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Battle of Cantigny Centennial

*Memorial Day marks the 100th anniversary of America's first key battle of WWI;
Commemoration activities for all ages planned at Cantigny Park*

Wheaton, Ill., May 9, 2018 — The First Division Museum at Cantigny Park will host a full day of events on Memorial Day, May 28, to commemorate the centennial of America's first key battle and first offensive of World War I.

The Battle of Cantigny took place May 28-31, 1918, in Cantigny, France. The U.S. Army's First Division led the charge, successfully liberating the small village from German occupation.

The decisive victory "bolstered the morale of America's European allies at a critical moment," said Paul Herbert, First Division Museum executive director. "It was also our country's first commitment in blood to democracy in Western Europe."

Cantigny Park claims a close connection to those events 100 years ago, about 70 miles north of Paris.

Robert R. McCormick, a true citizen-soldier, joined the Illinois National Guard in 1915 and served on the Mexican border in 1916. At the time, he was editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. He further volunteered for service in World War I with the First Division (now the 1st Infantry Division, the famous "Big Red One"), eventually earning the rank of Colonel.

The Battle of Cantigny was the only major battle in which McCormick participated, but the experience affected him deeply. Upon returning to the United States, he renamed his family's Wheaton farm Cantigny.

On Memorial Day, the First Division Museum will offer moments of reflection along with World War I learning opportunities, entertainment and plenty of family-friendly options. Highlights include a Battle of Cantigny memorial ceremony and wreath laying; readings of war letters written by soldiers; WWI reenactors and historic vehicles; a patriotic band concert; and self-guided tours of the newly renovated museum. [A complete schedule of events is below.](#)

Inside the museum's World War I galleries, visitors will find an artistic installation of 2,000 hand-crafted poppies, a display honoring America's casualties in the Great War.

Throughout the weekend, Cantigny Post 556 of the American Legion will be distributing memorial poppies at the park and Cantigny Golf in honor of our dead from all wars. The poppies are free, but any donations received will go to the Midwest Shelter for Homeless

Veterans in Wheaton, and will be matched dollar for dollar by the Robert R. McCormick Foundation.

Meanwhile, representatives from Cantigny Park and the Robert R. McCormick Foundation will travel to the battle site in France. A century-old First Division battlefield monument was recently restored with funding from the Foundation and relocated to the center of Cantigny village. The marker will be rededicated at a ceremony on May 26.

“The French people I’ve met with are very excited about this anniversary,” said Herbert. “I think the Colonel also would be excited, and proud of all that we are doing here at the park, in France and elsewhere. He’d want to give the keynote speech.”

In fact, Colonel McCormick returned to the Cantigny battlefield in 1937 and delivered a speech at the original dedication of the First Division monument. His words from that day are preserved on the floor of Freedom Hall, the expansive library inside McCormick House at Cantigny Park.

SCHEDULED EVENTS at CANTIGNY PARK

Monday, May 28

10 am to 5 pm

First Division Museum

- Battle of Cantigny memorial ceremony, with wreath laying and pigeon release (10 am)
- Poppy display in the World War I galleries (all day)
- World War I photo booth (all day)
- Activities for kids (11 am to 5 pm):
 - Play dress-up with WWI History Trunks
 - Learn how to finger knit
 - Make a poppy pinwheel
 - Build and paint a Doughboy helmet

Parade Field

World War I encampment with living history reenactors and historic vehicles (all day)

Bandshell

Illinois Brass Band (3 pm)

Visitors Center Theater

War Letters: Living history actors read letters written by soldiers from different eras and conflicts (1 pm)

Robert R. McCormick House

- Open House (10 am-4:30 pm)
- Living history reenactment of McCormick’s 1937 Cantigny, France, speech (on the hour, starting at 11 am; last performance 3 pm)

Much information about the Battle of Cantigny and World War I Centennial is available here: <https://www.fdmuseum.org/honoring-wwi-centennial/>

Memorial Day hours for Cantigny Park are 7 am to sunset. Both museums will be open from 10 am to 5 pm.

Admission to the park, museums and gardens is free with paid parking. Cantigny's regular daily parking fee is \$5 per car. On Saturdays and Sundays, May through September, parking is \$10. The \$10 rate also applies on Memorial Day, July 4th and Labor Day. Parking is free on the first Wednesday of every month.

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About the First Division Museum at Cantigny Park

The First Division Museum at Cantigny Park, fully renovated in 2017 and part of Robert R. McCormick Foundation, promotes public learning about America's military heritage and affairs through the history of the "Big Red One"—the famed 1st Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. It stands in tribute to all who have served our country in the armed forces. The Robert R. McCormick Research Center, open to the public, houses the museum's library, archival and photo collections. Visit the museum online at fdmuseum.org.

About Cantigny Park

Cantigny Park, part of the Chicago-based Robert R. McCormick Foundation, is the 500-acre Wheaton estate of Robert R. McCormick (1880-1955), long-time editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. It is home to the McCormick House, First Division Museum, formal gardens, picnic grounds, walking trails and a Visitors Center with banquet and dining facilities. More information, including hours, directions and upcoming events is online at cantigny.org.