



# The Association of Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia

*Welcoming Young & Old Alike to Join in Remembering the Past and Working for an Even Better Future*

***The District's Oldest Historic Organization –  
Founded December 7, 1865 – Our 155<sup>th</sup> Year!***

***Bulletin #163  
Fall 2020***

## ***Letter from the President***

Dear AOI Members,

On January 1, 2020, many of us gathered at the Capitol Skyline Hotel to share a festive New Year's Day brunch and the companionship of more than seventy-seven of our fellow AOI members. Who among us present that morning could have predicted the events we have been witness to since then? You're probably familiar with the ancient Chinese curse, "may you live in interesting times," it's certainly true for this year: what an "interesting time" we are living in!

But this is not the first time that Washingtonians have faced assault from a deadly disease: many of us heard tales from our parents or grandparents of the great influenza epidemic that ravaged the nation's capital in 1918-1919, taking the lives of almost 3,000 residents. Accounts from those days will seem almost eerily familiar if you follow the 2020 Corona pandemic in Washington: stay-at-home orders, schools and churches closed, hospitals overwhelmed. Fortunately, we have the benefit of a century of medical and scientific progress and access to communications options that keep us informed and entertained as we wait for the crisis to pass. Theodore W. Noyes was President of the Association of Oldest Inhabitants of the District of Columbia in 1918-1919, a position he held from 1908 through his death in 1946. As head of the Board of Directors of *The Evening Star*, he was undoubtedly well informed on the progress of the influenza epidemic, news which he certainly shared with fellow AOI members.

Today, your Board of Directors is in the same boat, except that in addition to

## **November's Luncheon Event**

**"Annual Membership Meeting & Elections"**



***SAVE THE DATE: Friday, Nov. 20, 2020***

A postcard reminder or newsletter will confirm details



newspapers, we have television, the internet, and all manner of hand-held devices to stay informed. As soon as the extent of the Covid threat became apparent, the Board made the safety and well-being of our members our first priority. With great regret, we postponed our spring luncheon meetings and the first two of our fall programs.

Now, the Board has tentatively scheduled Friday, November 21 for our next meeting. We'll renew "auld acquaintance" and share good company, but rather than having a speaker, the Board wants to hear from you – the members of AOI. We want to know what you like about the association, and what you don't like; what works and what could be made to work better, and most important, your thoughts on the future of this venerable organization. All this depends on the state of the District in November, so, keep your fingers crossed, and give some consideration to the best way forward for Washington's oldest civic association.

Thomas H. Neale  
August 10, 2020

## Future Meetings...

The AOI's 155<sup>th</sup> Year -- Meeting dates and tentative speakers:

Jan. 1, 2021 – Annual New Year's Day Brunch/Event (Tentative)

Feb 17, 2021 – To Be Announced

March 17, 2021 – To Be Announced

April 16, 2020 – To Be Announced

NOTE: All meeting subjects and speakers have been invited to appear, but nevertheless are tentative.

Remember: No luncheon meetings July/August nor December/January

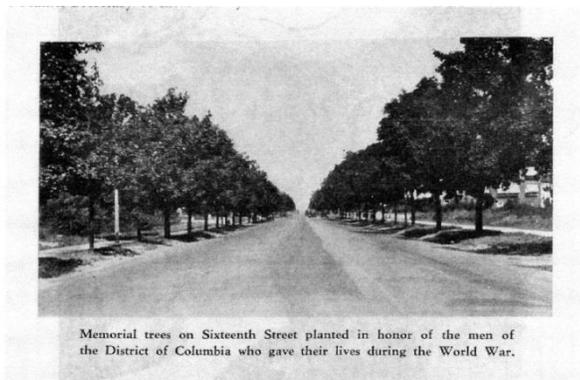
Note: The Board of Directors meets at the Heurich House Museum at 10 a.m. on the Monday immediately prior to a scheduled luncheon meeting.

Be Advised: In case of inclement weather call AOI at **202-342-1865** for last minute recorded information.



## The 16<sup>th</sup> Street World War Memorial

### Trees and Markers *by Barbara Bates*



Memorial trees on Sixteenth Street planted in honor of the men of the District of Columbia who gave their lives during the World War.

The American Legion planted the first Memorial Tree on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, NW on Memorial Day 1920. Soon it was followed by 506 other Norway Maple trees planted on 2.3 miles of 16<sup>th</sup> Street between Alaska and Varnum Streets, NW to honor the men and women of the District of Columbia (DC) who died in service to their country in the Great War. A small concrete post was planted along the side of each tree standing 6 inches above the ground with a copper plate embedded on top with the name of each veteran. On February 6, 1922, another 23 trees and posts were added. The only known photo of this Memorial is from a February 1932 issue of *American Forests* (as shown above).

What a beautiful and colorful sight this must have been when the trees were grown and formed a canopy along 16<sup>th</sup> Street. During the first several years flags and poppies were set next to the trees on Decoration Day. Then articles began appearing in the newspapers over the neglect and destruction of this once stately Memorial. Even though today the Norway Maple is considered invasive and could not be replaced, it was used as a street tree then and must have been a remarkable tribute to these men and women.



**Only two of the original markers remain along 16<sup>th</sup> Street and one is preserved in Council Chair Mendelson's office.**

For the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, members of the Association of the Oldest Inhabitants (AOI) gathered to honor this Memorial. Council Member Phil Mendelson attended and read the Ceremonial Resolution passed by the DC Council on May 4, 2010 acknowledging the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World War I 16<sup>th</sup> Street Memorial Trees. At that time, President Bill Brown called for a formal recognition that the Memorial existed by placing signage at Alaska and Varnum Streets in time for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. Many of us had hoped funds would be made available for this effort but they were not.

On May 26, 2020, a well-researched article on World War I by Krista Long, Executive Director of the University Club Foundation, was sent out over the History Listserv. It included the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Tree Memorial and her disappointment that there was no acknowledgement of this memorial on its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary; she gave credit to AOI for promoting such recognition. I responded to the e-mail indicating regret also. I proposed that there was still an opportunity for such acknowledgement in time for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 23 additional trees on February 6, 2022. I

have since e-mailed her article to several organizations and individuals encouraging work on waysides telling the history and listing the names on the Memorial.

I have contacted the ANC and citizens associations along that area of 16<sup>th</sup> Street and hope to meet with them in person when it is safe to do so. It is possible that some form of recognition might be done through them with help from the National Park Service that owns much of the land on one side of the street. In preparation for such a meeting, I pondered what would be key points for this. I already knew that 8 of the 10 women veterans were honored on 16<sup>th</sup> Street. I then realized that another untold story was that of the African American heroes who served their country so valiantly in World War I. Everyone has heard of the 369<sup>th</sup> Harlem Hell Fighters and New York City even gave them a parade when they first returned from the war. But what about DC's own National Guard who served in the 372<sup>nd</sup> Infantry and others that fought so valiantly in France? I am working on that paper now and have located 61 African Americans on both DC War Memorials and 41 were honored on the Tree Memorial. Bill Brown has entered this information on who these men were on The District of Columbia War Dead, 1917-1919 available on the AOI web site. This paper when completed will also be placed on the AOI web site. I look forward to telling their stories as best I can. As the title of one reference indicates "Black Soldiers Mattered."



## The District of Columbia's Forgotten Women Veterans of World War I

by Bill Brown

Ten of the first women veterans of World War I are honored on the District of Columbia War Memorial or Tree Memorial. Four of those women were buried in Washington, DC. Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels had found that he could hire "persons" therefore women to replace the men at home so they could go overseas to fight in the war. These women received the same pay as the men in those positions and were entitled to veteran benefits. The Red Cross recruited and hired the nurses for the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy Nurses Corps.

The four District of Columbia women veterans were never recognized by the Veterans Administration to receive the familiar traditional white marble government headstones. AOI Director Maggie Hobbs spent an exhausting amount of time trying to convince the Veterans Administration of the bonafides of these nurses and administrative workers. Eventually, the VA relented and accepted Maggie's and Barbara Bates' research and provided a stone for **Pauline Marie Everett Lawrence** (1899-1918), Landsman for

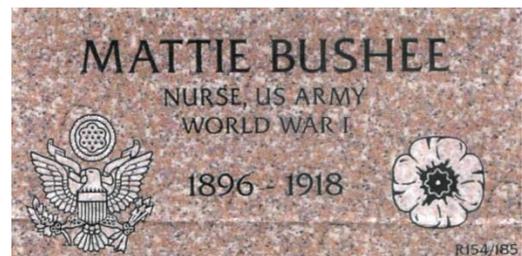
Yeoman (Female), US Naval Reserve Force who is interred at Mount Olivet cemetery in an unmarked grave adjacent to her family. (see photo)

The other three women who lacked proper recognition are all buried at Congressional Cemetery... two in completely unmarked graves and another, **Bertha Ryan Hayes** (1899-1918), Yeoman, 2<sup>nd</sup> CI, US Navy Reserve Force who is in a marked grave with her brother William but it lacks any indication that she served her country during World War I. The AOI is continuing to work with Congressional Cemetery to identify and install a small marker detailing her service which will be placed next to their headstone.

The AOI has purchased granite in-ground plaques for the two remaining veterans: **Mattie Virginia Bushee** (1896-1918), Nurse, Army Nurse Corps and **Blanche Eleanor Ridgely Pierce** (1889-1918), Landsman for Yeoman (Female), US Naval Reserve Force. (see below) We look forward to a public unveiling/dedication at some future date when the current pandemic has been resolved.



Pauline M. Everett Lawrence's headstone at Mount Olivet Cemetery.



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*Address Correction Requested*

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This Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and Washington History Center are currently closed due to the pandemic.



Limited research can be conducted via the HSW web site at [www.dchistory.org](http://www.dchistory.org).



**The Heurich House Museum is the former home of the Historical Society of Washington and served as AOI's headquarters from 1956 until 2003.**