

# Connecting Across the DKG Maine-New Brunswick Border Conference

Columbia Falls, Maine



Canadian Members

Dr. Lace Marie Brogden, Cheryl Perry Joan Somerville, Dianne Caron

**September 23-24, 2023**

Members from DKG NB were welcomed by DKG friends from the Maine State Organization at the cafeteria at the Wreaths Across America Museum on Saturday Sept. 23 for an inspirational two-day conference. Following lunch, we toured three memorable sites: the Wreaths Across America Museum, the Hospitality House for Gold Star Members and the historic Ruggles House Museum.

I will share a bit of information about these three special museums/

## *Wreaths Across America Museum*



We were treated to a delightful, enlightening tour by our guide Mrs. Willey, a former teacher and volunteer. She shared several fascinating stories about the military exhibits to honour veterans who had fought for their country's freedom. The 1800 square foot museum showcases thousands of military and personal items that have been donated to the organization. The treasures include military uniforms, helmets, personal award and relevant memorabilia.

### *WAA Hospitality House*



The heart-warming house honours Gold Star Military Families by allowing them to stay at the bed and breakfast at no cost. It is a tribute to veterans and each room is dedicated to a special veteran. Items have been donated by families of the veterans and a beautiful stain glass window was donated by the Campbell Family. Students frequently visit the House and are encouraged to learn about several wars (Revolutionary, Civil, Korean, Gulf, WWI, WWII and the Vietnam War). It is an on-hands site for learning.

### *The Ruggles House*



The Ruggles House was built in 1820 by Thomas Ruggles who came to New England to seek his fortune. He built the Federal-styled house for his wife Ruth. The family, including their children and grandchildren, lived in the home for the next 100 years. The Ruggles House features a beautiful flying staircase and the building is a showcase of historic furnishings and antiques. It has been restored and preserved over the years by Mary Ruggles Chandler and volunteers and now serves as an historic site in Columbia Falls.

## Bus Tour of Balsam Valley



*Balsam Valley Monuments*



In mid-afternoon we had a bus tour of the Balsam Valley, visiting Tipland, the Chapel, amphitheatre and other areas of importance.

The Worcester family has farmed balsam for years cultivating and tending acres of forest land. Each wreath is formed by hand with hand-tied bows, each carefully crafted to ensure that it is worthy of the family, the soldier, or the home as a tribute to the person in military service.

The Balsam Valley is a 48,000-acre Medal of Honour Park that has been dedicated by the Worcester Family to honour all American veterans. Over 250 workers use the tips of the balsam fir trees to create wreaths that are distributed and placed on the headstones across the United States and in European countries as a tribute to fallen soldiers. The placement began at the Arlington National Cemetery but has since broadened greatly. Thirteen million pounds of tree branch tips have used for the wreaths and 3.5 pounds of tips are used to create each wreath. The trees are cut at 12 feet high so that workers are able to reach the tips.

Members of family and friends of veterans may purchase dog tags of loved ones and tie them to the branches of trees in honour of their service. The name of the loved one is always announced prior to the placement of the tag.



Tour Director

*The Chapel*



The non-denominational Chapel was built by the Worcester family. It has services all year round. It is a beautiful building with several donated stain glass windows and pews that were donated by other churches.

*Tiger Flight 739 Monument*



One very interesting stop was a monument that had been built to honour those members of the All-Special Forces Unit who were missing during the Vietnam War

when their plane Tiger Flight 739 disappeared. Under “Plausible Deniability”, their names were omitted from the Vietnam Wall Monument since they had not died in active combat. When the Worcester family learned of this, they built the monument as a tribute to them and their names are engraved on the plaque.

The Natural amphitheatre was built in less than a month and music lovers came from all over United States to enjoy concerts given by such performers as Lee Greenwood and the Charlie Daniel’s Band.

We passed by a lit Christmas tree that has never been turned off. Even in travelling it was energized by a generator. That tree honours the soldiers who were never able to celebrate the “Christmas That Never Was”.

The bus tour ended as we passed the four factories where the wreaths are made beginning in mid-October. Over 150,000 wreaths are made each year and are transported by tractor-trailer trucks to military cemeteries. Volunteers announce the name on the veteran’s headstone before placing each wreath as an accolade to his or her military service.

The Balsam Valley and the Wreaths Across America are truly remarkable tributes to all members in the American Military Service and DKG members learned interesting stories and enjoyed the total afternoon experience.

Members were given the opportunity to participate in making wreaths with fresh balsam tips. The wreaths were used as door prizes so that they would be placed with respect upon the headstones of vets in the winners’ communities. Each veteran’s name is announced and a moment of respect given before the wreath is placed on the grave.

*Guest Speaker Dr. Lac Marie Hyland with President Mary Hyland*



Our guest speaker at dinner was our good DKG friend, Dr. Lacey Marie Brogden, Dean of Education at St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, NS. Lacey spoke about women in leadership.

### **Sunday, September 23**

Our day began at 9 a.m. following breakfast. We met at the cafeteria for an informative, helpful discussion of what DKG signifies. We shared valuable information about our DKG activities, our concerns and ideas for retention and revitalization.

Our weekend conference was terrific and we appreciate the fellowship and hard work of our DKG Sisters in Maine in hosting such a superb event.

Dianne Caron  
NB Provincial State President

(Photos submitted by Dianne Caron and Joan Somerville)