

## Preface

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In 2014 the world will commence the centenary remembrance of the Great War. It will not be a celebration – there is really nothing to celebrate about the madness that engulfed the world for more than four years. Nor the peace, which, as it turned out, was only a truce that allowed twenty years for the same combatants to build more powerful and deadlier weapons, and begin killing each other again.

The Great War will be remembered because it still retains a special place in national and individual memories, even in the United States, which only entered the war near the end. Hardly had the cease-fire been declared – at 11 o'clock on the 11th day in the 11th month, 1918 – then communities began constructing small memorials, like the one on our cover, on town squares or in city parks. Some memorials were on a grander scale, like Memorial Stadium (1923), where the University of Illinois plays football, and Soldier Field (1925) further north where the Chicago Bears play their games. All of them, large and small, were dedicated to those men and women who sacrificed their lives in the Great War.

Historians speak of the long nineteenth century – from the French Revolution in 1789 to the beginning of the Great War in 1914. The twentieth century began with the war to end all wars. We know now, and the people alive even then knew, the world changed with the outbreak of the Great War, and life would never be the same again. Some great empires fell, others, for a time, grew larger; political boundaries were redrawn as some countries disappeared and new countries were born; communism claimed it first nation; and the United States and Japan became world powers. Many people abandoned their trust in the Enlightenment ideals of science and progress as this war unleashed a technologically advanced, industrial strength, killing machine that used the wonders of science to destroy and slaughter. Not for nothing was the deadliest weapon in the war called a “machine” gun. Faith in an all-powerful, benevolent God declined as well, as survivors tried to comprehend the often unspeakable and hellish deaths of nine million husbands, brothers, and sons on far-away battlefields, of millions more who returned home horribly disfigured in mind and body, and for the unknown millions of women, children and the elderly who suffered death and destruction both on the “Battle Front,” and the “Home Front.” And if all this was not enough to question both God and science, a great influenza epidemic, for which neither ministers nor scientists had any answers, spread around the globe between 1917 and 1919, killing a further how many? 40 million? 100 million?

By 1925, as a result of changes brought about by the war, the world was as different from 1900 in every way – socially, philosophically, economically, politically, culturally, technologically – as any equivalent 25- year period in world history. Women – bomb assemblers, taxi drivers, nurses, spies – had left the home, earned salaries, and now demanded and received the vote. Farm boys, like my father from Indiana, would never be the same, after they'd “seen Paree’.” One need only compare the Roaring Twenties' bobbed-hair “flapper,” in her short, revealing dress, a whiskey in one hand, a cigarette in the other, dancing the Charleston, with the corseted (literally “strait-laced”) “Gibson Girl” of 1900 in her full dress brushing the floor, climbing to her neck, reaching to her wrists. By 1925, airplanes and cars had replaced horses, radios the phonograph, electric lights the gas light.

For the past three years I have taught a graduate class on World War I and its consequences. Believing that all history is local, I ask my students first to find out if any of their ancestors played a part in the Great War. If so, they are to learn everything they can about that person, see if there are any letters or other mementos of the war that survived, and write a history. If they find none, or have very little information, than they are to write about their hometown or county during the war. As none of my students so far has lived in a community where such a history already exists, they have had to carry out primary research: in libraries, historical societies, local memorials, graveyards, military records, newspapers, American Legion posts, local schools, and anywhere else they can dig up information about the war. Some have conducted oral interviews, gone on-line to genealogical and World War I sites, and written to war offices, regimental historians, and battlefields, in the United States and beyond. The 17 essays in this collection are the products of that assignment.

In the papers they turned in for the class I encouraged my students to give me everything they found – lists of draftees, lists of dead and wounded, lists of conscientious objectors, contributors to war bond drives, members of military units, photos – along with their narrative. These complete essays with full lists of names, photos, photocopies and other information I had them deposit in local libraries and historical society archives for future researchers to build on and not have to duplicate research. As such long lists can bring the general reader to tears, the essays contained here have been edited, both by me, and by members of Professor Michael Shirley’s “Historical Research and Writing” class. Each year this class produces an award-winning issue of *Historia* plus the department’s newsletter. This is a special edition of *Historia*.

I come to this project through my own father who served in France during the Great War. I have about 75 letters he sent home, plus a number of other items from his experience. A few of my students discovered relatives who had served in the war, and some, such as Tristain Sodergren-Baar, whose grandfather who served with the American Expeditionary Forces in Siberia fighting the Bolsheviks, also uncovered letters and other objects of historical interest. Similarly, Patrick Vonesh grew up believing his family came from Wales, but discovered while researching this paper that they originally came from Ireland, and lived in England for a while before finally settling in Wales. It was from central England that Patrick’s three great, great, great-uncles went to war. One of them, William, was ironically first sent to Dublin to put down the Irish rebellion of 1916 and then to France. Laura Mondt’s grandfather laid the communication lines between headquarters and the front lines in France, while working for Bell Telephone. Her essay goes beyond that individual history, however, to tell the larger story of communications technology in the war.

Most of the students had to turn to local history, but here they consistently discovered exciting and fascinating histories. In this collection we have an account of Eastern’s own role in the war by Derek Shidler, who tells how, among other fascinating bits, Eastern’s most popular football player, and president of the class of 1917, Martin “Otto” Schahrer, was killed in September 1918, and that our library is named after Mary Booth, who served in the American Red Cross and worked at General Pershing’s headquarters. Several students discuss the tension between patriotism and German-American citizenship, particularly Jon Burkhardt’s history of Pana during the war. James Buckwalter’s essay provides a history of Blue Island, an old community in Cook County, Illinois, as well as its involvement in the war, which reflected the community’s ethnic conflicts between Italians, Poles, and Germans. Amanda Evans turned in a highly original essay on the Army Nurse Corps, Red Cross Volunteers and the volunteers from Illinois State (Normal) University in the Great War. Margaret Hawkins was able to interview her grandmother about Margaret’s paternal great grandfather’s service in World War I and also build on an extensive family genealogy to tell this one family’s story in Mattoon, Illinois during

the war. Noah Sangster grew up in Decatur, and he describes Decatur's participation in the war, but Noah's family came from the British Isles and Eastern Europe, and there were intriguing stories here waiting to be uncovered as well. Kevin Green also grew up in Decatur and he tells Decatur's story primarily through a single newspaper, *The Decatur Herald*.

Nicholas Walsh comes from the rural community of Bement, Illinois, and he turned up a surprising amount of information on this town's activities during the war and its citizens who went off to serve. Ryan Herdes went above and beyond to track down all the information he could on Clay County, Illinois. We could not include all the records and lists he uncovered but the essay provides some indication of how future researchers will be forever grateful to him. Pesotum and Tolono are located about a twenty-minute drive south of Champaign-Urbana and Jason Miller's family has lived in the area for five generations. Both his great-grandfather and great-great uncle were drafted but never had to serve. Jason tells the rich history of how the war affected these small communities, and includes a poem written about the war by a Pesotum fourteen-year old boy. Chaddy Hosen researched the men of Company G, from Effingham County, Illinois and the history of the county itself. Here again, there was a tension over patriotism and the large German community in the county, especially in the heavily German town of Teutopolis. Christopher Kernc studied the small coal-mining communities of Coal City and Diamond, Illinois, and offered another angle to the assignment – the role of coal in the war effort, as well as the activities of the American Red Cross. Ryan D'Arcy is the world's authority on his hometown of Westfield, Illinois, so this assignment just offered him an opportunity to do more research on his favorite topic. Among other interesting bits of information he uncovered was the competition and cooperation among communities in Clark County to outdo each other in contributions for war savings, thrift stamps, Liberty Loans, and Red Cross activities. Jon Matthews also wrote about Clark County, but about his hometown of Marshall, Illinois. Patriotism and the large German-American community are again discussed here, as well as the contributions Marshall made to the war effort, as through Liberty Bonds, the Red Cross, Victory Gardens, and women going to serve in France as nurses. Finally, Nichole Garbrough's conducted an extraordinary amount of primary research on another Clark County, this one in Southeastern Indiana, and, much to her, and my, delighted surprise, uncovered an amazing wealth of fascinating details about the county, which included the Quarter Master Depot, located in Jeffersonville, and the Ohio Falls Car Manufacturing Company (also called the American Car Foundry). This factory played a critical roll in the war effort – it was the U.S. government's largest contractor -- produced escort wagons, wagon wheels, nose forgings for shells, rolling kitchens, packsaddles, and a variety of other metal equipment. The military depot, which procured, manufactured, and shipped huge quantities of war materials, employed around 18,000 women who, like many women around the world, found themselves out of work when the war ended.

I want to thank Dr. Michael Shirley and his class for all the time and effort they put in to produce this beautiful collection of essays. My thanks also to our History Department Chair, Dr. Anita Shelton, for supporting this special edition of *Historia*.