

Remembering the War to End All Wars

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In a few days we'll be celebrating Veterans' Day. This is a relatively new holiday in name but not in purpose. After World War II, it was decided to designate a day for celebrating the memory of the veterans of all wars in which America had been involved. Rather than naming an additional holiday, Armistice Day was changed to Veteran's Day. Armistice Day had been selected as a time to remember those who had served in the armed forces in World War I. This was on Nov. 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the cessation of hostilities between the U.S. and Germany. November 11 was known as Armistice Day each year until 1955 when the name was changed to Veteran's Day.

It is interesting to look back at what took place in 1918. Actually there were two celebrations. The first on Thursday, November 7, was premature and has since been known as the "false armistice." This writer remembers the day well — at the tender age of four and not aware that a war had been going on for several years.

The problem arose from confusion in a news release from Paris but the American people, hungry for peace, readily accepted that the war was over.

The German General Staff, recognizing that theirs was a lost cause, had started investigating surrender terms about Nov. 1. According to the morning edition of the Lowell Courier-Citizen on November 7: "German Armistice Team Reaches Allied Lines." The

The way It was

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circulation of the premature report of the signing triggered celebrations through the U.S. This writer recalls some of the events of that Thursday afternoon.

My father phoned from his office in Lowell and my mother reported to the guests she was entertaining that word was out that the war was over and throngs of people were celebrating in downtown Lowell. About that time church bells started ringing and the whistle on the Chelmsford Gingerale plant joined the cacophony. I was dispatched on a simple errand to the home of Napoleon Lovely next door. When Mrs. Lovely answered the door, she asked, "Where's the fire?" (This was logical because the Unitarian church bell was used as the fire alarm at that time.) Trying to appear very knowledgeable, I said, "There's no fire. The war has ended." This in spite of the fact that I wasn't sure what it meant.

I then joined my mother and her guests and we walked to the upper end of Central Square where we could see the church bell ringing wildly and a few men sitting on the

belfry rail with their feet hanging down over the clock. People were gathering in groups shaking hands and hugging each other saying that now the boys would be coming home. A parade was organized in North Chelmsford, led by the training school band. This was followed by a mass meeting on the steps of the North Congregational church. St. John's Church had scheduled a reunion for that evening at the North Town Hall but the attendance was reduced by the peace celebration.

However, the happiness soon turned to gloom when it was announced that the armistice had not been signed. Headlines on Saturday, the 9th, announced: "German Headquarters Considering Allied Armistice Terms" and on Monday morning, the 11th, it was reported that the Armistice was still unsigned.

Then came the good news for which everyone was waiting. The Lowell Courier-Citizen published a 7 O'clock Extra proclaiming: "Peace comes — Germany signs the Armistice — WWI ends at 6 A.M. Washington, 11 A.M. Paris — Kaiser Flees to Holland."

Shortly after 8 a.m. the bells started ringing again in Chelmsford and continued for several hours. Business was suspended, many people going to Lowell to join its two parades. Schools were closed and all children were asked to gather on the common.

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