

INTRODUCTION - STAMFORD'S WORLD WAR II SERVICE ROLL

A History of the Service Roll Memorial

Soon after America's entry into WWII, numerous counties, districts, cities and towns throughout the country began erecting honor or service rolls. Upon these structures were placed individuals names, as a means of honoring local men and women who were serving in the armed forces. The rolls emerged in many forms and designs, most of which were constructed of wood, though a number were also cast in metal. Typically, the list was affixed to the service roll's main section either in the form of a nameplate or wooden slat affixed to a larger background or painted directly to the roll. Those erected by businesses, fraternal organizations and schools were usually placed in prominent locations within their facilities. Municipalities, in most instances, favored setting theirs within a centrally located park. Sizes of these commemorative lists varied, depending primarily on the population of each community or organization.ⁱ

As the war progressed, Stamford erected a rather substantial Service Roll, of unique design, in Central [now Veteran's Memorial] Park, opposite the Old Town Hall. Included were names of men and women from within the entire Town & City who had either enlisted, were drafted, or were already serving in the military as of December 7, 1941. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on April 12, 1943.

In addition, local residents created neighborhood service rolls at Bull's Head, the East Side, Glenbrook, Springdale, Turn of River and on Liberty Street in the West Side.ⁱⁱ

By March 1943 it was reported in the Stamford Advocate that a Service Roll Committee had been formed, which approved a final revised design based on a preliminary one, prepared under the supervision of Frank Laney at the local State Trade School. An authorized model was to be placed on public view in the newspaper's front window on Atlantic Street. The Committee on Names announced that it obtained lists provided by the Stamford Advocate and Samuel W. Morrell, a local historian, which would in turn be transcribed onto file cards by volunteer typists at Harold Short's Secretarial School. The two local draft boards cooperated by authorizing individuals to compare the cards against their records. This helped make the list as complete as possible, which was necessary because, it was reported, that "the Adjutant General's office does not have a complete list of servicemen and women from Stamford."

After a preliminary register of 4,250 names was compiled, it was produced on placards, which were displayed in the Town Hall. Once on view, the public was asked to examine them and submit any omissions or corrections to the Selectmen's office; which in turn would send them to a subcommittee consisting of Lt. Col. James H. Wild, of the Connecticut State Guard, Kingsley Gillespie, publisher of the Stamford Advocate and Samuel W. Morrell. It was then announced that bids for painting the individual names on wooden slats measuring 1" x 12" would be sought. Herbert Sherman of "Herb Sherman Signs," 475 Atlantic Street submitted the winning bid.ⁱⁱⁱ Construction of the memorial itself, fabricated of wood, began and was scheduled to be finished by Memorial Day 1943.^{iv}

Bronze stars cast by a local firm would be inserted alongside of the names of those who died in the service of their country.

During the week before the service roll's dedication, the "Inscription Committee," consisting of Rev. W. Lee Baxter, Rev. Lawrence J. Flanagan and Rev. Dr. George Stewart, recommended the following inscription to be lettered on "the central panel of the Park Row side of the memorial"

"THESE BE OUR VALIANT SONS AND DAUGHTERS WHO HAVE GONE IN JEOPARDY OF THEIR LIVES – LET NONE WHO REMAIN BE FOUND WANTING" ^{v.}

Stamford's 1943 Memorial Day dedication observances began with a parade consisting of 57 units, which included the Stamford City Band, United Spanish War Veterans, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and World War I Veterans. They marched to St. John's Park where a program of traditional ceremonies was held, after which they continued along Main Street to the new Service Roll, which by this time contained 5,555 names.

Mayor Charles E. Moore opened the ceremony by thanking "the committee which helped make the Service Roll possible and the gratitude of all the people of Stamford for the heroic men and women whose names appear on the memorial." The invocation was delivered by the Rev. Lawrence J. Flanagan of St. Mary's R. C. Church, followed by the singing of the National Anthem and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance. Stamford High School's A Cappella Choir offered two selections, "Great God of Love" and "America's Message," then a recitation of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Elias Lieberman's "I Am An American." The principal speaker was the Rev. Dr. George Stewart of the First Presbyterian Church, who stated that America "must have the force to see to it that those responsible [for the war] are brought to justice and it must build for a permanent peace." Then, the Rev. W. Lee Baxter of Union Baptist Church presided at the unveiling of the Service Roll. This was followed by the Baptist Choir singing 'America' and 'To Thee O Country,' after which the program concluded with a benediction by the Rev. Allen Hackett of the First Congregational Church. The parade, one of the largest in the community's history, then continued on to its conclusion. ^{vi.}

The Service Roll was originally designed to accommodate 8,400 names. However, by the following year their arrangement had to be realigned in order to accommodate an ever-increasing number of members of the armed forces from Stamford, which by this time totaled over 7,700 individuals. It was estimated that the realignment would allow for a total of 10,500 names. ^{vii.}

It was noted in April of 1944 that a total of 51 bronze stars were added to the Service Roll's names for those who made the supreme sacrifice. Eventually that number would rise to 233. ^{viii.}

"Sixteen million Americans served their country during World War II. A little over 10,000 of these came from Stamford. Since it's total population in the 1940 U. S. Federal Census is listed as 61,215 individuals, this means that approximately one out of six citizens from Stamford answered their country's call to duty. This figure does not include factory workers, civil defense volunteers or the countless others who contributed to the war effort." ^{ix.}

Though formidable in appearance, the Service Roll's flat roof and swift construction of wood was not designed for long-term durability in New England's climate. Thus, by the late 1960's it was dismantled, primarily because of the combined ravages of time and the elements. The park itself was completely reconfigured in the early 1970's and as Tony Pavia, a local educator and author observed, "never again would the names of all those who served their country [from Stamford] be preserved in one place." ^{x.}

Despite this, in 1972 WWII veteran Tony "Old Sarge" Pia proposed that the location's name be changed from Central Park to Veteran's Memorial Park. He submitted his proposal to the Stamford Board of Representatives who unanimously approved the change.

"Stamford has grown to a community of over 100,000 in population. Not having a memorial such as this might lead one to believe that we have lost the faith and purpose of those courageous and valorous men. Their honor and dedication must be perpetuated. Several years ago, the temporary monument [Service Roll] of World War II was torn down. I feel it is for us, here and now, to replace that monument with one that will endure as a lasting memorial, whereby all of Stamford can pause periodically, and be thankful for the deeds of those being honored." ^{xi.}

Pia then sought plans for a new memorial and the necessary funds for its implementation. Four vertical Barre, Vermont granite monoliths were designed and installed by Geno J. Lupinacci, a local monument dealer. It was dedicated in November 1977 and inscribed with the names of those from Stamford who gave their lives not only in WWII, but also in Korea and VietNam. ^{xii.}

Compilation of this Service Roll Book: Acknowledgements

In 1985 Thomas Jay Kemp, then reference librarian at the Ferguson Library, donated to the Stamford Historical Society two sets of cards he had personally acquired. At that time it was believed that they were somehow connected with the endeavor during WWII to erect a local Service Roll. As it turned out, the smaller 3" x 5" cards are indeed those produced by the volunteer typists at Harold Short's secretarial school for exactly that purpose. With these materials in hand, the Stamford Historical Society decided to embark on a massive project of recreating the list of names that had appeared on the Service Roll. This endeavor would not have been possible without the cards as well as photographs of the Stamford Service Roll in the WWII collections at the Connecticut State Library in Hartford, plus photographs of the Bull's Head and Liberty Street (West Side) Service Rolls.

In matters of correct spellings, and singling out a specific person when there were two or more individuals with the same name, Dan Burke (a Stamford Historical Society volunteer) consulted the 1943, 1944, 1945 and 1946 Stamford City Directories. Also, obituaries in the Stamford Advocate. In addition, the Connecticut Veterans Commemorative Booklets were frequently checked. WWII Veteran's Discharge Papers recorded in the Stamford Town Clerk's Office were also examined. For this work, we are particularly indebted to Donna M. Loglisci, City and Town Clerk of the City of Stamford, together with her wonderful staff, for their assistance.

Regarding Service Roll photographs: Our thanks to City of Stamford, Connecticut-Urban Renewal Commission; Chris Colombo of Stamford for donating photographs of the Stamford Service Roll, viewed from Park Row; Alan Haviland of Eagle River, Alaska for emailing a photograph of the Turn of River Service Roll; Anne Genovese Longo for donating two photographs of the Liberty Street (West Side] Service Roll and informing us of its exact location. Appreciation to Dan Burke for photographing the current Bull's Head Service Roll, located on a plaque, at the junction of High Ridge and Long Ridge Roads.

Those who participated in the tedious but vital task of transcribing thousands of names from the cards were: Dan Burke, Susan Leifer and Daniel Schirmer.

Our appreciation to Kathy Ciuci, Photo Archivist, Stamford Historical Society for editing this work into a workable arrangement for publication, and Andrew Dzamba, a Stamford Historical Society board member for textual editing.

Bill Levin extracted and transcribed interviews of Stamford servicemen, which were published by the State of Connecticut in a series of pamphlets titled: Connecticut Veterans Commemorative Booklets. References to this source were added to the Service Roll list. His endeavors in this effort are greatly valued.

We are especially grateful to Tony Pavia for the vision to interview a number of Stamford's WWII veterans in preparation for his book An American Town Goes to War, as well as his gracious permission to quote from it. In addition, his thoughts, suggestions and input related to this project were invaluable.

The Future of this Service Roll

The U. S. Merchant Mariners took casualties at a rate exceeded only by the U. S. Marines. Someone decided that since their pay rate was higher than U. S. Sailors, they were somehow not really "veterans" and thus left off the Service Rolls. Many non-combatants are rightly considered veterans, but a Merchant Mariner who crossed the Atlantic or Pacific, possibly on a vessel carrying fuel, ammunition or high explosives, under attack by Japanese or Nazi submariners and aircraft were not. In 1988, Merchant Mariners finally obtained limited veteran status. We intend to include names of individuals in this service from Stamford as they can be located and verified.

As in all previous compilations of participants in wars from the American Revolution to date, no list is totally complete or free of error. In the event of inaccuracies or omissions, the public is requested to contact the Stamford Historical Society and substantiate their suggestions with any documentary evidence, i.e. honorable discharges, letters, obituaries, newspaper articles, etc.^{xiv.}

Notes

- i. Connecticut State Library website cslib.org Research Guide to World War II Service Records at the Connecticut State Library: Finding Aid RG 12, Series II: World War II Honor Rolls.
- ii. Stamford Historical Society website stamfordhistory.org Exhibits; Pride and Patriotism, World War II Stamford Service Roll; section showing Central [now Veteran's Memorial] Park, Bull's Head and Liberty Street (West Side) service rolls. / Pavia, Tony M. An American town goes to war. Paducah, Kentucky: Turner Publishing Company, 1995, p. 152. Hereafter cited as Pavia. / Stamford Shopper, May 27, 1943 / Stamford Advocate, March 6, 1943 / For groundbreaking ceremony, see: Stamford Advocate, April 13, 1943. / For dedication of the Liberty Street (West Side) Service Roll, see: Stamford Advocate, January 3, 1944. / For dedication of the East Side Service Roll, see: Stamford Advocate, November 9, 1942. / For dedication of the Glenbrook Service Roll, see: Stamford Advocate, February 23, 1943. / For dedication of the Springdale Service Roll, see: Stamford Advocate, September 18, 1942.
- iii. Personal communication to Ronald Marcus from Arnold Yellen, 2012.
- iv. Stamford Advocate, March 6, 1943 / Stamford Advocate, March 9, 1943 / Stamford Advocate, March 23, 1943
- v. Stamford Advocate, May 27, 1943
- vi. Stamford Advocate, May 27, 1943 / Stamford Advocate, June 1, 1943
- vii. Stamford Advocate, April 26, 1944
- viii. Pavia, pp. iv-v.
- ix. Pavia, p. viii. / Stamford Advocate, April 7, 1944
- x. Pavia, p. 152
- xi. Stamford Advocate, September 15, 1972
- xii. Pavia, p. 152 / Stamford Advocate, September 15, 1972 / Stamford Advocate, October 3, 1972. / Stamford, Connecticut Department of Parks & Natural Resources Public open space park and recreational facilities - Stamford Connecticut, Stamford, Connecticut, 1984, p. 20.
- xiii. U. S. Merchant Marine website usmm.org
- xiv. Stamford Advocate May 27, 2012. Article by Maggie Gordon.