



Historical Reminiscences: Remembering Our Early Veterans

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While many view Veteran's Day as just an extra day off before the winter holidays, it's essential to understand the true significance of this state and federal holiday. On May 13th, 1938, the United States Congress formally recognized Armistice Day as November 11, marking the 11th hour, of the 11th day, of the 11th month which commemorated the end of hostilities with Germany in World War I. It was renamed Veterans Day on May 26th, 1954, and signed into law by President Dwight D. Eisenhower at the request of veterans' organizations to recognize the sacrifices of all veterans.

This wasn't the first time, veterans were recognized by government entities for their military service and injuries received during enlistment. Before the American Revolution, England's North American colonies had regulations to care for military veterans and their families based on the *English Acte for the Relief of Souldiours* of 1593. Massachusetts was the first to pass laws in 1636 caring for wounded and disabled soldiers. Between 1644 and 1756 similar regulations followed in Virginia, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Georgia, and Delaware. New Jersey and Pennsylvania, enacted similar laws in 1777, after becoming states.

On March 15, 1777, New Jersey passed *An Act for Better Regulating the Militia* which included a tax deduction for each equipped under-aged son, apprentice, or servant. The funds from the tax exemptions were allocated for the relief and benefit of wounded or disabled soldiers and the families of those who died in service. In 1778, the Continental Congress, promised lifetime full pay for disabled soldiers and half pay for the widows of those who died in service. However, many veterans had to sell their bounty land certificates to speculators for pennies on the dollar to buy food for their families and pay debts, leading to a crisis of poverty among early American veterans.

The Veterans Pension Act of 1818 initiated care for veterans, later expanded by Acts in 1820, 1832, and 1836, to include state troops, militia, and widows of military veterans. While additional federal laws were passed prior to the Civil War in 1843, 1844, and 1848, to address pension eligibility for veterans, these Acts remained virtually unchanged, impacting a new group of veterans affected by the ravages of war.

Marcus L. Ward of Essex County, a successful businessman and vigorous supporter of veterans' issues during and after the Civil War, created a system for Union soldiers to allocate part of their pay for their families. Ward used part of his personal fortune to establish a hospital in Newark for returning veterans to receive proper medical care. He also established a veteran's home for wounded and disabled soldiers, laying the groundwork for New Jersey's modern veterans' healthcare system. His efforts included creating a veteran's service office to help secure federal pensions, medical care, and additional services.

The State of New Jersey and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, have continued to honor our veterans, recognizing the diversity of our military forces and supporting those injured during their service.