

## Written in Stone

by Lynne Belluscio

The Historical Society is preparing an exhibit on World War 1 that will open Memorial Day weekend. Part of the exhibit will focus on “LeRoy’s Twelve” - the eleven men and one woman who died in service to their country during the war. Plans are well underway, to raise funds to place a granite stone on Trigon Park near the soldiers’ monument on November 11 – the 100th anniversary of Armistice Day. The stone will be dedicated to those who served, and will include the names of those who died. The research has been extensive, and continues as we add more information.

A massive amount of work has been done by Terry Krautwurst, who has spent years researching Genesee County’s men and women. So in anticipation of the dedication of the monument in November, I wondered if we could locate direct descendants of “LeRoy’s Twelve.” We went to Terry Krautwurst’s files in the archives and identified John Wilder who had two children at the time of his death.

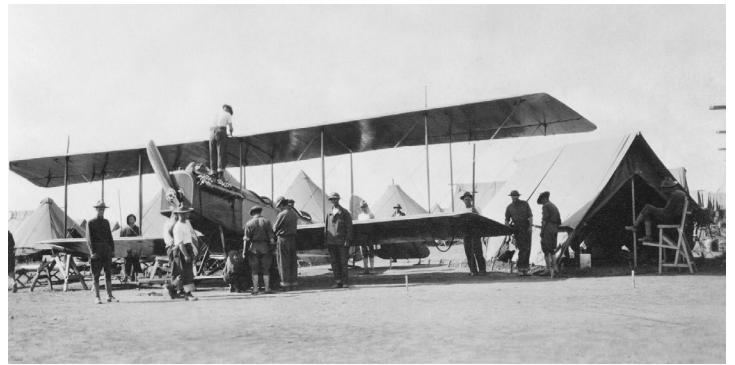
John Randall Wilder was born in LeRoy on August 5, 1890. His father was Frank Wilder, a farmer. His mother, Emma Randall, died when John was six. In 1909, John married Belle Verney of LeRoy and they had two daughters, Ruth and Dorothy. John was working on the Buffalo, Rochester and Pittsburgh Railroad as a fireman and the family lived on Richmond Road. Then, on July 20, 1915, John’s family was in a tragic railroad accident on the way home from a church picnic at Horseshoe Lake. John’s daughters were injured as well as his mother-in-law, but his wife Belle was killed. Two years later when war broke out, John registered for service and enlisted in Rochester in the aviation branch of the U.S. Signal Corps. He proceeded to Fort Slocum, New York, and then was assigned to the 50th Aero Squadron and was sent to San Antonio, Texas for training at Kelly Field. John’s mechanical abilities were put to good



*Both of these photos were taken at Kelly Field in Texas where John Wilder was stationed and learned how to service the Curtiss “Jenny” airplanes that were to be used in Europe.*

use and he was promoted to the rank of sergeant. In December 1917, he wrote a letter home to his aunt which was printed in the December 19, 1917 LeRoy Gazette. “I passed my final exams last Wednesday and am now rated as a Zenith Carburetor (sic) expert and have won a promotion to second class sergeant and will wear on arriving in France three stripes on my arm.” He considered his unit as “the finest squadron ever in Kelley Field” and continued to write that they would be leaving for New York and then set sail for France. John fell ill on the way to New York and was sent to the U.S. Army General Hospital No 2 at Fort McHenry in Baltimore. He died of pneumonia on January 11. His body was returned to LeRoy and he was buried in Machpelah Cemetery on January 16. With his wife dead, his two daughters became orphans, but it appears that they were raised by their maternal grandparents, the Verneys. So the question we asked ourselves - - what happened to the two girls, Ruth and Dorothy?

The search was on. Last Friday, Elizabeth Bolton who works in the Jell-O Gallery when she isn’t teaching, started to look on the internet. First, she had to find out if the girls were married. It is difficult to trace



daughters. Luckily she found an article in the LeRoy Gazette, that noted that both girls had inherited money and their married names were listed - - Dorothy Wilder Dryer of Rochester and Ruth Wilder Secord of Ann Arbor Michigan. Tracing Dorothy Wilder Dryer, Elizabeth discovered that Dorothy lived in Irondequoit. With a little more sleuthing, and a lot of luck, Elizabeth discovered Dorothy’s daughter who would be John Wilder’s granddaughter. And then she discovered Dorothy’s granddaughter - - John’s great granddaughter, Ann. And there was a phone number. So I decided to call. “My name is Lynne Belluscio. I am the director of the LeRoy Historical Society and we are trying to locate the descendants of John Randall Wilder, who died during World War 1 and is buried in LeRoy. We think you might be his great granddaughter. Does that ring

a bell?” And sure enough – we found John Wilder’s descendant. I felt like I was filming “Finding Your Roots.” She also told me that her sister has done a lot of genealogy which we hope to add to the files. Her mom is still alive and they have contact with their cousins who are descended from John Wilder’s other daughter Ruth. In the next couple of days, we hope to exchange information and in the meantime, I have invited her and her family to LeRoy on November 11th, for the commemoration of the World War 1 monument. A more detailed article about John Wilder and his descendants and “the rest of the story” will be included in the next Historical Society newsletter.

The two little girls were raised by their grandfather, Charles Verney on Richmond Road.