

Forgotten World War I Hero???

A bronze plaque mounted on granite, remembering World War I hero Lt. Joseph W. Emery, Jr., was installed recently in front of 1677 Maine Street.

Lt. Emery—only son of Joseph W. and May Newcomb Emery, and grandson of Rev. Samuel Hopkins Emery and of Richard Newcomb—was one of two Adams County heroes and recipients of the Distinguished Service Cross who were killed in action in France during World War I. The other was Gen. Henry Root Hill. Lt. Emery was buried at Oise-Aisne Cemetery in France, and Gen. Hill's body was returned to Quincy for burial.

After the war, Quincy's American Legion Post 37 was named "Henry R. Hill—Joseph W. Emery, Jr. Post 37" in honor of these two heroes. The names apparently are no longer in general usage, although a bronze plaque on the bandstand erected in 1934 at Woodland Cemetery shows both names in conjunction with Post 37. Gen. Hill was also recognized by the installation of a public drinking fountain on the [then] Public Library Building at 4th and Maine Streets [now the Gardner Museum of Architecture and Design], and the hospital at the Illinois Veterans' Home was named after him. A newspaper article concerning Lt. Emery's death is on display at the Parsonage Museum of the Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County, and a stained glass window was installed by the family in St. John's Episcopal Church in memory of Joseph W. Emery, Jr. and his sister, Katherine Emery Gardner. However, no highly visible public remembrance of Lt. Emery has been located.

After purchasing 1677 Maine Street in 2003, current owners Riddell L. Noble and Charles D. Rollins undertook an extensive research project to determine the history of the house and its early owners. This research revealed, in addition to many other interesting facts, that 1677 Maine Street was Lt. Emery's boyhood home from about age 5 until he went to Dartmouth College after graduating from Quincy High School. Emery played football in high school and was a star halfback at Dartmouth College. Immediately after graduation from Dartmouth in 1917, Joseph, Jr. volunteered for the Army. Shortly afterward, he wrote to his parents, "this is the greatest thing that has ever happened in the world and a man can't afford to be out of it." About a year later, on July 18, 1918, Lt. Emery met his heroic death near Vierzy, France, described thus:

"While attached to the regimental post of command in the rear, Lieut. Emery voluntarily joined the assaulting battalion as a platoon leader in a company, which was short of officers. When desperate hostile resistance was encountered at the outset of the attack and all the other officers of the company became casualties, he took command of the company and courageously led his men in overcoming enemy machine-gun nests. While rushing an enemy position at the head of his men, this gallant officer was killed."

Noble and Rollins, both veterans of military service, decided that this World War I hero should not be forgotten, and that the installation of a plaque in front of his boyhood home would be a fitting remembrance (particularly on November 11th). Almost certainly, no one alive today ever knew Joseph Emery, Jr., but his boyhood home stands to exemplify, illustrate, and illuminate, at least in part, this man and his history.

(Granite stonework by Brinkoetter Monument Company)

Copies released to the following:

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Historical Society of Quincy and Adams County
Quincy Museum

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