



Our Old Bookcase, October 5, 2017. Poet Joyce Kilmer was a War Hero in 1918.

Photo caption: Alfred Joyce Kilmer, (1886-1918) was more than a poet; he was an American Hero who gave his life for his Country, in the line of duty on July 30, 1918.

OUR OLD BOOK CASE

By Joyce L. Alig, President, Mercer County Historical Society

When we were in the Second Grade, we had a teacher who believed in students' memorizing poems. Perhaps, you will recall this poem, by Alfred Joyce Kilmer, "Trees," published in 1914.

**I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray.
A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.**

On Sunday, October 22, 2017, the Mercer County Historical Society is planning the 17th Annual Military Exhibit, hosted by the Museum of the Soldier, Portland, Indiana, and the Antique Gun Exhibit hosted by Local Antique Gun Collectors. Since the theme of this year's Exhibit will be the Centennial of the United States entering the First World War, (1917-2017) I have been reading American History books about

World War I. And that is how I learned about the Military History of Alfred Joyce Kilmer, also known for his poetry, the most famous poem being, "*Trees*."

The United States entered World War I in 1917; that same year, Kilmer enlisted in the New York National Guard. In 1917, the United States Secretary of War, Newton Baker, suggested to General Pershing in Washington, to have an American Division made up of men from across the United States. Thus, the 42nd Division, known as the Rainbow Division, consisted of National Guard units from twenty-six States and the District of Columbia. Kilmer served in that Rainbow Division. Kilmer achieved the Rank of Sergeant. He served as an intelligence officer, gathering information from the front lines.

Kilmer was a graduate of Rutgers College and Columbia University. Kilmer's stories of his work as a journalist on the New York Times drew the attention of his fellow Service men. Kilmer was also respected for how he celebrated the beauty of Nature, and for his quiet religious faith. On July 30, 1918, he joined in the battle of Ourcq and was killed by a sniper's bullet. Kilmer was awarded the French Honor, Croix de Guerre, [Cross of War] for his bravery. Kilmer left behind his wife and four children.

In 1938, Kilmer was recognized when the Federal Government purchased 3800 acres of old growth forest in North Carolina, which became a National Forest, with a section being named, "*The Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest*." Kilmer's poem, "*Trees*" became more popular, during World War II, and 1950's.

Don Lawson, in his 1963 book, "*The United States in World War I*" stated, "*The American successes were not without cost. Some 50,000 young Americans died or were wounded in the Second Battle of the Marne. Among those who died was a young sergeant in the 42nd, or Rainbow, Division who was world-famous for a poem he had written shortly before the war, 'Trees' by Alfred Joyce Kilmer. Kilmer's name has been given to schools, buildings, streets, and parks, including a park in the Bronx.*"

The October 22 Sunday afternoon Military Exhibit and the November 12 Sunday afternoon Post Card & Post Mark Exhibit, will be the last two Open Houses at the Mercer County Historical Museum in 2017. I hope to see you when you visit these History Exhibits at the Museum before the Winter Holidays.

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