

TURNPIKE TALES

by Jim Ford

"TURNPIKE TALES" #19

(Historical items from the "Madison Bouckville Antique Week" region)

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The Madison-Bouckville area has been rich in history from the arrival of the first settlers to the present day. As an addition to the website, we have decided to share some of that history in order that the patrons who travel to the Madison-Bouckville Show will have a better understanding of our truly unique region.

The Town Of Madison During WWII

The entry of the United States into WW11 led to marked changes in the lives of Americans everywhere. The Town of Madison was no exception. Immediately, efforts were channeled into ways to help the war effort. A great many from the township volunteered for military service, while others were drafted. Farms went into high gear producing food for the troops, local businesses started fund drives, and even children were given a role to play to help our nation win the war. We now take a look at the efforts of our local township during the war years of the 1940's.

REGISTERING FOR SERVICE – For the United States and the Town of Madison, 1940 marked the beginning of preparation for the eventual entry into the war. Selective Service Registration was conducted at Madison Central School in September of 1940. All males between 21 and 36 were required to register. By the end of the war 124 men and women from the Town of Madison had served in the military, with four paying the ultimate price of that service. They were Corporal Lyman Campbell, Private First Class Eugene F. Clair, Staff Sergeant John B. McMullin, and Private First Class David C. Owens.

Of that 124, we should note that four were women – Cadet Nurse Barbara Bridge, 2nd Lt. Margaret Clark, Josephine Kula, and Isabel Warren. They each played a significant role in the defense of our nation.

THE DEFENSE UNIT – In January of 1942 a Volunteer Defense Unit was formed for the communities of Madison, Bouckville, Solsville, and Madison Center in our township. Air raid wardens were selected and part of the readiness plan was to conduct air raid drills and a “blackout.” In March of 1942 a blackout was conducted and each of the communities named achieved a total blackout in 30 seconds or less from the time of the siren or bell warning.

WAR RATIONING – As in all areas of the nation, a rationing system went into effect to make sure that our troops were taken care of in the battle areas. Items such as gasoline, tires, sugar, and coffee were rationed. The citizens of Madison engaged in this program in a positive manner. If your ration book had items that you did not need, those were traded to someone who did need them. A popular item for trade was sugar. The Town of Madison has always been known for its good cooks.

RED CROSS COURSES – In 1942 Red Cross courses were conducted in First Aid. In May of that year, Dr. Carl Ellsworth announced that 34 candidates had successfully completed the course.

COLLECTING SCRAP METAL – 1942 also saw the first Scrap Metal Drive to support the war effort. A salvage rally and parade were held in October of that year and the area for collection was the vacant lot on the northeast corner of the main intersection in Madison. Eighty-eight tons of scrap were collected and sold in 1943 for \$718.45. That was a huge amount for a small area.

THE NAVY PILOT PROGRAM – An aviation course had been started at Colgate University in October of 1940. World events were pushing the United States to begin preparation efforts in case we entered the conflict. An airport was established on Rt. 20 between Madison and Bouckville, across from the present Troop’s Scoops Ice Cream stand. With our entry into the war, Colgate became the site of a Navy Pilot Training Program.

The pilots lived on the Colgate campus, ate in the dining hall, exercised on the athletic fields, took courses in the University classrooms, conducted swimming and life-saving lessons at Lake Moraine, and had their flight training at the airstrip on Rt. 20. Area residents filled a number of jobs associated with the airport.

An airport hangar was built in 1940. An additional larger hangar was built in 1942. It burned in November of 1942, shortly after construction was completed. The sad thing was that all of the 21 airplanes, parachutes, tools, flying suits, and classroom materials were lost in the blaze. A new hangar was immediately built and used for the duration of the war.

CHRISTMAS PACKAGES – The local “Wives and Mothers of Servicemen Organization” packed Christmas packages for the troops. 150 packages were sent in 1942. Each gift box contained cigars or cigarettes, tooth paste, a jar of hard candy, stationery, and several packages of gum.

THE SALE OF WAR BONDS – War bonds were sold each year during the war and were bought in large quantities by the citizens of the town. Bonds could be purchased at area stores or banks. The local G.L.F. Store in Solsville sold \$2,900 worth of bonds to its patrons in 1944.

A FLAG AND HONOR ROLLS – A public defense meeting was held on August 8, 1943 to dedicate a “Service Flag” to be placed at the four corners in Madison. An Honor Roll was placed in the Bouckville Church during the same year and an Honor Roll board was placed on the four corners in Madison.

EFFORTS FROM OUR CHILDREN – Children played an important part in the war effort and their efforts were continually praised. Many helped in the collection of scrap metal. In 1942, an article stated that “Much credit should be given several small boys who have carried scrap with their carts from homes in Madison to the pile.”

The Girl Scouts of Madison made a house-to-house canvass for silk stockings for the war effort and were rewarded by receiving several pounds. This was in 1943. They also gathered eight pounds of fats to be used in the production of war materials.

A very unique offering from the children was the collection of milkweed pods. An article from 1944 stated: "From the Township of Madison, the school children collected 360 bags of milkweed pods. The pods are used in the production of life preservers."

WOUNDED IN ACTION – We have already mentioned those from the township who died during the war. The Town of Madison also had its share of wounded personnel. Sergeant Wallace C. Ford was wounded during the Battle of Saipan in the Pacific - 1944, Private Donald J. Carney was wounded during action in France - 1944, and Robert Sigsbee was wounded twice, in March and in April of 1944, while fighting in Germany.

HONORS FOR SERVICEMEN – Those mentioned as wounded in action were awarded the Purple Heart. Others in the township received honors as well. Lt. Billy Wolbur completed 32 successful air combat missions. He had graduated from Madison Central School in 1940. Lt. Harold Way survived 35 air combat missions, having had his plane hit only once.

Lt. Alyn S. Hughes was awarded the Bronze Star for heroic action during the Italian Campaign. Cpl. Neil C. Shoemaker was wounded in the North African Campaign, received the Purple Heart and also a Bronze Star. And finally, Lt. Thomas M. Lemery was awarded four Bronze Medals and the Distinguished Flying Cross for his efforts in the China-India-Burma Theatre.

CROPS GROWN FORTHE WAR EFFORT –

We have wonderfully fertile soil in the Town of Madison. During the war years there was a huge emphasis on growing crops that could be sent to the troops. Peas and beans were grown in great quantities by farmers such as Grove Hinman, Morris Spooner, and David Stephens. Packing plants were located in neighboring towns and cities and the resulting canned products were sent overseas.

A problem during the war was the shortage of available labor since many men had been drafted into military service. African-American workers came north from Florida and other workers came from points as far away as the Bahamas. Female students from colleges also helped at harvest time.

One example of this in our area was the arrival of students from Brooklyn College in 1943-1944 to help harvest peas and beans.

They were housed at Morrisville College, offered courses for a portion of the day, and were then transported to the fields. Their efforts were highly praised.

OUR CONTRIBUTION – As you can see, the Town of Madison contributed much to the war effort. A point to keep in mind, however, is the fact that the township has never had more than 2,500 citizens. When you look at the scope of what was accomplished, we have to feel a sense of pride for the patriotism and sacrifice displayed by our people during those trying years.