



Town Gathers for Veterans Memorial Rededication

by Mathilda Gregory, Editor-in-Chief

This Veterans Day, years of effort by veterans groups in and around Hardy Falls paid off when the town council held a ceremony to rededicate the Hardy Falls Veterans Memorial monument, located in a small park in the historic Oak Park neighborhood. Sadly, the memorial had been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair over the past decade.

“I think we just lost track of it,” admitted Stanton Landis, head of the town council. “We’re glad that we were finally able to step up and make things right for our veterans.”

The memorial itself consists of a large bronze plaque engraved with a list of the names of those men and women from Hardy Falls who lost their lives serving their country. Under the bronze plaque is a large white boulder that Jefferson Hardy, who served with the American 82nd Airborne Division during the Normandy Invasion, shipped back from France after World War II.

“That thing must weigh a ton. Literally. I have no idea who he bribed or how he managed to get that hunk of rock back over here,” laughed Sadie Matthews, one of Mr. Hardy’s two surviving children. “But that was Dad.”

“Uncle Jeff was incredibly determined,” agreed Ronald Hardy, the son of Jefferson’s younger brother. “He always said that Normandy didn’t kill him, so he wasn’t going to let anything else stand in his way. If he wanted a piece of France, he darned well got a piece of France.”

And Jefferson Hardy got a piece of Hardy Falls, too.

Although he was the eldest of three, Jefferson Hardy had no desire to run the family business now known as Hardy Hardware and Building Supply, and the business passed to Mr. Ronald Hardy’s father, also named Ronald.

Jefferson went into real estate instead.

“After the war, the country was crazy building houses for vets,” said Ronald Hardy. “Uncle Jeff thought that was a great idea. He bought the old Clearbridge farm and turned it into a development specifically targeting the returning vets. The houses were smaller so they could afford them.”

And thus, the Oak Park neighborhood was born.

To cement the idea that this development would be a living memorial to veterans, Mr. Hardy named the streets after men and one woman from Hardy Falls who lost their lives serving the country in World War II.

“I grew up on Derstine Street,” said Police Chief Jackie Kline. “Named after Elwood Derstine, who died in the Battle of the Bulge.”

There are also streets named after Orrin Clark, Gertrude Horton (a nurse killed when her plane was shot down over Norway), Jerry O’Connell, Owen Murphy, Lester Webster, Jim Taylor, and Martin Chester.

When he saw how popular the new development was with veterans, Jefferson Hardy decided that the finishing touch would be a memorial monument. He reserved a small piece of land in the neighborhood to be a park and set the boulder he’d shipped from France in the center of it. He decided that the bronze plaque over the boulder should be engraved, not only with the names of those who died in World War II but those who had sacrificed their lives in other wars as well.

So the plaque was engraved with the names of people from Hardy Falls killed in wars in all branches of the military, going back to the founding of the town with the intention it would be added to as necessary.

“The list of names on the plaque was kept pretty much up to date until about ten years ago, but anybody who died in active duty since then didn’t have their names added,” said Joe Horton, resident of Hardy Falls and an Army vet. “We were able to get that fixed.”

After the veterans groups finally got through to the town council, the memorial was updated at long last, all of the landscaping was replaced, and plans for future maintenance were set in place.

The rededication ceremony for the memorial was held, fittingly enough, on Veterans Day at 11:11 a.m.

Representatives of the veterans groups who spearheaded the revitalization effort, current active duty servicemen and women, and other townspeople from Hardy Falls descended on the Oak Park neighborhood for speeches, memories, and music. Also attending were family members of the fallen who returned to town from all over the country.

“My father would be so proud,” said Sadie Matthews, who had traveled from Chicago with her son and daughter-in-law to be at the ceremony. “He’ll be happy that the neighborhood is still flourishing, and even more, that the memorial is still here and still important.”

“I knew a lot of the people who have their names engraved on that plaque,” said Albert Cromwell, an Army vet. “And I knew a lot of the people who have their names on the street signs in this neighborhood.”

“We’ll keep on top of things from now on,” promised Mr. Landis. “These men and women belong to Hardy Falls, and Hardy Falls will honor them.”

We will remember. And to all of the veterans reading this, we thank you for your service.