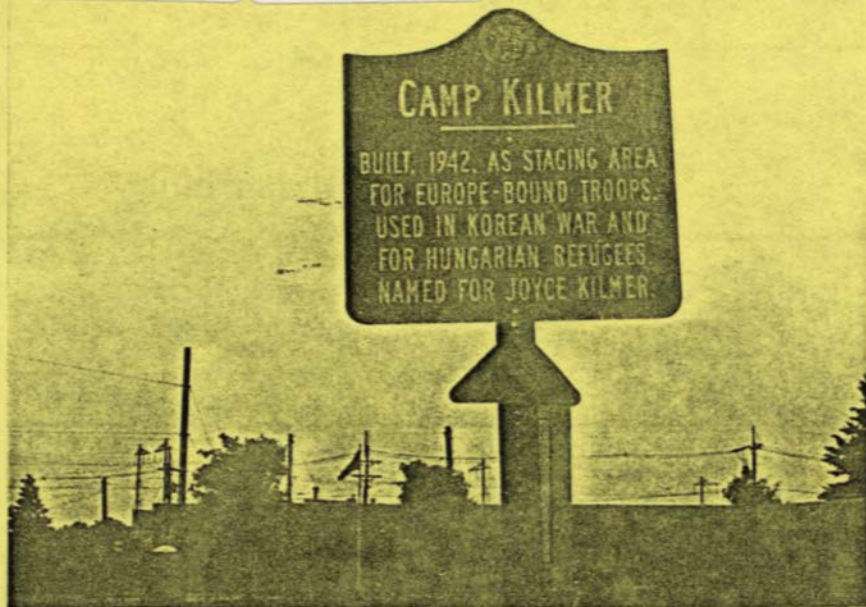


Camp  
Kilmer

(Edison  
History)



In 1941, the Federal Government bought 1,000 acres to use as a staging area for troops fighting the War in Europe. It was an active Army installation through the Korean War. In 1956, it was used as America's Reception Center for Hungarians seeking freedom from Communist oppression. A portion of Camp Kilmer was returned to use by the township as a park and ball-fields. Today, the Sutton/Kilmer Industrial Campus is home to many prestigious corporations and is the site of Edison's large Kilmer Mail Facility. The New Jersey Job Corps Center is also located here. The area bears the name of Middlesex County's poet-laureat, Joyce Kilmer, the author of "Trees." Sergeant Kilmer was killed in action in Europe in World War I.

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REFERENCE

CAMP KILMER  
Plainfield Avenue & Kilmer Road

ASK AT DESK



# Remembrance Of A Poet

Kilmer,  
Joyce  
1978

NT 7/29/78



For my mother February 21, 1918  
Headquarters Co 169th Inf (69th N.Y.)  
A. E. F.

Joyce Kilmer



NOT TO BE TAKEN  
FROM LIBRARY

# From postal center to Army camp, Kilmer lends name to area facilities

By Joseph Kaschak

EDISON — The name Kilmer is intricately woven into the history of Middlesex County and Edison.

The name is reflected in names given to parks, roadways, businesses and an American Legion post in the area. Prior to the use of all-numerical telephone exchanges, most Edison residents could reach their neighbors by dialing KI5 (Kilmer 5). And the large U.S. Postal Service center near the Kilmer motor vehicle inspection station is called the Kilmer General Mail Facility.

In fact, those two buildings occupy land which once was part of the sprawling U.S. Army Camp Kilmer.

Students who had to memorize the poem "Trees" will recall that it and several others were written by New Brunswick native Joyce Kilmer. It is for him that all these buildings, businesses, parks and organizations owe their names.

Of almost equal interest is how Joyce Kilmer came to bear his name. The son of Frederick Barnett Kilmer and Annie Kilburn Kilmer, young Joyce was baptized in Christ Church, New Brunswick, on December 28, 1886, by the Rev. Elisha Brooks Joyce, and one of the baby's sponsors was the Rev. Alfred R. Taylor, the curate of Christ Church.

It was after them that Kilmer was baptized Alfred Joyce Kilmer. From early childhood, he was referred to as Joyce, and he later "discarded" his first name, Alfred.

Kilmer was born on Codwise Avenue — now Joyce Kilmer Avenue — in New Brunswick. The home still stands at 17 Joyce Kilmer and serves as a museum.

Kilmer attended Rutgers Preparatory School and, later, Rutgers University. There he was an associate editor of *The Targum* and wrote some pieces for the *Red Cross Messenger* and *Red Cross Notes*. The latter two publications were printed by Johnson & Johnson, for which Kilmer's father worked as a chemist.

The elder Kilmer was head of Johnson & Johnson's scientific department, and he is credited with developing Johnson & Johnson's Baby Powder and the adhesives used for Band-Aid bandages.

Kilmer attended Columbia University after traveling with the family in Europe and graduated in June 1908 with a bachelor's degree.

He and his wife, Aline Murray Kilmer, whom he met while they were attending Rutgers Prep, were married at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Metuchen the month he graduated. She, too, published works of poetry, and the couple had two children — a boy, Kenton, in 1909 and a girl, Rose Kilburn, in 1912.

Kilmer held a teaching position at Morristown High School until 1909 when he went to work for the *New York Times*. There he wrote book reviews and worked on the Sunday Magazine section until he left for service in the U.S. Army in August 1917. He served with the 165th Infantry, part of the famous 43rd or "Rainbow Division."

While he was serving in France in March 1918, Kilmer was promoted to sergeant. He was killed in action on July 30, 1918, in the Battle of Chateau-Thierry, France. Kilmer was buried in a military cemetery at Fereen-Tardenois, France.

World War II necessitated the rapid establishment of an Army installation in the east so that troops could be processed and deployed to the

## 5 million soldiers stopped in Edison en route to Europe during Second World War



New Brunswick native and famous poet Joyce Kilmer was quite familiar with the Metuchen-Edison area. After all, he was married to Arline Murray in St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Metuchen. He later became a soldier and went to fight on French soil in World War I.

European Theater of Operations, and land was acquired in Edison and Piscataway for the purpose of building such a facility.

The land was primarily farmland, vacant acreage and a poor farm, and it took 11,400 civilians four months to transform it into Camp Kilmer. Reports indicate that the camp consisted of 1,100 buildings, "row upon row of wooden two-story barracks, a 1,600-bed hospital, a 'PX' (post exchange), chapels and a large garbage incinerator."

Many local histories credit Joyce Kilmer American Legion Post 25 with having the post named after the famous poet. Opposition was voiced by the Army because, until that time, no Army installation had been named for an enlisted man, but the post prevailed and Camp Kilmer officially opened in 1942.

It served as a staging area for nearly 5 million soldiers departing for Europe and for those returning to the states.

It should be noted that the camp also served as the setting for approximately 2,000 weddings per year for the many soldiers who passed through Kilmer.

A recently published account of the history of Edison's Stelton Baptist Church tells that Ruth Smith, who served as chairwoman of the church's 1989 tercentennial celebration, would along with her family

and Nellie Potts "always invite soldiers (from Camp Kilmer) home for supper."

Mrs. Smith's husband, Nelson, and she met during the war when he was stationed at Kilmer awaiting orders to be sent overseas.

"I came to church one day," Nelson said, "and this girl caught my attention. She was trying to shoo a pigeon from the windowsill. After the service, she invited me and my buddy home for supper."

"Mother and other families were always inviting soldiers home," said Mrs. Smith. "My mom would invite four at a time when we only had one chicken."

The report continues that Smith was away for three years "sustained through the war by the frequent letters and spiritual tracts sent by Nellie Potts, who wrote faithfully to all the servicemen she knew or had heard about."

Smith returned to Edison after his Army "hitch" to marry that "young girl who caught his attention."

All are still very active members of the Stelton Baptist Church, Plainfield Avenue, and all will attest to the impact that Camp Kilmer had on their lives and the lives of residents of the township.

Pre-existing the establishment of Camp Kilmer was the Smalley family cemetery. The Smalley family were among the original settlers of the Piscataway-Edison area, and their ceme-

tery lies within the borders of Camp Kilmer and to this day serves as a link and reminder of the connection between the camp and the community.

Camp Kilmer was deactivated in 1949, but it was not the end of the camp.

In 1956, it became temporary home for more than 40,000 Hungarian refugees who fled the communists during the Hungarian revolution. Histories reflect that this project was dubbed "Project Mercy" and that Camp Kilmer was nicknamed "Camp Mercy" during the period, and the mess hall was "geared to serve 1,500 meals at a setting."

Just as rapidly as the camp was made America's Reception Center, it was deactivated in May 1957, and many of the refugees settled in Edison and throughout the Middlesex County area.

President Johnson's "Great Society" began to take shape in 1965, and in June of that year, Vice President Hubert Humphrey visited the deactivated military installation to reactivate a large portion of it as the Kilmer Job Corps Center. There, young men were trained in vocational programs to enable them to obtain employment. To this day, the Kilmer (now called Edison) Job Corps trains men, and now women.

However, this is not the end of the Camp Kilmer story. In the mid-1960s, Rutgers University was the recipient of 549 acres of the former military post for what was to become Livingston College.

Edison itself received 149 acres in the railroad site area. Kilmer Park is part of that acreage, and it was given to the township during ceremonies attended by Julie Nixon Eisenhower. The Edison Agnells softball field also is located on former Camp Kilmer land.

What is now the Edison train station was part of a system of spurs and switches for the passenger and freight railcars which serviced Camp Kilmer during the war. The site of the township's municipal complex and Lake Papaiani were once an area which was occupied by what best can be described as a large "jughandle" for the troop trains coming from the south to gain access to the bustling Camp Kilmer of the 1940s.

Today, much of the land which was Camp Kilmer is a large industrial park and home to the Piscataway campus of the Middlesex County Vocational-Technical School System. Many Rutgers and Livingston College offices and classrooms today occupy old army buildings and land.

Headquarters of the 78th Division, National Guard, the Sgt. Joyce Kilmer U.S. Army Reserve Center still serves as concrete reminders of the once busy army installation which has added much richness to local history.

Plans are being formulated by the Army and National Guard for a museum on the site not only to chronicle and preserve the military history of the activities over the years there, but to shed further light on the impact that the men and women who served there had on the men and women, like Nellie Potts and the Nelson Smiths, who lived in the area around Camp Kilmer.

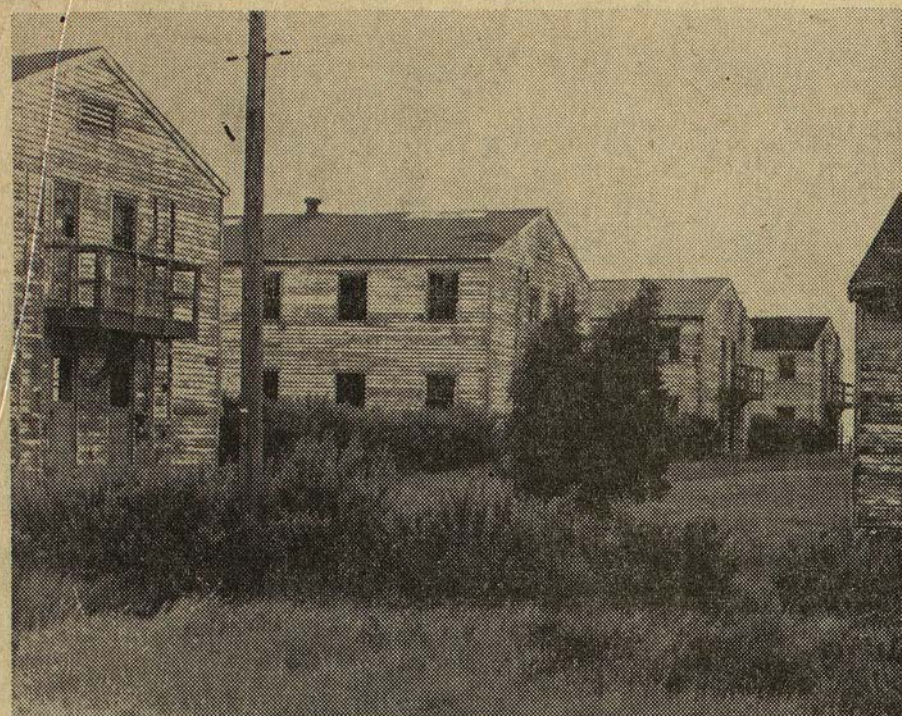
Joseph Kaschak, a U.S. Army veteran, is a member of the Edison Township Historical Society and the Hopelawn Veterans of Foreign Wars. This article is one in a series written by society members for the Metuchen-Edison Review on the history of the area.



ASK AT  
DESK

EDISON TWP. FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY NOT TO BE TAKEN  
FROM LIBRARY

10 The Edison Tribune, Woodbridge, N. J. — Friday, May 29, 1970



Old barracks still stand at Camp Kilmer.



Livingston College Academic Building.



Dormitory section of Livingston College.

Camp Kilmer

(Edison History)

REFERENCE

## Kilmer: Soldiers, Refugees, Students Know It Well

EDISON — Thousands of soldiers, refugees and students have poured through the gates of Camp Kilmer, a site where men have prepared for global warfare, regrouped forces after fleeing Communist oppression, and learned skills in the nation's short-lived war against poverty.

Relative newcomers to Edison and Middlesex County associate Camp Kilmer with the now-defunct Job Corps, one segment of the Johnson Administration's controversial War on Poverty which was phased out last year by President Nixon and replaced with a Job Skill Center.

But old timers, or those who have lived here for at least 28 years, remember the camp bustling with military activity not long after it sprouted from dust in four short months, built by some 11,400 civilians soon after U.S. entry into World War II.

Officially opened in 1942, the military installation served as a staging area for some 4,220,848 soldiers embarking for Europe's war theater or returning stateside. More than 20 divisions passed through the facility.

Joyce Kilmer Post 25, American Legion, in New Brunswick played a strong role in getting the installation named after the New Brunswick-born poet who was killed during World War I.

Kilmer, a sergeant, died in France during the Second

Battle of the Marne, July 30, 1918.

The post was the first such installation ever named after a non-commissioned officer. Kilmer enlisted as a private in the Seventh Regiment of the Rainbow Division.

The Army acquired the post site, former farmlands which straddle Edison and Piscataway Townships, totalling 1,548 acres for \$479,532. Piscataway records show that the area of that township purchased had been the poor farm for more than a century.

Parts of the land had belonged to the Smalley family whose roots reach back into the pioneering days of colonial America of the 1660s.

Still standing on the camp grounds is the burial plot of the Smalley family, containing the grave of John Smalley. The family name is listed among the original members of the Baptist Church of Piscataway and on a 1679 list of settlers.

Camp Kilmer was officially deactivated in 1949, but the outbreak of hostilities in Korea the next year put the camp back in operation as a replacement depot and separation center.

The camp returned to an "inactive" state by 1955 and, except for serving a few diverse functions in the intervening years, retained that status until the inception of Job Corps.

Among the most notable was "Operation Mercy," a move in the mid-1950s to feed and shelter some 32,000 Hungarian refugees who fled to the United States following the bloody Hungarian Revolution against Soviet Union troops in 1956.

At Kilmer the refugees were provided with health and welfare services until they found permanent settlement in this country.

By this time most of the installation's 120 buildings were sealed in mothballs. The 1277th Service Unit Caretaking Detachment was established to maintain the post on a caretaker basis.

This detachment was charged with the duty of providing maintenance for family quarters for military personnel, repair and utility service for anti-aircraft artillery units assigned to Kilmer and support for Army Reserve unit training exercises.

Joining the caretaker unit in 1955 was the Headquarters 483rd AAA Missile Battalion which moved to Kilmer along with the First Army Engineer Field Maintenance Shop which was transferred from Fort Dix.

In 1956, the International Terminal Operating Co. leased warehouse buildings at Kilmer.

The camp returned to an "inactive" state by 1955 and, except for serving a few under a cross-service agreement. The firm at that time subcontracted for Western Electric Co., a prime contractor for the Air Force in connection with the Air Force Defense Early Warning System in the Arctic region.

Kilmer also saw its share of reserve officer training when the installation became headquarters for the Second U.S. Army Corps (Reserve which had responsibility for all Army Reserve and Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) activities in New York and New Jersey. The Reserve Corps. 78th Division followed and established itself at Kilmer a few months later.

During the next year, the Combined Field Maintenance Shop which serviced missile sites in Northern New Jersey and Southern New York State was completed. The shop fell under the jurisdiction of Fort Dix.

Still another exodus of military personnel occurred in 1963, after the Army Corps of Engineers declared the acreage as excess property and earmarked it for disposal by the General Services Administration. The Army had decided on the shut down because the camp's limited acreage made it unsuitable as a training center for combat troops.

The Army's decision prompted Rutgers University and Edison and Piscataway Townships to put in requests for the land for use in campus expansion and industrial development, respectively.

Today, Livingston College, Rutgers University's new \$17 million liberal arts college occupies some 540 acres of the former camp grounds in the Piscataway area.

Some of the old warehouses are still in use, but the university tore down an estimated 40 per cent of the buildings for the new college.

which opened its doors for the first time last September.

Another portion of the camp has undergone a drastic transformation and now supports a light industrial park containing buildings worth in excess of \$5 million. Purchased by Sutton Industries of Union in late 1968, the 250-acre park is the new home of Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Sales, which is housed in a 140,000 square foot building and the American Can Co., which occupies a 170,000 square foot building. Construction is underway for three more buildings, one of which will house National Industries, a Louisville, Kentucky-based conglomerate.

Still another part of the camp grounds have been utilized for educational purposes in the past four years, first with the vocational training program in the

Johnson Administration's Job Corps and more recently with the GOP counterpart, the New Jersey Residential Manpower Center.

Both the now-defunct Job Corps, first opened in 1966 and phased out last year, and the Manpower program are completely federally funded. But unlike its federally-operated predecessor, Manpower comes under the sole jurisdiction of New Jersey's Department of Education, and only state residents are eligible for this training.

Under the Job Corps, youths, most of them high school dropouts with no skills, came from all parts of the country for vocational training and remedial work which usually led to high school equivalency diplomas for those who completed the work and passed the exam.

Money is provided by the

Department of Labor to provide training for some 350 youths between 16 and 22 years. Courses are offered in police cadet training, transportation (trucking and warehousing), food service, auto body and mechanics, welding, printing shop and electronics.

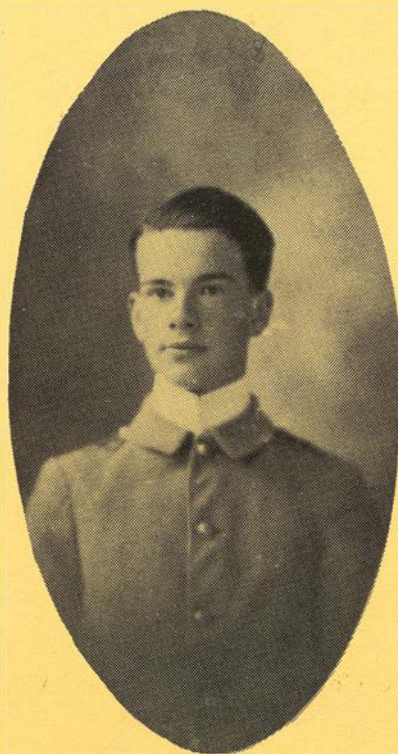
The military operations which once monopolized the entire tract of land off Plainfield Avenue have been pared down, and only the 78th Division now remains, along with the Army Support Activity for Nike bases in the New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania area. Government controlled lands are now down to about 100 acres.

Although the camp no longer serves as a training ground for reserve troops, the installation is used as a reserve clearing center.



Kilmer,  
Joyce

*Joyce Kilmer*  
*and*  
*New Brunswick, New Jersey*



*Joyce Kilmer*  
*Rutgers Preparatory School*

**Richard G. Durnin**



This booklet was re-issued for the July 30, 1993 commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the death of Joyce Kilmer, at the Battle of Chateau Thierry in France. It was first published in 1986.



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Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission

703 Jersey Avenue, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

732-745-4489, 732-745-3888 (TTY)

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## PREFACE

Joyce Kilmer spent twenty of his thirty-one years in New Brunswick. His wife was from Metuchen and he was married there. It is fitting that the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission takes notice of this important American poet and hero.

There are many reminders of him in the area: Joyce Kilmer Avenue (renamed in 1961 from Codwise Avenue), Joyce Kilmer Park, Camp Kilmer, the Kilmer Postal Facility, Joyce Kilmer American Legion Post No. 25, a former telephone exchange Kilmer and several business enterprises using the name. In Western North Carolina there is a Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest. In Brooklyn there is a Joyce Kilmer Square.

The seventy-fifth anniversary of Kilmer's birth was observed in New Brunswick on December 6, 1961 by the local American Legion post and the one-hundredth anniversary was celebrated in 1986.

It is hoped that this booklet may serve to enlighten those who may read it concerning Joyce Kilmer's life and place in literature.

Richard G. Durnin

Richard G. Durnin served as the Middlesex County Historian and as a Cultural and Heritage Commissioner for 19 years, retiring in 1995.

Edison Twp. Public Library  
340 Plainfield Ave.  
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*Rutgers Preparatory School  
Corner of Somerset Street and College Avenue.  
Kilmer went to school here from 1894 to 1904.*



## JOYCE KILMER AND NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY

### BIRTH, FAMILY AND CHILDHOOD.

The year 1986 marks the centennial of the birth of Alfred Joyce Kilmer, American poet, essayist, editor and World War I casualty. Kilmer was born on December 6, 1886 in the central New Jersey college and manufacturing city of New Brunswick, the county seat of Middlesex County. His parents were Frederick Barnett Kilmer (1851-1934) and Annie Kilburn Kilmer (c.1851-1932). The family lived in a two and one-half story frame house at 17 Codwise Avenue, now known as Joyce Kilmer Avenue. Joyce was born in the front upstairs bedroom in this house.

The Kilmer family had moved to New Brunswick from Binghamton, New York in the 1880s. Dr. Kilmer was a chemist by profession and had an establishment in New Brunswick for a few years before he joined the new Johnson & Johnson Company (established 1886), manufacturers of surgical supplies, in 1889. At J&J he became head of the Scientific Department where research was carried on, and he is credited with developing the famous J&J baby powder.

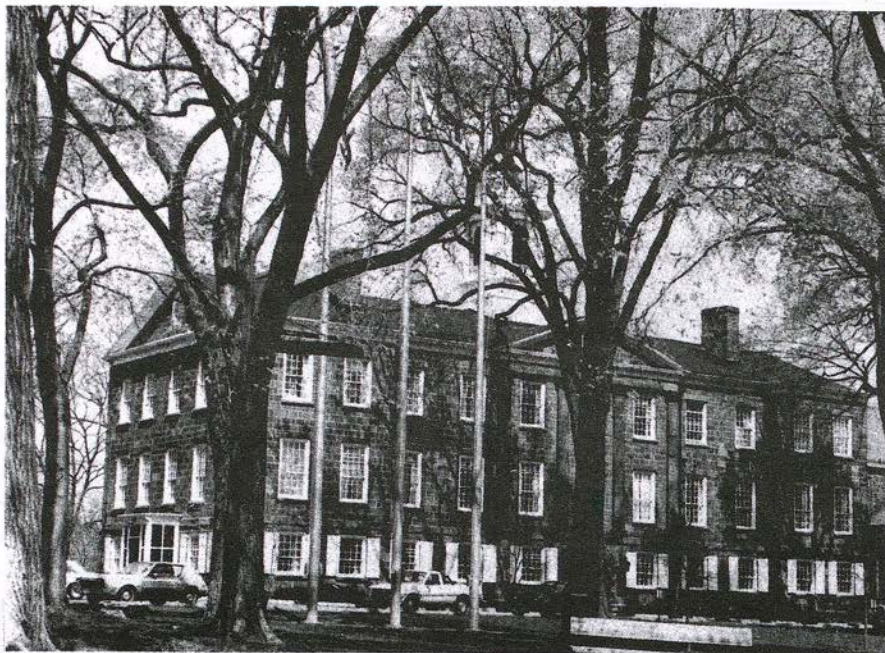
The Kilmers were communicants at the parish of Christ Church (established 1742) in downtown New Brunswick. Young Joyce was baptised at the church on December 28, 1886 by the rector, the Reverend Elisha Brooks Joyce. The sponsors were listed as the Reverend Alfred R. Taylor, the curate, Anda F. Kilmer, the baby's older brother and a Mrs. R. Blauvelt. The child was named Alfred Joyce Kilmer, his first name coming from the first name of the parish curate, and his middle name from that of the last name of the rector. He later came to be known as Joyce Kilmer, discarding his first name.

Joyce was the fourth and last child born to this couple. Two of the earlier children, Ellen Annie Kilmer (1874-1875) and Charles Willoughby Kilmer (1880-1880), had died as infants, and his older brother, Anda Frederick Kilmer (born 1873), died in 1899 at the age of twenty six. So Joyce Kilmer was an only child from the age of twelve, and he was, consequently, a much favored youngster.

### RUTGERS PREPARATORY SCHOOL.

Elementary schooling for young Joyce began in 1894, at the age of seven, when he entered the lower school of the Rutgers Preparatory






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*Rutgers College where K lmer was a student from 1904 to 1906.*



School, then located at the southwest corner of Somerset Street and College Avenue. The walk to school was a short one as the Kilmer family had moved from Codwise Avenue to 147 College Avenue, near the college, in 1892.

This old institution, having begun as Queen's College Grammar School in 1766, was under the headmastership of Eliot R. Payson, a distinguished New Jersey educator. Payson's progressive leadership had extended coeducation (which had begun earlier at the primary level) through the secondary grades.

Joyce was at home during the school year 1895-1896. His experience with the world outside New Jersey and the United States was greatly expanded when he travelled to England with his parents in 1899 when he was twelve. He went again to England, with his mother, in the summer of 1903, the year before he was graduated from the Rutgers Preparatory School.

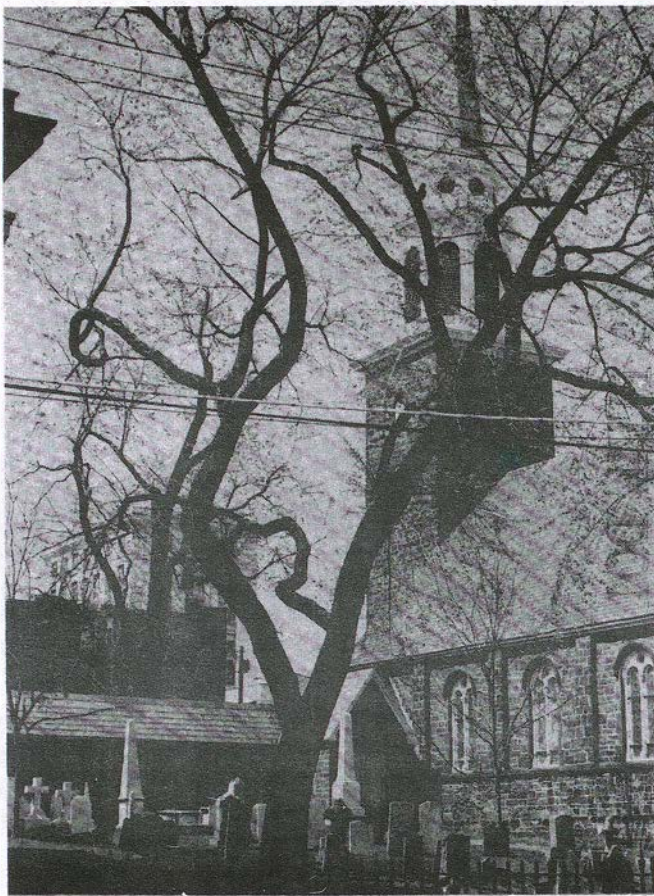
He read widely as a child and his poetry writing began then. He disliked the study of arithmetic and geography, had trouble with Greek, and never took an interest in chemistry, his father's profession. But he won a prize for public speaking, was editor of the Argo, a literary monthly, where some of his earliest writing appeared, was a member of Delta Theta fraternity and served as president of his class. It is interesting to note that as early as age fourteen he signed his name "A. Joyce Kilmer," and a 1903 history examination paper is signed "Joyce Kilmer." He was graduated in 1904 when he was seventeen.

His school has had good reason to remember him, aside from his national fame, as he wrote "Down Where the Raritan is Flowing" (sung to the tune of "The Old Folks at Home") and "Football Song" (sung to the tune of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"). His mother gave \$500 for the establishment of a "Joyce Kilmer English Prize," in his memory, in 1929.

#### RUTGERS COLLEGE YEARS.

Joyce Kilmer entered Rutgers College in the fall of 1904, and his two-year stay there coincided with the last year of Dr. Austin Scott's presidency (he resigned in June 1905) and the first year of the long service of Dr. William H.S. Demarest (who served as Acting President during 1905-1906). It was a relatively small institution with about eighty or so students in an entering class and about 240 in the entire student body.






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*Christ Episcopal Church, New Brunswick,  
New Jersey, where Joyce Kilmer was baptised and where he attended during his New Brunswick years.  
The Joyce Kilmer memorial tree is in the foreground.*



The Kilmer family home, at 147 College Avenue, was only a block away from the campus. The house stood on the east side of the street and was taken down in the fall of 1960 to make room for the new college commons.

Kilmer was a reporter and later associate editor of The Targum, the college newspaper. During his Rutgers years he contributed some pieces to Red Cross Notes and the Red Cross Messenger, publications of the Johnson & Johnson Company. At Rutgers he was listed as "A.J. Kilmer."

In those years it seems that a student had to pass the entire year's course of study in order to progress to the next year's class. Joyce had trouble with mathematics, and it was required that he repeat the sophomore year. He and his parents were very much opposed to this policy so he transferred to Columbia College, in New York City, where he was permitted to enter the junior class.

#### COLUMBIA COLLEGE.

Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler was the president of Columbia during Joyce Kilmer's two years there. If Kilmer took work in English and literature, as is likely, he probably would have known such famous professors as Brander Matthews and George Rice Carpenter. John Dewey, the famous American philosopher, was on the faculty, but it is not known whether Kilmer had contact with him.

At Columbia Kilmer served as associate editor of The Spectator, the college newspaper, and was a member of Delta Upsilon fraternity and the Philolexian Society. He won the Curtis and Philolexian Medal (public speaking) and the Springern Belles Lettres contest. He was graduated in June of 1908 with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

#### JOYCE KILMER AND CHRIST CHURCH, NEW BRUNSWICK.

As was mentioned earlier, Joyce Kilmer's baptism took place at Christ Church twenty-two days after his birth, and he was named after the curate and rector of the parish. He was an active communicant of the church during his New Brunswick years.

In 1904, at the age of eighteen, he became a lay reader at services. About this time he attended a religious retreat at Holy Cross (Anglican) Monastery, up the Hudson River, at West Park, New York. Without doubt, he was a young man of deep spiritual orientation. He gave his





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Joyce Kilmer



mother the gift of a rosary in 1907. She has written that he once had an interest in entering the ministry of the Episcopal Church.

Joyce Kilmer can be said to have been identified with "high churchmanship," that is, ritual and emphasis on the Eucharist that were more closely associated with Anglo-Catholic or Roman Catholic practices. Christ Church in New Brunswick, like many Episcopal parishes of the time, was no doubt a "low church," one that had a minimum of ritual. Kilmer referred to himself as having been a "ritualistic Anglican," in a letter written July 14, 1914 to the Reverend James Daley, S.J. Kilmer's interest in the Gaelic heritage and Irish nationalism brought him close to Roman Catholicism.

Joyce Kilmer and his wife, Aline (Murray) Kilmer, whom he married at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Metuchen, in June of 1908, became members of the Roman Catholic Church at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle, New York City, on November 5, 1913.

Frederick Kilmer, the poet's father, served as People's Warden at Christ Church from 1926 to his death in 1934. A tree in the southeast corner of the churchyard, said to have been planted by Dr. Kilmer in the 1930s, still stands in memory of Joyce Kilmer.

### HIS CAREER.

Joyce Kilmer's wife Aline (Murray) Kilmer (1888-1941) had been a classmate at Rutgers Preparatory School and she was later graduated from the Vail-Dean School, Elizabeth, in 1907. She, too, had interest and ability in poetry. Seven published works from her pen appeared over the years.

Kilmer's first position was as a teacher of English and Latin at Morristown High School where he spent the academic year 1908-1909. He did some writing and had some poems published in magazines during the year.

In June of 1909 he left Morristown High School for a position at Charles Scribner's book store in New York City where he worked for two weeks. In the summer of 1909 he went to Funk and Wagnalls Publishing Company to work on the preparation of the Standard Dictionary. He remained there until September of 1912 when he became editor of The Churchman, an Episcopal Church weekly.

In May of 1913 he went to the New York Times where he worked on



the Sunday magazine section and wrote some book reviews. There were two children, Kenton (born 1909) and Rose Kilburn (born 1912), and the family lived in Mahwah, New Jersey, in a house built for them in 1911. The Erie Railroad provided convenient commuter service to work in New York City. He remained at the Times until his departure for army service in August 1917.

During the winter term of 1916-1917, Kilmer gave a course in "news-paper verse" in the Department of Journalism, New York University, and he was said by a former student to have been "a stimulating and constructive teacher."

### SERVICE IN WORLD WAR I.

World War I had begun between Austria and Serbia in July of 1914. In August of that year Germany, Russia, France and Great Britain became involved. The entry of the United States into the European conflict came on April 6, 1917.

Joyce Kilmer had joined the 7th Regiment, New York National Guard, in April of 1914. He enlisted in the regular army in August of 1917, and was with the 165th Infantry, part of the famous 43rd or "Rainbow Division."

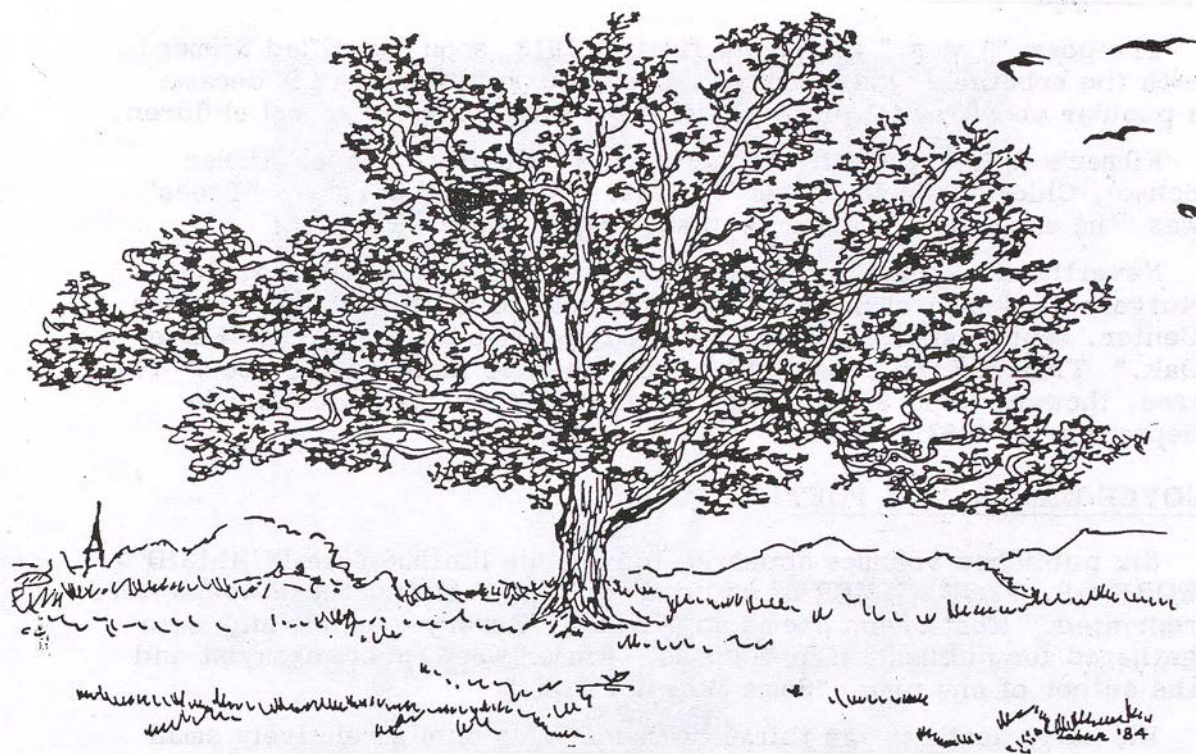
His last visit to New Brunswick was on September 10, 1917 when he brought for burial the body of his five-year old daughter, Rose Kilburn Kilmer. She had been stricken with poliomyelitis in July of 1913, before she was one year of age. The Kilmers were then living in Larchmont, New York. Joyce left for training at Camp Mills, Long Island, New York in September of 1917.

Very soon afterwards, in October of 1917, he was off for service in France. Promotion to the rank of sergeant came in March of 1918.

Joyce Kilmer was killed in action on July 30, 1918 in the Battle of Chateau Thierry, France. He is buried in a military cemetery at Fere-en-Tardenois. A posthumous award of the Croix de Guerre was awarded by the French government. His obituary appeared in the New York Times of August 18, 1918.

He left his widow and four children, Kenton (now living in Vienna, Virginia), Deborah (now Sister Michael at a Benedictine convent in St. Joseph, Minnesota), Christopher and Michael (both of whom have died). His wife, Aline (Murray) Kilmer, died in Stillwater, New Jersey on October 1, 1941.





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*Drawing of the Kilmer oak tree by Joan Labun, New Brunswick, 1984. Tree was located near the Rutgers Labor Education Center, just south of Douglass College. Tree was taken down in September 1963.*



## THE KILMER OAK.

The poem "Trees," appearing first in 1913, soon identified Kilmer with the arboreal. The poem was set to music in 1922 and it became a popular vocal recital piece as well as a song sung by school children.

Kilmer's father wrote to teachers and pupils of the Joyce Kilmer School, Chicago, on December 2, 1932, saying that the poem "Trees" was "the exaltation of a commonplace tree in his backyard."

Nevertheless, the old seventy-foot high oak tree, located at the Rutgers Agricultural School (later the location of the Labor Education Center, southeast of Douglass College), became known as the "Kilmer Oak." This was the tree said by many to have inspired the poet. The tree, thought to be 300 years old, was dying and was cut down in September of 1963.

## JOYCE KILMER AS A POET.

Six published volumes appeared during his lifetime (see PUBLISHED WORK OF JOYCE KILMER at end of booklet). Some of these works were reprinted. Most of his poems appeared in literary journals and were gathered for publication in volumes. Kilmer was a poet, essayist and the author of one play, "Some Mischief Still."

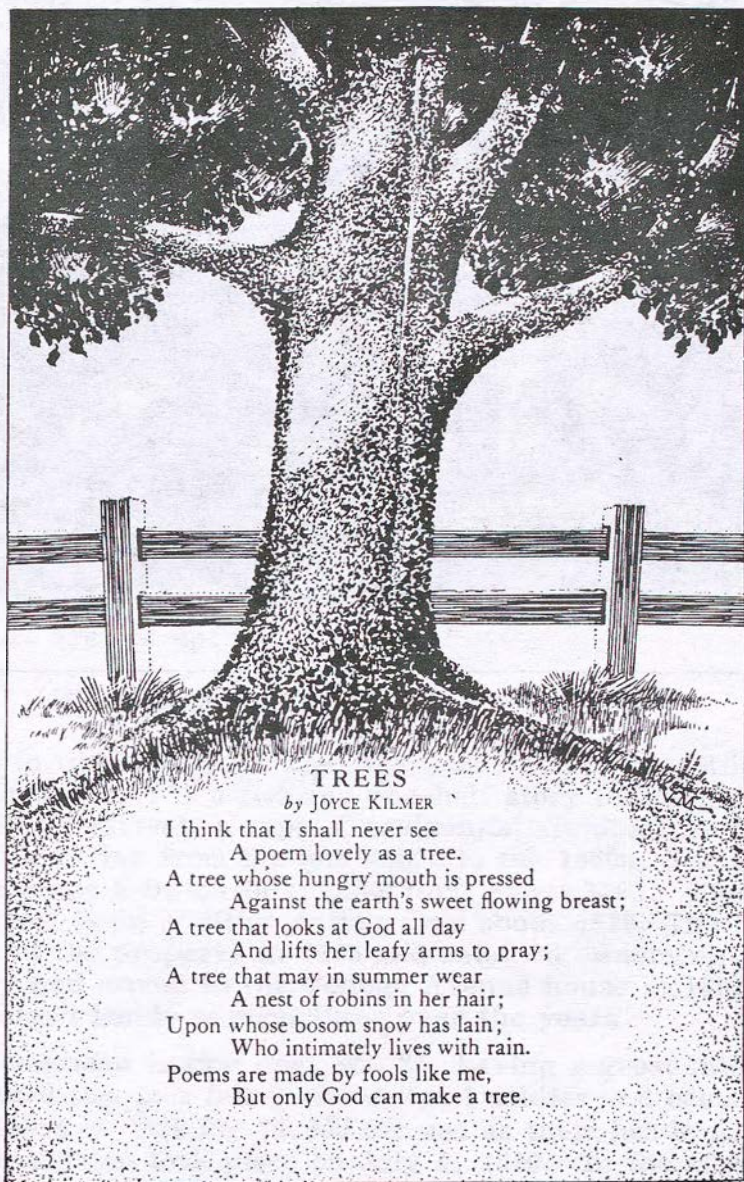
His early death at age thirty one has left us only a relatively small collection of work. Poets, along with other literary figures, often enjoy many productive years, and sometimes their most distinguished work appears at a mature age. Would Joyce Kilmer have continued to be productive, and would his prose and poetry have received increasingly favorable critical acceptance as the years moved on?

"Trees" was the poem that early established the reputation of Kilmer. Many school children since the 1920s have heard it, learned it and sung it, often at Arbor Day exercises in April.

The poetry of Joyce Kilmer reflected the scenes and people who made up his world. He was sentimental and romantic. Poetry in America underwent great changes in the twentieth century, beginning even before his death. The sentimentality and romanticism of the "household poets," Longfellow, Whittier, J.R. Lowell and O.W. Holmes, gave way to different language styles, mood and subject matter. Joyce Kilmer's poetry reflected these older models.

He was the first widely recognized American Roman Catholic poet. Here he received acclaim and appeared in the literary anthologies used



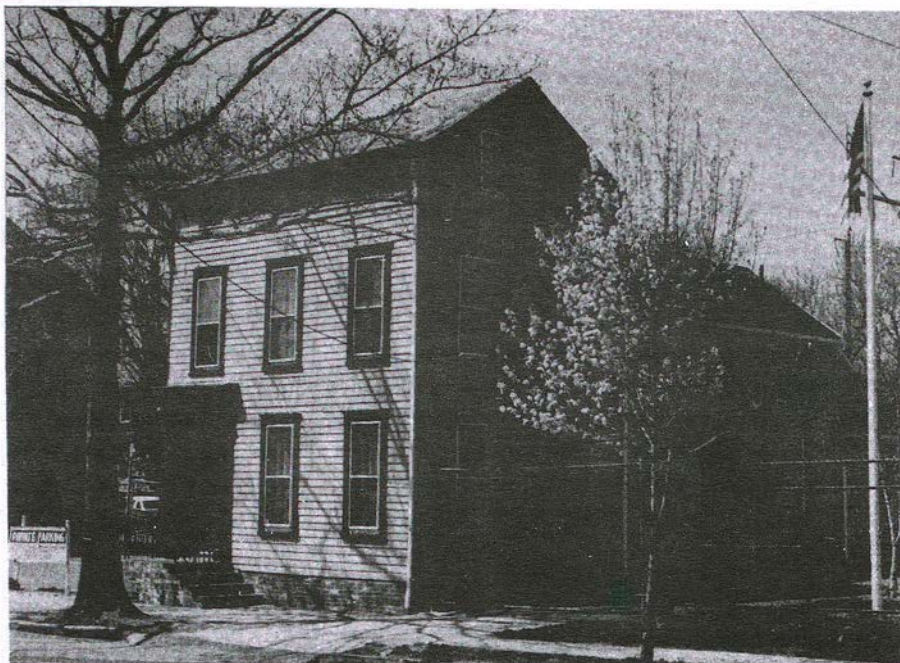


### TREES

by JOYCE KILMER

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.  
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;  
A tree that looks at God all day  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;  
A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.





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*The birthplace of Joyce Kilmer in New Brunswick, New Jersey.*



in the church schools. As a review of a recent work on the American Roman Catholic experience pointed out, members of that prominent denomination had made only modest contribution to the intellectual life of the nation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Then appeared Joyce Kilmer's writings.

Joyce Kilmer began to write poetry at an early age. A scrapbook in the Rutgers University Library contains poems written each school year on the occasion of his mother's birthday. A later one, written in August 1911, mentioned the recent coronation of King George V:

"We in this sea-severed nation,  
Share with England our elation."

From another poem in the scrapbook:

"They say that life is a highway and the milestones are the years.  
And now and then there is a tollgate where you buy your way  
with tears."

An editorial on Joyce Kilmer appeared in the New York Times of Sunday, August 25, 1918:

"His was a fine career- and his country and his country's literature are not apt to forget him."

#### THE JOYCE KILMER HOUSE.

The house in which Joyce Kilmer was born, at 17 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, in New Brunswick, is a two and one-half story building known as vernacular Greek revival, a type of residential architecture found in New Brunswick dating from the late 1830s to the 1860s. The oldest part of the building was a Dutch farmhouse built about 1780. The structure facing the street is an addition dating from about 1839. The Kilmer family acquired the property in 1886 and retained ownership until 1903 although they had moved to the College Avenue house in 1892. The property changed hands several times over the years.

The local American Legion Post No. 25, having a great interest and strong emotional ties to a fellow World War I soldier and casualty, purchased the house in 1929 for \$4,600 for use as their headquarters. The formal dedication took place on July 4, 1930. In the afternoon of that day, the Reverend Herbert Parrish, rector of Christ Church, dedicated the upstairs front bedroom as the "Joyce Kilmer Shrine."





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*Joyce Kilmer*



The Joyce Kilmer Post No. 25, American Legion, used the building for many years, but as the "age of vandalism" began to move in, unattended buildings were extremely vulnerable and the organization found that it could no longer keep up with the damage. The house was sold to the state of New Jersey, the purchase being authorized in 1967 and the final purchase in October of 1969 for \$24,000. There had been discussion of the destruction of the place in 1965. The state purchase saved the house. The Legion Post continued to use and maintain the building until 1972.

In 1973 the Joyce Kilmer Birthplace Association, a non-profit group, was organized and invited membership and activity. The late Kenneth Q. Jennings, journalist, professor and city historian, acted as the spearhead in the restoration of the Kilmer house. The association leased the building from the state and some restoration work took place. Members of the New Jersey Arborists were active in the association. A Joyce Kilmer Poetry Center was located in the building. Money for the restoration came from state and local funds and it was completed in 1978. The illness and later death of Mr. Jennings removed him from a leadership position and the association became inactive.

The city of New Brunswick took lease of the building on September 1, 1983. The "Dial-a-Ride" project, operated by the city for the elderly, occupies the first floor. A tenant is on the second floor, but the bedroom where Joyce Kilmer was born is preserved.

With the approach of the Joyce Kilmer Centennial, Dr. Harvey J. Brudner of Highland Park called together a group of interested people and the first meeting was held in the house on January 9, 1986.



## PUBLISHED WORK OF JOYCE KILMER

### A Summer of Love.

New York: Baker and Taylor, 1911.

New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1911.

Kilmer's first book. It is made up of sentimental poems from his early years, many of which had been published in newspapers and magazines.

### Trees and Other Poems.

New York: George H. Doran Company, 1914.

London: Duckworth, 1941.

The poem "Trees" made him famous. It was written while he was living at Mahwah and it first appeared in Poetry magazine for August 1913.

### The Circus, and Other Essays.

New York: Lawrence J. Gomme, 1916.

New York: George H. Doran Company, 1921.

Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1968.

Reprints from various periodicals.

### Main Street and Other Poems.

New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917.

Poems from various periodicals.

### Literature in the Making; by Some of its Makers.

New York: Harper and Brothers, 1917.

Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1968.

Introduction by Kilmer. Selections from American writers, among them William Dean Howells, Kathleen Norris, Booth Tarkington, Rex Beach, John Erskine, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Amy Lowell and Fanny Hurst.

### Dreams and Images: An Anthology of Catholic Poets.

New York: Boni and Liveright, 1917.

New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926.



Dedicated to the Rev. James J. Daly, S.J. Five of Kilmer's poems, "Trees" being one of them, are in the volume. One poem by his wife appears in the work.

Joyce Kilmer's Anthology of Catholic Poets.

New York: Liveright, 1937.

New York: Books, Inc., 1939.

New York: Liveright, 1939.

New York: Halcyon House, 1940.

New York: Halcyon House, 1947.

Garden City: Image Books, 1955.

This is a revision of Dreams and Images: An Anthology of Catholic Poets (1917).

Edited by Robert C. Holiday.

Joyce Kilmer.

Volume I: Memoir and Poems.

Volume II: Prose Works.

Kilmer's only dramatic work, "Some Mischief Still," a play in one act, is in this volume. The two-volume work consists of reprints of poems, essays and lectures.

New York: George H. Doran, 1918.

Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1968.

Joyce Kilmer

Two volumes in one.

Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1918.

Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1929.

Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1932.

Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1935.

Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1940.

Garden City: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1945.

By Annie Kilburn Kilmer.

Memoirs of My Son, Sergeant Joyce Kilmer ... with Numerous Un-  
published Poems and Letters.

New York: Brentano, 1920.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY ON JOYCE KILMER

Hillis, John.

Joyce Kilmer: A Bio-bibliography.

Washington: Catholic University of America Libraries, 1962.

Kilmer, Annie Kilburn.

Leaves from My Life.

New York: Frye Publishing Company, 1925.

Joyce Kilmer Scrapbooks.

Special Collections, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick,  
New Jersey.

Folder on Joyce Kilmer.

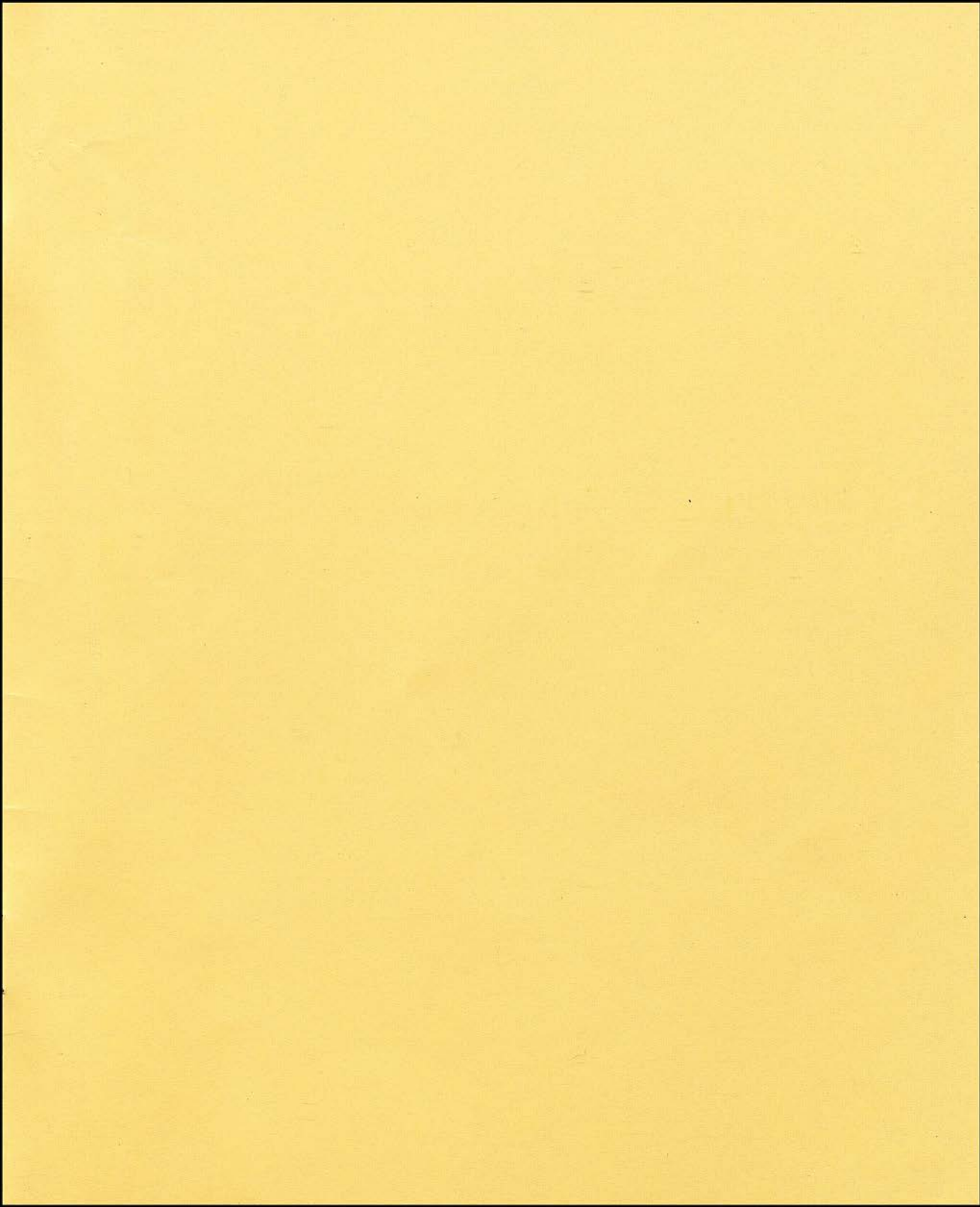
Rutgers Preparatory School Library,  
Somerset, New Jersey.

Smaridge, Noah.

Pen and Bayonet: The Story of Joyce Kilmer.

New York: Hawthorn Books, 1962.







# Death of poet-soldier Joyce Kilmer didn't still his works

By DORIS E. BROWN  
Home News staff writer

HN  
2/3/80

"... Poems are made by fools like me,

But only God can make a tree."

NEW BRUNSWICK — Joyce Kilmer, the New Brunswick-born poet who wrote those immortal lines, was killed in action on a French battlefield in World War I, 62 years ago Wednesday.

Today, "Trees" is the only remembered poem by the illustrious poet, who when he died at the age of 31 on July 30, 1918, already was one of the best-known literary figures in the United States.

Even the majestic white oak, which inspired the poem, failed to survive the years. The stump was uprooted last March during construction of an addition to Rutgers Labor Education Center.

In 1920 when the poem was but seven years old, the poet's mother, writing in "Memories of My Son, Sgt. Joyce Kilmer," observed: "One of Joyce's poems 'Trees' has been more quoted than almost any other."

Today, there's hardly an American who can't recite or at least recognize some of its 12 lines. "Trees" remains a standby at Arbor Day celebrations, is memorized by numerous school children and even has been put to song.

Neglected today, except for that single poem, the New Brunswick-born poet had earned widespread fame for many other literary accomplishments before his untimely death.

As early as the age of 25, Kilmer was a celebrity listed in "Who's Who." He was the youngest member of the Authors' Club and had achieved success as a popular people's poet and winner of prizes for poems read before the Poetry Society. In addition, he was much in demand as a circuit lecturer and also gave readings of his poems.

Though endearingly praised by his mother in her reminiscences, his father, Dr. Fred B. Kilmer, was more reserved in comments contained in a letter addressed to Librarian Mary N. Walker of the New Brunswick Free

Public Library on April 4, 1919, and still treasured by the library. He wrote that his son's "childhood was perhaps that of an ordinary child in an American family . . . So far as I can say, he was not a precocious child, and yet he was not backward." The father added, "Even in his manhood he still retained the elements of a good natured boy."

Kilmer, whose birthplace is preserved by the city, was born at 17 Codwise (now Joyce Kilmer) Ave., on Dec.



JOYCE KILMER  
... dead 62 years

6, 1886. Baptized Alfred Joyce Kilmer at Christ Church here, he as an adult dropped the first name. At age 6, he moved with his family to College Avenue, where his parents still resided at the time of his death.

"He worked hard at his studies, and records of his early school days show good averages," related the father in his letter, explaining that his son graduated from Rutgers Preparatory School in 1904, "taking the Lane Prize." The father told the librarian: "In his school days he became editor of

the school paper, the Argo, and the principal of the school stated several times that he made a success of it, and gave it as much of a literary character as a boy of his age would be able to do."

During the next two years at Rutgers College, young Kilmer was assistant editor of the Targum, and during his subsequent two years at Columbia University, he served as editor of that university's daily newspaper.

Two weeks after his 1908 graduation from Columbia, Kilmer married Aline Murray of Metuchen. He had aspired to the Episcopal ministry, but turned to a literary career instead although remaining devout. He and his wife converted to Catholicism in 1913, the same year in which a baby daughter died from infantile paralysis.

Kilmer, whom a friend said combined "piety and mirth" to live up to the joyfulness of his first name, dated his emergence as a poet from 1913. He also became the laureate of the Catholic Church.

After graduation from Columbia, he engaged in several, brief literary ventures in New York City, including editing a horsemen's magazine, selling at a book store and helping to revise a dictionary. He came to prominence when he joined the Churchman as literary editor and supplemented religious journalism with book reviews for the Nation and the New York Times. He also became poetry editor of Literary Digest.

Kilmer's last employment before going off to war was as a regular book reviewer and special writer for the Sunday magazine of The New York Times.

As Christopher Morley wrote in a tribute to Kilmer, "the poet must go where the greatest songs are singing." Less than three weeks after the United States entered the war, the New Brunswick native enlisted as a private in the Seventh Regiment of New York's National Guard. He later was transferred at his own request to the 165th Infantry, U.S. Army. This was the famous old "Fighting Sixty-Ninth," a unit of the Rainbow Division described by him as "a volunteer regiment, the bravest and best regiment in the army."

A sergeant-major who served with Kilmer in the Marne advance told The New York Times, "The front was his goal and no sooner had the regiment reached France than he made every possible effort to be transferred." The poet soon achieved posting to intelligence with promotion to the rank of sergeant.

As the sergeant-major remembered, "He would always be doing more than his orders called for — that is, getting much nearer to the enemy's positions than any officer would ever be inclined to send him. Night after night he would lie out in No Man's Land, crawling through barbed wires, in an effort to locate enemy positions, and enemy guns, and tearing his clothes to shreds. On the following day he would come to me for a new uniform."

Stars and Stripes, in reporting Kilmer's death near the Ourcq river some 90 miles from Paris, related: "He had volunteered his services to the major of the foremost battalion because his own battalion would not be in the lead that day."

Kilmer and his fellow soldiers were engaged in a five-day battle for mastery of a heights when the battalion adjutant fell, and without commission or appointment Kilmer found himself serving as aide to the commander. Discovering that the woods ahead harbored machine guns, he reported his findings and then led a patrol to establish the enemy's location. Several hours later when the battalion advanced into the woods to secure the spot, the body of the valiant poet-soldier was found. He had been killed by a bullet in the brain.

Sgt. Alexander Woolcott, another literary great who was with the regiment the day the battalion came out of the woods, said that the news of Kilmer's death "greeted me on every turn. The captain under whom he had been serving for several months, the major at whose side he fell, stray cooks, doughboys, runners — all shook their heads sorrowfully and talked among themselves of what a good soldier he had been."

Kilmer was buried beside a lieutenant at the edge of a small copse close to the river known as the Wood of the Burned Bridge, near the half-destroyed

village of Seringes which American troops had captured the night before his death. Enlisted men as a rule were not buried with officers, but Kilmer had won so much admiration and respect that his commanding officer authorized the grave to be dug on the spot next to that of a lieutenant who had just lost his life. The grave was marked by a wooden cross inscribed, "Sergeant Joyce Kilmer...Killed in Action — July 30, 1918."

Kilmer unwittingly wrote his own epitaph in a earlier poem to an English poet, who preceded him to death in the

first World War. The first verse of "In Memory of Rupert Brooke" reads:

*In alien earth, across a troubled sea,  
His body lies that was so fair and young.*

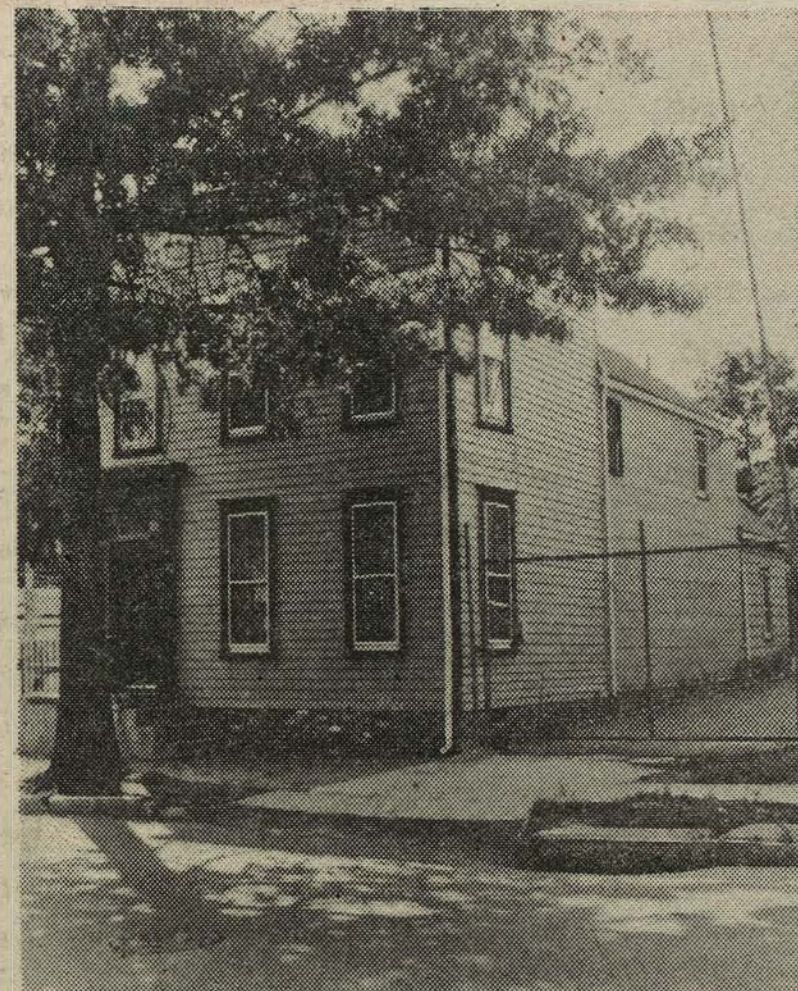
*His mouth is stopped, with half his songs unsung;*

*His arm is still, that struck to make men free.*

*But let no cloud of lamentation be  
Where, on a warrior's grave, a lyre is hung*

*We keep the echoes of his golden tongue,*

*We keep the vision of his chivalry.*



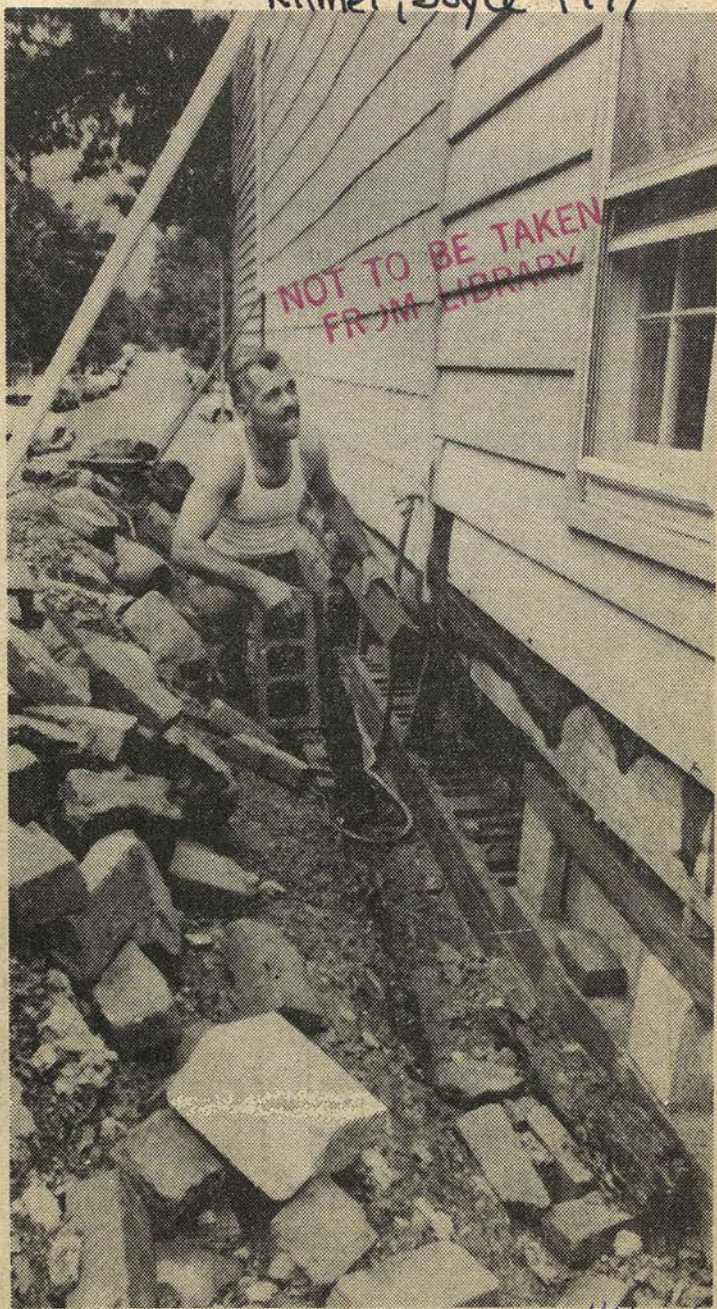
Home News photo by Pat Ferraioli

**POET'S BIRTHPLACE** — New Brunswick has preserved the birthplace of one of its most famous sons, Joyce Kilmer, at 17 Joyce Kilmer Ave. He was born there in 1886, and died in France during World War I in 1918.



NEW BRUNSWICK

Kilmer, Joyce 1977



HN 7/17/77

The 200-year-old main foundation of the Joyce Kilmer Birthplace in New Brunswick is being replaced section by section without disturbing city administration personnel who work inside the historic site. State contractor Michael Kalogridis of Three Brothers Contracting Co., Edison, helps install a new concrete block-and-cement foundation. The newer front of the building, shown at rear of photo where Welton Street meets Joyce Kilmer Avenue, requires less foundation work. The state intends to complete \$10,000 in exterior rehabilitation and improvements by Sept. 1. Dedication of the famed poet's birthplace will be later this year, says Birthplace Association President Kenneth Q. Jennings.



# Centennial of Kilmer celebrated

Kilmer,  
Joyce

NT 11/16/86

By AL FEMIA

News Tribune staff writer

WOODBRIIDGE — World War I cut short the life of poet and essayist Joyce Kilmer, who was 31 when he died.

Nonetheless, the New Brunswick native was able to provide a body of work which will go on exhibit during the Joyce Kilmer Centennial Year, to run 12 months beginning in December.

Copies of photographs, letters, telegrams and greeting cards — gleaned from thousands of pieces of Kilmer memorabilia — will be shown beginning Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m. in Mendham Public Library, according to Leland Cook of Colonia.

Cook is a professional photographer and member of the Joyce Kilmer Centennial Commission.

Mendham is one of 13 libraries that will host the exhibit in the coming year, Cook said. The exhibit will be shown at the Woodbridge Main Library at a time to be announced.

"About four months ago, we started sifting through newspapers, photographs, original letters and water color cards he had made for his mother as a child," Cook said.

"We found water color birthday cards he did when he was obviously quite young," Cook said.



LELAND COOK

"He was very close to his mother. Very often they had dinner engagements. Once, he couldn't reach her by phone to confirm (a dinner date), so he sent her a telegram.

See CENTENNIAL, Page A-14.



# CENTENNIAL: Exhibits to honor author of 'Trees'

Continued from A-11

While he was living in Mahwah, Kilmer was hurrying to work at the New York Times one morning when he was struck by a train and taken to Suffern Hospital. Cook said he suffered broken ribs, although Kilmer tries to play down the severity by saying "slight internal injuries" so as not to worry his father, Frederick Barnett Kilmer, a chemist with Johnson and Johnson.

"Some letters were written to his mother (with a) New York Times letterhead," Cook said.

Kilmer, perhaps best known for the poem "Trees," worked for the

Times from 1913 to 1917, writing book reviews and articles for the Sunday magazine section.

In August 1917, he left for the Army. Kilmer was killed in action on July 30, 1918, in the Battle of Chateau Thierry.

He was buried in a military cemetery in France. A posthumous award of the Croix de guerre was awarded by the French government.

Cook, 68, a retired advertising photographer with Tiffany's of New York, said his interest in Kilmer stems from a 1961 New York Times photograph he took of the Kilmer oak tree that inspired the famous poem. The accompanying article

mentioned that the tree, located near the Rutgers Labor Education Center, was dying.

Two years later, in September 1963, Cook attended a ceremony to cut down the tree.

"I had photographed it various times for my collection and had received a Freedoms Foundation award from Valley Forge for the picture," he said.

Cook said he subsequently met Kilmer's oldest son, Kenton, now 77 and living in Virginia, and a daughter, Sister Michael of the Benedictine convent in St. Joseph, Minn.

The state Senate has declared Nov. 30 through Dec. 6 to be Joyce

Kilmer — 100 Years Week. One of the highlights will be four talks by Kenton Kilmer.

The talks are scheduled for: Wednesday, Dec. 3 at 7:30 p.m. in the Somerset County Library; Thursday, Dec. 4 in Morristown at a time and place to be announced; Friday, Dec. 5 at 7:30 p.m. in the Mendham library; and Saturday, Dec. 6 — Kilmer's 100th birthday — at 2:30 p.m. in the Elks building in New Brunswick.

Anyone wishing to attend the Elks luncheon should make a reservation by sending \$20 to TICKETS: The Kilmer House, 17 Joyce Kilmer Ave., New Brunswick 08901.

More information on the luncheon may be obtained by phoning (201) 745-5117.

Kilmer was educated at Rutgers Prep School, Rutgers College and Columbia College. He had a brief career as a teacher at Morristown High School before entering the publishing business. He published poems, essays, and literary reviews in magazines and had three published volumes of poetry.

Because of Kilmer's reputation, a 3,800-acre national forest has been dedicated to him in Robbinsville, N.C. In July, a rededication ceremony took place at the Joyce Kilmer

Memorial Forest.

"I saw a lot of Americana (in Kilmer's works)," Cook said. "But there was more religion. I felt he was an all-American person who felt that he had a patriotic duty (and) that's why he enlisted."

Dr. Harvey Brudner, commission president, said the Dec. 6 parade will begin at 1 p.m. on Livingston Avenue near New Brunswick High School and end near the Kilmer monument on the street bearing the poet's name.

Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3117 in Edison is coordinating the event, he said.

## A special remembrance

MILLTOWN — The 350 students at Joyce Kilmer School here will play a role in the observance of the 100th birthday of the school's namesake, according to the principal.

Each student will be asked to express in writing the message conveyed in Kilmer's poem "Trees," said Dr. Bert Nussbaum.

Faculty members in each grade will select the best two or three entrants. Three teachers will then select the best of each class and the best overall, Nussbaum said.

"One of the things we started to do at least a couple of times a week is to read over the school's loudspeaker from a Joyce Kilmer pamphlet," he said.

"We are going to take the poem 'Trees,' read it to the kids, make copies and ask each youngster to tell me what the poem means to them, and then we will have a message it conveys to them."



**Sad fate** Courtesy Leland Cook

The grave of poet Joyce Kilmer is marked by this simple cross in a military cemetery at Fereen-Tardenois in France. He died in the Battle of Chateau Thierry in 1918.



# Kilmer House restoration

NEW BRUNSWICK — Exterior work is complete and interior work should begin by Sept. 1 on the Joyce Kilmer birthplace, 17 Joyce Kilmer Ave.

It took 34 years, however, for an assortment of citizens groups to be this close to the idea of making the house a historical landmark.

On Nov. 12, 1939, Ted Malone, NBC Blue Network announcer and poet-critic, broadcast nationally from the house. As part of a fund-raising drive for the Joyce Kilmer Memorial Shrine Committee, he took his listeners on a tour of the house. He went room by room, describing Kilmer's schoolboy desk, christening robe, furniture used in the front upstairs room where he was born, pictures of him from babyhood through college, and a framed manuscript of "Trees" in his own handwriting. The drive, however, was curtailed by World War II.

From the early 1930s through Oct. 7, 1969, the building was owned by the Joyce Kilmer American Legion Post No. 25, which used it as its headquarters and meeting place. On the latter date, New Jersey bought the property for \$24,000 in order to preserve it as a historical landmark.

In mid-April 1972, a plan for renovation was suggested and later approved. The state would repair and paint the exterior, leaving the interior to be renovated by public or private agencies for use as offices, meeting rooms, an apartment and a Kilmer Museum. The New Jersey Arborist Association and the New Jersey Society of Tree Experts decided to occupy the first floor of the building after its renovation.

This year the county decided to contribute \$10,000, the city, \$5,000 toward the estimated interior renovation cost of \$25,000.

After the announcement of the contributions, the activity of the Joyce Kilmer Birthplace Association and its chairman, Kenneth C. Jennings, intensified in an attempt to complete its fund-raising drive by July 30. As of last Wednesday, the total was \$2,800 short of the goal.

The largest contributions have come from the New Brunswick Mutual Foundation, \$2,000, and from a fund-raising drive held in 1965 by the American Legion post, \$1,950.55.

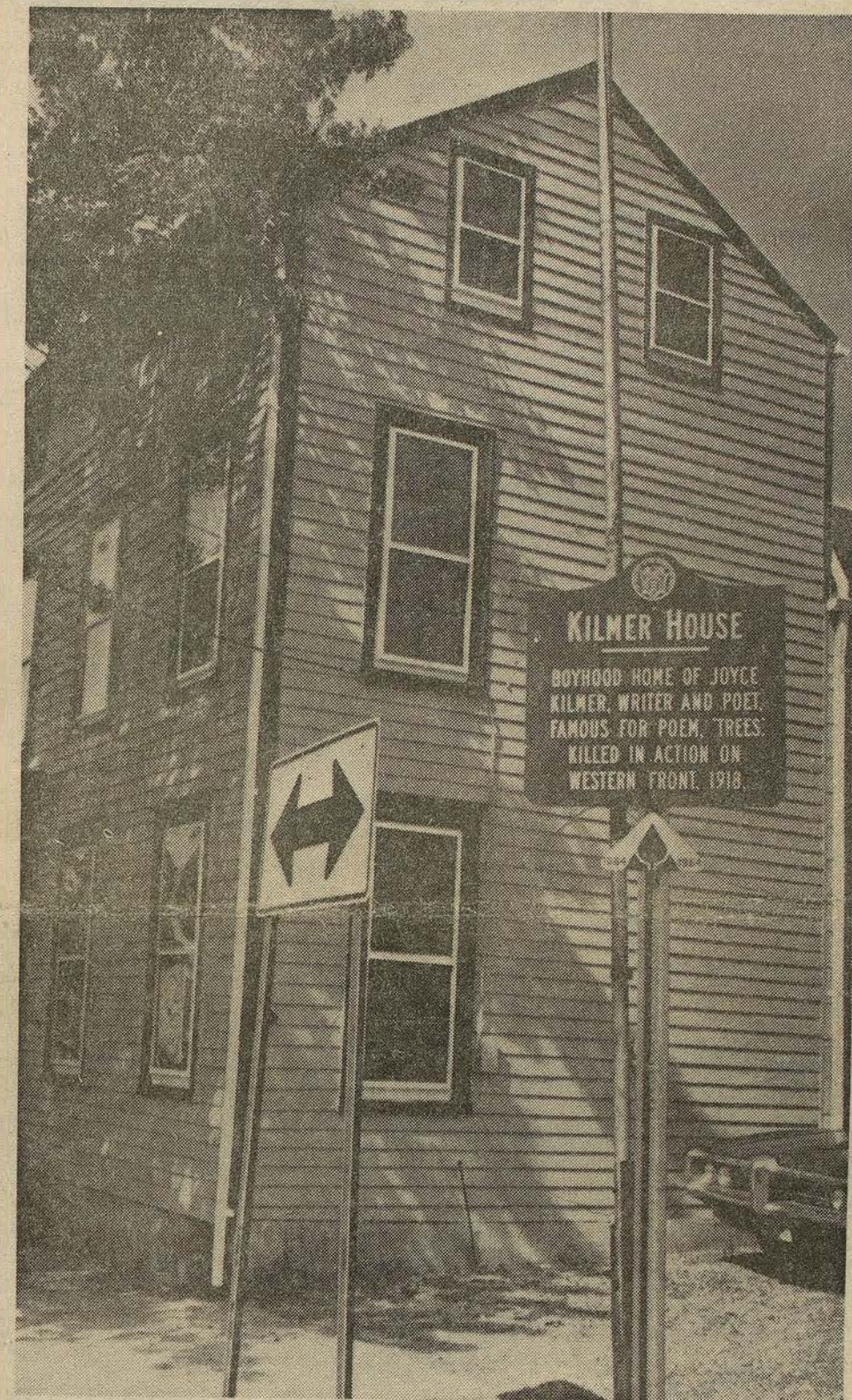
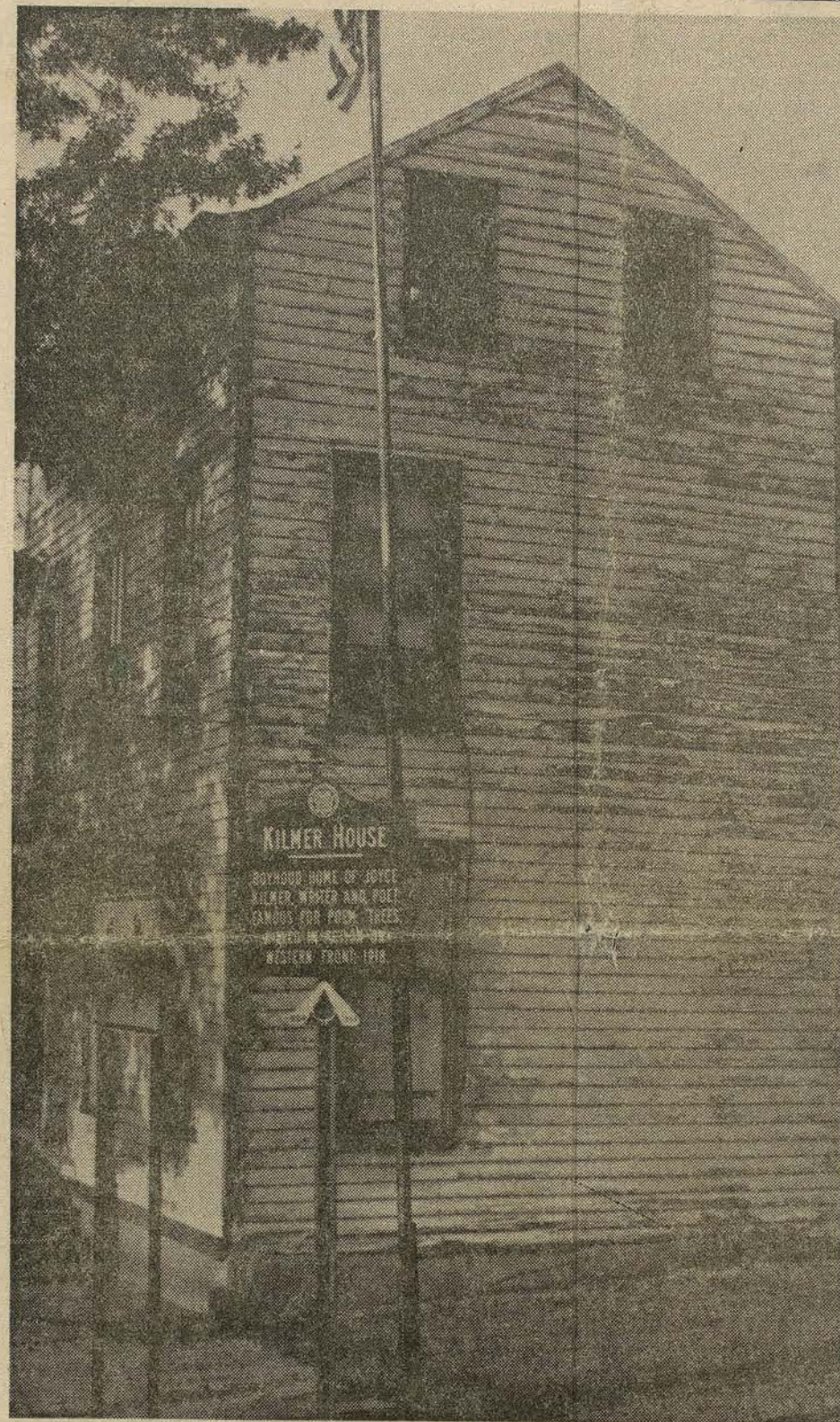
The plans for the interior of the house call for two offices and a meeting room on the first floor, a birthplace museum and an apartment for the curator on the second floor and the Joyce Kilmer Museum on the third floor. A rear extension to the house, added by American Legion Post No. 25, will be razed.

The exterior work has been finished by the state. After 15 coats of paints over the years, the state painted the landmark in the colors it had when Kilmer was born in 1886, mustard yellow with a green trim.

The remaining part of the property will have 10 parking spaces, to be rented out when they are completed. In addition, the grounds will be landscaped, with work donated by the supervisors of the Shade Tree Commissions of Bergen County.

The Home News donated the \$350 necessary to transform the third floor of the house into a museum.

ROBERT BERMAN



The Joyce Kilmer house before restoration, left, and after exterior work, right.

Home News photos

Kilmer,  
Joyce  
1911

Not to be taken from this room



# 'Heroic performance of duty'

The following article is reprinted from The Home News of August 22, 1918.

An eyewitness story of how Joyce Kilmer met death at the front was told yesterday by Lemist Esler, a Sergeant Major, who served side by side with Kilmer in the Marne advance, and found Kilmer's body after the writer had been shot through the head by a bullet from a German machine gun. Sergeant Esler, a Harvard graduate, returned to this country for instruction duty at a draft army camp. He was withdrawn from the Rainbow Division, to which he was attached with Joyce Kilmer, shortly after the operations were concluded in which Kilmer was killed.

"Joyce Kilmer met his end in the heroic performance of his duty," said Sergeant Esler. "During the Marne advance, the 1st Battalion of the old 69th Regiment, to which we were both attached, penetrated a village which the Germans had evacuated. The night before Joyce Kilmer was killed we were in full occupation of the town, and early next morning our battalion was directed to go on and pick up contact with the enemy again.

"Being attached to the Intelligence Department, it was the duty of Kilmer to precede the battalion and discover the possible location of enemy guns and enemy units. The last time I saw him alive was on that morning after he had crept forth alone into No Man's Land, and had come back on a brief errand into the village. He was full of enthusiasm and eager to rush back into the woods, where he and others had suddenly discovered enemy machine guns.

"A party of us moved out with him, the battalion slowly following. Then the commander sent forth a patrol with Kilmer in the lead to establish the exact location of the machine guns which were bunched in the woods. I lost sight of Kilmer, and a couple of hours later the battalion advanced into the woods to clear the spot of the enemy. In the course of this advance I suddenly caught sight of Kilmer lying on his stomach on a bit of sloping ground, his eyes just peering over the top of what appeared to be a natural trench. Several of us ran toward him, thinking he was alive and merely lying there with his attention fixed on the enemy.

"We called to him, but received no answer. Then I ran up and turned him on his back, only to find that he was dead with a bullet through his brain. What had happened was obvious. He had crawled ahead of his patrol to scout out the guns and had reached the ridge of ground behind which he held himself concealed from the German gunners until, no longer able to resist the temptation, he stuck his head over the ridge to get a better view of the enemy. In that position the bullet found him.

"It is not a rule to bury enlisted men with officers. But Kilmer had won so much admiration and respect not

only from the enlisted men in his company but also from the officers, that the Commander of the regiment authorized that his grave be dug on the spot and that he be buried next to the grave of a heroic Lieutenant who had just lost his life. Thus was a tribute paid to him, although Kilmer himself, in the great love that he bore for his fellow enlisted men undoubtedly would have considered it as great an honor to lie at the side of a buck private as at the side of an officer.

"Joyce Kilmer left an impression upon his comrades," Sergeant Esler said, "which can never be erased. Always cheerful, always inspiring, he was a man who could never be happy unless he was in the thickest of the fight. He enlisted originally in the Seventh Regiment. At Camp Mills he had himself transferred to the 69th, and it was then that I first came into contact with him. From the very first he impressed me as a man who found fascination in action, sheer joy in the doing of things, which could not fail to impart itself to those around him.

"On our arrival in France, he was constantly on the lookout for something to do. The front was his goal, and one could see that he would never be happy until he was right on the firing line doing his duty with the men who were in the thick of it. At first he was attached to the Regimental Adjutant's office, doing statistical work. But he fretted under the task. The sound of guns, the realization that out there somewhere in front was a line where men were suffering and dying for the great cause in which he had his whole heart was too much for him.

"He bent all his efforts toward being transferred and he finally had himself moved to the Intelligence Department. It was in that department that he was elevated to the rank of sergeant. I was supply sergeant at the time and Joyce Kilmer was a perfect trial to me. He would always be doing more than his orders called for—that is, getting much nearer to the enemy's positions than any officer would ever be inclined to send him. Night after night he would lie out in No Man's Land, crawling through barbed wires, in an effort to locate enemy positions and enemy guns, and tearing his clothes to shreds. On the following day he would come to me for a new uniform.

"That was the Kilmer our regiment got to know. A man of relentless energy and enthusiasm, facing death with jaws firm but laughter always in his eyes, and returning, always, with a useful report of what he had seen and heard across No Man's Land. Shortly before his death we were in a village which had been evacuated by the enemy. Before leaving the town, however, the Germans had established underground communication among the cellars of almost all the buildings in the outskirts of the town, and these underground passages connected directly with the German trenches."



JOYCE KILMER

Kilmer,  
Joyce 1917

## 'Trees'

By JOYCE KILMER

I think that I shall never see  
A poem lovely as a tree.  
A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed  
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;  
A tree that looks at God all day  
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;  
A tree that may in summer wear  
A nest of robins in her hair;  
Upon whose bosom snow has lain;  
Who intimately lives with rain.  
Poems are made by fools like me,  
But only God can make a tree.

## A forest memorial

ROBBINSVILLE, N.C. — Deep in the North Carolina mountains is 3,800 acres of wilderness designated as a memorial to the man who wrote "Trees."

Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest typifies the vast hardwood forests which covered the Southern Appalachians many centuries ago. It lies within Nantahala National Forest southwest of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and is preserved in its primitive and natural state except for access roads and trails which make it accessible to visitors.

The entrance to Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest is 15 miles northwest of here and is accessible from Route 129 by a Forest Service road.

On a plaque near the entrance to the park, which contains more than 20 miles of trails, is a plaque bearing the poem, "Trees." Another plaque inside the forest tells the visitor about the man for whom the stand of trees is named.

JOYCE KILMER

165th Infantry—Rainbow Division

Soldier and Poet

Author of "Trees"

Born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, December 6, 1886

Killed in action in France, July 30, 1918

For Reference

Not to be taken from this room



# Reminders of famous poet still abound in area

Kilmer,  
Joyce

AT 11/16/86



Joyce Kilmer, essayist, editor, playwright and poet, would have been 100 years old on Dec. 6.

A series of events have been planned by the Joyce Kilmer Centennial Commission to honor the occasion.

Nov. 30 through Dec. 6 has been designated Joyce Kilmer — 100 Years Week by the state Senate. It will include talks by Kilmer's eldest son, Kenton, an exhibit of his works and a parade on his 100th birthday.

Kilmer spent 20 of his 31 years in New Brunswick, according to Richard G. Durnin, commissioner of the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission and Middlesex County Historian.

There are many reminders of Kilmer in the area: Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Joyce Kilmer Park, Camp Kilmer, the Kilmer Postal Facility, Joyce Kilmer American Legion Post No. 25 and several business enterprises using the name, Durnin pointed out.

Kilmer's parents were Frederick Barnett Kilmer and Annie Kilburn Kilmer. The family lived in a two-and-a-half-story frame house at 17 Codwise Ave., renamed Joyce Kilmer Avenue in 1961.

The Kilmer family moved to New Brunswick from Binghamton, N.Y., in the 1880s, according to Durnin. Dr. Kilmer, a chemist, joined the

then-3-year-old Johnson and Johnson Company in 1889. He became head of the scientific department and is credited with developing the company's famous baby powder.

The Kilmers were communicants of Christ Church, where young Joyce was baptized Alfred Joyce Kilmer, the first name coming from the first name of the parish curate and middle name from the rector's surname. He later came to be known as Joyce Kilmer, discarding his first name, Durnin said.

Joyce was the fourth and last child born to the couple.

He read widely as a child and his poetry began then, Durnin said. As early as age 14 he signed his name "A. Joyce Kilmer," and a 1903 history examination paper is signed "Joyce Kilmer." He graduated in 1904.

Kilmer entered Rutgers College in the fall of that year. He was a reporter and later associate editor of The Targum, the college newspaper.

Policy differences with the college administration led to his transfer to Columbia College in New York City, where he was permitted to enter the junior class. At Columbia, he served as associate editor of The Spectator and graduated in June 1908.

That same month, he married Aline Murray, a classmate from

Rutgers Preparatory School, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Metuchen. Five years later, they became members of the Roman Catholic Church at the Church of St. Paul the Apostle in New York City.

Following graduation, Kilmer became an English and Latin teacher at Morristown High School. He did some writing and had some poems published in magazines during that year.

In June 1909, he left Morristown High School and went to work in New York City in a book store. He worked at Funk and Wagnalls until 1912, when he became editor of an Episcopal Church weekly.

From 1913 until the war, Kilmer worked on the Sunday magazine section of The New York Times, writing book reviews.

During the winter of 1916-17, Kilmer gave a course in "newspaper verse" in the department of journalism at New York University.

World War I had not yet begun when Kilmer joined the 7th Regiment, New York National Guard in April 1914. He enlisted in the regular Army in August 1917.

His last visit to New Brunswick was on Sept. 10, 1917, when he brought for burial the body of his 5-year-old daughter, Rose Kilburn Kilmer, who had been stricken with

poliomyelitis in July 1913 before she was one year of age.

Kilmer was killed in action on July 30, 1918, in France, where he is buried in a military cemetery. He left a widow and four children.

His death at age 31 left the public with only a relatively small collection of work, Durnin said.

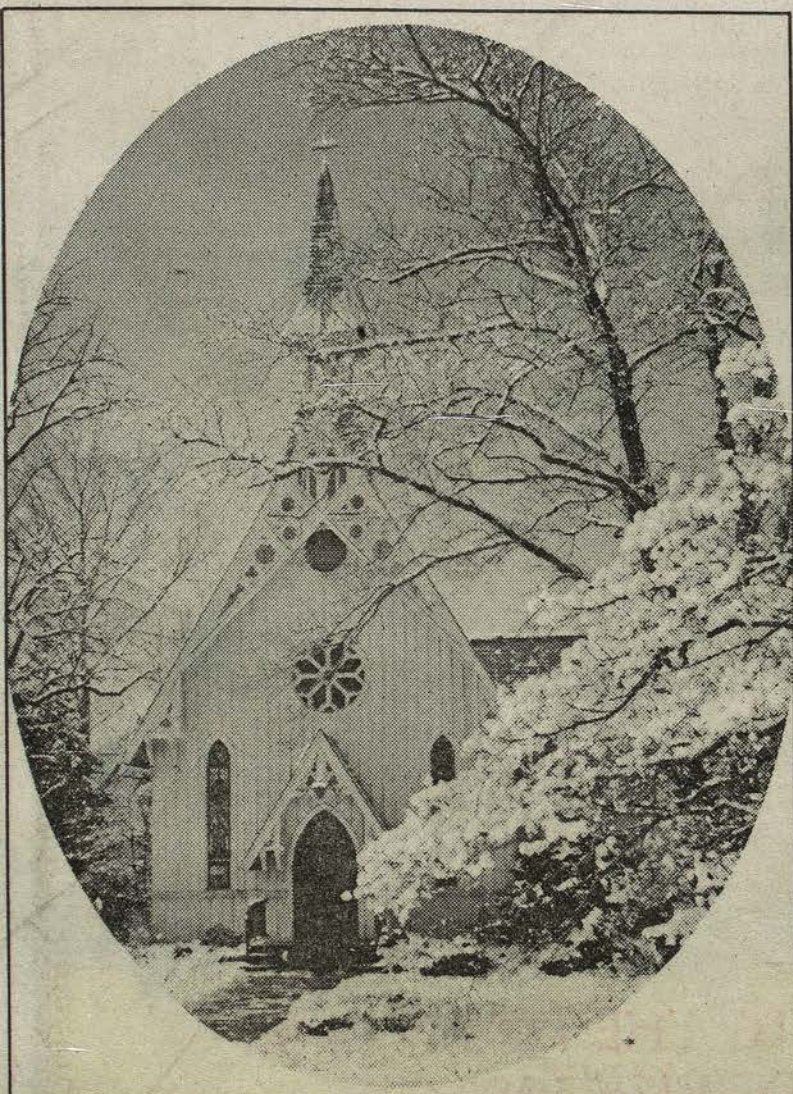
The poem "Trees," appearing first in 1913, soon identified Kilmer with the arboreal. The poem was set to music in 1922 and became a popular vocal recital piece as well as a song for schoolchildren, Durnin said.

A 70-foot high oak tree, located at the Rutgers Agricultural School became known as the "Kilmer Oak." This was the tree said by many to have inspired the poet. Thought to be 300 years old, the dying tree was cut down in September 1963.

The poetry of Joyce Kilmer reflected the scenes and people who made up his world. He was sentimental and romantic.

Poetry in America underwent great changes in the 20th century, beginning even before his death, Durnin noted.

The sentimentality and romanticism of Longfellow, Whittier and others gave way to different language styles, mood and subject matter. Joyce Kilmer's poetry reflected those older models.



| WESTERN UNION   |  | TELEGRAM |  |
|---|--|----------|--|
| 411 GEORGE STREET, NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.<br>TELEPHONES 101 AND 102 |  |          |  |
| 1916  |  |          |  |
| JULY 27   |  |          |  |
| JOYCE KILMER  |  |          |  |
| JOYCE   |  |          |  |
| WILL BE IN HOSPITAL THREE WEEKS BLIGHT INTERNAL BRUISES           |  |          |  |

| WESTERN UNION   |  | TELEGRAM |  |
|---|--|----------|--|
| 411 GEORGE STREET, NEW BRUNSWICK, N. J.<br>TELEPHONES 101 AND 102 |  |          |  |
| OCT 10 1907 1200PM  |  |          |  |
| 147 COLLEGE AVE NEW BRUNSWICK NJ                                  |  |          |  |
| CANT GET YOU ON TELEPHONE WILL DINE WITH YOU TONIGHT              |  |          |  |
| AT HOTEL DEVILLE  |  |          |  |
| JOYCE   |  |          |  |



Photos courtesy Leland Cook

## Memories

A young Joyce Kilmer and his mother, Annie Kilburn Kilmer, top left, sit on the front porch of their College Avenue home in New Brunswick in the company of a maid. His early childhood

was spent in a home at what is now 17 Joyce Kilmer Ave., a street named in his honor. Kilmer wed his classmate, Aline Murray, at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Metuchen, bottom left, in

1908. He frequently communicated with his mother by telegram, center, when he was unable to reach her by telephone. Mrs. Kilmer, right, holds photograph of her son.







# Bicentennial (Edison-History)

Edison Twp. Pub. Library  
340 Plainfield Ave.  
Edison, N.J. 08817

ASK AT DESK

REFERENCE

BICENTENNIAL-- Andrew G. Lipnick, supervisor-Edison recreation department (r) and bicentennial committee member sells the first official Edison bicentennial mug to Mayor Thomas H. Paterniti. The mugs, imprinted with the Edison Light Tower and the National '76 logo, are available in quantity to township organizations and clubs. Interested parties should contact Lipnick or business administrator John Delesandro at city hall. The township has been approved as an official bicentennial community, a designation which entitles Edison to use the official national bicentennial symbol and to fly the bicentennial flag. Arrangements are being made for formal presentation of the flag by an officer of the state committee.

