

Kittie McPherson

by Lynne Belluscio

If you're not headed off to the lake to open up the cottage or taking the kids camping over Memorial Day weekend, and you have a hour or two on Saturday morning, we could use a little help putting out the 400 flags at Machpelah Cemetery.

It's one of those jobs that makes you feel good, knowing that those military men and women who offered their lives to preserve our country for future generations, are being recognized for their service. It may seem like a small token of recognition, but when you see all the flags, you realize that LeRoy's contribution to the armed forces was not a small token.

Over the years, through many wars, LeRoy has given our best. For each flag there is a story. For each story there is a face. For each face there is a family. Over the past several years, as we go through the roll call, we have tried to add a few more stories and a little more information about the people who we are commemorating.

Although Catherine McPherson is buried in Stone Church, not in Machpelah, I discovered her story today when one of her family came in to do genealogical research. He was amazed to see that we had her photograph. She was born on September 24, 1872. Her parents were Donald and Sarah Farnham McPherson and she had two sisters, Mary and Imogene and two brothers, Alex and Donald. Her father died when she was fifteen.

According to the Ingham files, a Kittie McPherson attended school in 1888, but it is not certain whether it is Catherine. At some point, Kittie became a nurse and in July 16, 1919, the *LeRoy Gazette* printed a story about her experiences in the Red Cross during World War I. In our files is her war record signed by Lt.

Col. Caldwell, Surgeon General of the U.S. Army.

Kittie was assigned to active duty with the Army Nurse Corps on April 15, 1918 and first served at Base Hospital at Camp Meade in Maryland. She left for Europe for the Atlantic Division A.E.F., sailing on the English ship *Carmania* at the height of the submarine war in the Atlantic.

The division landed in Liverpool and were received by a huge crowd and a musical band. They crossed the English Channel to LeHavre and then on to Blois just before the Battle of Chateau Thierry. Casualties were so great, that the nurses moved their suitcases out of their tents and used their beds for soldiers. There still wasn't enough room and many soldiers were left on litters in the out of doors.

Shortly after she was assigned to Camp 25, joining other nurses from Base Camp 38. This hospital camp was so large it was equipped with X-ray equipment. On leave at her home on Summit Street, she recounted that "After long hours on duty it was very depressing to hear long motor trains passing all night on their way to the front, and to see the boys marching by with their heavy packs a few dropping out from illness and weariness, but most of them cheering the Red Cross nurses and singing "I don't want to get well." The nurses cheering and calling good luck after them. During the pneumonia and influenza epidemic this camp had 2,200 cases, the hospital having a capacity for 1,500, consequently many were on litters on the floor."

According to her war record, she was paid \$15.00 per month. When she returned home after the end of the war, she was assigned to Walter Reed Hospital. While serving at Walter Reed, she apparently became sick with



influenza and was hospitalized for anemia for a month.

In April 1920, she was relieved from active duty. Not much is known about her life after she returned home. She never married and was a registered nurse at Buffalo General Hospital. I was told, that as a result of the suffering and tragedy that she witnessed during the War, she converted to Catholicism, having

worked alongside many nuns and Catholic nurses.

She died in 1967 at the Rest Haven Nursing Home in Batavia and the service was held at St. Peter's Church. She is buried in Stone Church Cemetery. I might just drive up to Stone Church to make sure Kittie McPherson's grave is properly marked with a flag, from the grateful nation which she served so heroically.



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