

Remembering Those Who Served

Every year Brighton holds a commemoration of its residents who served in the armed forces. The ceremony at the memorial in Buckland Park takes place in the afternoon of November 11, the day the first World War ended in Europe. A color guard presents the flag, an a capella chorus sings the national anthem, and appropriate remarks are made. A highlight of Brighton's ceremony is the recitation by Brighton Town Supervisor, Bill Moehle, of the poem "In Flanders' Fields" by John McCrae.

Flanders, Belgium, was the site of a prolonged battle between the Allies and Germany during the war yet poppies grew in the damaged soil after the battle, prompting Canadian Lt. Col. John McCrae to imagine the bright red flowers as the symbol of the soldiers who died there. After the war, the American Legion, the Royal British Legion, and other veterans' groups began selling artificial poppies to raise funds to support veterans and their families.

World War I, called the "war to end all wars," by President Woodrow Wilson (from a quote by H.G. Wells) exacted enormous casualties on its participants. The estimated number of Allied soldiers and sailors was 42.1 million who served. Of these, 5.1 million died and 12.8 million were wounded. The United States participation was 4.3 million in total with 126,000 who died and 234,000 who were wounded. The conflict wiped out a whole generation of young men in Great Britain.

The armistice to end the war was declared at the 11th hour in the 11th month. In 1921 President Warren G. Harding proclaimed November 11 as Armistice Day in the United States. In that same year, the first burial was made at Arlington Cemetery in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower changed Armistice Day to Veterans' Day, to honor the men and women who served in all wars.

Brighton's commemoration of its military veterans is visible at the Brighton town hall. Constructed in the early 1950s, not long after the end of World War II, the lobby of the building was intended to be a war memorial. On the dark marble wall facing the entrance is a carved eagle plaque above the words "In Honor of the Men and Women of Brighton who Served in the Armed Forces of Our Country." On the marble shelf below the inscription rested for many years a book inscribed with the names of the veterans of World War II.

With the acquisition of Buckland Park in the late 1990s, space became available for an outdoor monument. Brighton Town Council member James R. Vogel chaired the committee of veterans and others who created Brighton's memorial near the flag pole in the park. Towering over the stone work is a magnificent, sculptured eagle made by artist Mary Taylor. It is at the eagle that people gather each November 11th to remember.

"In Flanders fields the poppies blow between the crosses, row on row..."

Mary Jo Lanphear
Town of Brighton Historian
14 October 2025