

Voices of World War I: John Edwin Sargent

By Logan Gillis

Introduction:

As time continues to move on, history continues as well, occasionally leaving the common man behind. Often with large historical events, such as World War I, brave individuals are left to be forgotten when familial memories fade and written records disappear. As members of the new generations, it is our job to ensure that the effects of time impacts as few individuals as possible. It is our duty to give these individuals a voice in history so that their lives and stories can continue to serve as a guide to the generations of the future. For this reason, we have selected common members of society who we would like to remove from the obscurity of passing time to ensure the extension of their memory. Veteran John Edwin Sargent is one of these individuals.



Figure 1: John E. Sargent sits at his desk. September, 1946.¹

Early Years:

John Edwin Sargent was born on February 9, 1898 in Fryeburg, Maine to his parents Edwin Sargent and Katherine V. (Bemis) Sargent. John Sargent was the youngest of three children. The oldest child of the family was his sister Linnie M. Sargent, who was born in 1888, and the middle child was Reed W. Sargent, who was born in 1894. Sargent and his siblings all grew up in Fryeburg and were enrolled in the Fryeburg public school system and later the Fryeburg Academy, one of the oldest private schools in the United States with a founding date of 1792.² John Sargent's father died on August 28, 1904 when John was only six years old and on December 15, 1914, Sargent's mother Katherine got remarried to a man named William S. Leavitt, also a resident of Fryeburg. From that point, Sargent lived with his mother and new stepfather.³ Three years after his mother's second wedding, John Sargent graduated from Fryeburg Academy as a member of the Class of 1917.⁴ Seeing as the United States was in the midst of a World War at this moment in time, Sargent decided to enlist in the Navy and become a member of the United States Naval Reserve Force, rather than to continue on to a higher education, in order to help his country.

RECORD OF A BIRTH

Child's Name John Edwin Sargent
Date of Birth Feb 9th 1898
Place of Birth Fryeburg Me
Sex M Color W
Living or Stillborn Living
No. of Child, est. and, etc. 3
Father's Name Edwin Sargent
" Birthplace Conway NH
" Color W
" Residence Fryeburg Me
" Occupation Farmer
Mother's Maiden Name Katie V Bemis
" Birthplace Albany NH
" Color W
" Occupation Housewife
Name and address of Physician (or other person) reporting said Birth.
W. C. Towle M.D.
STATE OF MAINE.
I hereby certify that the above birth record is correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.
H. Charles
Clerk of Fryeburg Me

Figure 2: John Edwin Sargent's birth record. ⁵

World War I Service:

At twenty years old, John E. Sargent registered for the draft on September 12, 1918. On October 15 of that year, Sargent was sent to Hingham, Massachusetts, where a large naval training camp was in operation. Camp Hingham was built as an addition to a naval ammo depot one year earlier in 1917 with a purpose of preparing new sailors for possible fighting in the Atlantic during the war. The camp was equipped with a hospital and seventeen barracks, allowing for a large number of sailors to move in and out as training and shipping continued throughout the war.⁶ Especially during the last few months of the war, training was fast paced and rigorous as both the army and the navy needed to ensure that they had enough men at their disposal for final push efforts in Europe.⁷ John E. Sargent stayed at Camp Hingham, intensely training for the possibility of future fighting, until November 9, when he was transferred to another nearby naval training camp on Bumpkin Island.



Figure 3: Bumpkin Island Training Camp, Boston Harbor (1917).⁸

Sargent stayed at this new camp for three days until November 11. The war had ended. Sargent remained on inactive duty as part of the United States Naval Reserve Force until January 7, 1919, when he was honorably discharged from service and was allowed to return home to Fryeburg.⁹ Even though Sargent was never actually sent to Europe or even spent a day on the sea with the navy, Sargent's return was met with celebration from the local community. After the

war had finished, every returning service member was treated like a hero, no matter how much he actually contributed to the war effort.

Afterward:

When John E. Sargent returned from the war, his life returned to a fairly normal state. Sargent got a job working as a bookkeeper for a business called Perkins and Pendexter and worked there until 1922, when he got married.¹⁰ Sargent, at 24 years old, married a 22 year old woman named Sarah Theona Farrington on June 24, 1922 in Lovell, Maine, the hometown of his new bride.¹¹ The next year, Sargent was appointed by the President to be Postmaster for the town of Fryeburg, a position which he served on and off for many subsequent years. His first appointment was May 1, 1923 and his last was December 5, 1955.¹² This appointment was an honor from his town and his reappointment later in his life demonstrates the success and popularity that he gained during his time in office. One year after Sargent's first Postmaster appointment, he and his wife had their first child, Edwin. Three years later in 1927, the couple had their second child, this time a daughter named Beverly.¹³ After the Sargents took time to raise their kids, the couple took ownership of the Farrington family's hotel on Lake Kezar in Sarah's hometown of Lovell. John and Sarah Sargent ran the Farrington Hotel from Lovell in the



Figure 4: Farrington's Hotel.¹⁴

summer, but they closed it every winter and stayed in Fryeburg until the warm season came around again. Their comings and goings from the town of Fryeburg were noteworthy enough to be put in the local newspaper, which on September 27, 1949 noted that “Mr. and Mrs. John E. Sargent have closed Farrington’s Hotel at Lake Kezar and have returned to Fryeburg for the winter.”¹⁵ Sargent and his wife lived in this fashion for several years following a fairly regular routine until Sargent’s death. Sargent’s now grown kids had lost their father and the town of Fryeburg had lost their beloved Postmaster. His death was a great loss to the community.

John E. Sargent died on April 3, 1957 at the age of 59. He is buried in Pine Grove Cemetery next to his mother and father right in his hometown of Fryeburg, Maine.¹⁶



Figure 5: John E. Sargent fishing.¹⁷

Notes

1. "Sargent, John Edwin (1898-1957)," *Lovell Historical Society Online Collections Database*, accessed June 10, 2018,
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4. Harrie B. Coe, "Maine Biographies," *Google Books*, accessed June 10, 2018,
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5. "John Edwin Sargent," *Ancestry.com*.
6. "At Bare Cove Park in Hingham, a Modest Museum Bears Testimony to Key Ammo Depot during WWII," *BostonGlobe.com*, August 22, 2013, accessed June 10, 2018,
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9. "John Edwin Sargent," *Ancestry.com*.
10. Harrie B. Coe, "Maine Biographies."
11. "John Edwin Sargent," *Ancestry.com*.

12. "Postmaster Finder," *United States Postal Service*, accessed June 10, 2018, <https://webpmt.usps.gov/pmt005.cfm>.
13. "John Edwin Sargent," *Ancestry.com*.
14. "Sargent, John Edwin (1898-1957)," *Lovell Historical Society Online Collections Database*.
15. "Historical Newspapers from 1700s-2000s," *Newspapers.com*, accessed June 10, 2018, <https://basic.newspapers.com/image/90085556/?terms=John+E.+Sargent>.
16. "John Edwin Sargent (1898-1957)," *Find A Grave*, accessed June 10, 2018, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/52607831>.
17. "Sargent, John Edwin (1898-1957)," *Lovell Historical Society Online Collections Database*.

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