
NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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LEST WE FORGET



Rockford's Memorial Hall ranks as the first
of its kind in the nation.

President Theodore Roosevelt dedicated
the structure, June 3, 1903.

Courtesy Winnebago and Boone Counties Genealogical Societies.

FROM AN EDITOR'S DESK

Annual Memorial Day observances remind us of the tragedies of war, the sacrifices of life, and the dedication of honorable service. Originally known as "Decoration Day"-- so-named by its founder General John A. Logan, commander of the Grand Army of the Republic--the event first occurred May 30, 1868. Then participants placed flowers and flags on veteran's graves. Now expanded to include parades, speeches, and band concerts, it also includes ceremonies at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington Cemetery, Virginia, and water services for those who died at sea. Flags fly at half mast until noon. The holiday falls on the last Monday in May, a change instituted in 1971. (*Source: Collier's Encyclopedia, New York: MacMillan Educational Company, 1990, Volume 12, p.192.*)

Rather than observing only a one-day remembrance, area community organizations have erected permanent memorials. Statues, plaques, sculptures, war memorabilia (such as American Legion Daniel Post's howitzer pulled in Memorial Day parades), Memorial Hall, and an Eternal Flame serve as reminders. This issue highlights significant present and in-process memorials. Others exist in cemeteries, including grave site plaques beginning with recognition of Revolutionary War veterans. Space does not permit inclusion in this issue.

Without the assistance and knowledge of key people involved in these projects, the cover story would not have unfolded. Thanks to Arthur W. Anderson, Hazel Hyde, Nicholas Parnell, Ray Nihan, James Corbett, Bob Borden and Jerry Strombeck. Then, too, John Molyneaux of the Rockford Public Library's Local History Room, Vance Barrie of the Rockford Park District, President Kathleen Juni of Midway Village, and Joseph T. Vecchio provided data and/or photos.

In our second feature, Assistant Editor Hazel Mortimer Hyde reminisces about personal involvement in Rockford's World War II efforts--especially activities related to Camp Grant personnel.

Lori Whitman, our usual desktop publisher, was not available for this issue. Consequently, the format this time is different.


Peggy Jensen, Editor

LEST WE FORGET

In bursts of patriotism, area citizens continue to erect memorials to honor armed forces personnel in all branches of service.

MEMORIAL HALL

A five-foot stone, inlaid with a panel in the shape of Illinois and a star to indicate Rockford's location, identifies Memorial Hall at 211 N. Main Street as "the first of its kind in the United States."

Rockford citizens had been thinking of it for years. The Rev. M. P. Kinney first proposed such a building during a May 20, 1866, sermon at Second Congregational Church. The project gained approval by a popular vote in November 1900. Construction of the combination Greek Revival/Classical building began in 1901 by contractor W. H. Cook. The design by the architectural firm of Bradley and Carpenter incorporated Bedford, Indiana, limestone blocks and Ionic pillars. Completed in 1902, the hall's total cost--including furnishings--totaled \$59,136.

Thousands of area residents attended dedication ceremonies on June 3, 1903. Principal speaker, President Theodore Roosevelt, declared, "No more fitting memorial could be erected to the men who fought, than a hall such as this ... a hall beautiful because of the uses to which it is consecrated."

Through the ensuing years, veterans groups and women's auxiliaries used the hall for meetings. It also became a repository for war relics. These artifacts, dating from the Civil War era, are now displayed on a rotating basis. Eighteen bronze wall plaques honor Civil War armed forces personnel.

Eventually, some groups called for plans to enlarge the building; others to sell; still others to tear down to make room for a parking ramp. None of those options materialized. Instead, the county board spend \$30,000 for improvements in the mid-1960s, including sandblasting the exterior, waterproofing the stone, plus caulking and painting window frames as well as refinishing stairways and landings. In 1976, the hall was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Two years later, a federal grant matched \$25,000 in renovation funds for heating, wiring and insulation.

By the late 1980s, the building had deteriorated so much that it needed major renovation, modernization and repair. A four-year \$1.5 million restoration project began in 1988. Phase one included the main floor and downstairs; phase two, landscaping; phase three, the Auditorium. On December 31, 1992, First Night musicians inaugurated a return to performances in the refurbished Auditorium. Today, the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau leases the first level. Veteran's groups still meet here and an office is maintained for Veterans Assistance. *Sources: Rockfordiana Files at the Rockford Public Library.*

STATUE PARK

His history has been a subject of debate. Nevertheless, today a Civil War soldier stands watch in a mini-park at the intersection of N. Main and Auburn streets. The zinc statue surveys the neighborhood atop a Corinthian column once part of Rockford's 1903 public library. Crafted wearing a long coat, a cape, square-toed shoes, and a Union hat, the soldier poses with a musket.

Some sources tried to place the "Old Soldier," as he has been affectionately called, at the courthouse in 1877. But an October 21, 1900, *Morning Star* report told of the previous day's installation of a fountain and life-sized "Volunteer" statue on the courthouse lawn. But did our Volunteer arrive merely as a decorative portion of the fountain? Or--as research by Richard C. Bergman, Major USAF Ret. discovered--had the soldier previously stood guard over a cannon and a pile of round shells in Haskell Park?

We do know that that the "Old Soldier" remained as a fountain ornament from 1900 until 1967. Then, while the "old" courthouse was being razed, the statue (according to Bergman's research) found a temporary home on Springfield Avenue at the Winnebago County Highway Garage. In 1970, upon completion of the "new" courthouse, the celebrated figure stood in the Church Street entry. But vandalism threatened him. In 1975, the Rockford Council of New England Women provided a safety glass enclosure and placed a plaque, "Well done--Good and Faithful Servant." He then was stationed east of the court house at a bus stop.

Ray Nihan spearheaded a drive among Main and Auburn Business Association (MABA) members to relocate the statue to improve their area's appearance. Since Civil

War volunteers trained at nearby Camp Fuller, it seemed appropriate to adopt and to renovate this historic statue.

Dedication events on May 24, 1985, included a memorial ceremony for an unnamed Civil War veteran whose remains had recently been buried at the site. Nihan, Chairman of the Statue Park committee said, "He is a symbol of all men who fought in all of our wars." The monument's base carries the inscription: "A Timeless Tribute to Every Soldier."

ETERNAL FLAME

Erected on North Second Street one block south of East Riverside in 1947, the Eternal Flame honors "Loves Park men and women who courageously gave their lives in the service of their country." Names engraved on three granite columns begin with those who died in 1951 and continue through 1974. VFW Clifford Johnson Post 9759 and the Ladies Auxiliary donated this memorial. A temporary display at the site--yellow ribbons, flags and a plaque with their names--honored 91 Harlem School District personnel who served during the Persian Gulf conflict. All returned safely.

NAVY ANCHOR

In Beattie Park, a one-ton anchor from retired Cruiser U. S. S. Tuscaloosa CA37 sits on a circular pedestal of black polished granite 16 feet in diameter. It, in turn, is mounted on a Cherokee white marble base, 32 feet in diameter. Ninety feet of anchor chain from the Tuscaloosa surround a circular walkway with four openings for access. A jackstaff (flagpole) from the cruiser contributes to the memorial's 30-foot overall height.

Dedicated on Navy Day--October 27, 1966--by the Navy Club of Rockford, the project consisted then only of the flag staff on its base and the anchor lying on its side nearby. Ceremonies began with a 40-unit parade and a concert by the Great Lakes Naval Service School Band. Speakers included Rear Admiral Howard A. Yeager, Commander of the Ninth Naval District at Great Lakes; James E. Corbett, Commander of the Navy Club of Rockford; and Representative John B. Anderson who presented a flag from the national capitol.

Letters to solicit contributions indicated that this memorial would honor Navy, Marine and Coast Guard personnel who had given their lives. It would thank veterans,

show support for armed forces wherever they serve, and demonstrate that citizens of Rockford love their country and that flag waving is not out of fashion. But six years would pass before sufficient funds (to reach a \$5,000 goal) had been donated. Upon completion in 1972, a re-dedication service took place.

VICTORY

At the corner of N. Main and Mulberry streets, near Memorial Hall, a sculpture created by Gene Horvath, also memorializes veterans. Dedicated May 30, 1994, it features an African-American, an Asian-American, an Hispanic American and three European-Americans: five men and one woman. Arms upraised, fingers formed into a "V" for victory sign, the figures stand triumphant, each detail of clothing and equipment fine-tuned by Horvath. Colonel Joseph T. Vecchio served as chairman of the committee.

The dedicatory plaque reads:

To all veterans, to our neighbors and friends, to the men and women who served in every branch of the Armed Forces in time of war or peace, we dedicate this memorial.

Remembered here before us are brave veterans from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Persian Gulf.

United by love of country and service to each other, we celebrate our ethnic diversity as we salute each individual's victory of courage over fear and hardship. We will not forget our comrades who died.

FIELD OF HONOR

Forty flags of stars and stripes flying over columns and statuary create a spectacular sight both in daylight and in night-time floodlights. Five larger flags, representing Loves Park, the United States, Illinois, MIAs, and Machesney Park complement the others. Still under construction, the "Field of Honor" Veterans Memorial is situated on seven acres within Sand Park, west of Heart Blvd. and south of East Riverside Drive in Loves Park. Surrounded by fields of greenery, the memorial itself is being created to convey respect and gratitude for those who have served in wartime situations as well as to acknowledge the pain of loss suffered by families of the deceased.

Five limestone columns, each weighing 12 tons, represent wars of the twentieth century: World War I, World War II, Korean, Vietnam and Persian Gulf. Eight symbolic figures--an infantry soldier, a sailor, a nurse, a paratrooper, an Air Force pilot, a medic, a tank battalion soldier and a support service person--will eventually be placed in front of the columns. They'll represent men and women of our ethnically-diverse nation who served with honor in every branch of the armed forces. A small column, placed center front, contains a dedication statement recognizing contributions of civilians.

Loves Park resident Arthur W. Anderson envisioned the project as a means to honor Harlem School District armed forces personnel. Two situations influenced him. First, he witnessed protests by Vietnam veterans during a 1991 visit to Washington D. C. Next, he searched an Eighth Air Force memorial book at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. He located a neighbor's name among 15,000 persons killed. But he lamented, "At home, nobody remembers."

Rockford sculptor Gene Horvath designed the concept and prepared clay models. His untimely death in 1995 occurred before work had begun on final stages of creating the statues. While the committee searched for another sculptor, the project was on hold for six months. Finally, a contract was signed with Christopher Bennett of Keosauqua, Iowa. He produced one bronze figure--an infantryman--in time for the November 10, 1995, dedication. Anticipated completion date: November 1996.

Of the forty flags, 36 now fly in specific remembrance of Harlem School District war dead with accompanying plaques. Sleeves are in place to anchor an additional 10 flags, as needed. This spring, a second phase will begin. It includes a curved road leading from Heart Blvd. and the addition of soft music accompanied by a heart beat.

Co-sponsored by the City of Loves Park, the Village of Machesney Park, VFW Post #9759, Rockford Park District, and the Rockford Park District Foundation, the project has been promoted and supported by a citizen's committee headed by Chairman Anderson. Funding for the \$370,000 memorial had reached \$240,000 as of April 1996.

Donations to: "Field of Honor" Memorial, 6464 N. Second St., Loves Park, IL 61111.

LZ PEACE

It's taken almost ten years, but a Vietnam veteran's dream memorial should become a reality soon. Nicholas (Nick) Parnello, who had served in an aviation unit, now chairs the area's Vietnam Veterans' Honor society. Since 1986, it has been planning one of the country's most significant memorials. This tribute, to be constructed on a two-acre site donated by Midway Village, is scheduled for completion in 1997.

Designed with a Huey Helicopter as the focal point, the memorial will include a V-shaped marble wall with 73 names inscribed. They represent Winnebago County's Vietnam dead and one MIA. Flags, lamp posts, shrubbery, trees, and a brick walkway will complete the scene. Parnello sees it as "a sanctuary, a place of composure and sacredness."

Architect Jim Lev, who prepared the conceptual design, explains the choice of Huey. "(It) took us to war, brought us back, kept us supplied, and kept us alive. It delivered ammunition, mail, care packages, and Bob Hope." Revered as a lifeline, it educes gratitude for its role.

Nicknamed "The Lady," this particular Huey (one of 26,000 manufactured) flew in Vietnam for seven years. In 1988, through the combined efforts of Congresswoman Lynn Martin; John Emery, President of Emery Air Charter; and Jim Grimes, Manager of Channel 23; and the Rockford Park District, acquisition of Huey materialized. Since then, it has been stored at Rockford Airport. Meanwhile, Honor Society members and a citizen's committee have solicited donations toward a goal of \$300,000 to fund the project. In-kind contributions pledged by contractors and suppliers will help to keep the cost from rising more.

In Parnello's dream he saw the name "LZ Peace." LZ indicates Landing Zone in helicopter terminology. Each Vietnam landing zone had a designated name such as LZ Garden, LZ Mary Lou, or LZ No Slack. The dream also presented these words: "This monument stands as a testimony to those brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in a time of Great Conflict."

Donations to: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, c/o Linda Landsee, Trust Department, Amcore Bank, 501 Seventh St., Rockford, IL 61104.

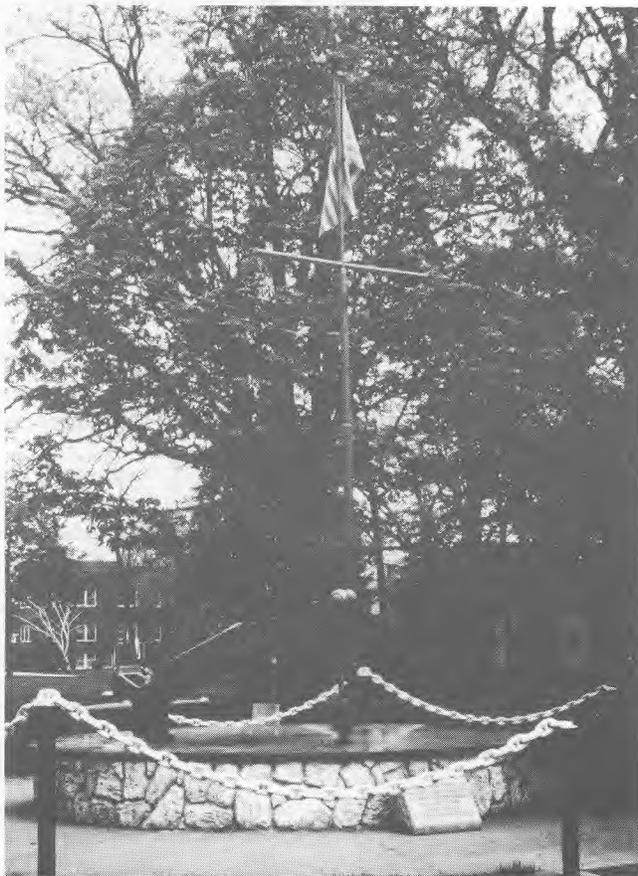
Peggy Dahlberg Jensen



“Victory,” N. Main and Mulberry.
Courtesy Joseph T. Vecchio.

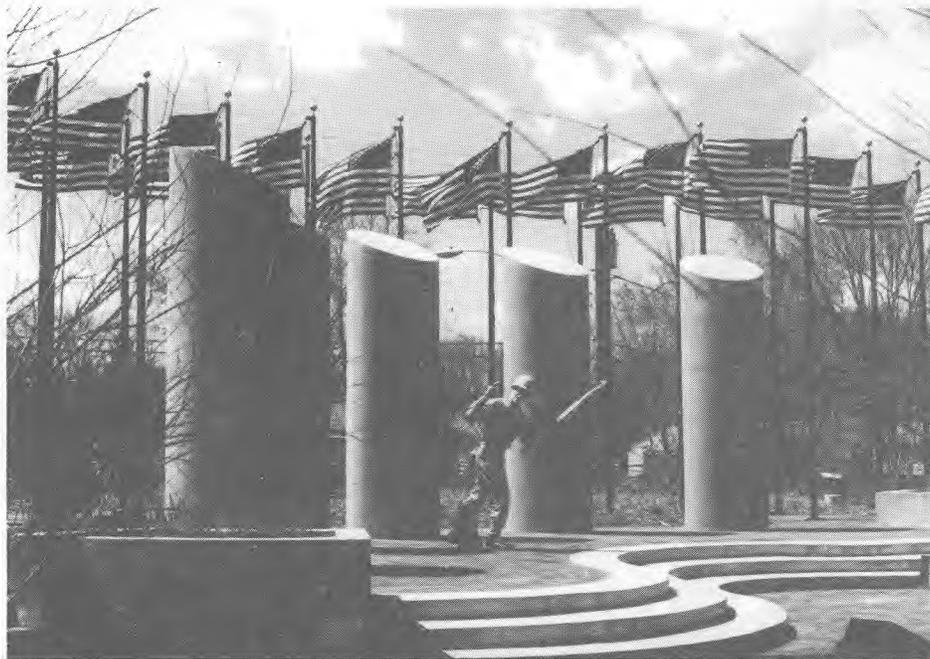


Statue Park, N. Main and Auburn.
Courtesy Rockford Park District.



Navy Anchor in Beattie Park,
Park Ave. and N. Wyman St.

Photo: David Damon. Courtesy Rockford Park District.



“Field of Honor,” Sand Park. Scheduled for completion, Nov. 1996.
Courtesy A. W. Anderson



Architect's sketch of Vietnam Memorial--LZ Peace.
Courtesy LZ Peace Memorial Committee

MEMORIES OF WORLD WAR II

World War II came to the United States about 7:35 a.m. December 7, 1941, when the first Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor. Shocked Americans heard on radios that about 300 Japanese planes had attacked our Pacific fleet. Within a space of two hours, we had lost eight battleships, three cruisers, four other vessels and about 170 planes. (*World Book*, Vol. 20, pg. 392) Horror, disbelief, and emotional shock united the people of the United States. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called it "a day that would live in infamy."

In Rockford, World War II inspired a spirit of patriotism. It stirred us to greater unity and a desire to cooperate. But now, many have forgotten how students were marched to school basements to receive instruction in case of an air raid. Or how teachers received first aid training. Rationing seems like a dream or something read in a book. Cardboard signs with stars indicating family members in the military have been thrown away. And we may forget to display the flag on Veterans' Day. World War II is now a page in history.

Camp Grant

Camp Grant (now the site of Rockford Airport), developed during World War I. The U. S. government authorized the project on June 12, 1917. Actual construction began July 1. By September 5, it was ready for the arrival of 2,000 draftees. Then during World War II the camp was reactivated. Its functions included a medical center with a large hospital, a Reception Center for induction and basic training as well as release from duty at war's end. The people of Rockford interacted with, and welcomed, Camp Grant soldiers. Residents entertained soldiers, invited them into their homes, and socialized with them through USO-sponsored activities.

DAR (Daughters of American Revolution)

Today I wear a National DAR medal presented by the Rockford Chapter for 800 hours of acceptable war volunteer work. (Not counted: USO activities and dancing at Camp Grant.) I received the award for working evenings and Saturdays at the DAR's Information Booth, located on the mezzanine of the Faust Hotel. Althea Weller, who lived in the Faust Hotel was the project's chairman. A card file listed available rooms and apartments for rent. Officers who formed the cadre could live off base. Parents

visiting their sons might wish a room for a night or two.

When Mrs. Carl Nyman, Regent of the Rockford Chapter (1941-43), visited Camp Grant Hospital, she saw no flowers. She appointed a DAR committee and called on city-wide cooperation to provide flowers. They were brought to the Nyman garage on Harvard Avenue. Underestimating the number of sections in the hospital and the number of patients, the ladies could not leave flowers in each room the first time.

As radio chairman for Rockford Chapter, I wrote two radio plays. Then I procured Camp Grant soldiers with some acting experience to perform on the local radio. Florence Lovejoy Shugars assisted with sound effects. One play, "Hoof Beats" featuring Paul Revere's ride, was part of the national DAR program listings.

USO

At the Rockford USO--located in Central High School--Myrtle Fetzer headed the local organization. We volunteers signed in with her on a senior USO card. Four of us worked on the Classical Music Committee. Frances Shimmin (later Mrs. Menroy Mills) served as chairman. Our budget provided funds to purchase records for the music room. Equipped with a good record player and comfortable chairs, the room attracted dedicated listeners and musicians. We took turns being in charge. Sometimes we planned listening contests to recognize selections by Beethoven, Mozart and others. The winner received a pocket-size book. Other evenings, when not on duty in the Music Room, I would go to the downstairs dancing area.

Court Street (United) Methodist Church

During World War II, the church converted its gymnasium into a place to entertain Camp Grant soldiers. Young women church members, often led by Frances Shimmin, promoted group games such as shuttlecock, darts, and Chinese Checkers as well as a Sinnissippi Park hike. Members not only provided activity refreshments but they often invited soldiers home for dinner. Many "regulars" attended Sunday School with other young Courtstreeters.

On one occasion, a soldier I had met during Court Street activities asked me to attend an Army-Navy football game to be played in Camp Grant's Bell Bowl. At about half time, another soldier sitting next to me said, "You don't look like the wife he brought last time." I was quite surprised, but my date said, "We all do it. It's just a little joke."

Rockford Womans Club

A quota (about 6 or 8) of young girls from the Intermediate Department could attend each dance at Camp Grant. I was telephone contact person and the young women called me to make reservations. A military escort took us to and from the camp. Once there, no one was permitted to go outside the recreation room. A grand march determined partners for the first dance. When the music stopped, the couple facing each other were designated partners.

Keeping In Touch

Some soldiers requested us to write to them after they received orders: "Shipping out to an unknown destination." As soon as they knew their APO addresses, they notified us. Some sent me gifts in gratitude for their Rockford experiences. Rudy, for instance, sent a beautiful red cover for carrying a paperback book and two hand-carved ebony figures. Censorship forbid him to give his location, but I believe it was Casablanca. Henry wrote in a letter that he was in a place where there was absolutely nothing. But he had collected cowrie shells for a necklace. Another sent a bracelet of coins and I think he might have been in France at that time. Richard, now living in San Antonio, Texas, wrote to the Rockford Superintendent of Schools for my married name and address. He and his wife still send cards at Christmas. In 1994, in appreciation for dinners in our home and evenings at Court Street Church, he made a gift of a one-year subscription to *National Geographic Magazine*. Another Richard story concerns square dancing at the 1940s Rockford College campus. Having asked if he could bring his own girl friend, he invited me. Since his special interest was weight-lifting, he not only gave me a book on that subject, but he would demonstrate his prowess by lifting me off my feet during square dances.

Rockford Ships

The USS Kishwaukee, named after the Kishwaukee River, was a 310-foot gasoline tanker. Its keel was laid September 26, 1942; launching occurred July 24, 1943; commissioning took place at New Orleans, May 27, 1944. The Kishwaukee participated extensively in the latter part of World War II, supplying bases at Midway and Okinawa. (*Nuggets of History*, Vol. 3, No. 6, Sept.-Oct. 1966, pp. 4-5)

The USS Rockford, a frigate, was sent down the ways at Wilmington, California. Mrs. Ella Crotzer, a Rockford mother of five World War II servicemen, christened the

frigate on September 28, 1943. A delegation from Rockford traveled to California for the event. They included Mayor C. Henry Bloom, past national president of Navy Club Sig Sandeen, and actress Barbara Hale. (*Nuggets of History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Mar.-Apr. 1972, "Rockford's Naval and Marine Training Center," H.M.Hyde, p.10-11.)

Rationing

Rockford housewives remember sugar rationing being especially troublesome. My mother did not bake many cookies, so occasionally she and others gave their coupons to church groups or other organizations for special events. A class for women, held at the Gas and Electric Building--now the Pioneer Center-- demonstrated and explained how to economize in using scarce items. My mother, as a volunteer, sat at a desk in the lobby to answer questions about nutrition and the canning of foods. People were encouraged to grow vegetables in "Victory Gardens."

Gasoline rationing limited travel and caused inconveniences. Purchase of meats required special ration slips. Since shoes were rationed, I took mine to Joe Bean's repair shop after dancing a hole in a red shoe while at a Camp Grant dance.

VJ Day

Although Japan surrendered on August 14, 1945, Rockfordians waited to dance in the streets until September 2, 1945. Designated as VJ Day (Victory over Japan), because surrender papers were signed then, it marked the end of World War II.

Now

As I recall the faces of Richard, Henry, Rudy and others, questions arise. Where are they now? What happened to the man who introduced me to his mother in Chicago? Did the actors in my radio play return to their hometowns to resume jobs, perhaps in theatre or radio announcing? Why did some come back to Rockford to re-enter civilian life? And finally, what are their memories of Court Street Methodist Church, the USO, Rockford College, and Camp Grant?

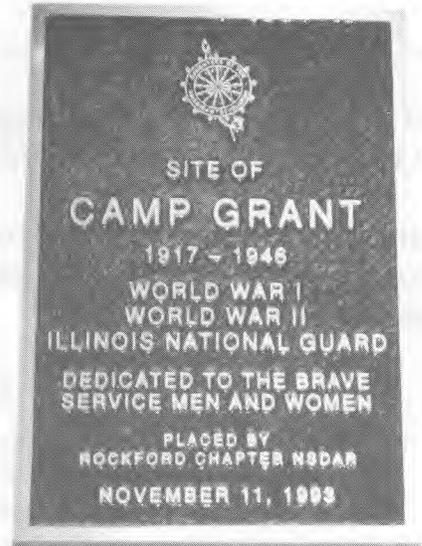
Commemorative Event

On November 11, 1993, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Armistice Day--now called Veterans' Day, the Rockford Chapter of the DAR placed a Camp Grant marker at Rockford Airport, former site of the camp.

Hazel Mortimer Hyde



Camp Grant, World War II. *Photo: Signal Corps, U. S. Army
Courtesy Midway Village and Museum Center.*



DAR marker. *Photo: Hazel Hyde.*



Hazel Hyde at Nov. 11 dedication.

Photo: Hazel Hyde.



World War II Army Nurse Gertrude Pederson and Robert White (Adjutant & Finance Officer, Phillip Cafagna American Legion Post #209, Byron) at marker ceremony.

Photo: Hazel Hyde

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Statement of Purpose: To enlighten and to educate people about their place of residence, to entertain with stories and fact, and to enrich lives regarding what is available to enjoy, to treasure and to honor.

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We welcome manuscripts and photos, related to area historical events and personalities, for publication consideration. We reserve the right to edit and to condense. For return, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Send to:

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