

Warren Historical Society

Oral History: Memorial Day 1961 (8 min 49 seconds)

A Word Picture of Warren Connecticut

In honor of Robert H. Perkins

Read by RJ Cashion

Transcribed by Janice Swartzfager, August 2021

[Big band music plays]

“This recording is for the purpose of presenting a word picture of our town, and one of its most honored citizens.

“The town is Warren, Connecticut. The time, Memorial Day, 1961. The man we honor here is Robert H. Perkins.

“This small New England town, population around 600, is and has been since colonial times a farming community. There are no factories, no shopping centers, no formal streets. It is a place for gentle, graceful living. A place where a man’s wealth has no particular affect on the attitude of his neighbors. A place where a man may stand up in town meeting and speak his mind. A place which, like many of its kind, typifies a fiercely independent political sector of our society, one of the last strongholds of pure democracy. This then is Warren, Connecticut, in the foothills of the Berkshires. Our town, a good place to live.

“Memorial Day services in our town are impressive, made so by their purpose, by their simplicity, by the peaceful surrounding countryside, by the sober bearing of the participants, by the solemnity of the proceedings. The central high school band, lead by comely young girls twirling batons, veterans of two wars in their service uniforms, volunteer firemen with sparkling equipment, the color guard, the firing squad, a tribute to the honored dead, group singing, prayers, taps. The solemn proceedings performed with military precision and cadence, bring a lump to the throat, a catch to the voice, a feeling of pride in our town and in our country. The roll call of the honored dead covers every war since the Revolution. These are the men who went from our town to fight for their country in far away places. These are the men who fought to preserve a way of life. These are the men who loved freedom enough to fight for it, enough to die for it.

“As the long list is read, with a sobering drumroll after each war, one recognizes familiar family names. And these veterans who march today, these are the men who came back from war to our town to reconstruct their lives, to bring up their children in this peaceful countryside. These are the men who more than all others, pray for an end to international strife, pray for an end to man’s inhumanity to man.

“The highlight of the ceremony is the recitation of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, by Robert H. Perkins, a function which he has proudly performed on each Memorial Day, for many years. Robert H. Perkins, age 90, lifelong resident of this town, elder statesman of the community, honored and respected by his neighbors, still active, still interested in his town and in his church. Proud of his heritage, proud of his town. To the entire town he is known affectionately and respectfully as Uncle Rob. And during his entire life, he has worked faithfully for his family, for his church, and for his town. This then is Robert H. Perkins, Uncle Rob, and this is his contribution to the exercises in our town on Memorial Day nineteen-hundred and sixty-one.”

[Big band music continues]

[Voice of Robert H. Perkins as he recites The Gettysburg Address]

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

“Now, we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who gave their lives that that nation might live. It is all together fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow this ground—The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little know or long remember what we say here; but it can never forget what they did here.

“It is for us the living rather, to be dedicated [to] here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation under God, shall have a new birth of

freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

[Big band music continues]

[Voice of RJ Cashion]

“On Memorial Day in the year of our Lord, nineteen-hundred and sixty-one, we salute you, Uncle Rob Perkins age ninety. We hope you’ll live to be a hundred.

“This is our town, Warren Connecticut, foothills of the Berkshires, and one of its most honored citizens, on a very special day. And so another event of our town passes into history. We have paused, we have meditated, we have remembered the honored dead.”

[Big band music]