43 members. As we witnessed on Memorial Day, Cass City has an outstanding organization of veterans serving in our community.

Their VFW Hall (the remodeled former bowling alley) serves as an attractive and convenient meeting place for the organization's activities as well as being available for other activities in the community.

As time goes on it gets harder and harder to remember those veterans of the earlier wars, and how our celebration of Memorial Day originated. There were no people living here who had experienced the Revolutionary War or the War of 1812, but there were many who came here directly after the Civil War and many of those were veterans of that war. There are over 60 veterans of the Civil War buried in the Elkland Township Cemetery, and also a sizeable number buried in the Novesta Township Cemetery.

The Grand Army of the Republic, the "GAR", was formed in 1866 in Springfield, Illinois to include the Union Army, Navy and Marine Corps with many posts



across the northern states and a few in the south. It was a fraternal organization and it became the first advocacy group in American politics. It promoted voting rights for black veterans, a patriotic education and the making of Memorial Day a national holiday.

On May 5, 1868 the Commander-in-Chief, General John Logan, declared May 30 to be Memorial Day (also known as Decoration Day) which called upon the members of the GAR each year to decorate the graves of the veterans of the Civil War.

The Cass City Post of the GAR was named the Milo Warner Post after the first veteran buried in the Elkland Township Cemetery. Milo had been a First Sergeant of the 8th Michigan Cavalry and a prisoner of war in the infamous Andersonville Prison in Georgia. At the time of that first Memorial Day there were four other veterans buried in the cemetery—Alonzo Shefler, David Houghton, Orlando White and Lucius Bardwell.

Dr. Daniel P. Deming, also a veteran and a member of the GAR wrote the following in the Tri County Chronicle on May 20, 1904.

“The first service was held in the old Methodist Episcopal Church. Elder Palmer, a comrade preached to us assisted by Elder J.S. Deming. A goodly number of citizens attended the service and twenty four veterans were present. Robert Toland delivered an address in the Town Hall. George Farrar read an oration and Robert Tennant gave a reading by Will Carleton entitled “Cover them over with beautiful flowers, these dead heroes of ours. As we fell into line to the cemetery many of our good people asked what was going on, and

we told them we were putting flowers on the graves of old soldiers. Many of our citizens laughed at us and advised us to fix up the cemetery so we could find their graves, as the grass had not been cut for years. From the retrospective view of 18 years I can see what the Milo Warner Post began has been beneficial. Many of the ex-soldiers were whiskey drinkers and now they do not drink. The grass does not hide the graves as it did in those days. Good substantial work has been done and our cemetery is cared for, and all join hands on Memorial Day to beautify our once neglected “City of the Dead”. To the mothers, wives and daughters—the GAR Ladies this honor belongs, and to the Milo Warner Post belongs the teaching of the people to respect and keep in repair the graves of our loved ones.

Let us hope as our eyes grow dim and our hand trembles, and the white head of the old veteran appears in our midst on the next Memorial Day we will have cheers for the living and tears for the dead. We hope the Milo Warner Post may live long, the Ladies Circle of the GAR, and the kind friends will live until the time shall come when only one comrade is left, and that some kind hands will lead him to the cemetery in Elkland and lay spring flowers on all our graves. And when taps is sounded, and the last light of the Milo Warner Post is out, we hope some of our friends will not forget the men who served their country in the dark days of the Civil War.”

That last comrade was Clark S. Bixby who died February 26, 1938 at the age of 87. He joined the military at the age of 14 (he was large for his age, and lied about his age to join).

He took part in General Sherman’s “March to the Sea”.¹



Today we decorate each veteran’s grave with an American Flag. This tradition started years ago with the Boy Scouts under the direction of Scout Master Harold Oatley. As the project got larger and larger it was taken over by the Cass City Historical Society. Last year it was transferred to the Tuscola Veterans Administration under the direction of Mark Zimerski. Now each flag has a designed metal stand to hold it.

It is very important that this tradition continues “Lest We Forget” the price that was paid for our freedom. It is said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”² What does that tell us about our guardians of “The land of the free and the home of the brave?”

¹ Cass City Chronicle 3/4/1938

² John 15:13
