

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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August 12, 2017

## Wetumpka artist **John Kelly Fitzpatrick** to be honored at Elmore County's **9th Annual Tribute to Veterans**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2017 | TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 5375 US Hwy. 231, Wetumpka, AL

Wetumpka, Alabama—On Saturday, November 11, 2017, Elmore County's "9th Annual Tribute to Veterans" will take place at Trinity Episcopal Church in Wetumpka. **This year's tribute will be dedicated to Wetumpka artist John Kelly Fitzpatrick.** Fitzpatrick was born in Wetumpka on August 15, 1888. He was the son of Jane Lovedy Kelly and Dr. Phillips Fitzpatrick and the grandson of Benjamin Fitzpatrick who served as governor of the State of Alabama from 1841 to 1845.

Fitzpatrick grew up on Wetumpka's west side in a comfortable home located on Autauga Street. By the age of four, he became interested in painting. He cultivated that interest as a young adult during a brief period of study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1912 and much later at the age of 37 at the Académie Julian in Paris.

Fitzpatrick is considered one of the South's most prominent artists and art promoters of the 1930s and 40s. He is best known for his paintings of rural central Alabama. His work can be found in the permanent collections of numerous art museums and selective private collections. During his travels in Europe, Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters such as Cezanne, Matisse, and Van Gogh greatly influenced his style.

In March of 1918 Fitzpatrick enlisted in the US Army. On July 19, 1918, Fitzpatrick and his unit came upon a German machine gun nest. During this confrontation, the Aisne-Marne Offensive, almost his entire unit was killed. Fitzpatrick, one of the few survivors, suffered severe shrapnel wounds to his face, neck, and chest. This offensive, in which 30,000 were killed and wounded, marked the turning of the tide in World War I. It began with the last German offensive of the conflict and was quickly followed by the first allied offensive victory of 1918. The American Expeditionary Force with over 250,000 men fighting under overall French command played key roles both in the initial defense and the later advances. After this battle, Fitzpatrick received the "**Presidential Wound Certificate**" (**What is today the "Purple Heart"**) Prior to the award of the first Purple Heart in 1932, soldiers received the "Presidential Wound Certificate" and veteran's had to apply for their medal. After 1932, WWI veterans with the "Presidential Wound Certificate" were able to apply for a "Purple Heart" medal.

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Fitzpatrick's combat experience colored his outlook profoundly, and he later wrote that his physical suffering caused him to lose interest in the material world and focus instead on the beautiful and spiritual aspects of life. In a February 2017 interview with the DAC Foundation, Norma Forbes, a 98 year-old native of Birmingham and long-time close friend of Fitzpatrick, described in vivid detail how Fitzpatrick's life profoundly changed as a result of his military service in World War I.

After returning to his hometown of Wetumpka, he was one of the founders of the Dixie Art Colony, the Alabama Art League, and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and was the first director and co-founder of the Montgomery Museum of Art School. During The Great Depression, a particularly tough time for artists, he participated in the US Treasury Department's Public Works of Art Project, also known as the New Deal Art Project, which was a part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal economic recovery program.

While working on a series of murals for the Bank of Tallassee, Fitzpatrick suffered a massive heart attack and died on April 18, 1953. Based on the numerous newspaper articles that appeared after his death, it was very clear that he was one of the area's most beloved and respected citizens.

We are continuing our research and hope to find more details soon. On July 12, 1973, a fire at the National Personnel Records Center in Overland, Missouri destroyed 16 to 18 million official military personnel records. Some of Fitzpatrick's records were among those destroyed. We are trying to find information about the date Fitzpatrick returned to Wetumpka.

Interestingly, we do have knowledge of and access to a watercolor painting by Fitzpatrick that is dated 1918. It was apparently painted during his military service. This painting along with a series of five large storyboards will be included in an exhibit in the Annual Gallery of Honor display at Trinity Episcopal Church's Trinity Hall on November 11, 2017.

**Anyone with additional information about Fitzpatrick's service, photographs or knowledge of other works of art painted by Fitzpatrick between the years 1918 and 1919 are encouraged to contact the DAC Foundation director, Mark Harris, at 334-513-1086 or M.Harris@DixieArtColony.org.**

Information about the performers participating in this year's musical tribute will be forthcoming soon.

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### **MILITARY RECORD: Private Kelly Fitzpatrick: 1888 – 1953**

Serial #57391 | 4th Infantry Division | 8th Infantry Brigade, Company C | 12th Machine Gun Battalion

In March of 1918 Fitzpatrick enlisted in the US Army. He was a combat participant in the following campaigns during World War I:

- **AISNE-MARNE OFFENSIVE: East of Reims, France, July 18, 1918 – August 6, 1918**

The Second Battle of the Marne marked the turning of the tide in World War I. It began with the last German offensive of the conflict and was quickly followed by the first allied offensive victory of 1918. The American Expeditionary Force with over 250,000 men fighting under overall French command played key roles both in the initial defense and the later advances. In the Second Battle of Marne with 30,000 killed and wounded, the United States started suffering casualties on the enormous scale usually associated with the battles of the Great War. **On July 19, 1918, Fitzpatrick and his unit came upon a German machine gun nest. During this confrontation, almost his entire unit was killed. Fitzpatrick, one of the few survivors, suffered severe shrapnel wounds to his face, neck, and chest.**

- **SAINT MIHIEL OFFENSIVE: Saint-Mihiel salient, France, September 12, 1918 – September 15, 1918**

The battle of St. Mihiel saw the first major independent American offensive of the World War I. General John Pershing had generally resisted British and French attempts to feed American troops into the frontline as soon as they were available, instead preferring to concentrate his troops in a single army. On August 30, 1918 the First American Army was finally ready to enter the battle. The new army was immediately deployed to the south side of the St. Mihiel salient. This salient, south of Verdun, had been in German hands since 1914, but in the autumn of 1918, the Germans were in retreat. In mid-September they were about to abandon the St. Mihiel salient to withdraw to the Hindenburg Line.

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• **MEUSE ARGONNE GHENT OFFENSIVE:** Argonne Forest, France, September 26, 1918 – November 11, 1918

The Meuse-Argonne Offensive, also known as the Maas-Argonne Offensive and the Battle of the Argonne Forest, was a major part of the final Allied offensive of World War I that stretched along the entire Western Front. It was fought from September 26, 1918, until the Armistice of November 11, 1918, a total of 47 days. The Meuse-Argonne Offensive was the largest in United States military history, involving 1.2 million American soldiers, and was one of a series of Allied attacks known as the Hundred Days Offensive, which brought the war to an end. The battle cost 28,000 German lives and 26,277 American lives, making it the largest and bloodiest operation of World War I for the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), which was commanded by General John J. Pershing, and the bloodiest battle in American history. American losses were exacerbated by the inexperience of many of the troops and tactics used during the early phases of the operation.

This exhibit will be part of the annual "Gallery of Honor," open on Saturday, November 11 from 4:00 to 8:00 pm at Trinity Episcopal Church located at 5375 US Highway 231 in Wetumpka, AL.

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