

***THE WORLD WAR II SERVICE FLAGS
KEARSARGE AND WILMOT GRANGES
WILMOT, NEW HAMPSHIRE***

This information was collected and compiled by Grange member and Wilmot Historical Society member Elizabeth Kirby and presented at the annual meeting of the Historical Society on November 6, 2011.

According to Wikipedia, “a service flag or service banner in the United States is an official banner that the family members of service members in harm’s way can display. The flag or banner is defined as a white field with a red border, with a blue star for each family member on active duty. A gold star represents a family member who died during service, without specifying cause of death. The deceased might have been killed in action, or died due to unrelated causes.” Per Department of Defense regulations, the service flag may be displayed in the window of the place of residence of persons who are members of the immediate family of service members serving in the Armed Forces of the United States during any period of war or hostilities in which the Armed Forces of the United States may be engaged for the duration of such periods of war or hostilities.

An example of the flag can be seen hanging in the window of Mrs. Ryan’s house in the movie Saving Private Ryan. Another great movie with the service flag is the Majestic.

These two service flags, (see below) which are now in the collection of the Wilmot Historical Society were displayed by the two grange fraternities which were active in Wilmot during World War II. The flag regulations state that an organization may fly a service flag if one of its members is serving on active duty. The flag with the one gold and eight blue stars hung in the Kearsarge Grange Hall which was in the former community center until it disbanded in the mid 1970’s. This membership was mostly from the Wilmot Flat and Kearsarge Mountain areas of town. We have not been able to locate the records of Kearsarge Grange to get any additional information about their flag or the people represented by the stars.

The flag with the 13 blue stars hung in the Wilmot Grange Hall, which was the Town Hall on North Wilmot Road, and drew from the people in that area and North Wilmot as well as some from Andover and Danbury. This group merged with Blackwater Grange in Andover in the mid 1990’s. Fortunately all their records are in our historical society, and we know quite a bit about these people.

The flags were first used in World War I, with subsequent standardization and codification by the end of World War II. Per Wikipedia “the banner was designed in 1917 by United States Army Captain Robert L. Queisser of the Fifth Ohio Infantry in honor of his two sons who were serving in World War I. It was quickly adopted by the public and by government officials.” “Manufacture of these flags is only by specific government license in the territories under

American jurisdiction. The flag size ratio must be 10:19 the same as the flag of the United States.” Blue and gold are the only colors specified for the stars.

The population of Wilmot in 1930 was about 490 people. There were 143 households. The 1940 census will be released to the public on April 2, 2012 but any change during those 10 intervening years was probably small. At the Veterans’ Memorial the two granite tablets that flank the monument list the names of 2 women and 42 men who served in World War II from Wilmot. It could be surmised that well over 10 percent of the adult population of Wilmot served in World War II. Many large and small families saw all their sons go to war including the 5 Gove brothers and the 4 Farnum brothers. Of the 4 Bertagna brothers, it appears that 2 served in the Army and 2 in the Navy. Wilmot has a proud tradition of patriotism and service.

The following information is from the Wilmot Grange Secretaries’ records. On April 4, 1941 the grange voted to pay the membership dues of the enlisted men who were members in the amount of \$3.90 but it is not known how many individuals this included. This grange continued to pay service members’ dues until it disbanded. Other war support activities included buying war bonds, making scrapbooks for the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth and the V A Hospital in White River Junction, Vermont, donating to the Red Cross and the USO, participating in the Wilmot town defense plan and sending Christmas gifts to service members.

At the grange meeting held on August 7, 1942 there were “...remarks by Felix Bertagna, our guest of honor for the evening. Felix is a member of the Air Force with a rank of Ensign.” He was probably in the Navy. At that meeting the members voted to buy a “Service Flag for Wilmot Grange men in the service” and Mrs. Blanche Stearns was the committee to research this. The flag was purchased for \$4.00 and hung in the hall on October 16, 1942. At the end of 1942 there were seven blue stars on the flag. On November 6, 1942 a star had been placed in honor of Lawrence Stevens and on December 4, 1942, David Whittemore was presented a gift upon entering military service. Each member was honored the same way before they left. There were apparently 5 stars in place prior to these 2. The exact date of enlistment of all honorees is not known but the following list includes the names of the 13 men whom we believe are represented by these blue stars.

Captain Henry Sawyer was the first Wilmot man in service in World War II and he served in Africa and Europe. Reverend James Blok resigned his grange office in October 1940 to enter the military and was stationed in the Canal Zone in January 1943. Albert Bertagna enlisted on December 10, 1940 and served in Australia. George Woodward was among the first 7 to join up. James Whittemore enlisted May 26, 1942 and served in North Africa and Italy.

Lawrence Stevens enlisted October 13, 1942. David Whittemore enlisted November 24, 1942 and was stationed in England. These account for the first 7 stars. Lewis Pinard enlisted on July 10 1943. George Gove enlisted on October 9, 1943. Frederick W. LaJoie enlisted on November 5 1943. Ralph Stevens enlisted on December 6, 1943. Donald Smith enlisted in November 1944 and was the only member to join the Navy. The last star was placed in early 1946 for Joseph Mathieu. Many of these service men returned home safely in 1945.

