History of the Patriot Hall

Veterans Plaque

By Matthew Cox
After World War I ended with the signing of the armistice with Germany on November 11, 1918, Americans were in a very patriotic mood waiting for their troops to come home. Many didn’t come home for months or even years due to a lack of transportation. While waiting, they did various projects to help restore France. My Great Grandfather Andrew, helped build the Pershing Stadium in Paris. Over 10,000 soldiers were registered at the American Expeditionary Force University in 1919 at Beaune, France. Among them was Astorian Floyd Reith, who later returned to Astoria as an insurance agent. Another Astorian remaining for six months after the war was Dr. Otto Utzinger, Lt. Colonel – U.S. Army Medical Corps. His diary of his time spent in France was published by his son and nephew. He describes the battles, noise, living conditions, and treating the wounded at the battlefields, even some of the “Boches” as they called the German enemies.  

There were 32 soldiers from Clatsop County listed as World War I dead. Seven were killed in action, four died of wounds, and 21 died from disease, mainly pneumonia.

Patriotism and war stories were on peoples’ minds when the Astoria School District decided to build a new annex to the Astoria High School campus in 1921. They decided to dedicate it to the memory of the Clatsop County young men who gave their lives in defense of their country during the world war. “The matter was brought up by Charles A. Murphy, representing Clatsop Post American Legion. He said the memory of the men who had made the

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1 Clatsop County Historical Society Cumtux – Vol. 26, No. 1 – Winter 2006 
“Diary of a World War I Brain Surgeon”
"Otto E. Utzinger, Lt. Col., M.C., USA

2 The Daily Astorian – July 25, 2006 – Pages 1 & 12
“Doughboy Supporters Rise to the Occasion”
World War I Monument Re-Dedicated at Uniontown Ceremony”
“Doughboy: Restroom Has National Designation”
supreme sacrifice in support of liberty would be a testimonial of the honor and respect in which the memory of these men is held by the citizens of Astoria".3

"After some discussion, a committee consisting of Directors Halderman and Hoefler, was appointed to act with the American Legion in arranging the details of the proposed dedication. The committee was authorized to procure a suitable memorial tablet to be erected on the building and Director Hoefler said he would defray the expense".4

The national holiday called Armistice Day (now called Veterans Day) was first observed on November 11, 1921 all over the country and in Astoria. The body of the Unknown American Soldier had just been returned to America and was to be buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. on November 11, 1921. The whole country was to observe a moment of silence and respect at 11:00 AM Eastern time – 8:00 AM our Pacific time. Buglers from the Astoria American Legion played "Taps". This was the perfect day for the dedication of the plaque for Patriot Hall at Astoria High School. The ceremony was set for 10:30 AM under the direction of Clatsop Post of the American Legion.5

Despite the drizzle of the morning, hundreds of local people and school children attended the formal dedication of Patriot Hall, the new $75,600.00 annex to Astoria High School and the unveiling of the bronze memorial tablet. The committee from the Clatsop Post American Legion and the Charles H. Ambercrombie Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, as well as United Spanish War Veterans and other patriotic organizations occupied the stage.

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3 Astorian Budget – September 7, 1921 – Page 1
"Astoria Wardead To Be Honored In Annex Dedication"
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5 Astorian Budget – November 10, 1921 – Page 1
"Buglers Will Blow Taps in Astoria For Unknown Dead"
Rev. William S. Gilbert, who suggested the name Patriot Hall, delivered an impressive address about the true significance of Armistice Day “predicting an understanding between the civilized nations of the world that would banish wars for all times and result in nations settling international disputes without bloodshed”. Attorney Edward E. Gray stated that “patriotism in times of peace is equally important as in times of war”. The exercises opened with singing of “America” and Rev. Frederick Taylor of Grace Episcopal Church gave the prayer. The poem “In Flanders Field” by John McCrae was read by student, Sedoris Jordan. The words are as follows:

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie

In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.

If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders fields.

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6 Astorian Budget – November 12, 1921 – Page 1
“Hundreds See Hall Dedicated To All Clatsop Soldiers”
7 Astorian Budget – November 12, 1921 – Page 1
“Hundreds See Hall Dedicated To All Clatsop Soldiers”
8 The Best Loved Poems of the American People
Doubleday & Co., 1936
Little Miss Violet Kenney unveiled the bronze memorial tablet and Attorney Edward E. Gray officially dedicated it and the building with the words "In the name of the Astoria School District, in the name of the American Legion, and in the name of the good people of Astoria, I do now dedicate this new building, this annex, Patriot Hall, in honor and in the memory of the soldiers of Clatsop County. Long may it stand." Afterward, the people toured the new building, a model of construction and design of architecture, which will be used by the high school students. At noon, 150 ex-servicemen attended a luncheon at the Weinhard with L.R. Gilbert as Toastmaster. Entertainment included singing songs which were familiar in encampment, on transport, and on hikes along the roads in France during the war.

Now this treasured, historic, faded, tarnished plaque has hung on the outside north wall of Patriot Hall at Clatsop Community College on 16th Street in Astoria, Oregon, for 93 years. When voters passed a bond measure to remodel Patriot Hall in November, 2014, the plaque was removed. My Senior Project plan was to clean and restore the finish on the plaque and research its history. Then, in 2016, after the restoration of Patriot Hall is finished, the plaque will be re-hung in a prominent place and re-dedicated. I worked with Commander Dean Perez, National Guard Camp Rilea, Mr. Larry Galizio, President of Clatsop Community College and college staff members Ann Gyde and Greg Dorchus. I have completed my portion of the cleaning, leaving the patina as requested by the College Board of Directors. The words on the plaque are as follows:

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9 Astorian Budget — November 12, 1921 — Page 1
"Hundreds See Hall Dedicated To All Clatsop Soldiers"
THE LAST FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION

PATRIOT HALL

DEDICATED

IN HONOR OF

CLATSOP COUNTY

SOLDIERS OF ALL

WARS

PRESENTED BY

H.R. HOEFLER

The plaque features 16 stars and 13 stripes, made of bronze and is 3 feet wide by 3 feet 4 inches tall.

I was very honored and proud to have the opportunity to honor our veterans and preserve a piece of history. As former State Senator Joan Dukes was quoted as saying at a recent event, “In this community we don’t just look back on history, we create it every day. This is about the future of our country and keeping it free and passing it on to those who come after us”10. This is why I wanted to do this project.

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10 The Daily Astorian – July 25, 2006 – Pages 1 & 12
“Doughboy Supporters Rise to the Occasion”
“World War I Monument Re-Dedicated at Uniontown Ceremony”
“Doughboy: Restroom Has National Designation”
References:

Astorian Budget – September 7, 1921 – Page 1
“Astoria Wardead To Be Honored In Annex Dedication”

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The Best Loved Poems of the American People
Doubleday & Co., 1936

The Zephyrus (Astoria High School Yearbook)
“Patriot Hall” 1922 – Page 71
Photos of the building – 1926 – Page 2

The Daily Astorian – October 27, 2014 – Page 6A
“The Importance of Voting” by Larry Galizio

The Daily Astorian – July 25, 2006 – Pages 1 & 12
“Doughboy Supporters Rise to the Occasion”
“World War I Monument Re-Dedicated at Uniontown Ceremony”
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