

Houlton's first Armistice Day

November 1918



The war finally came to an end in November, 1918 and the town's reaction was immediate and enthusiastic. Orders for a demonstration were put into effect by the Board of Selectmen and of it, the Houlton Times noted that, 'Houlton broke away from its usual reserve and celebrated the victories of our brave and gallant boys on the battlefronts of France. Whistles blew, bells rang, people yelled themselves hoarse as the pent up patriotism of years was let loose as never before.'

The entire day following receipt of the news of Germany's surrender was one of complete pandemonium throughout the town. From 4:45 in the morning when the news was first received, the town echoed with a roar of jubilation. Church bells, whistles, sirens, horns contributed to the din which rocked the community.

ALL STORES CLOSED

Business took a holiday. All stores were ordered closed and those who failed to heed the order were promptly shuttered by the Houlton Fire Department.

A sleepy populace was soon aroused. The citizen's committee that had long been awaiting this opportunity, was under the chairmanship of Percy L. Rideout and the sun had hardly topped the horizon before the full vent of patriotic ardor was underway. The weather was fair, which brought out the citizens in force, both old and young.

The day was the climax to impatient waiting by the late Vic Holdaway who had, for weeks, been fattening up a "peace ox" to be barbecued as the principal article on the day's menu. Just at sun up Vic was at his work and soon a large spit in Market Square was revolving with the carcass of the ox being roasted for the enjoyment of the people.

A committee on 'stunts' had also been named in advance composed of Dr F.W. Mitchell, B.B. McIntyre, and Charles Osgood. The effigies of the Kaiser and the Crown Prince were suspended from a wire between the Rice Block and the Mansur Block and were later burned to the wire amid the plaudits of the people.

"The first man from Houlton was killed in action June 16, 1918 was Chester L. Briggs., son of Mr and Mrs Thomas Briggs, for whom the Chester L. Briggs Legion Post is named.

PATRIOTIC SONGS

The big event of the day took place in the evening following the barbecue. Vic Holdaway had as his assistants, Charles W. Starkey, Harry Hallett, Dr E.P. Henderson, and Amos Putnam. After the meat of the ox had disappeared, a chorus appeared on the Snell House piazza to sing patriotic selections under the direction of E.L. Cleveland. This was followed by a torchlight procession, marshalled by Raymond Cumming garbed as Uncle Sam. This was formed on the High School grounds and it is estimated there were 500 in the line of march.

While the parade was halted in Market Square for the ceremony of burning the Hohenzollerns, father and son, moving pictures were shown against the Fox Block by the manager of the Dream Theatre. Two bonfires were sending flames skyward at each end of the Square.

Houlton's final blowoff of the first world war came on Independence Day in 1919 to the form of a welcome home to her soldier, sailor and nurse sons and daughters. Gov. Carl E. Milliken and his staff were guests of honor for the occasion. A peace pageant was presented by the school children of the town and the long parade included four companies of soldiers, over 500 in number, who marched through the huge welcome arch that has been erected at the east end of Market Square."

Works Cited

Houlton Pioneer Times, Centennial Edition, August 15, 1957

