



Ardsley Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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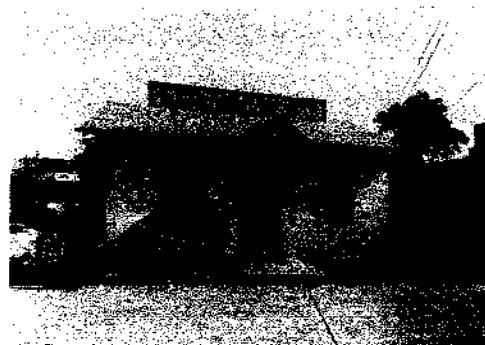
THE ARDSLEY AMERICAN LEGION POST #458

By Theresa DiStefano

The Ardsley American Legion Post #458 is 86 years old. It has been an active American Legion Post in support of all the Ardsley veterans who have served their country, and it has also been a post dedicated to serve its country and community.

In the 1800s, Mr. James McCartney came from Scotland and became an inspector for the Croton Aqueduct construction. He also established the oldest business in Ardsley, The McCartney Real Estate and Insurance Agency. This business building was located in Addyman Square in the early 1900s. Later, the business was carried on by his son, Mr. Arthur McCartney, who became a WWI veteran. When Arthur McCartney returned safely from war, he along with other WWI veterans petitioned the American Legion offices in Washington DC to establish an American Legion post in Ardsley.

As a result, these veterans were granted a charter and the Ardsley American Legion Post #458 became a reality in August 1921. Mr. Arthur McCartney then offered the new American Legion Post #458 his office building as a place to hold their meetings and activities. Thereafter, the McCartney Real Estate and Insurance Agency/Village Clerk's Office Building also became the first home for the Ardsley American Legion Post #458.



Original McCartney Real Estate and Insurance Building at 477 Ashford Avenue with Arthur McCartney standing in front. Photo courtesy of Scott McCartney

American Legion Post #458 (cont'd)

Right from the beginning, the Post supported and upheld the goals of all American Legion posts. It became a place that provided opportunities for social events and support for its community's needy veterans and their families. In addition, the Post supported and upheld the rights and principles they had fought and risked their lives for: justice, freedom, and democracy.

In the first years of the Post's history, it had 44 members. During this time, the members would rotate being Post Commander. The Post was active in taking measures to help those maimed or disabled in the War. It also sponsored Boy Scout troops and sent young boys to camp each year. It presented medals and an American Legion award to girls and boys who demonstrated great moral and educational qualities. It held memorial services for its departed comrades and decorated their graves each year on Memorial Day.

Then in 1923, as part of the Ardsley American Legion Post #458, the Women's Auxiliary of the Post was founded, which included members' wives. These women became active in making and securing donations for the benefit of needy veterans and their families. It also supported the local Girl Scouts and gave awards for Americanism and History.

So for many years, numerous social events were held at the McCartney Insurance and Real Estate Agency/Village Clerk's Office/Ardsley American Legion Post #458 Building. And most importantly, the Post was always available to help its veteran members and community whenever called

upon while following the aims and purposes of all American Legion posts—the preservation and defense of the American Constitution and the principles of justice, freedom, and democracy.

Time went by and only WWI veterans, their families, and friends participated in the Post and its activities. Then came the infamous December 7, 1941, and the sleepy town of Ardsley was awakened to the cries of WWII. Now the sons and daughters of many of the WWI veterans of the Ardsley American Legion Post #458 were called by the draft or the call of their own hearts to fight for the rights and freedoms their fathers and relatives had fought for in WWI.



Ardsley American Legion Post #458 delegates to National American Legion Convention in Washington, D.C., c. 1938-39. L to R: Harry DeNike, Mike Wilmoth, Charles Caporale, Bill McHenry, Arthur Silliman, Tommy Wilmoth, C. William Borchers Photo courtesy of Bea Caporale.

Ardsley's war heroes left home to fight in lands that most of them only knew from history classes and from their veteran fathers' and relatives' war stories. Three hundred and six men and women left Ardsley with brave hearts. Fourteen did not return.

In support of these men and women, and their families, Post #458 continued its work at home. It helped to organize and participate in the numerous activities in which the Ardsley Community was engaged, in support of the war effort. The Post, along with the rest of Ardsley, joined in working in defense jobs, rationing food supplies, practicing air raid alerts, sending letters to the men and women at war, and in welcoming home wounded veterans and attending to their needs when they came home to recuperate before returning to the war fields again.

American Legion Post #458 (cont'd)

As such, the Post continued to reach out to its community and its various needs. All of these activities happened in or immediately around the McCartney Agency Building.

Later, when those who finally did return came home to Ardsley, the Ardsley American Legion Post #458 was waiting for them as it had done in the past. The Post was still working out of the McCartney Real Estate and Insurance Agency/Village Clerk's Office/American Legion Post #458 Building. Now the Post had new members with whom to share war experiences and laughter.

Post#458 also attended to the needs of its new veteran members who, in some cases, were sons or daughters of fathers or relatives of the original Post members. With time, the new veterans went back to their everyday lives and were absorbed into Ardsley's warm society. And, for approximately 25 years, the Ardsley American Legion Post #458 continued to hold its meetings and numerous activities in the McCartney Agency Building.

Then in the late 1940s, the McCartney Real Estate and Insurance/Village Clerk's Office/American Legion #458 Building had to be moved out of Addyman Square. The McCartney Agency was to build a new structure in its place. So the Post emptied the old building of the Legion flags and records. Now the old McCartney Real Estate and Insurance/Village Clerk's Office/Ardsley American Legion Post #458 Building was no more.

At this point, this old building with so many years of memories was given to Miss Joann DeRosa who was a devoted employee of the McCartney Agency for many years. She arranged for a new foundation to be built on her property in Dobbs Ferry for the old building. The Kipp Brothers loaded the old building onto a flat-back. Then the building traveled over the Ashford Bridge and arrived in Dobbs Ferry.

Still intact, it made its way onto 12 Northfield and was finally set down on its new foundation on the DeRosa property.

After its arrival at 12 Northfield Avenue, its new owner, Ms. DeRosa, converted the old building into a garage. The building remained as such for over 50 years. Recently, in 2007, Ms. DeRosa retired to live in The Woodlands after she had sold the property with her family home and the old McCartney Agency Building.

Mr. John Forcetti, the builder who had purchased the DeRosa property, plans to construct two new homes on this property. Before he started the construction, he offered the old McCartney Agency Building to the Village of Ardsley because of its historic meaning.



The Mc Cartney Building as a garage on the DeRosa property in 2007, shortly before being taken away. Photo by Beverly Levine

In the meantime, Mr. Paul Petretti, who is an engineer for the developer and is also a member of the current Ardsley American Legion Post #458, took responsibility for the garage that had also been the old Post #458 Building. So, during the fall of this year he, along with other volunteers, arranged to move the old tired building to a safe place.

In the near future, this building is to be refurbished. Then when this is all done, the old building will be moved to rest in Ardsley's Ashford Park, where it will have a new home. It will be placed alongside other monuments calling attention to the names of the 306 Ardsley men and women who served their country when called to do so. It will be there each year when Ardsley's Memorial Day services are held in Ashford Park to honor all veterans.

American Legion Post #458 (cont'd)

Going back to the late 1940s, the removal of the old Post building from Addyman Square left Post #458 without an official home. However, shortly thereafter, the Post, with its charter still active, moved its meetings and activities to the Municipal Building and continued business as usual. The Post and its Women's Auxiliary planned and held all the activities they had held before. The Post continued to help its veterans and their families.

Now, however, the Post had more wounded veterans and families to assist and more veterans' graves to decorate on Memorial Day. With all the increased activities, the Post meetings stayed in the Municipal Building until the early 1950s. With time, because of increased membership, the Post needed and wanted a building of its own and worked toward this goal.

As a result, in the early 1950s, with monies raised by Post activities and contributed by the Post's friends, the Post purchase land on the old Aqueduct Street. And in 1956, the Post was given a building permit by the Village to construct a new American Legion Post #458 Building on Aqueduct Street. All came to help including veterans themselves, family members, and community members.

While this construction went on, the Village renamed the street. Aqueduct Street became the current American Legion Drive. Time passed and finally, in May 1960 on the 40th anniversary of the Post, the new building was completed and dedicated.

Once again the veterans dedicated themselves to what they had done in the past, and for the next 25 years the Ardsley American Legion Post #458 flourished by tending to its veterans' membership needs and service to its community.

Also during this time, in 1966, the Post honored the Ardsley WWI and WWII veterans who gave their lives while securing America's democracy and freedom by erecting two bronze plaques on the front of its new building. These plaques can still be seen on the building.

This was a very active time for Post #458. The Post was part of a yearly memorial service to deceased veterans at Mount Hope Cemetery and was also a part of the annual Tri-Village Memorial Service

held each Memorial Day. In addition, along with the Post's Women's Auxiliary and Junior Auxiliary, the Post decorated the graves of departed veterans, sold memorial poppies made by hospital veterans, cared for patients in the Franklin D. Roosevelt Veteran's Hospital at Montrose N.Y. (Ardsley Unit), and supplied a gift shop so veterans could select presents for loved ones.



New American Legion Building, with bronze memorial of WWI and WWII veterans who died while serving their country. Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Arone.

They also entertained veterans in the hospital, listened to veterans' concerns, contributed to the American

Legion Mountain Camp, and helped at Rosary Hill Hospital for terminal cancer patients—to mention only a few civic activities carried out by the Post at that time.

Then there were the fun activities held at the Post: flea markets, Hobo Nights, New Year's Eve parties, Super Bowl dinners, champagne brunches, children's and youth programs, special dances, and even boxing matches held in the parking lot. All in all, the Post was at this time a well-known and much appreciated member of the Village of Ardsley.

As the Post's membership increased, the need for more room led it to expand its quarters. By 1979, the expansion alterations were completed and a new dedication took place on October 13, 1979. Now the Post could have visiting American Legion members and could even hold County conventions.

American Legion Post #458 (cont'd)

It now had approximately 150-200 standing members, which allowed it to successfully function in good economic health.

However, these times did not last long because of declining membership and mounting costs. Consequently, in the late 1980s, the Post found itself with very few members and unable to sustain itself monetarily. Finally, in 1985, a reluctant membership sold the building with the understanding that it could rent a room located in the downstairs section of the building, where it could hold its monthly meetings for the remaining members to socialize and continue planning civic goals. For three years, with Andrew Santoro as its Commander, the Post functioned in rented quarters.

Then, when it was time to renew its lease, the new rent was too high to be sustained by the remaining small veteran membership. So, in 1988, with great sadness, the Post closed its doors on American Legion Drive. However, although the building was closed, the Ardsley American Legion #458's charter was still alive and active—even though the Post had only eight active members and its Commander, Mr. Andrew Santoro.

Despite not having an official building for the first time in over 65 years, for a brief period of time the Post held its meetings in the Ardsley Community Center on the third Thursday of each month.

Then a few Vietnam veterans who lived in Ardsley realized that the Post needed to increase its membership and vitality. They feared that without an active Post #458, there would be no Memorial Day ceremony in Ardsley honoring the many men and women who responded to America's call when they were needed. They felt all veterans needed to be thanked and recognized.

They all went to work. They checked all publicly available local records that listed the names of veterans in the local Ardsley area. With time, they found them. The list included WWII, the Korean War, and Vietnam War veterans. Then little by little, each name on the list received a phone call. If they could not be reached by phone, the veterans went from door to door introducing themselves and explaining their mission.

Later, the new veterans were asked if they knew any other veterans. These new veterans were also asked to further help by 'asking around' in an effort to find even more veterans. All cooperated. Eventually, the mission was met with success and gradually Post #458 increased its membership.

Now, with new and old members, the Ardsley American Legion Post #458 is thriving and once again is doing what it has always done in the past: it continues to help needy veterans and their families and to be available to its Ardsley community.

Most importantly, Post #458 remains true to its mission. Each year, the Post organizes a Memorial Day ceremony and parade to which it invites local administrators, religious leaders, residents and all veterans. Then, in that parade, the Post marches to Ashford Avenue Park, stopping in front of the Honor Roll of WWII Veterans' Memorial. Here, the national anthem is sung while everyone salutes the American flag.

Then the Post pays tribute to all the young women and men who have made the ultimate sacrifice by playing Taps, followed by a moment of silence. And so each year, Post #458 proudly continues on as it celebrates its 86 years of serving as an American Legion Post.

Ardsley American Legion Post #458 (continued)

In the end, Ardsley American Legion Post #458 may not have a "building" but it does have its charter, and its approximately 50 active veteran members from WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War continue to help its remaining veteran membership and the Ardsley community. Meetings are every third Thursday of the month with its current Commander, Mr. Steve Wittenberg.

Many thanks to:

Ardsley, N.Y., *"The War Years: 1941-1945"* by Fred N. Arone and Patricia Arone

A Short, Informal History of Ardsley, N.Y. by Arthur W. Silliman

Ms. Joann DeRosa and the many other local residents who shared their memories of the Ardsley American Legion Post #458

All Ardsley American Legion Post #458 members who shared important information



**Current members of Ardsley American Legion Post #458 -
Memorial Day, 2006. Photo courtesy of Steve Wittenberg**

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