

GLENN MILLER'S MEMORIAL GRAVESTONE



Glenn Miller's Connection to New Haven

In 1943 and 1944, Glenn Miller made personal appearances in New Haven and also in East Hartford, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New London, Norwalk, Stamford, Wallingford and Westville.

Glenn Miller and his orchestra performed in New Haven from March 27, 1943 to June 19, 1944. He made personal appearances at War Bond Drives on the New Haven Green, enlisted men's dances at Yale, a War Bond Drive in Woolsey Hall (May 31, 1943), New Haven Airport, an AAF Recruiting Show at the Shubert Theater (June 23, 1943), a wedding in one of Yale's chapels, the Yale Bowl, on the Old Campus, the Roger Sherman Theater, the New Haven Arena, Loew's Pole Theater, the Yale Drama School Theater, and Eagle Hall. The Glenn Miller Orchestra's very first concert in Woolsey Hall was on May 29, 1943. The orchestra, or band, was activated on March 20, 1943, with its permanent station at Yale University. Its first official name was The 418th Army Air Forces Band and was also known as "the Yale Band," Glenn Miller's Band, the "I Sustain the Wings" Band, and the AAF Radio Band.

The group settled down on Temple Street and rehearsed both military and dance music. They played during many cadet luncheons in Woolsey Hall. A fair number of local residents who are 'of a certain age' remember listening to the band's rehearsals while they stood on the sidewalks outside its rehearsal hall as well as watching the band march to the New Haven Green. Many can also recall listening to the band's Saturday night radio broadcasts from Woolsey Hall.

Glenn Miller's Memorial Gravestone in New Haven's Grove Street Cemetery

On December 13, 1998, Peter Cofrancesco (a local resident and Glenn Miller devotee), with help from some of his friends, held a memorial service in Grove Street Cemetery for Major A. Glenn Miller to remember his disappearance on December 15, 1944, when his plane went down over the English Channel.

Over ten years ago, Mr. Cofrancesco began collecting photos, recordings, trombones, and other Miller memorabilia. Some of the mementos have been loaned to museums. He tracked down surviving Miller band musicians such as Sal Libro and Paul Tanner. Today, Peter Cofrancesco continues to introduce young people to the excitement and fun of swing dancing and the "Glenn Miller" sound.

Mr. Cofrancesco's strong feelings about Glenn Miller's connections to Connecticut and especially to New Haven led him to invest his own money to buy a Grove Street Cemetery plot as well as a black granite gravestone to commemorate the impact of the well-known band leader on the New Haven community during World War II.

On the day of the memorial service, the sky was overcast and the cemetery chilly. But a crowd gathered. A bugler called the group to attention and Joel Schiavone emceed the sentimental ceremony. After a rendition of taps wafted through the cemetery on the sharp December air, the Paul King Orchestra played several Miller hits. There were many misty eyes during their final rendition, “Moonlight Serenade.”



Photo by Thomas C. Williams, 2002