

# HISTORY OF THE EPSOM HONOR ROLL (How it came to be)



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## **THE EPSOM HONOR ROLL (on grounds of the Public Library, Epsom, N.H.) History of the Permanent Honor Roll, including complete record of the Dedication Ceremony held on Memorial Day 1963.**

The Elwood O. Wells Post, American Legion, was organized on November 11th, 1953. The following May, 1954, the new Post assumed full responsibility for the observance of Memorial Day in the town of Epsom. The inspiring exercises at the Epsom Baptist Church were followed by a grand parade to Hopkinson Cemetery. Several years earlier the Epsom Woman's Club had erected an Honor Roll on the grounds of the Public Library. This structure, honoring men and women who went from Epsom into World War II, although made of wood with the names painted on, was quite good looking and under ordinary conditions would have stood up for a long time. On this 1954 Memorial Day the parade paused at the Honor Roll and little Miss Kathleen Wells, daughter of Elwood O. Wells, placed a floral decoration. Kathleen, then ten years old, was accompanied by Mrs. Anna Yeaton, who was the first President of the Auxiliary.

In this same year (1954) a fast traveling tropical hurricane struck New Hampshire and the wood-constructed Honor Roll was completely demolished. The date was August 31st. It was the

general feeling that something more permanent was needed in the way of replacement and in the summer of 1955 the Woman's Club communicated with the Elwood O. Wells Post about the matter. Charles R. Miner, than Post Commander, attended one of the meetings of the Woman's club to talk matters over. Subsequently the Club turned the whole project over to the new American Legion Post, together with a sum of money to start a fund for a permanent monument.



*Photo: The old Epsom Public Library with the Honor Roll to the left.*

Thus the Elwood O. Wells Post assumed responsibility for the Honor Roll. The organization took over the project on a long-range basis knowing that a lot of work would be involved and that in some way a lot more money would have to be made available. The Post voted that the monument, when erected, would carry eligible names pertaining to World War I, World War II and the Korean Conflict. The local American Legion had a great many uses for its meager income. Various fund raising projects were tried out. A few were successful but others barely paid expenses. Nevertheless, small sums from time to time were added to the "Honor Roll Fund" which was kept in a special savings account.

Time rolled along. In the Elwood O. Wells Post the personnel of officers changed and interest in the long-range project bogged down somewhat. Some of the members, however, were bound to keep the idea alive and so the Honor Roll continued to be mentioned from time to time in the course of regular Post meetings. Finally it was determined to tackle the problem anew and make a big effort to carry through. The year was 1960. Donald R. Perry, then Post commander, appointed a special Honor Roll committee, including Gilbert H. Knowles, Charles R. Miner and Robert F. Demers. The Commander designated Knowles as chairman.



*Photo: Close-up of the Epsom Honor Roll.*

In the course of the 1960 Memorial Day address, which was delivered by Gilbert Knowles, the Honor Roll project was brought to the attention of the people of the Town. Subsequently the Committee went to work in earnest on the lists of names eligible for the Honor Roll. This proved to be a long and somewhat pains-taking job, involving a considerable amount of correspondence. One letter followed the addressee around through several foreign countries before the answer came back. In the last analysis the records of the Adjutant General's office proved the most helpful and reliable source of information. James Walter Mitchell, who followed Perry as Post commander, retained the same committee members, including also Past Commander Perry. The lists of names eligible for the Honor Roll were completed in 1962 and the remaining need was more money. After the success of its 1961 Minstrel show the Post had built up the "Honor Roll Fund" to a little more than two hundred dollars. It was felt that the Honor Roll monument was a matter of interest to the whole Town and that the necessary funds could be raised by soliciting. However, after some discussion in one of the Post meetings it was voted to ask directly for an appropriation. This would perhaps be the simpler and quicker way. The chairman of the Honor Roll Committee explained the project at the open meeting of the Epsom Budget Committee and later, in their closed session, said Budget Committee approved an appropriation for the monument. The Selectmen, who had shown every willingness to cooperate all along, inserted the following article in the Town Warrant:

"Article 15. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$500.00 ( to be used with a fund now in the hands of the Elwood O. Wells Post A L) for a permanent Honor Roll to be erected on the grounds of the Epsom Public Library."

The money was duly appropriated by the voters at the Town Meeting, March 12th, 1963, and the Honor Roll Committee pushed ahead with the hope of having the monument ready for the dedication on Memorial Day. The Committee contacted a number of monument companies

requesting bids. The highest figure was \$1372.00. All but one company requested a larger sum for the monument than was available. Mr. L. Sherman Elliott of Nottingham, a salesman for the Union Marble & Granite Works, was most helpful to the Committee. He brought the whole problem to the attention of Mr. Robert L. Lowe, the manager-owner of the monument company at Union, and both Mr. Lowe and Mr. Elliott met with the Committee in Epsom. Mr. Lowe gladly gave the benefit of his long experience with honor rolls and war memorials which made it comparatively easy to determine the type of monument that would be best for Epsom. An admirable plan was worked out whereby Epsom would have an Honor Roll monument erected on scheduled time for the sum of money that was available.

The four members of the Committee, together with Mr. Neil G. Reid (representing the Selectmen) journeyed to the show rooms of the Union Marble and Granite Works in Rochester for another meeting with Mr. Lowe and Mr. Elliott. Samples of finished monuments and lettering were examined and final details pertaining to the Epsom Honor Roll were worked out. The Committee would be responsible for putting in the cement foundation on the Library grounds. Mr. Lowe would give the Barre granite; the cutting, finishing and lettering would be done at the plant in Union and the monument would be erected prior to May 30th.

One Sunday afternoon on the grounds of the Epsom Public Library, members of the Committee, the Post Commander, the president of the Woman's Club, the Library Trustees and the Librarian met together and marked the exact location for the Honor Roll. Some ten days later the cement foundation was put in by the four members of the Committee, assisted by Commander John Johnson, Senior Vice Commander Albert J. Yeaton, Louis A. Demers, and Albert J. Yeaton Jr. (all Post members). A trench five feet deep was dug and then filled with stones and cement to make a permanent solid base that would not be moved by frost. Then to make a final check on the lettering just before the names were sandblasted into the stone, Louis A. Demers, acting for the Committee, made a trip to the plant at Union, NH. Demers noted several errors which were promptly corrected and the workmen then went ahead with the sandblasting. The monument was delivered and erected May 25th. It was immediately veiled with white sheeting.



*Photo: 1963 Memorial Day Parade approaching the Public Library.*

## **DEDICATION OF THE PERMANENT HONOR ROLL May 30, 1963**

### **(On the grounds of the Epsom Public Library)**

Rev. Franklin Parker of Chichester delivered the 1963 Memorial Day address at the Epsom Baptist Church in the afternoon of Thursday, May 30th. Others taking part included Rev. Robert J. Meakim, local pastor; Mr. Philip N. Yeaton, soloist; Mrs. Grace McKay, organist; and the Epsom Band directed by Mr. Charles Downs.

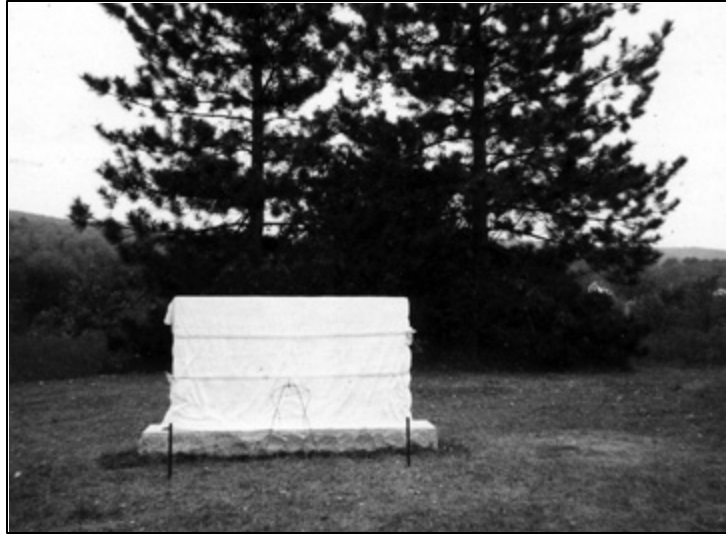
The roadsides were lined with people as the colorful parade moved up from the Church to the Library. The weather was fair and the temperature was comfortably warm. The dedication of the Honor Roll was under the direction of Gilbert H. Knowles who was the speaker. The ceremony opened with a selection by the band. After the music stopped, the speaker, standing near the veiled monument, began as follows:

“Just three years ago in my address at the Epsom Baptist Church I made the remark that some Memorial Day we would have the dedication of a permanent Honor Roll. That day has now arrived!”

“This project, started actually by the Woman’s Club, and given a substantial boost at the last Town Meeting, has been brought to completion by the Elwood O. Wells Post. Although we of the Committee have experienced many ups and downs, we have forged persistently on and the permanent Honor Roll is now a reality. During these last months the original plan to make use of both stone and bronze has been discarded in favor of a monument made entirely of granite. Time, we believe, will prove the wisdom of this change.”

“On behalf of the full Committee I desire to express thanks to all who have helped in any way with this project: - the Epsom Woman’s Club; the Elwood O. Wells Post; the Board of Selectmen; Library Trustees; tax payers of the town; - Mr. Robert Lowe of Union; Mr. Sherman Elliott of Nottingham; and others. We are especially grateful for the help and cooperation received from the office of the Adjutant General in Concord, without which our committee, I fear, would still be groping in the wilderness. Recalling, however, that Epsom’s own General Michael McClary served for twenty-one consecutive years as Adjutant General of New Hampshire, I conclude that no other town has better credentials to call upon that department.”

“We have a number of special guests here this afternoon; I will only attempt to name a few of them. We have Mr. Walter Wells and son from Center Barnstead; Mr. and Mrs. Francis Hackett and Mrs. Charlotte Day from Rochester; Mr. Ferdinand Zinn, a World War I veteran who has come all the way from Patterson, N.J. for the occasion; Mr. Sherman Elliott of Nottingham; Mrs. Robert Whitaker and Dr. Everett Lombard of Concord; and others that I could mention if there were time to do so. We are especially fortunate to have with us this afternoon Miss Kathleen Wells, a student at the University of New Hampshire and the daughter of Captain Elwood Osgood Wells for whom the local American Legion Post is named; and at this time Mrs. Evelyn Johnson, representing the Woman’s Club, will cut the ribbons and Miss Kathleen Wells will unveil the Honor Roll.”



*Photo: The monument before unveiling.*

(Using a pair of scissors Mrs. Johnson quickly slit the several strands of ribbon and Miss Wells stepped forward and removed the coverings, revealing the beautiful monument.)

“And now the flags!” the speaker continued, “Miss Sharon Cofran and Mr. Ray Kelley, representing the Girl Scouts and the Boy Scouts, will place the flags. – (Flags were carefully set in place, one at either side and just in front of the monument.)

“And Miss Susan Johnson, daughter of Commander and Mrs. Johnson, representing the Elwood O. Wells Post and Auxiliary, and all the people of Epsom, - will place the decoration; the wreath.” (The wreath was set in place in a wire frame that had been prepared to receive it, just between the flags.)

As Miss Johnson stepped back the speaker raised his right arm and with fore-finger pointed to the sky, pronounced the dedication in the following words, -

“We now dedicate this monument to the memory of those who fell in the service of our country. We dedicate it in the name of those who offered their lives that Justice, Freedom and Democracy might survive to be the victorious ideals of the peoples of the world.”

After a short pause the speaker asked, “Do the Selectmen accept this monument for the Town of Epsom?”

Mr. John B. Yeaton, Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, responded, formally accepting the Honor Roll for the Town.

“And being the Town’s monument” the speaker said, “it becomes the duty of all of us to guard and protect it.” (pause) – “We will ask Mr. Parker to lead us in prayer.”

Rev. Franklin Parker stepped up to the Honor Roll and gave the prayer in words appropriate and well chosen for the occasion. When he had finished Commander John Johnson of the Elwood O. Wells Post gave the order to the commander of the Firing Squad to fire salutes. When the noise of the rifles had ceased, taps were sounded by members of the band. The dedication was over and the parade re-formed and started on for another ceremony at Hopkinson Cemetery. Many

people, however, lingered around the Library to examine more closely the beautiful stone and read the names.

The Honor Roll monument is made of Barre granite, done in what is known as satin finish. The main stone, which carries 98 names, is five feet long and is mounted on a somewhat longer base of the same material. The Union Marble & Granite Works received \$700.00 for their part. The balance of the fund was used to buy the cement for the foundation.

### **PERSONNEL OF BOARDS, ORGANIZATIONS, etc.**

#### **WHEN HONOR ROLL WAS ERECTED**

Board of Selectmen

John B. Yeaton, Chairman

Elmore A. Bickford

Neil G. Reid

Library Trustees

William B. Moore

Phylis M. LaClair

Frances B. Allen

Librarian

Marjorie A. Yeaton

President of the Woman's Club

Evelyn P. Johnson

#### **ELWOOD O. WELLS POST No. 112, AMERICAN LEGION**

##### **Officers of the Post**

John Johnson, Commander

Albert J. Yeaton Sr., Vice Commander

Rene G. Bonefant, Junior Vice Commander

Robert F. Demers, Adjutant

Robert F. Demers, Finance Officer

J. Walter Mitchell, Chaplain

Gilbert H. Knowles, Historian

Charles R. Miner, Service Officer

Robert Backus, Sergeant-at-arms

President of the Auxiliary

Jacqueline L. Palmer

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##### **Honor Roll Committee 1960-1963**

Gilbert H. Knowles, Chairman

Charles R. Miner

Robert F. Demers

Donald R. Perry  
 Color Bearers (May 30, 1963)  
 Robert F. Demers & Charles W. Cushman  
 Color Guards  
 J. Walter Mitchell & E.S. Mitchell  
 The Firing Squad  
 Commander; Charles R. Miner  
 Riflemen: Donald R. Perry, Elmer Palmer, Theodore Bailey, Robert Miner, Albert Grandmont,



*Photo: Taken immediately after the dedication. Standing, left is Miss Kathleen Wells of Rochester who unveiled the Honor Roll; center, Gilbert H. Knowles who pronounced the dedication; right, Mrs. Evelyn P. Johnson who cut the ribbons binding the coverings.*