

2017 Ghost Walk

William Brownlow – played by Joe Edkin

World War I was a bloody, horrible meat-grinder of a war. I should know. I saw it first hand, not as a front-line soldier, but as a medical illustrator stationed at Army Base Hospital No. 4 in France. Tonight you'll be hearing a lot about World War I, but this is my story. My name is William Brownlow and I drew the war.

When I graduated from Elmira Free Academy in 1909, I knew I wanted to be an artist. I had won prizes in a few local art shows, but there's a reason they're called starving artists. I met Dr. George W. Crile while studying art in New York City. He told me about medical illustrators who work closely with doctors to draw and paint new medical conditions and procedures for articles and textbooks. It requires more training in biology than the average artist, not to mention a strong stomach. Over the course of my career, I've seen some horrific injuries and witnessed hundreds of surgeries and autopsies.

In August 1916, my mentor Dr. Crile began recruiting staff for a military hospital in the event that America entered World War I. Of course, I signed up. The United States entered the war on April 6, 1917, and, by May 25th, we were open for business in Rouen, France. We were the first American military unit to arrive in Europe and we stayed there until March of 1919.

I saw a lot of terrible things: men with half their faces blown off, men with rotting feet, men coughing up their lungs thanks to poison gas. I saw a lot of amazing things too. The war was a time of tremendous innovations in medicine as doctors struggled to keep their patients alive and I was there to document every experimental surgery, every new technique. Take blood transfusions, for example. Before the war, it required that the donor be hooked directly to the recipient. Then military doctors figured out ways to store treated blood on ice up to 28 days and inject it into patients via syringe.

Other doctors were developing new tools and techniques too. Dr. Crile designed a new mask for safer and more effective anesthesia. Infection was a huge problem during the war. The mud of the trenches was filled with human waste and rotting trash. In the first year of the war, 70% of all amputations were due to infection rather than the initial injury, and no one with an abdominal wound was expected to survive. Then an international team of scientists created a new antiseptic wash which could be applied to wounds to prevent infection. It worked like a dream and variations upon their formula are still in use today.

The new techniques I drew the most during the war were in the field of facial reconstruction. Soldiers would be struck in the face with shrapnel. They would be horribly burned by gas. Working together, dentists and surgeons would reconstruct soldiers' jaws. Dermatological surgeons experimented with skin grafts. I made quite a few before and after drawings of their work and observed many a procedure.

After the war, my friend Dr. Crile and a couple of the other doctors from Army Base Hospital No. 4 decided to open the Cleveland Clinic together. I was invited to join the team as head of the medical illustrations department and my wife Eva and I moved out to Ohio. I loved the work but,



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on May 15, 1928 it all went up in smoke. Literally. The hospital's stockpile of nitrocellulose x-ray film caught fire in the basement and triggered a series of explosions. Worse, the burning film released a toxic gas which smothered people before they could hope to escape. My two assistants died at their desks. I managed to break a window and climb down, but I was already having trouble breathing. I died later that night at a nearby hospital. 123 people died in the fire, mostly from the fumes. My wife, Eva, came home to Elmira and brought my body with her. Now we both lie here together.

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Mary Potter – played by Cathleen Wiggs

I fear that in telling you my story this evening that you might leave here thinking I am some sort of traitor. I do recognize that my deeply-held convictions are no longer in fashion and that you, particularly my fellow women, might wish for me to slink back into the darkness. Nonetheless, I pray that you will hear my side of the story and reserve your judgement until the end of my tale.

My name is Mary Potter. I was an educator in Elmira from 1873 to 1913. That is a 40-year career nurturing young minds and shaping generations of productive citizens. I loved it. I even started my own school, the Madison Avenue Primary, in 1877. I served as the school's principal. I even became a certified Sunday School teacher after I retired.

But I suppose that won't matter to some of you. That isn't what you've come to hear about tonight. You are here to learn about my efforts to stop women's suffrage. I understand that in the 21st century, this might come as a surprise to many of you. A woman opposed to rights for women. Does that not make me a traitor to my gender? I would argue that you are mistaken. The campaign for women's suffrage was not so simple as men vs. women. No, I was not alone in my disdain for the vote. On its most fundamental level, this was a battle between women.

Why didn't we want the vote? Anti-suffragists had many justifications. Women's suffrage was wholly unnecessary because the interests of women were represented by the men in their lives. The mothers of men are women. Their teachers are women. And the most supreme influence in a man's life, his wife, is also a woman. It is true that men make civilization and equally true that women make men. Who is most responsible in this case for higher moral standards?

Ours was a campaign for enlightenment. Men voting "no" on women suffrage were not selfishly withholding a right. They did so because most of the real homemakers wished them to. Manhood yields to women anything they clamor for. The majority of women see their duty in other forms of service rather than being a pestering nuisance in politics.

One of the most pressing issues was the war. We resented that this unneeded battle on the home front was taking away attention from our young men dying on the fields of France. This was a time when every endeavor of the womanhood of the country should have been centered upon the relief of suffering rather than the clamor for votes.

The women picketing, parading, and standing at the White House gate to make faces at the president and to call him names did not stand for the desires of all women. Suffrage leaders said that the women of America wanted the ballot. That was a gross misrepresentation. In my estimating, the women of American wanted nothing of the kind.

The suffragists failed in their 1915 campaign to bring the vote to women in New York State. Despite this setback, the suffragists regrouped and made plans to try again in 1917. They had rallies, parades, and all manner of demonstrations. They wrote articles and went door-to-door with petitions. They were an impressive force, but we didn't allow them to go unchecked.



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A powerful anti-suffrage force emerged. If the suffragists marched in a parade, so did we. If the suffragists had a booth at the county fair, so did we. We challenged them to a public debate on that matter, but they refused. I believe it is because they feared their argument for suffrage didn't hold up to scrutiny.

While I and others contended that this was an ill time for political experiment and useless expense, we lost. In 1917, 100 years ago, New Yorkers voted to grant the woman vote. Turning their focus to the national stage, the suffragists pushed through the 19th Amendment on August 19, 1920. So maybe women like me faded into the darkness after all.



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Leah Sittenfield – played by Gianna Lutz and Ivy Robinson

Good evening everyone. I'm Leah Sittenfield and I would like to welcome you to the Sons of Abraham section of the cemetery. This is where members of the Jewish community have found their final resting places. I, myself, have been here since 1930.

The Jewish community has a long history in Elmira, dating back to the early 1850s. In the 1860s we built our first synagogue, B'Nai Israel, on High Street on Elmira's east side. The congregation started out with just 31 families and grew greatly over the years. In the 1880s, two more synagogues, Temple Shomray Hadath and the Sullivan Street Synagogue, were built to accommodate the growing population of Eastern European Jews who were moving into the area.

In the 1920s, I actually served as president of the Sisterhood of the High Street Temple. I was particularly interested in supporting the College Welfare Department of the organization. I was also a member of the Elmira chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women, serving as treasurer for the organization and chairman for the council's farm and rural work.

My first taste of public service, however, came during World War I. While our boys were being sent overseas to fight, men and women from all walks of life came together to help with the war effort at home. Some joined the Home Defense Corps. Some sold Liberty Bonds. Some grew vegetables to help alleviate food shortages. I, along with over 12,000 others from Chemung County, joined the local chapter of the Red Cross.

The American Red Cross was first established in 1881 in Washington, D.C. When the First World War broke out, it grew into a major, nationwide organization with over 20 million members. In September 1916, a group of Elmirans organized a local chapter. I joined the organization in 1917. We raised money to help military families at home, and knit thousands of socks, sweaters, and wristlets for soldiers overseas. We also manufactured over half a million surgical dressings for Atlantic Division hospitals.

In June 1918, the Elmira Chapter of the Red Cross established its Canteen Service, of which I was a member. We would go down to the railroad station and serve sandwiches, coffee, lemonade, cookies, and candy to soldiers passing through on troop trains. We'd even had ice cream for them in the summer. It was the least we could do for them. Over 126,000 soldiers passed through here on their way to fight in the war.

We also provided basic medical care to soldiers on the trains who happened to be sick. In the fall of 1918, we started to see soldiers who had contracted the Spanish Flu. The 1918 outbreak of the Spanish Flu was the deadliest influenza outbreak in recorded history. Over a quarter of Americans caught the flu during the outbreak and half a million people died. Servicemen were hit the hardest. More than a third caught the disease, many while they were still in training camps. It's estimated that up to 50 million people worldwide died of the flu.

Chemung County was not spared. In October, the city Health Department canceled all public gatherings because of the flu. Schools, churches, libraries, museum, pool halls, and bowling



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alleys were all forced to close. Stores even canceled sales so as not to draw crowds. The Red Cross established a kitchen at the Federation Building to help feed children whose parents had fallen ill. The epidemic got so bad that the Hotel Gotham in Elmira was converted into a hospital just for flu patients. The quarantine was lifted at the end of October but the effects of the flu were devastating. Around 3,500 cases of the flu were reported locally and 127 people died.

My time with the Red Cross taught me a lot about giving back to the community. It is especially important at the worst of times for everyone to come together and help each other.



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Private Ansel McKinney – played by Robert Lavarney

There are 128 names on the World War I honor roll list on exhibit at the museum where you began your evening. 128 men from Chemung County who paid the ultimate price in this fight. 128 lives lost and families shattered. 128 men representing the very real cost and trauma of war. Many of those 128 find their final resting place here in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Just here, within a stone's throw of this very spot, there are eight of those 128. That doesn't count the many others buried elsewhere here in Woodlawn. Or in the National Cemetery. Or in other cemeteries. Or those whose remains never made it back from their battlefield burials on foreign soil.

The war was brutal. Just this evening, you've heard of the trenches. Of the terrible injuries. Of the poison gas. Of the deadly Spanish Flu. But do you really understand? 128 names on a list is a difficult thing for us to fully comprehend. It feels almost unreal. I want you to never forget that there were real men behind those names. I want to introduce you to some of those men buried around us so that you can look them in the eye. You can study their faces. You can learn their stories.

Private Boyd C. Reese was one of the most popular young men on Elmira's southside. He got married a few months before leaving for France. That's where he died of the flu less than a month before the end of the war. He, like many soldiers, was buried in France at first. Once the conflict ended, the bodies of our fallen heroes were sent home and reinterred by their families. Private Reese was laid to rest here in October 1920, two years after he died.

Lieutenant Harry Robinson was one of 7 Elmira officers with the Allied troops smashing through the Germans' Hindenburg Line. The battle was fierce and ugly. Of the seven Elmira officers in that battle, only two came out unharmed. Lieutenant Robinson was not one of those fortunate two.

Private Clifford Elliott was a member of the Watkins Glen home defense unit that was mustered into service by the Captain of Company L. While many men here died on the battlefields of France, some never made it that far. Private Elliott died of the flu while in training at Camp Merritt in New Jersey. He was 18 years old.

Private Russell Parmenter was killed in action in France in August 1918. Official notice of Private Parmenter's death was delayed, so his father learned of his 20-year-old son's passing in a letter from one of Russell's comrades. The letter was from Private Clarence Estep who had watched his friend killed by shell fire in front of him.

Unlike the other men I have spoken of this evening, Private Oliver Darwin Jacque made it home alive. Private Jacque was gassed by Germans on the Hindenburg Line in September 1918. He recovered enough to make it home and was one of the proud boys who marched in celebration when they returned to Elmira. Private Jacque was strong, but the effects of the gas were stronger. He suffered from illness of the lungs for months before dying at the Arnot Ogden Hospital.



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And that leaves me. My name is Private Ansel McKinney. I was killed in action on October 16, 1918. On the day I was killed, I wrote a letter back home to my family. I told them that I had been in some severe fighting but that I was ok. I enclosed a label for my parents to send over my Christmas box. My death only added to the tough times my family had been having. My brother Paul died a year earlier. My brother Mason was in training with the Marines in Philadelphia. I was the only member of my church to die in the war and they dedicated a flag to me. It was a nice tribute, I suppose.

This is where your journey tonight ends. I implore you to remember the 128 men who died in service. Please also realize that it is not just we who died that you should remember. Many of the men who made it back fared poorly, as well. Remember that the wounds of war cut deeply, but that they also are not always visible.