

“Robert Brashears Memorial Speech”

Tradition, Honor and Service are 3 words that come to mind when I think of Roane County’s history of patriotic service.

I would like to thank the Tennessee Society of the Sons of the Revolution for the honor they have bestowed upon me by asking me to speak at this very special occasion. I would also like to recognize all the other organizations present today who help us to remember and honor our heritage and those that have fought for our freedom. Roane County has a long and honorable tradition of service to our country and one of the founders of this tradition was Robert Samuel Brashears whom we will honor here today.

A list of Revolutionary War soldiers, compiled by noted historian, Snyder Roberts, a descendent of Robert Samuel Brashears, who is being honored today, shows that over 180 Revolutionary War soldiers came to Roane County. Some moved on, while others remained and are buried here in Roane County and have many descendants who still live in Roane County today.

Roane County has a rich tradition of military history. Fort Southwest Point in Kingston was founded as the most southwest point of the Territory South of the Ohio which was opened to white settlement in 1791 and was in operation until 1811. It is interesting to note that when the fort was created, its primary job was to protect the whites from the Indians, but by the time it closed, it was protecting the Indians from the whites.

Since its founding in 1801, Roane County has had soldiers who have fought and died in all of the wars from the War of 1812 to the Vietnam War.

Just a little over a decade after the founding of Roane County, the United States once again found itself embroiled in armed conflict. The War of 1812 involved the United States, Great Britain and the American Indian tribes.

On the lawn of the historic Roane County Courthouse, a regiment commanded by Colonel John Brown was raised at that spot. Over 100 Roane County men volunteered. A plaque is attached to the south wall of the historic Roane County Courthouse honoring those soldiers.

In 1846, the United States once again called for volunteers, this time to serve against Mexico. The Mexican War lasted for two years and was fought by regular soldiers and state volunteers. The volunteers normally served for 1 year terms. Roane County had over 100 men volunteer to serve in the Mexican War.

During the Civil War, the exact numbers are not known but hundreds of men volunteered for service in both the Union and Confederate armies. Many died in battle while others died from disease and in prison. Two county officials, Robert K. Byrd, the Trustee, and James T. Shelley, the County Court Clerk, left their positions to join the Union Army in Kentucky. George L. Gillespie received the Medal of Honor.

Roane County men also served in the Spanish American War.

During World War I, 37 Roane Countians gave their lives.

Among those soldiers who served with distinction and returned to Roane County were:

Benjamin Diggs of Oliver Springs, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross of Extraordinary Heroism in Military Operations Against an Armed Enemy of the United States. He also served in World War II.

Walter Stripling, who fought in nine major battles, also received the Distinguished Service Cross and a certificate for injuries which he received in battle. This certificate was the forerunner to the Purple Heart. He was also awarded a Victor Medal which was inscribed with all the battles in which he fought.

During World War II, Roane County has 132 men who gave their lives. Among those was William G. Christian who died at the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

World War II also saw Roane County participate in service to country in another way. The building of the K-25 and X-10 plants for the development of uranium enrichment saw Roane County entering a new era of service. In order for the plants to be built and to insure the security of the installation, all the families living on the land had to be relocated. People gave up land that had been in the families for generations, all for the greater good. Roane County continues to provide service to our country with the Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the ground breaking research and development that occurs there.

From the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the United States was involved in wars and conflicts in Southeast Asia. 15 Roane Countians lost their lives during the Korean War and 26 gave their lives during the Vietnam War. A listing of names of our fellow Roane Countians that were either Killed in Action or Missing in Action in WWI, WW II, Korean War and Vietnam War can be seen on the memorial standing on the front lawn of the Roane County Courthouse.

Today, Roane Countians serve in all branches of the military including the National Guard. The foundation laid by brave men like Robert Samuel Brashears continues to be built upon today. Many of the people involved in the ceremony today are veterans and we honor them and their service at the same time as we honor the service of Robert Samuel Brashears. I see the young men of Troop 101 here today and I know that the tradition of service to country and community is alive and well in Roane County today.