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OHS Quarterly

Occoquan Historical Society (OHS)

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New Handmade Door for the Mill House Museum

As regular visitors to the Mill House Museum may have noticed, a great many interior renovations have taken place in the museum building over the past few months. One of them, the removal of a closet and its replacement with a historic post office window display, is discussed elsewhere in this newsletter. But one of the varied renovations is also partly an exterior renovation, namely, the installation of a new historically-appropriate entrance door to the museum.

Designed, constructed, and installed by Occoquan resident and craftsman, Michael Mannherz, the door is not only functional, but a work of art in itself. Over a period of several



months, Mr. Mannherz sourced the wood, acclimated it appropriately to the museum environment, cut and joined the pieces into the door shape, stained it, incorporated carefully-selected hardware, and then installed the door along with a new doorframe.

Made from Eastern white oak, the door is designed to reflect what the mill house entrance might have looked like during the heyday of the mill complex.

Also, during installation staff noticed a charred beam that may be attributable to the fire of 1924 that destroyed what remained of the mill complex. We plan to leave that charred section open to public viewing.

Stop by the museum and check out our new entrance door.

Occoquan Historical Society Annual Board Meeting

The annual membership meeting of the Occoquan Historical Society will take place on Thursday, June 11, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. at the Occoquan Town Hall, located at 314 Mill Street. All current members of the Occoquan Historical Society are eligible to participate in the annual meeting either in person or remotely via Zoom. A formal notice of the meeting will be sent via email to all members at least 10 days prior to the meeting in accordance with the bylaws of the society. Members who wish to participate remotely are asked to respond to the notice email with a return email indicating that they wish to participate remotely. They will then receive a Zoom meeting invitation prior to the meeting date.

The primary business item is the election of the members of the board of directors for two-year terms that will begin on July 1, 2026.

In accordance with the society's bylaws, a nominating committee is nominating the following individuals to serve on the board of directors: **Bob Love, Earnie Porta, Dolores Elder, Olivia McDaniel, Gillian Gonzalez, Zoe Vitter, and Alexis Wright**. Nominations from the floor may also be made at the meeting. Officers will be elected from the board at the July 2026 meeting of the board.

Identifying Occoquan's Veterans of World War I

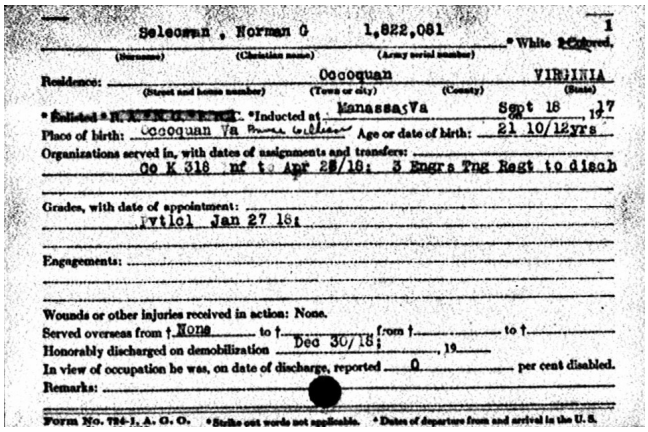
The Town of Occoquan currently has no formal memorial that recognizes town veterans of the First World War. Consequently as a first step toward creating such a memorial, last fall the Occoquan Historical Society began a research project centered on identifying these veterans. Numerous databases now available made a search far more manageable than it would have been just a decade ago, yet some basic challenges remained before we could identify and learn some of the story behind these individuals.

One challenge was answering the threshold question of deciding who, in fact, should be considered an "Occoquan" veteran of WWI. Did they have to live in the town when they were drafted or enlisted? What if they were born and raised in the town, but moved shortly before entering the service? Or what if they only lived most of their lives *after* the war in the town of Occoquan?

Ultimately, we decided to characterize a veteran of WWI as an "Occoquan" veteran if they fit into one of three categories: (1) they were born and lived for an extended time in town, (2) they lived in town at the time of draft registration, induction, or enlistment, or (3) they resided in the town in 1920 (according to the census) after having served.

The second challenge involved the surprising number of references to Occoquan in various types of military records related to World War I. For example, the search of a database of WWI draft cards with the term "Occoquan" generates almost 2,500 entries, far beyond the number that could be associated with a town population at the time of only a few hundred. Detailed investigation resulted in a variety of explanations for this high number. In some instances, a parent of the potential draftee lived in Occoquan. Some individuals were actually associated not with the town of Occoquan but with the Occoquan Workhouse in Fairfax County, typically as an employee of the prison complex. In other cases, individuals lived in unincorporated areas of southeastern Fairfax County and simply put Occoquan as the city for their address, while others actually received their mail at the Occoquan post office, but lived elsewhere.

Add to this that WWI draft cards were but one source that required detailed investigation. Others included the Virginia Department of Military Records, military transport records, muster roles, war service files, and genealogical studies. The 1930 census was also useful insofar as it asked individuals whether or not they were veterans. In fact, with regard to the last, there were a few individuals in the town of Occoquan at the time who answered that question affirmatively, but for whom we could find no other records to indicate that they had either served in the miliary or registered for the draft.



Selecman , Norman G 1,822,081 1
(Surname) (Christian name) (Army serial number) * White Colored.

Residence: Occoquan VIRGINIA
(Street and house number) (Town or city) (County) (State)

* Enlisted * N. A. N. G. U. S. * Inducted at Manassas Va Sept 18 1917

Place of birth: Occoquan Va Age or date of birth: 21 10/12yrs

Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers:
Co K 318 inf to Apr 28/18; 3 Engrs Trg Regt to disch

Grades, with date of appointment:
Pvt1cl Jan 27 18;

Engagements:

Wounds or other injuries received in action: None.

Served overseas from † None to † from † to †

Honorably discharged on demobilization Dec 30/18; 19

In view of occupation he was, on date of discharge, reported 0 per cent disabled.

Remarks:

Form No. 724-I, A. G. O. *Strike out words not applicable. †Dates of departure from and arrival in the U. S.

Norman G. Selecman Service Record

Combing through the various databases with so many Occoquan references thus required the use of a variety of parameters to identify appropriate individuals. Searches typically included looking for "Occoquan, Prince William" as some databases included entries for "Occoquan, Fairfax," and since the United States entered WWI in April of 1917, we used 1917 +/- 2 years as the data range for the military records. Those two parameters generated approximately 270 possible candidates.

After that is when more powerful reading glasses and screen zooms became critical to the analysis, for at that point we decided to take the 1910 census and go through every line for the town of Occoquan (careful to distinguish the town from the Occoquan magisterial district) and identify every male who would have been between the ages of 18 and 45 when the United States implemented a draft[1] — in other words, every male in the census who would have been between the ages of 10 and 37 in the census.

Occoquan had 246 entries in the 1910 census and review of the individual entries indicates that 50-60 individuals may have been eligible for the draft and/or filled out draft registration cards. This is still only an estimate because of difficulties in counting and reading ages, and the need to recognize that people could have moved in or out of Occoquan between the time of the 1910 census and the draft in 1917/18. The number seems reasonable, however,

Identifying Occoquan's Veterans of World War I (cont'd)

since a figure of 60 individuals represents 25% of Occoquan's 1910 population and is close to the 23% figure for draft eligibility for the country as a whole.

Even at this point, some difficulties in determining residency remained. An individual named Lewis Roane, for example, sometimes shows up as being an Occoquan veteran of WWI. Careful analysis of his address, however, seems to indicate that he lived just outside of town on what was then referred to as Woodbridge Road. Another individual, William Deardorf, also lists Occoquan as his home address in one document (he was in Gettysburg at the time he was drafted), but it seems clear from other records that he and his family actually lived in Fairfax County.

After cross-referencing the various databases and source materials, and applying the relevant criteria, it appears that 3 individuals from Occoquan enlisted and 12 were drafted during World War I. Of those 15 individuals, 7 of them served overseas, including all 3 African-Americans who were drafted. A chart that follows provides a breakdown.

Of the 15 Occoquan residents that enlisted or were drafted, there was only one casualty, and it was of an individual who was not sent overseas. This unfortunate draftee was Malvern Varyer. He was born in Occoquan on September 6, 1890, and in 1910 was living on Elizabeth Street (what is now the driveway for Rockledge) with his parents. Varyer was drafted into Company I of the 38th Infantry and sent to Camp Greene in Mecklenburg, North Carolina. The camp suffered a major outbreak of the Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 and other sicknesses like cerebrospinal meningitis and measles. Hundreds in the camp died, and Malvern Varyer was one of them, passing away on January 11, 1918, from pleurisy.

Research on Occoquan WWI Veterans
As of November 16, 2025
Earnie Porta, PhD

Table of Occoquan WWI Veterans

Enlisted	**Sent Overseas**
Leo Elmer Beach	No
Thomas F. Joyce	Yes
John S. Powell	No
Drafted	**Sent Overseas**
Clifford Harry Beach	No
Winston W. Beach	No
Reed Hynson/Hornbaker	No
Jessie Douglas Janney	Yes
Charles F. Milstead	Yes
Leary Pinkard	Yes
Norman Selecman	No
Malvern Varyer	No
Webster White/Whyte	Yes
Phillip Williams	Yes
Robert A. Woodyard	Yes
William F. Woodyard	No
African-Americans Drafted (subset of above)	**Sent Overseas**
Leary Pinkard	Yes
Webster White	Yes
Phillip Williams	Yes

One of Occoquan's more experienced soldiers was Thomas F. Joyce, an Irish immigrant who joined the Marine Corps in 1900, became a naturalized citizen, and lived in the town of Occoquan in 1920 as a renter while still in the Corps. He lived here again soon after his retirement in 1935 until his death in 1966.

Joyce was not sent to Europe during WWI, but his overseas experience with the Corps was vast. Originally enlisting as a private, he served on the *USS Tacoma* and then, after being promoted to corporal, on the *U.S. Flagship Brooklyn.* Later promoted to sergeant he was sent to the Panama Canal Zone. By the time of WWI he was a sgt. major and then was discharged from the service to accept a commission as a marine gunner (the first warrant officer rank in the Marine Corps during WWI). Eventually promoted to captain, during WWI he was sent to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and given command of the 9th Marine Regiment. After the war in the 1920s he was involved in various Marine actions in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua. Retiring in Occoquan, he lived on Mill Street, and upon passing away in 1966, was buried in Pohick Episcopal Church Cemetery.

As mentioned earlier, all three of the African-American Occoquan residents drafted were sent overseas. One of them, Leary Pinkard, was born on February 26, 1890, in Occoquan. His family lived on Washington Street, according to the 1910 census, but by the time of draft registration in 1917, Leary had moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where he was working as a porter at the famous Kaufmann's Big Store. There, on June 21, 1918, he was inducted, and as part of the August Automatic Replacement Draft[2] was assigned to the 4th Company of the Colored 802 Pioneer Infantry Regiment.

This unit was a segregated

Identifying Occoquan's Veterans Of World War I (cont'd)

construction labor unit deployed to build roads and railroads. After September 17, 1918, however, Pinkard served with Company E of the 372 Infantry Regiment until his discharge. This company was a famous unit, part of the 93rd Division of the U.S. Army, one of only two specially created all-black combat units under the command of white officers. When it arrived in Europe, the 372nd Regiment was seconded to the 157th Infantry Division of the French Army (known as the "Red Hand Division"), which needed reinforcements. Although his war record lists no engagements, Pinkard would have joined in time for the regiment's actions in the Champagne-Marne region and the Meuse-Argonne offensive—the final and decisive allied advance of the war, which cost the 372nd Infantry regiment about a third of its strength in killed and wounded. Among multiple awards, the regiment received the Croix de Guerre, France's highest military honor.

After the war, Pinkard returned to Pittsburgh, where he died at age 37. He is buried in Mt. Olive Baptist Cemetery in Woodbridge, Virginia.[3]

These are but a sampling of the stories of individuals from Occoquan who served in the military during WWI. At some point in the future we hope to be able to recognize them more formally in the town for future generations.— *E. Porta*

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[1] The first draft was limited to ages 21-30, but later moved to 18-45. Virtually all draftees went into the Army, though the Marines did take some out of the country's overall military conscription. The Navy did not accept draftees.

[2] This draft was a specialized conscription program implemented by the U.S. in 1918. Pre-organized units of men were sent to the front lines to serve as replacements for casualties, so that frontline units would not have to be dissolved and reorganized as a result of combat losses.

[3] Both Pinkard's age and his unit number appear to be incorrect on his grave marker. The former is explained by his age being listed incorrectly on his death certificate, while the company designation does not match military records.

Historic Post Office Display

The Occoquan Historical Society's Mill House Museum at 413 Mill Street closed for the month of January to undergo some renovations, collection inventory, and cleaning. Return visitors to a now re-opened museum will notice a number of changes, perhaps the most striking of which is the restored and remounted historic post office window and sign. Previously tucked away behind some display cases and storage items, and blocking an exterior window, the post office display now sits unencumbered in full view of the public. Staff have cleaned the item, repaired the glass, and mounted it in attractive and accessible fashion, with mail slots that include some historic post cards and other postal items from Occoquan's past.

Occoquan's first postmaster was Bernard Gilpin, who was appointed on October 1, 1808, followed by well-known Occoquan resident and businessman Nathaniel Ellicott on September 1, 1810. Historically, post offices in the United States used to switch locations frequently. A new postmaster, for example, once appointed, might move the town's post office from a town hotel to a general store that they operated. This was the case for much of Occoquan's history, with the site of the town post office moving among various private homes and businesses.

Our current post office at 202 Mill Street opened in 1969. The post office window box on



Post office at 304 Mill Street

display in the Mill House Museum was donated by Bine Cross and comes from the immediate predecessor to our current post office. This earlier office was located at 304 Mill Street, where Potomac Chocolate is now, and was allegedly built by John Leary sometime in the late 1920s or early 1930s as the town's first post office building. It stood between what was once Leary's Mercantile Store at 302 Mill Street (later Leary Lumber Company, Blackbeard's Seafood Restaurant, the Golden Goose, Urban Posh, and now Curate), and Wayland's Grocery at 306 Mill Street (later Jennings' Drug Store and now Jerry's Occoquan Jewelers).

Although brought to us from that first post office building, our window box in the Mill House Museum apparently pre-dates even that structure. Isabel Beach was named postmistress in 1904 followed by Lee Beach in 1914 and our window box was apparently used for the post office at the Beach family home at 206 Commerce Street. Charles Pierce took over as postmaster in 1920 and operated the

Post Office (Cont'd)

post office out of 307 Mill Street and later out of Slack's Funeral Home at 301 Union Street. When John Leary built the post office where Potomac Chocolate is today, Pierce took our post office window box with him to the new site.

If you get a chance, stop by to see the new display.— *E. Porta*



New Display

Mill House Museum News

The Mill House Museum reopened to our normal operating schedule in February. While the weather kept many people from visiting during those first weeks of bitter cold, our numbers returned to normal as soon as the temperatures did.

We have had a busy spring at the Museum so far: we welcomed about 6,500 people since the season began. In addition to our normal operations, we extended hours and had popup activities and exhibits for the Swords, Brooms & Magical Beasts event in March and the Town's Shad Run in April. We also extended hours to welcome all the "peepers" during the Peep Show.

We started a new program called "Mornings at the Museum" in March. Staff opens the museum early two Mondays each month to welcome children who aren't in school, for story time and activities that are centered around a changing theme.

The Mill House Book Club continues to meet every other month. The next meeting of the Mill House Book Club is on July 5 at 4:00 p.m. at the Museum, and the book is "Code Girls" by Liza Mundy. You can sign up for that, catch up on other things we're doing at the Museum, or check out our fantastic videos filled with historical information on Instagram!

During the third quarter we were also fortunate to welcome a number of new sponsors. These include Platinum Sponsor, **Gillian Gonzallez**, and Gold Sponsors, **Walter Seiberling** and **Cindy Fithian**. We thank them for their support.

Occoquan Historical Society

Mill House Museum

413 Mill Street,
PO Box 65
Occoquan, VA 22125

Free Admission

Open Thursday thru Tuesday
11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

millhousemuseum@gmail.com
www.occoquanhistoricalsociety.org
Instagram: millhousemuseum

The Occoquan Historical Society (OHS) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization founded in 1969 and dedicated to telling the story of the town of Occoquan, Virginia.

OHS operates the Mill House Museum, an historic structure containing an eclectic collection of documents, photographs, and other artifacts related to the town's history. Over 400 items are catalogued and many of these are on permanent display. Admission to the museum is free Thursday through Tuesday weekly from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. We hope you will consider dropping by.