

Pvt. Emmett O. Preston

The process of making a documentary film

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Motivation

- ~2010
- Easter Sunday, April 20, 2025
- Acknowledgments



Research Resumes

- Who was PVT Emmett O. Preston?
- Fabius Christian Church archives
- US Census records @FamilySearch.org
- Finding his family & tracing his roots

The Cemetery

- Internet search → **Evergreen Cemetery, Fabius, Transcribed by Kathy Crowell, September 1999**

Preston, Addie 1857-1916, w/o Eugene

Preston, Emmett O. 1896-1918, Co. E, 23rd U.S. Inf.

Preston, Eugene 1855-1907

Preston, Franklin H. 1874-1894, s/o Gardner C. & Mary

Preston, Fred

Preston, Gardner C. 1842-1915

Preston, George(?)

Preston, Harriet Nye(?)

Preston, John

Preston, John D. d. 26 May 1892, ae. 62. Co. I, 61st N.Y. Vol, s/o James & Anna Hand Preston

Preston, Livinne

Preston, Martha J. Smith d. 22 May 1894, ae. 63, w/o John

Preston, Martha Smith

Preston, Mary Saunders 1844-1917, w/o Gardner

Preston, Quirke ____-1927

- **Find-a-Grave – no entry** *Russell Reynolds Bennett & Prudence Mowry*

More Research

- Fabius Historical Society Meeting [May 12, 2025]
- Fabius Veterans' Display [May 26, 2025]
- Tully Historical Society Veteran's Display [June 2025]
- **FamilySearch.org** [US Census]
- **Rowley genealogy from Linda [Skeele] Meyers**
- Records of Fabius Evergreen Cemetery from John Meyers

Military Records

- 23rd US Infantry
- National Archives Records Center
- Military personnel records are open to the public 62 years after the individual leaves the military.
- Name, DOB, DOD, serial number, Social Security Number
- Submit request by mail and wait 6 weeks

Army Card

Preston,		Summitt, O.	49,020	* White * Colored
(Surname)		(Christian name)	(Army serial number)	
Residence: R. F. D. #3,		Apulia,	NEW YORK	
(Street and house number)		(Town or city)	(County)	(State)
* Enlisted R.A. * N.G. * E.R.C. * Inducted at Camp Syracuse, N. Y. on Aug 7, 1917				
Place of birth: Apulia, N. Y.		Age or date of birth: 21 3/12 yrs.		
Organizations served in, with dates of assignments and transfers: Co E 50 Inf to Aug 7/17; Hq Co 23 Inf to death.				
Grades, with date of appointment: Pvt.				
Engagements: Sommedien Sector, Chateau-Thierry, Soissons, St. Mihiel.				
Served overseas from † Sept 7/17 to † death, from † to †				
Killed in action Sept 13, 1918				
Other wounds or injuries received in action: none				
Person notified of death: Fred E. Preston (If none, so state)				
P.O. Box 16		(Name)	Apulia	(Degree of relationship) N.Y.
(No. and street or rural route)		(City, town, or post office)	(State or country)	
Remarks:				
Form No. 724-6, A. G. O. * Strike out words not applicable. † Dates of departure from and arrival in the U. S. Nov. 22, 1919. 2-7205				

National Archives Records Request

- Social Security Act was signed into law by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on August 14, 1935 [**17 years after DOD**]
- Millions of military records were destroyed in the disastrous 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri. Records for **Army personnel discharged between Nov. 1, 1912, and Jan. 1, 1960 – GONE** (80% loss)

FamilySearch.org

- No fee membership
- 'lost documents'
- Census data
- Family trees
- Triangulate information-what is true?

10 days pay

NAMES, PRESENT AND ABSENT, AND RANK. (Commissioned and uncommissioned officers according to rank. Surnames of all enlisted men will precede Christian names. Privates of each class in alphabetical order. See Instruction 1 (a).)	WHEN ENLISTED.	All present and mustered except those indicated in this column by the word ABSENT.	REMARKS. (In case of detachments composed of more than one company, the company to which each man belongs will be shown under "Remarks.")
Privates - continued			
Pezza, Antony	July 19/17		
Pickard, Harold S.	AUG 1/17		
Pinijian, Charlie	AUG 1/17		
Popielski, Stanley	July 31/17		
Powell, Roy W.	Apr 16/17		
<i>App. 1st Lt. discharged. 7 Nov. 22, 30. 5th. Port of Embarkation, Hoboken, N.J.</i> Prestiano, Joseph	AUG 2/17		<i>July 27, 1918.</i>
Preston, Emmett O.	AUG 7/17		To have 10 days pay detained 30 Nov 14/17.
Reed, Edgar O.	AUG 9/17		
Roberts, John L.	July 31/17		
Rodriguez, John	AUG 1/17		
Rogers, Edward	AUG 6/17		
Ross, Vincent	July 21/17		
Rubbione, Cesero	July 26/17		
Scott, James F.	July 17/17		
Sharaf, Joseph	July 24/17		
Sheen, Thomas H.	July 26/17		
Sherman, Laurance	AUG 1/17		Rd fr Pvt 1cl to Pvt Dec 23/17 O 31, 1917.
Sherman, Roy M.	AUG 9/17		Deserted at AEF, France, Nov 14/17. Apprehended by G Auth at AEF, France, Nov 26/17. Returned to Mil control Dec 11/17 at AEF, France. In conf awaiting trial for desertion since Dec 17/17. To have 11 days pay detained 30 Nov 11/17.
Simmonds, Verne L.	Jan 23/17		
Simoneau, Arthur D.	July 6/16		Rd fr Sgt to Pvt Nov 1/17 RO 166, 1917.
Snowden, Fred	July 21/17		
Sokolowski, Joseph	AUG 1/17		
Staszewski, John	AUG 7/17		
Steele, James E.	July 20/17		
Stevens, Joseph F.	June 6/17		Left US Oct 16/17. Joined Co fr DS with animals at Newport News, Va., Nov 22/17
Stevens, Raymond A.	June 6/17	Absent	DS at Newport News, Va., since Aug 21/17, see July-Aug, 1917 rolls. Left US Oct 16/17, Sk in Base Hosp #101 AEF, France.

Do not write in this space. See instruction 6.

“To have 10 days pay detained”

- During the Great War, military pay was typically detained, forfeited, or subjected to "stoppages" for five main reasons: disciplinary actions (such as courts-martial for **AWOL** or **desertion**), **loss or destruction of government property** through neglect, the need to redirect funds for **family allotments/dependents**, **medical treatments** for self-inflicted conditions or venereal diseases, and the deduction of **life insurance premiums** or war bond investments directly from a soldier's account

Why and How Much?

- 1917 Army Private pay = \$30 per month
- ~ \$10 beginning 14 November 1917
- Edith Preston married Charles Selover 31 December 1917

Fabius Historical Society

- *Art Fritz & William Tolley*
- Newsletter list of students 1909-10
- Apulia District #10 Class Picture
- Tully Times
- Diary of Irving Skeele
- Images of Apulia



Reconstructing Emmett's Childhood

- Family Search – military records
- Notes from Rowley Reunions
- Maps of Apulia Station
- Life in Central New York

Keep Going!

- **Where is Emmett Preston's body?**
- St. Mihiel Cemetery in France?
- Fabius Evergreen Cemetery?
- May 2025 – Fabius Christian Church search team finds the Preston family stones
- IS he buried in Fabius Evergreen Cemetery, or is it only a headstone?
- NEXT INSPIRATION!

Inspiration

- The first image of Pvt. Preston
- AI-generated colorization
- Where is the original image?
- Who are his living relatives?



Curiosity Becomes Documentary

- Preston image comes to life
- Purpose? Why bother?
- Documentary as message on Memorial Day Sunday 2026
- 15-minutes
- Technical limitations



Concept

- *Sunny Jardine*
- Spring 2025 cleaning at Pompey Hill Cemetery
- Walk to the farmer's scythe tree
- Speaking names
- "Three deaths"

National Archives Catalog

- Actual film from Great War Battles
THE ST. MIHIEL DRIVE *Other title:*Misc. film, no. 347
- Reports from the front lines
- Photographs of soldiers

Hire Professionals!

325 Productions --September 1, 2025

- Coordinate background music, sound effects and AI narrations

Me

- Concept
- Script
- Images
- Narrations

The carte de visite

- The original carte-de-visite image - September 23, 2025
- Using AI to match the image of Pvt. Preston with the boy
--Emmett



Spread the Research Net

- Syracuse University Archives
- Newspaper Archives
- Pompey Historical Society
- Onondaga County Historical Society
- Madison County Veterans Presentation -- Matthew Urtz

Sidelines & Distractions



Sydney Harris Moments

"Things I Learned En Route to Looking Up Other Things."

- The silent film ***Wings*** [1927] featured the **Battle of Saint-Mihiel**; filmed over ten days with 3,500 infantrymen on the recreated battlefield.
- Clara Bow starred as an ambulance driver [**Mary Preston**] along with pilots Charles "Buddy" Rogers [3rd husband of Mary Pickford] and Richard Arlen.
- Both Rogers and Arlen later served as flight instructors, training WWII pilots.
- At the 1st Academy Awards Ceremony held in 1929, ***Wings*** won the **Academy Award for Best Picture**.

Academy Awards

- Although his minor character in *Wings* died shortly after his few on-screen moments, one young actor became a Hollywood legend
- In 1941, Warner Brothers released a movie based on a hero of The Great War. The film featured the heroic actions of a reluctant Army draftee during the **Meuse–Argonne Offensive**
- In the leading role as *Sergeant York*, **Gary Cooper** won the Academy Award for Best Actor.
- **Private Alvin York and Private Emmett Preston** fought in battles at Somme Diem Sector, Chateau-Thierry, Soissons and Saint Mihiel

Over There

- *Over There* was written by George M. Cohan in 1917. Enrico Caruso popularized the song during the Great War.
- Caruso died on 2 August 1921 and the age of 48. The cause of death was peritonitis.
- The body of Pvt. Emmett Preston arrived in Fabius on August 3, 1921.

The Final Details

- Removal Project Information – buried 3 times
- AI confirmation of Emmett & Edith in grade school pictures
- Church record of window installation
- Details in Skeele diaries
- Tully Times local news

Who was Emmett Preston?

- AI imaging from carte-de-visite
- Red Cross Blood donations
- Tully American Legion connection
- Flashback of life & 23rd Psalm
- Letters to Uncle Byer Rowley

The Voice of Emmett Preston

- Filmed live scenes and recorded voice-over on October 27, 2025
- Film *almost* ready by mid-November 2025
- AI-generated voice? – NO!
- Professional voice-over actors? – NO!
- WHO???
 - 18-24 YO male
 - from Central New York
 - Available & willing

After the Documentary

- YouTube video links
- Find-a-Grave entry
- The found footage of Camp Syracuse at OCHS
- Fred & Luvinnie [Rowley] Preston

Fred & Luvinnie Preston



Loose Ends

- Preston ancestry – the dual Mayflower connection
- What happened to Fred Preston?
- Who was Kathryn Surrect?
- Who was Quirke Preston?
- Where are the lost letters of Emmett Preston to Byer Rowley?

What About the Window?

- Donated by Cora Adele Rowley Hills = Aunt Dell
- Possibly crafted by Utica Glass
- In 1930, custom religious stained-glass windows typically cost around **\$150 to \$240 per window**

