



History of The American Legion, Joyce Kilmer, Post 25, Department of New Jersey



Post 25, New Brunswick

American Legion Post #25 was founded in New Brunswick, New Jersey, chartered on July 18, 1929. The following year, 1930, they acquired the home located at 17 Cogwise Avenue, later renamed Joyce Kilmer Avenue, New Brunswick. This building was the birthplace of Joyce Kilmer, the poet-soldier, who was a Sergeant, in Headquarters Company of the 165th Exp. Born in 1880, Kilmer was a former newspaperman. He was fighting with the Rainbow Division. He was killed in World War I and his grave site is in the Oise-Aisne Cenetary, Fere en Tardenois, France.

After the war, the women of Unit 25 use to have covered dish pot luck suppers all the time at the post home. Many members attended on a regular basis. They had many members who were judges in the court system. Harry Van Pelt was the post caretaker and kept the post home very clean. Every Sunday, three federal agents from the nearby Camp Kilmer came in and socialized with the members.

In 1966, the post indicated that it needed a larger facility for its post headquarters. They began looking for someone to take over their current building. The post tried to raise money to preserve the building, but when this failed, officers said the building would have to be razed. The structure was once the home of William Franklin, the last royal governor of New Jersey.

From this action, Post 25 launched a campaign in January of 1967 to enlarge the Building Fund. When the post initially announced it wanted new quarters, its officers offered the Kilmer house to anyone who would move in and restore it. The New Brunswick City Commissioners then in office considered relocating it to Buccleuch Park, but the route it would have had to travel made this an impossible job for house-movers.

By February 1967, the post was "in receipt of heartening news when State Conservation Commissioner Roe announced that the State of New Jersey would buy the Joyce Kilmer site in a move to preserve the birthplace of Joyce Kilmer as an historical heritage for the citizens of the state and of the country for that matter."

The news was especially gratifying to the membership as concern for its preservation has stymied the plans of the Post to build a new Post home. Plans have been in the offering for several years now, but the members were striving to

preserve the home that for many years they have been ex-officio retainers of for posterity.

As of the June 1967 the Post 25 building fund had \$21,485.00. Much more was needed if Post 25 was to get that much needed new Post home. Every month since January, when the Building Fund was first started, the Kilmer Report had a coupon in each newsletter, urging the members to send in a dollar or two.

By November of that same year, negotiations of the sale were underway. "The sale of the Post 25 home to the State of New Jersey was the first step towards the preservation of the site as a shrine to the memory of the great poet Joyce Kilmer, namesake of Post 25. The November Kilmer Report, the Post 25 newsletter, had "We are happy to report that on Thursday, October 26, the Post Committee concerned with the building of a new home for Post 25, met in Trenton with state officials in negotiations for the same of our present home to the state for the purpose stated above. According to reports brought to the attention of your reporter the committee brought back glade tidings. We can honestly say that it looks good. The Post and the state seem to be in accord as to reachable price for property, and it is just a matter of time for all details to be ironed out. State officials intimated that we should expect a final affirmation within the next sixty days.

The Home News, local newspaper in New Brunswick, reported the following, "On December 12, 1967, Post 25 and the New Jersey Department of Conservation & Expansion Development reached an agreement when the Joyce Kilmer home at 17 Gogwise Avenue (later called Joyce Kilmer Avenue) will become an historic site and maintained by the state. The property was sold to the state for \$24,000.

The Building Committee was now in the process of searching for a suitable site on which to build a new Post headquarters, an effort was being made to acquire property on Joyce Kilmer Avenue as a first choice. Should this prove fruitless, the Post will consider other possible locations.

The March Kilmer Report reports, "Although the state has not finalized the purchase of our present headquarters, they are now in the process of title search. And as soon as that is complete, closing will take place."

In May 1968 a delegation of members from the Building Committee of Post 25 met with the City Commissioners on Friday, April 19. Topic, Possibility of the Post purchasing city owned land to be used as a site for the new Post headquarters. The committee pointed out to the powers that be, that acquisition of private land for that purpose is well nigh impossible as vacant land is of private ownership, and of area large enough for our purposes is practically non-existent in New Brunswick.

The Home News had the following article, "On July 5, 1968, the state finally took position. Payment had been delayed because of the end of the state's annual

budget. Now that a new fiscal year had begun, payment was expected to be made shortly. The American Legion post would use the funds to relocate its headquarters from this historic building.

In February 1969 the Post was denied land for a suitable building site in New Brunswick. The Building Committee was reported to be so perturbed over city's refusal to help Post relocate in a decent setting that it is considering relocation out of town.

In early 1970, while they were still looking for a new headquarters location, Mike Puskus, who was the Finance Officer, mentioned that Post 25 had a financial balance of \$98,000.

The February Kilmer Report headlines were **LAND IN SIGHT!** "On Saturday, December 12, 1970, we signed a contract to purchase land on which to construct our new post headquarters. Although the future site of the new post home does not have direct frontage on Joyce Kilmer Avenue, we will have a twenty foot driveway leading to the main part of the property which begins at a point 200 feet from the avenue, and extends all the way back to the Pennsylvania Railroad. The new site is located directly opposite the Pantry Pride Shopping Center and sits on high ground overlooking Joyce Kilmer Avenue.

"The terms of the contract of sale call for final closing when the property has been subdivided, when a variance to build out new post home on the site has been obtained and when approval of the transfer of our club liquor license to the new premises has been granted.

The frustrations continue for the Building Committee. Reported in the October 1971 edition of the Kilmer Report, "Joyce Kilmer Post 25 suffered another frustrating blow in its long struggle to find a piece of land in New Brunswick on which to build a new post headquarters. The latest rebuff was in the form of the refusal of the New Brunswick Board of Adjustment to grant a subdivision on the parcel of land which the post was attempting to purchase. Without the sought after subdivision the plans for building could not be carried out. It means that the post must seek other land on which to build. The search must begin anew. The plot of land in question represented just about the last hope of the post for a site in New Brunswick.

"The Board of Adjustment gave as its reason for the turndown the belief that it did not want to create two odd sized lots. Testimony of post officials that the Board's granting of the subdivision was the last hope for Joyce Kilmer Pot 25 to remain in New Brunswick was not of sufficient import to the Board for reaching a decision favorable to the post. It ruled against the post.

"Because of this latest turndown by an official agency of the City of New Brunswick, much of the meeting of September 28 was devoted to a discussion of

moving out of New Brunswick. The Building Committee has a commitment as a result of a past vote to find land outside of New Brunswick if land could not be found in New Brunswick within a three month period. That time has long expired. The Building Committee has now been empowered to seek land outside of New Brunswick.

Then in the November 1971 edition of the Kilmer Report, the front page read **NOTICE – IMPORTANT - NOTICE**. “This is official notification that at the regular meeting of Tuesday, November 23 at 8:30 P.M., the following propositions will be voted on:

1. That Joyce Kilmer Post 25 of The American Legion of New Brunswick, N.J. merge with Perry Worthge Post 173 of Milltown, N.J. to form an American Legion Post to be known as Joyce Kilmer Post 25 of The American Legion of Milltown, N.J.
2. That the entire assets of Joyce Kilmer Post 25, American Legion of New Brunswick be combined with the entire assets of Perry Worthge Post 173 of The American Legion in Milltown, N.J. for the purpose of erecting a new building in Milltown, N.J. which shall be the headquarters of the proposed Joyce Kilmer Post 25, American Legion of Milltown, N.J.
3. That the officers of Joyce Kilmer Post 25, American Legion of New Brunswick, N.J. be empowered to take whatever steps as necessary to affect the proposed merger of Joyce Kilmer Post 25, The American Legion of New Brunswick, N.J. with Perry Worthge Post 173, The American Legion, Milltown, N.J. for the purpose of creating the Joyce Kilmer Post 25, American Legion of Milltown, N.J.

“Be it further known that this will be final and only notice to the membership regarding the above mentioned propositions.” This was signed by Frank Marrone – Commander and William J. Kaye, Adjutant.

At the regular meeting of November 23, 1971 the members present at the meeting voted by 37 to 11 to merge with the Perry Worthge Post 173 of Milltown to form a new post to be known as the Joyce Kilmer Post 25 of Milltown, NJ. On the same night the members of Perry Worthge Post 173 of Milltown voted to merge with Post 25 of New Brunswick for the purpose of forming the new Joyce Kilmer Post 25, The American Legion of Milltown, N.J.

A resolution to that effect was submitted to the County American Legion, who took it to a regular meeting of the Department of New Jersey Executive Committee of The American Legion on Saturday, December 18. The merger was approved by the Department of New Jersey American Legion. We are now awaiting the issuance of a new charter by the National Executive Committee of The American Legion. The merger of the two posts will be an established fact as soon as the new charter is issued.

Post 173, Milltown

American Legion Post 173, Department of New Jersey, was founded in Milltown, New Jersey, chartered on April 21, 1933. The post acquired its name, Perry Worthge, from members of two Milltown families of long standing were casualties of World War I. Spencer Perry was killed in battle of the Argonne in France and George Worthge fell to a fatal illness while in the service of his country.

Mr. Lefkowitz owned the land that is now the Post parking lot. The Borough of Milltown wanted to buy the vacant land he owned which is now the Post parking lot and land where the pavilion is located. They wanted to put in a shopping strip mall for commercial trade. Mr. Lefkowitz did not want that to occur in Milltown, so he approached the Post Executive Committee and said that he had this land and was willing to sell it to the Post for \$105,000 and no interest. Col. John Bradley and Past Post Commander Charlie Riva met with him and they worked out an agreement of paying Mr. Lefkowitz back over the following five years. He indicated that the Post could pay him back whatever amount they wanted on whatever basis they could handle.

Post 173 Auxiliary used to initially meet at different Unit member's homes and then they would meet at the Firehouse on Cottage Avenue.

The Post had dinners and many other fund raising activities to pay back the purchase of this land in three years. General Robert Wood Johnson, one of the Post members, donated \$1,000 to get the activity started.

Post 25, Milltown

The Home News reported On December 18, 1971, Post 25 and Post 173 merged into a single entity located in Milltown and the merged Post retained the number of 25. The Department of New Jersey American Legion was very interested in this merger, because this was the first time in New Jersey that there was any merger between two posts. They wanted to learn from this experience to see what worked and what did not work.

The May 1972 edition of the Kilmer Report had the following. "This is the first issue of the Kilmer Report to be mailed to the combined membership of Joyce Kilmer Post 25 formally of New Brunswick and Perry Worthge Post 173 of Milltown. From now on and forevermore we are all members of Joyce Kilmer Post 25 of Milltown. On behalf of the officers of Joyce Kilmer, Post 25 your editor wishes to extend a warm welcome to all out members whether they be in New Brunswick, Milltown or Oskosh. We welcome and urge your participation in all affairs of Post 25. Long may we prosper together."

The first merged Post 25 meeting (formally members from Post 25 and Post 173) met on May 23 at the Firehouse on Cottage Avenue in Milltown at 8:30 P.M.

Another article in the same edition reads **NEW BUILDING**. "As of this writing architects were working on plans for the new building for Post 25 in Milltown. As soon as the architects have the plans completed to the satisfaction of the Building Committee, the building permit will be applied for and away we go."

On July 3rd, 1972 the members of Post 25 did commence the building of the new post headquarters of Joyce Kilmer Post 25 of The American Legion on a peaceful street called John F. Kennedy Drive in a wonderful town called Milltown.

Joyce Kilmer Post 25 participated in the Fourth of July celebration in Milltown in 1972 for the first time. They were assigned the job of overseeing the fireworks. In addition they marched as a unit in the parade.

From July 3, 1972 through the Spring of 1974 many volunteer hours by many post members were spent on building the new post headquarters. Not going into great details about all the hard work that was executed, but almost every month, the Kilmer Report Editor, Bill Kaye, kept the entire membership up to date with all the step-by-step activities and expressed the need for more volunteers. He also kept asking for donations, especially from those members who had not donated a single cent toward the construction of the new beautiful post headquarters.

The June 1973 Edition of the Kilmer Report had the following update. **ALMOST COMPLETED**. "They did it. They did it. The dirty dozen plus some others. They have nearly completed the painting on the outside of the building, and a more professional job you could not buy. The dirty dozen I refer to are Addison Bradford, Richard Best, Bud Goodwin, Bill Kaye, Frank Marone, Rollin Rathbun Sr., Lew Panek, Charles Riva, Frank Toth, Charles Meisheid, John Bradley II, and David Miller. These twelve have put in the most time on the paint job. They were helped also by Frank Bobroski and Bill Jackson Jr., Uncle Tony Nasdeo chipped in with some preparation help while Joe Lindemann was always around to run the necessary errands. Bud Compton and Lauren Poulsen spent one Sunday afternoon applying a much needed asphalt coating on the inside. Our man in charge of plumbing, Frank Facchini was busy as usual in that department while Bill Thomson has kept busy on the electrical, Ronald Hastings, Mike Graci, and Bill Clay are credited for helping on the painting. As building chairman by hat's off to Addison Bradford, Bud Goodwin, Rollin Rathbun Sr., Frank Toth and Charles Riva. Of the dirty dozen on the painting they were the dirtiest and I mean that in a most complimentary sense of a word very hard to be complimentary with. Dick Best and John Bradley II and Chet Galbraith were not much cleaner. They all worked hard under trying conditions, heat and all. Hell, with workers like that we can't help but end up with the best damn American Legion post in the state of New Jersey. And lest I forget Dave Miller is working

on the construction of our new bar with the help of John Morrissey of Post 401. Let's drink to that."

Another article in the same edition read **AND THE CHOW**. "Those of you who failed to show for the paint details deserve to miss the good food served up by Ann Goodwin and Dorothy Goodwin. The best description I can think of is that we all went back for seconds. Nuff said."

At the regular meeting of June 26, 1973 the members present voted to name the main ballroom of our new building the Robert Wood Johnson Room in memory of the late illustrious member of Joyce Kilmer Post 25. As a result of this the Building Committee was determined to make this room as beautiful as possible in order to befit the memory of a great man. To that end they were calling on our membership to contribute as much as they can afford to truly make the Robert Wood Johnson Room of Post 25 a fitting tribute to the man who was a member of our post from 1948 to the time of his death.

The January 1974 Kilmer Report announced that the first affair in the new post home would be held on Saturday night March 2nd starting at 6:30 P.M. It is the annual Past Commanders and Past Presidents Dinner Dance and will be for the benefit of the post Building Fund.

Sources of regular income started shortly thereafter. Starting Friday night, May 3 at 8 P.M. and every Friday thereafter Joyce Kilmer Post 25 sponsored Bingo in the Robert Wood Johnson Room of the new post headquarters.

The long awaited dedication of our new building would take place on Saturday, August 24 and the schedule followed: 1:00 P.M. sharp – Ceremonies dedicating the new building will be held in front of the building. Following the dedication ceremonies a cocktail hour will be held in the first floor lounge until 3:00 P.M. At 6:30 P.M. – a dinner dance will be held in the Robert Wood Johnson Room of the new building. Tickets for the dinner dance will be on first come first served basis and will be limited in number. So be wise and get yours from your usual source as soon as possible. Members and their guests may attend all of the functions of the day. The price of the dedication dinner dance tickets will be twelve (\$12.00) dollars per person. It will include dinner, set up and dancing. This is an historical event for Post 25. Once again, be wise, get your tickets now. Chairman Frank Facchini has a crew of ticket sellers. If you have any problem on tickets you can call Frank. Frank Marrone, Commander Charles Riva and Nora Rathbun or any Auxiliary Officers also have tickets.

At that same time, it was announced that for those of our members who enjoy a refreshing drink now and then we are glad to report that at long last the bar is open to members and their guests. At the present time the hours will be restricted to the evening hours of 7 to 11 and as patronage builds up hopefully the hours of opening will be increased.

Over the course of many years, the Post home has had its troubles. One such incident was when it was noticed that the back end of the building was getting a lot of water seeping in from the ground. What they determined was that the water was running off the roof of the garage located on Main Street and backs up to the Post home. After the members approached the owner of the garage about this issue, he immediately installed gutters on his roof to redirect this runoff water to the driveway and not to the small space between the backs of the two buildings.

Memorial Park was the inspiration of Past Post Commander Bill Thomsom. When the time came for its dedication, the Post notified Dept. of this occasion and it just happened that the then National Commander was in New Jersey and they immediately planned on him being at the dedication ceremony. What a great three to have the National Commander of The American Legion at the dedication of our Memorial Park. Since that date, Memorial Park has been dedicated in the honor of Bill.

One bad incident was the fire in the bar/lounge area. Early one morning, a Post member entered the front of the post and immediately noticed the extreme heat in the post. He discovered that the ground floor was extremely hot, without flames, but immediately called the Fire Company. There was a lot of smoke damage in the downstairs. What was determined was that as they closed up the bar the night before, someone cleaned up an ashtray and poured the contents into a garbage can. There must have still been some lit embers which caused the garbage can to smolder all night, causing the smoke.

Starting in early December 2005 through January 2006, a team of active volunteers, lead by Richard Craparotta (Past Post Commander), renovated the upstairs hall. They lowered the ceiling around the edges, leaving the center ceiling in tact. They placed in new energy efficient lights in the ceiling and sconces around all four walls. They built in a new lights control panel, so we never have to go to the electric panel in the kitchen again. They cut in four large windows to let in preciously needed light in that lovely hall. We installed new, much smaller speakers for our PA system. We installed a 27" TV for viewing the next Bingo ball, removing the two smaller monitors. Finally, a chair rail was installed around the entire wall, plus painting the walls a very pale tan color. The final outcome brightened up the entire hall which has received many very favorable comments.

As we fill in some more of the history of Post 25, this section will be updated. Any information any member might have will be greatly appreciated. Please send those comments to Bob Richards at finance@post25.org so he can insure we retain all the historical events of Joyce Kilmer, Post 25, The American Legion, Dept. of N.J.