

Weldon R. Storey, Son of Lumberton

Jim Alexander

In 1921, Lumberton was mostly working farms, with a village downtown on Main Street that included a few small stores, churches, a small post office, a train station, and a thriving shoe factory. The steel furnace, foundry, and sawmill by the Rancocas were long gone. It was a quiet, friendly place, where residents knew and watched after each other.

In that year, Weldon R. Storey was born in a modest home on Chestnut Street. His parents worked in the shoe factory. He attended the local Walther school (then much smaller than today), and went to high school in Mt. Holly, where in 1938 he was in the first class to graduate from its new building, which is still in use. He later described life in that year:

We were before TV, before penicillin, the pill, polio shots and frisbees. Before frozen food, nylon, Dacron, Xerox, and Kinsey. We were before radar, fluorescent lights, credit cards or condominiums. A chip meant a piece of wood, hardware meant hardware, and software wasn't even a word.

During the Depression, life was challenging. There were few radios in town, and residents often listened to them by sitting on people's porch steps. Bathrooms were mostly outhouses, and cars were rare. Diving off the railroad bridge into the Rancocas was an available excitement. Playing baseball and walking were other available fun.

In 1928, Weldon attended his first Memorial Day parade in Lumberton, and recalled that a local veteran of the Civil War was in attendance. His

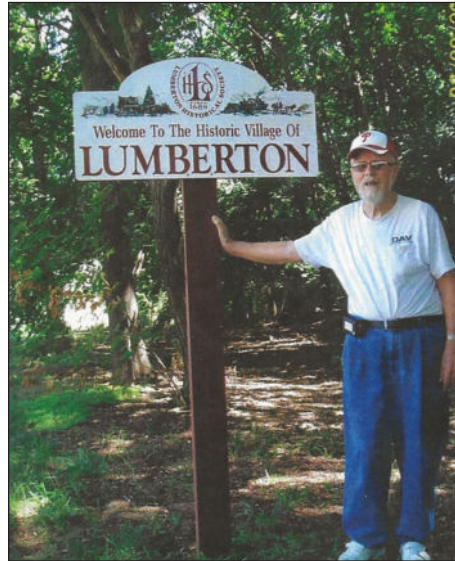
own father had served in World War I, earning a Purple Heart. Participation in the parade each year became central to his love of Lumberton.

But his graduation was just before World War II, and soon Weldon found himself serving in the 10th Mountain Division Ski Troops in Italy, where he too earned a Purple Heart, as did his son some years later in Vietnam. He was credited with saving a fellow soldier's life by holding a tourniquet in place for over 12 hours until help arrived.

Returning to town after the war, he joined with a small group of other veterans from both wars, committed to helping both his town and residents in need. They aided the town in building playing fields, sponsored local teams, and took provisions

to those in need, with a special emphasis on military widows. Organized as "The Last Man's Club" with 41 members in 1946, they ran the Memorial Day parade for many years. The original memorial, which still stands adjacent to the Lumberton Historical Society's Gaun Community Center/museum on Main St. (formerly the Town Hall), was the original focus of commemoration, but with passing time the club recognized the need for and assisted in creating the current memorial in Village Green Park, which they had also promoted. They started lighting Christmas candles in the windows of the Gaun building each season, a tradition carried on today by the Lumberton Historical Society. Committed to civic responsibility, they excelled, and aided the town in a period of growth to its current suburban nature.

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Cluster 7 Christmas Party

Doris Kahley

On Wednesday, December 9, Cluster 7 held its first annual Zoom Christmas Party (and probably its last annual Zoom Christmas Party). Winnie and Tom Lyall were gracious hosts and some guests brought drinks, although most of us were angry that the Moores did not send pizza to all of us.

After chatting, we began to answer the Christmas trivia quiz that Tom had emailed to all of us. We started off confident since everyone knew that the other common names for Santa Claus were Kris Kringle and Saint Nicholas. Someone knew that Coca Cola made the concept of Santa Claus popular worldwide, but most were surprised to learn that *Home Alone* is the highest-grossing Christmas movie of all time. Many people guessed *It's a Wonderful Life* or *Miracle on 34th Street*.

Most knew that *White Christmas* was the most popular song, but we were surprised to learn

that *Jingle Bells* was originally written for Thanksgiving. There was some controversy over where the song *Silent Night* was written, since most of us thought it was Germany. It was written in German, but it was written in Austria. In fact, Winnie and Tom had visited the small church where it was written. No one was surprised that Thomas Edison was the first to create an electrically-lighted tree, but we all were stumped to find that Jimmy Carter was the first President to have a National Menorah on the White House lawn.

Phil had a conference call, so he arrived just as we finished the quiz. We made him take the quiz all over again, giving him hints and generally giving him a hard time over the ones that even we hadn't known. The final question was proposed by Tom who is fond of all things Japanese. What do they eat for Christmas in Japan? Why KFC, of course! ■

Storey (continued from opposite page)

One by one, the members died. In 2015, he became the last one. His daughter, Evelyn Throne, brought him back to Lumberton for numerous visits, including his conducting historical tours and making class visits, all in support of his commitment.

He made a point of attending the Memorial Day parade each year, offering a wreath of respect, the last time being in 2019. He took pride in pointing out the unrecognized history of many buildings and the town's earlier residents. A few years ago, he assembled and had printed "Lumberton – Then and Now." This 180-page



At 2019 Memorial Day Event

compendium of newspaper clippings, old photos, maps, and remembrances from bygone residents, stands as a shining expression of life in what he called in its subtitle "A Little Town with a Big Heart."

On November 1, 2020, when the Last Man, Weldon R. Storey, proud Lumbertonian from a kinder era, died, he left behind a town different but more developed than when he was born—richer for his and his

colleagues' commitment. His burial, reflecting his service to the Nation, was in Washington Crossing National Cemetery. ■