

## War Memorial

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In Observance of the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Dedication of the War Memorial.

The Royal Neighbors of America was started in 1888 by Marie Kirkland of Council Bluffs, Iowa. She placed an ad in her local paper asking the wives of Modern Woodmen of America members to meet for a social gathering. Eight women responded and organized what became Royal Neighbors of America. Since then, the organization has spread across the country. Their mission encompasses three core pillars: insuring lives, supporting women, and serving community.

In 1942 mention of the local group of the Royal Neighbors of America called "Onward Camp No. 166" were holding regular meetings in town and electing officers. Notices of meeting were printed in the paper, but rarely was there follow-up with mention of officers or what they were working on.

In March 1943 it was noted in The Montague Observer that the Royal Neighbors and the Onward Club were celebrating their 48<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary with a potluck at their hall. That would imply that the group had been around since 1895. Their hall was the Kern Hall which was located over Kern's White Lake Grocery on Colby. Today that would be over the store where Posh is located.

In October 1943, it was announced that a plaque or roll of honor bearing the names of all the men and women of the cities of Montague and Whitehall who were in service or who have served in the armed forces in the present war (WWII) was to be erected by the Royal Neighbors at "Tunnel Park" in Whitehall. The plaque was to be known as the "Twin Cities Honor Roll." Members of the committee in charge of procurement and erection of the plaque were Mrs. Walter Houseman, Mrs. George Zatzke, and Mrs. Nelson Lyon. The group was having a series of card parties, rummage sales and dances among other things to raise funds to purchase the plaque.

Plans for the plaque indicated that it would be about 18 feet wide and 10 feet high, set in an ornamental brick frame topped with a brass eagle with a concrete approach.

Originally intended as a service plaque for the members of the organization, the idea quickly expanded to include the names of all the men and women of the area in service. The dedication was scheduled for Memorial Day 1944.

In December 1943 some additional names of the RNA appeared with the election of officers for the group. Mrs. James Connell was elected Oracle. Mrs. E. D. Todd was the retiring Oracle. Other officers were Mrs. Nelson Lyon, Vice-Oracle, Mrs. Edward Hall, past Oracle; Mrs. G. W. Zatzke, Recorder; Mrs. E. D. Todd, Receiver; Mrs. I. J. Lyons, Chancellor; Mrs. Edmund Quackenbush, Marshall; Mrs. Harry Sikkenga, Inner Sentinel; Mrs. Elmer Buttlemann, Outer Sentinel. Mrs. Theodore Petter was elected manager for a term of three years. Installation of the elective and appointed officers was to be performed in January by the installation officer, Mrs. Nonnie Funnell.

As the plaque did not arrive on time, it was instead dedicated on July 4, 1944, with 275 names on it with an additional 30 to 50 names to be added later.

In August 1998, the condition of the dilapidated monument was brought to the attention of then Whitehall City Mayor, Norman Ullman and a committee was formed to look into its restoration. As the RNA was no longer in existence in the area, the city sent letters to service clubs, veterans associations and businesses to try to raise funds to make the necessary repairs.

In September 1998, with the help of Norm Ullman, Al Harris from the Legion, Walter Gibbs and others, extensive work began to restore the tarnished nameplates, replace the three non-working fluorescent lights, and repair the broken glass on the front. Some of the nameplates had fallen off the wooden backing, which had to be replaced before they could be reattached. Those named on the Honor Roll were service personnel from Rothbury, Montague, Whitehall and the surrounding townships. Those who had died in the service were indicated by a gold star. After the restoration was completed, a rededication took place on August 17, 1999.

Since then, the City of Whitehall has funded the new steps that were recently built by Morden Construction. Greg Johnson and Bill Chamberlain have worked to keep up on the maintenance of the Memorial as well as Dick Connell and Ron Arnson. Hopefully, with their help and others like them, the Memorial will last another 80 years or more.