

Coal City & Diamond, Illinois During The Great War

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The American public often relegates World War I to the periphery of American popular memory, as Americans tend to remember and assign more importance to the United States' participation in the Second World War. This selective memory is readily understandable to some extent. For the United States, World War II was longer, bloodier, and more destructive than its predecessor. In fact, most Americans agreed with why the nation took up arms, as World War II was referred to as "The Good War." World War I received no such moniker; the soldiers who fought were referred to as "The Lost Generation."

World War I is mostly given secondary attention because it was seen as a failure in the long term. It was not, after all, the "war to end all wars," with World War II beginning only twenty years later, returning American troops to Europe to fight the Germans. Although the United States came out on the winning side, it was a shallow victory. Yet, this in no way means that U.S. participation in World War I should be overlooked. Indeed, World War I had a profound impact on the United States, on both national and local levels

Cities and towns across the nation were transformed by World War I, as the departure of military-aged men to fight in Europe was notable. Lives were placed on hold due to the onset of the war. Many households either lost their primary breadwinner, or in the case of farming families, their main source of labor. Citizens across the nation enlisted in war, joined the Red Cross, went to work in war related industries, invested their hard-earned money in war bonds, or spent their time putting together comfort packages for the boys overseas.

There was no shortage of ways in which a family or community could participate in the war effort. In the small towns that dotted the nation, one likely knew someone who served during the war—be it a family member, friend, or neighbor. If not, everyday Americans were usually indirectly affected in the home or workplace as World War I influenced consumption patterns, the prices of commodities and goods, and business in general. The villages of Coal City, Illinois and Diamond, Illinois were no exception, and in fact serve as a microcosm for small communities throughout the U.S. during World War I. The citizens banded together, overcoming the ethnic and labor tensions of their mining communities in order to give to the war effort and bring the troops home victorious.

Coal City and Diamond Prior to the War

The villages of Coal City and Diamond are located in Grundy County in northeastern Illinois. Although the villages constitute two distinct municipal entities, they are compounded in this study. Many residents in either village may find fault in my doing so, especially due to a long-standing rivalry between the residents of the two villages. Yet, the close proximity of the towns makes it difficult to know where one town ends and the other begins. Even long-time residents of both villages may find it difficult to distinguish whether certain businesses or homes are in Coal City or Diamond. Besides sheer proximity, the two villages also have a shared history.

Both Coal City and Diamond came into being as a result of the coal industry—hence their names. The coal industry was a major historical force for both communities, and the same can be said of the industry during World War I. The coal vein in this region was relatively small in comparison to coal seams in other localities; however, the boom coincided with the expansion of

railroads in Illinois and the industrial emergence of nearby Chicago. In reference to a mine located in Diamond, a report by the Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics stated:

The seam of coal is thin, and near the surface, and one of the chief sources of expense in mining it is the handling of the great quantities of water which continually accumulate in the workings. Its proximity to Chicago, alone, gives to this coal field its special value, and it is doubtful if the necessary capital would be found to develop it were it not the nearest coal to the largest market in the West.¹

This report suggests that proximity played a fundamental role in the birth of the coal industry in both Coal City and Diamond, Illinois. Chicago provided a market, as well as financiers, and the railroad provided the link to the Chicago and regional markets. According to M.J. Donna, the first major railroad line near Coal City and Diamond passed through Braidwood, Illinois, located just a few miles from Cold City and Diamond, and its construction was completed in 1853. Braidwood's forested areas were used as a source of wood to power railroad engines. The discovery of coal in the area corresponded with the shift toward coal-powered locomotives; thus, the growth of the mining industry in the area was no coincidence.² Because of the railroad, the area became an important part of the transportation network of the region, and coal mining became a lucrative enterprise. Mining operations began sprouting up all over the area. Many more miles of railroad track and spur lines through the northern Illinois coalfield followed.

Several local mining communities were directly founded by railroad companies, or sprang to life as the result of railroad companies sinking mines in the area. According to Jim Ridings, neighboring Braceville boomed when the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad purchased a large tract of land and began mining operations in the 1880s. The population of the township swelled from a small village with few inhabitants to a bustling community of over 3,500 residents within a decade.³ Likewise, the founding of Coal City and its organization was plotted in relation to the Chicago, Pekin and Southwestern Railway.⁴ James MacFarlane stated that the northern Illinois coalfield, "on account of its vicinity to the great market afforded by the city of Chicago, is for obvious reasons destined to be one of the most productive districts in the state."⁵ By 1870, mines in nearby Will County ranked second in the state for coal production, producing 228,000 tons, and the mines in Grundy County were producing 51,375 tons of coal.⁶ Likewise, the Chicago and Alton Railroad had increased its coal shipments from 12,281 tons in 1865, to 176,876 tons in 1870.⁷ Proximity to Chicago and the railroad's dependency on coal made mining in Coal City and Diamond economically feasible.

As is the case with any area dependent on a single staple industry, the fate of the people who lived among the coalfields of Coal City and Diamond rested on the fortune of "king coal."

¹ Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Statistics of Coal Production in Illinois: A Supplemental Report of the State Bureau of Labor Statistics* (Springfield, IL: H.W. Rokker, 1883), 97-98.

² Modesto Joseph Donna, *The Braidwood Story* (Braidwood, IL: Braidwood History Bureau, 1957), 310, 59.

³ Jim Ridings, *Cardiff 2: A Second Volume of History from the Lost Coal Mining Town on the Prairie and More History from Clark City, Tracy, Torino, and Campus* (Herscher, IL: Side Show Books, 2008), 287.

⁴ Helen Stine Ullrich, *This is Grundy County: Its History from Beginning to 1968* (Dixon, IL: Rogers Printing Co., 1968), 173.

⁵ James MacFarlane, *The Coal Regions of America: Their Topography, Geology, and Development* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1875), 426.

⁶ Richard Joyce, "Mines of the Prairie: Life and Labor in the Wilmington, Illinois, Coal Fields, 1866-1897" (Masters Thesis, Illinois State University, 1980) 15.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Coal production in the area hit its peak in the late nineteenth century, but began to wane into the early twentieth century. Coal City was mapped in 1875 and incorporated in 1871, and Diamond was organized in 1873 and established as a municipality in 1895.⁸ According to population statistics compiled by local historian Richard Joyce, the population of Coal City in 1890 (the first census since its founding) was 1,672 and the population of Diamond in 1900 (again the first census from its founding) was 672.⁹ The population of Diamond may have been larger in the 1870s and 1880s; however, a disaster in the Diamond Mine in 1883 and the mine's subsequent closure caused a mass exodus of local inhabitants. The closure forced Diamond miners and their families to relocate in order to find employment. A local resident reported that prior to the disaster, the town consisted of "about fifteen hundred inhabitants," but she continued:

Today Diamond is but a shadow of its former self. The coal around town is nearly all worked out. The company sank a new mine, Number Six about seven miles south of Diamond where a little village by the name of Torino is springing up. Many people from Diamond have gone there. Some have moved their houses; other their business places.... Yet most leave with genuine regret the little village that has so long been their home but is now on the decline.¹⁰

Prior to World War I, the populations of Coal City and Diamond in 1910 were 2,667 and 255, yet, by 1920 the towns' populations dwindled to 1,744 and 85 inhabitants respectively.¹¹ This pattern of outward migration somewhat slowed during World War I, as wartime demand led to a temporary revitalization of the local coal industry.

The quest for coal not only altered the area's economy, landscape, and environment, but also its political, demographic, social, and cultural makeup. For innumerable reasons, thousands of individuals from all parts of the globe descended upon Coal City and Diamond to try their luck in its burgeoning new industry. As a result Coal City and Diamond were fairly diverse communities by the time the United States became embroiled in the First World War. This heterogeneous mix of peoples created an interesting wartime dynamic. The loyalty of the newly arrived immigrants was often questioned, and "One Hundred Percent American" campaigns exacerbated community tensions, which were already at an all-time high. Citizens often wondered if immigrant workers would assimilate and support the war or if they would be potential saboteurs and dissenters who would impede the war effort. These inquiries played hand-in-hand with the long history of labor strife and militancy that had existed in the area since the 1870s. Many Anglo-Americans, capitalists, and politicians were undoubtedly leery of where immigrants' loyalties remained. The war either afforded recent immigrants an opportunity to prove their loyalty, or it obligated them to prove it.

Because the populations of both Coal City and Diamond consisted of working-age males, many inhabitants of the towns enlisted in World War I. Downturns in the local coal industry prior to the war, as well as the coal industry's drudgeries, likely influenced many to join the

⁸Coal City Public Library District, "Coal Mining in Illinois," Coal City Public Library, <http://www.coalcity.lib.il.us/coalmining/coalcity/coalcity.html> (accessed April 8, 2011).

⁹Richard Joyce, "Coal Mining Towns Population Statistics," prepared by Richard Joyce, Coal City Public Library District Collections, Coal City, Illinois.

¹⁰Flossie Strickland, "The Rise and Fall of Diamond," Unknown Newspaper (May 1907), courtesy Coal City Public Library District, http://www.coalcity.lib.il.us/coalmining/diamond/diamond_riseandfall.html (accessed April 8, 2011).

¹¹Joyce, "Coal Mining Towns Population Statistics."

military. First, second, and third generation immigrants joined the services, as well, in order to prove their loyalty to their native-born neighbors. According to a local newspaper published after the war, a total of 234 local men, as well as four nurses and one Y.M.C.A. worker, served during the war.¹² Of those, eight men lost their lives during the war.¹³

Coal City and Diamond During the War

The Coal City Courant, reveals that the residents of Coal City and Diamond heeded the call to service during World War I. During the war, the paper was saturated with advertisements for the Red Cross, war bond drives, recruitment drives, tips for conserving resources during the war, and general wartime propaganda. The local newspaper also reported the names of drafted community members who were expected to “be ready for service within forty-eight hours.”¹⁴ A key feature of these articles was the list of names they provided. These lists not only showed who contributed to the war effort, but were also not-so-subtle hints to everyone else in the community to do their part. Perhaps some residents performed their part in order to be featured in these patriotic lists, which were also conveyors of social status; the publicity surrounding war-related work put additional pressure on members of the community to contribute to the war effort.

Announcements for community gatherings pertaining to the war were a key feature of the newspaper during the war years. In *The Coal City Courant*, one such headline proclaimed: “Community Gathering,” and reported that a “beautiful silk service flag, the gift of Frank Hejna, and made by his mother, Mrs. Rose Hejna and Miss Nelle Owens, [would be] formally presented to the village...” Those present at the gathering included the mayor, a quartette of local notables, and a marine band. After a speech by Reverend A.C. Ramsay, Miss Constance Somerville, dressed as Liberty, placed a red carnation on a table after the name of each local man in the service was read.¹⁵ A carnation was also placed for Miss Fannie Campbell, a Red Cross nurse, as she was “truly in the service as if she were on the battlefield of France.”¹⁶ What is significant about this event, and others like it during the war, was its public and ceremonial nature. Just like the patriotic lists in the newspaper, one wanted to be seen as doing their part for the war, and their displays were often a mixture of patriotic festivities and solemnity. Community members celebrated the war, but at the same time remained cognizant of the danger faced by fellow community members fighting overseas.

Public displays of patriotism abounded. The local Home Guards—commanded by Scottish emigrant, former Coal City mayor, and pioneering airplane designer and manufacturer, Captain William E. Somerville—met every Sunday during the war for drills at the high school campus.¹⁷ The Coal City Home Guards also competed in sporting events against other nearby chapters. The newspaper reported on one such spectacle in which the Coal City Home Guard defeated the Morris Reserve Militia in a “ball game” in front of a “fair sized crowd” by a score of eighteen to two; the proceeds of the game (\$82.76) were donated to the local Red Cross unit.¹⁸

¹²Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, unknown compiler, Coal City Public Library District, Coal City, Illinois. For a full list of those from the community who served during World War I see Appendix One.

¹³ Ibid.; The source listed those “men who made the supreme sacrifice” during their service as: William Bridel, John Dececco, Rudolph Hajek, Benjamin Kaplan, Corp. John Pavlis, Frank Schwab, Joseph Sestak, and Andrew Tallman. Accounts of their deaths are provided later in this study.

¹⁴*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 17 May 1918.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Coal City Public Library District, “Somerville,” Coal City Public Library, http://www.ccpld.org/coalmining/coalcity/coalcity_Somerville.html (accessed April 13, 2011).

¹⁸*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 10 May 1918.

Local residents also held thrift campaign drives and competitions. *The Coal City Courant* reported that “the local branch of the War Savings Club...completed its house to house canvas. Members of the committee were kindly and cordially received by all. The response on the part of the public for pledges was general and productive of excellent results. It furnished much evidence of the patriotism, zeal and generosity of [the] community.”¹⁹

Patriotic parades were also common occurrences. One such parade was held in honor of local men who had recently been called into the service. They were “honored by [the] citizens in a mighty patriotic demonstration that outrivaled by far any like affair in the history of Coal City.”²⁰ The report on the parade stated that all business was suspended and “a big parade with over a thousand in line opened the program.”²¹ The procession was made up of a band, the Home Guards; all the local children from surrounding schools; and the twenty-two young men drafted into the military. The report stated that, “the entire community assembled as one big, loyal family, [and that] there was a vain [sic] of sadness... but...the boys were so earnest, so keen for service that the going was made comparatively easy.”²² The procession was followed with a speech given by local clergyman, Reverend A.C. Ramsay, who did “valiant service in the thrift campaign, liberty loan and as food administrator.”²³ In an attempt to drum up support for the third Liberty Loan drive, Reverend Ramsay declared, “We can trust our boys—but can they trust you?”²⁴ Local religious leaders and institutions were usually involved in public displays during the war, and they utilized their pulpits for advocating patriotism and sacrifice. Following the affair, several hundred citizens, as well as the band, accompanied the men all the way to Morris where they had been ordered to report.²⁵

The Red Cross and Red Cross News were also prominently featured in the *Coal City Courant*. Every week, the newspaper informed the community of the activities of the local chapter of the Red Cross, and listed local citizens’ monetary and material contributions to the organization. The newspaper also informed the public of items needed by the boys in the service. For example, one article asked that Red Cross volunteers concentrate their present efforts on knitting, as the Department of Military Relief had asked “to increase the supply of sweaters, socks, and wristlets” since these items were necessary for soldiers overseas.²⁶ The Red Cross worked in coordination with the military to see that the needs of the men in the field were met. What is striking is that the government and military were unable to adequately supply such items. The necessity of work and materials provided by organized citizens demonstrates the scale of the war and the government’s need to utilize private donations to provide for American soldiers overseas. In a sermon at the Opera House, Reverend Father Griffin preached, “Modern warfare is 75 percent industrial effort...for without it an army cannot be satisfactorily equipped, fed, maintained, and transported...this is not the U.S. government’s war. It is everybody’s war. All must fight one way or the other. The obligation is individual and not merely official.”²⁷

The Red Cross Commission in France informed the local chapter that, “The Red Cross ha[d] direct responsibility for supplying [American soldiers] with surgical dressings ... standard dressings in millions must be sent over with all possible speed. If this [was] not done

¹⁹*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 17 May 1918.

²⁰*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 5 April 1918.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 7 December 1917.

²⁷*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 18 January 1918.

and done immediately a serious calamity and national disgrace [was] inevitable.” The announcement continued, “the Red Cross Chapters should prepare with all the enthusiasm and speed possible the dressings which mean life and death to our own men. This whole question deals with the most vital thing that the women of America do for the soldiers in this war.”²⁸

The December 14, 1917 edition of the newspaper reported typical items donated to the Red Cross. Local citizens knitted or sent thirty-five sweaters, four mufflers, thirty-three pairs of wristlets, seventeen pairs of socks, eight petticoats, 105 head bandages, sixty-five abdominal bandages, and so forth.²⁹ Likewise, one woman gave the Red Cross “16 skeins of bright colored yarn to be used in making afghans or other knitted articles for Belgian children,” and another woman donated an electric iron “for the use of the surgical dressing department.”³⁰ Articles and advertisements pertaining to the Red Cross pulled on the community’s heartstrings by pointing out biblical quotes related to charity, which were followed by illustrations of wounded and ragged soldiers, complete with captions like “Help Save This Lad’s Life.”³¹ Evidently, their campaign was quite successful given the volume of contributions that were reported in the weekly lists of donations.

Comfort packages, which saw to the needs of men in the field, were also prepared by the local chapter of the Red Cross. The local Home Service Committee was established to ensure that local boys received their care packages by asking all men in service in addition to their next of kin to promptly provide their addresses so that community could correspond with them and see to any material requests they had.³² Considering the soldiers’ responses to the program, printed in the paper, this system must have worked fairly well. Angelo Deluckie, who was stationed with the 345th Infantry in Camp Pike, Arkansas, wrote to the Coal City Red Cross that the Christmas box and socks he received “were very welcome, especially as [they were] having cold weather...”³³ Corporal P. Francis Boetto, who was stationed at Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois, wrote:

I wish to express to you and the kind people of Coal City my most sincere thanks and appreciation for the Christmas box and wristlets which you sent me. It certainly cheers a soldier up, even though he has the blues, to know the ones back home have not forgotten him. I want to assure you that these courtesies will not easily be erased from our memory.³⁴

Francis Boetto’s correspondence reveals that these care packages served not only to satisfy local soldiers’ material needs, but their psychological ones as well.

Of course, certain ethnic tensions and dissent remained; although, perhaps, less vocally than before the war. Much of this ethnic tension likely stemmed from the media’s glorification of America’s allies and its demonization of America’s foes during the war. A few examples from the newspaper highlight this contrast. The mayor and commissioners of Coal City in an official notice declared that:

²⁸*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 7 December 1917.

²⁹*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 14 December 1917.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 21 December 1917.

³²*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 4 January 1918.

³³*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 18 January 1918.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Whereas, Sunday, July 14th is the great National holiday of France ... it is fitting that the people of the United States and their allies should show our appreciation of their participation and in some proper manner commemorate their national holiday which has meant so much to them. It is therefore requested that the people of Coal City, wherever possible, display the flag of France ... and that in all our churches or other gatherings reference be made of our imperishable debt to France and of our determination to stand by her until peace shall have been achieved by victory.³⁵

This stands in stark contrast to the ways in which the Germans were depicted by the media. An article from the *Providence Journal* and reprinted in the *Courant* stated that:

Every German or Austrian in the United States, unless known by years of association to be absolutely loyal should be treated as a potential spy. Keep your eyes and ears open. Whenever any suspicious act or disloyal word comes to your notice communicate at once with the Bureau of Investigation ... We are at war with the most merciless and inhuman nation in the world. Hundreds of thousands of its people in this country want to see America humiliated and brought to her knees, and they are [determined?] and will do everything in their power to bring this about.³⁶

Another example can be found in a Red Cross advertisement:

Fathers: Suppose that three years ago a powerful and savage enemy had invaded our nation suddenly and you had been called into the army to defend the country. Suppose that our country had been captured by the invaders; your home burned, your wife and half-grown daughter carried away into slavery worse than death and your son mutilated and put to work behind enemy lines ... Well, just those horrors were visited upon thousands of fathers in France and Belgium by the kaiser's savages.³⁷

In light of this fiery rhetoric, it was no wonder that clashes between German and non-German community members ensued. In nearby South Wilmington, a coal miner was nearly lynched and had to be rescued by federal agents for allegedly making “unpatriotic statements.”³⁸ According to the report, August Gewer, “who [was] of German parentage, narrowly escaped violence... at the South Wilmington coal mines after he [allegedly]...said ‘the h—l with the Tuscania—it had no business on the water anyway.’”³⁹ The SS Tuscania, a former luxury liner, sank while ferrying American troops to Europe in early 1918, the victim of a torpedo attack by a German submarine. Word of Gewer’s statement spread among the community, and talk among locals spoke of forming a lynch mob. Gewer was “rescued from an angry crowd of miners by officials of the Chicago, Wilmington and Franklin Coal company,” and rushed to Chicago “under protection of United States secret service agents,” where he was incarcerated for the duration of the war.⁴⁰ In the hearing on the charge, Gewer stated, “I am

³⁵ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 12 July 1918.

³⁶ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 14 December 1917.

³⁷ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 21 December 1917.

³⁸ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, “Threaten to Lynch Miner as Disloyal,” 26.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

with the United States all of the way ... this country is my home. I have made my living under the stars and stripes and why shouldn't I be for America. Charges that I am disloyal are false and I can prove it."⁴¹ He denied ever making the statement, and attempted to demonstrate his loyalty by showing that he had purchased liberty bonds and "contributed to different organizations for help of the soldiers and sailors."⁴² Ultimately, the charges against Gewer were dropped and he returned to work.⁴³

Another incident of wartime patriotism and anti-communist fervor concerning a local resident occurred in Butte, Montana, involving Frank Little who "had worked as a coal miner in Coal City and Diamond."⁴⁴ Little's father, Captain William Little, was a Civil War veteran and longtime Grundy County collier.⁴⁵ Frank was a member of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), an organization widely known for its labor militancy and commitment to worker socialism. The coal mines around Coal City and Diamond were a hotbed of labor activism and produced a number of notable labor advocates. Frank Little was no exception. On August 2, 1917, after giving an anti-war speech in Butte, in which he referred to American troops as "Uncle Sam's scabs in uniform," he was abducted from his residence by "masked vigilantes" and "hanged from a railroad trestle."⁴⁶ This, perhaps, is an extreme example, but an example nonetheless, of Americans fervent patriotism and the widespread hysteria aimed against ideas that were deemed foreign and radical.

Individuals like Gewer and Little seemed to be more of an exception than the rule during the war. Many other residents may have been against the war, or perhaps ambivalent about it, but wartime patriotism and hysteria served to silence them, for the most part. Patriotism, whether feigned or not, seemed to be the local population's response to World War I. Given that residents in Coal City and Diamond had family members, friends, or neighbors in the service, it made sense that the communities came together to support the war. Many immigrants in the area also found an opportunity to gain acceptance, or a sense of belonging, through public displays of patriotism during the war. Parades, celebrations, gatherings, sacrifices, and donation drives allowed the inhabitants of Coal City and Diamond to participate in World War I patriotism. The Hejna family was recognized by the local press for being a stellar example of both patriotism and successful assimilation. The newspaper reported that:

The Hejna family of Coal City, are of Bohemian nationality. The parents came to America about thirty-five years ago.... The father was accidentally killed by a fall of stone in the Coal City company No. 7 mine, July 3, 1917. Since then Frank has been practically the head of the family.... What makes the family conspicuous at present is found in a little talk given by Frank two weeks ago when he was called to service. 'You young folks should invest in War Savings stamps,' he said, 'and show you are true Americans. How about you older folks, have you purchased Liberty Bonds? Buy until it hurts, as the saying goes ... My mother (as most of you know), is a widow with ten children, and she purchased a bond for every child and one for herself, and furthermore, she has given two sons to fight for Old Glory. I say my mother is 100 percent loyal and patriotic to the American flag.'⁴⁷

⁴¹Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Miner Proves He is Loyal to America."

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴Ridings, 289.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "She is 100 Per-Cent Patriotic," 27.

Those Who Served

Many Coal City and Diamond residents contributed to the war effort beyond the home front. As previously mentioned, 234 local male residents served in the military during the war, as did five women as nurses and Y.M.C.A. workers. Although none of these veterans remain alive today for interviews, they have left behind artifacts, writings, and pictures that can help shed light on the individual experiences of Coal City and Diamond citizens serving in World War I. Again the *Courant* proves a valuable source. During the war, the *Courant* reprinted letters that local men in the service sent to their family and friends. It also reported on any notable occurrences involving local servicemen such as promotions, injuries, or in the worst case, deaths. These letters were censored and gave only cursory information that lacked substantial details. Likewise, many were watered-down by their writers in order to alleviate their loved one's fears. However cursory, much information on an individual's tour of duty can be gained by looking at when the letters were dated, from where the letters originated, and what unit the individual was serving in. It is also worth noting that the letters sent home after the war ended provide a rich account of what these soldiers experienced, and these did not have to deal with wartime censorship or constraints on information. For the sake of this study, I picked out a sampling of some of the more notable examples that detailed Coal City and Diamond residents' experiences in the service during the First World War.

One article noted that, "Coal City is very proud of its war record. According to population this place ranks first in the country with number of men in service."⁴⁸ The highest ranking individual from the area was Major F.A. Stockdale, the "first Medical man in Grundy County to volunteer for service."⁴⁹ Charles Warren Campbell also advanced in title during World War I; after volunteering, he rose to the rank of 1st Lieutenant.⁵⁰ Private Nelson Campbell, who was under age at his time of enlistment, was "cited for bravery under shell fire" for which he was awarded the Croix-de-Guerre, a French medal given to both French and allied soldiers during World War I.⁵¹ According to another account, Nelson Campbell was "recommended for bravery by the Medical Division of the French Army."⁵² In the French account, Campbell was an ambulance driver with the "French army S.S.U. 553 ... He...contributed greatly to the success of rapidly conveying the wounded to safety under most difficult and perilous conditions; and particularly distinguished himself on the 20th of August 1918, when he drove his ambulance continuously during a most terrific bombardment."⁵³

Sergeants and Corporals received media attention, as well,⁵⁴ and their stories were revealed in the letters they wrote. In one letter, John Strejeck recounted how he received a citation for bravery. According to Strejeck, the 6th U.S. Engineer Train was being shelled not far from where he was positioned. He volunteered to carry letters and blankets to them while under heavy fire.⁵⁵ John Fleming of Diamond was also honored for his bravery. As part of the 5th Division, Fleming was cited for "forcing against the enemy in position, a crossing of the River Meuse near Dan[?] and near Brioules, building bridges and swimming the river in the face of machine gun and artillery fire and in advancing some nine kilometers in the enemy's

⁴⁸Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Cited for Bravery," 29.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections.

⁵⁵*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 14 February 1919.

territory...in spite of fatigue and shortage of rations.”⁵⁶ The report continued that this action not only secured the left flank of the XVII French Corps, allowing it to advance, but broke the German army’s line of resistance on the east bank of the Meuse.⁵⁷

Marshall Matthews also recounted his service overseas in a letter home. According to Matthews, he was assigned to the 113th Field Hospital. Many of the men in his company were from Baltimore and together they sailed to Europe aboard the *Acquitalia*, which had about 10,000 soldiers aboard. After a short stint in England he arrived in France on July 16th.⁵⁸ Matthew wrote:

From that time until the signing of the armistice we have been on several different sectors of the western front and under shell fire practically all the time. We have participated in fighting in the Alsace, Argonne, and Meuse sectors of the western front. We have been cited for the excellent work and accomplishments made by our division in the Argonne forests north of Verdun. You are no doubt familiar with the condition which existed in this sector. It consisted of hills and ravines with forests and woods every few hundred feet. The enemy had thousands of machine guns in these forests which made our advancement very difficult.... While we were in Combles I met several of the Coal City boys.⁵⁹

Private Joseph Boggio also served on the Verdun Front. Recounting the devastation he witnessed, he wrote:

I intended to write oftener but as we have been in the front lines since the 26th of September it was impossible for us to do so but I will try to make up for it now. We went over the top several times and if you ever heard or read about Dead Man’s Hell or Dead Man’s Valley, you will know just where we were at and in ... I wish you could see these towns that we have gone through. Only a picture could give you any idea of how they are shot to pieces. There is nothing but a rock pile left and the woods which were a dense forest are just swept to ground from artillery fire. I think the same thing will happen to Germany if the Kaiser don’t wake up soon.⁶⁰

The plight and everyday experiences of soldiers on the front are also gleaned through their correspondences home. Domenic Baudino wrote about his time in the service to his local clergyman, Reverend Father Griffin. Baudino explained that he had been transferred from the 1st Division to a new regiment, the Railway Operating Troops, on account of his familiarity with the railroad.⁶¹ This spoke to the importance of the railroad and transportation in modern warfare. Baudino stated:

I have been at the front since October 1, training with the French.... Our division was the first in the trenches and we have already taught the huns something about how the Americans fight.... It was rather hard to leave some good pals that had been with me since I enlisted. I am now in St. Pierre des Corps close to Tours. Here

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 31 January 1919.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 13 December 1918.

⁶¹ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 2 August 1918.

we have beds with springs in them instead of sleeping in a hole in the ground and we take our clothes off when we go to bed. We are also able to take a bath any time we want to instead of going two and three days without even washing your face.... I wasn't a bit sorry about getting rid of the crumbs (lice)... The hunns used to shell us and on clear nights they would come over in airplanes and drop bombs so we had to sleep in dugouts. About a week before I left the 1st Division I was going for rations and a British airplane flew over me at a height of about one hundred feet and opened up his machine gun on me and loosened the dirt around me some but never done any harm, then he went a little ways and dropped a few bombs on a French camp. He was brought to the ground and it was a hun that was running the plane ... I haven't yet seen any of the coalfield boys while in France. I was glad to hear of the star on the church flag in my honor and hope you get many more. Tobacco is scarce for the French for there are about as many with a pipe or cigarette as there are with a mustache. We can buy all the tobacco we can use. We will never forget the work done by the Red Cross near the lines and way back here. I don't need anything and thank you. With best wishes to my friends

I am

Sincerely yours,
 Domenic Baudino
 Co. B, 59th Battalion
 R.O.T. A.P.O. 717 ⁶²

Many wrote home anxiously inquiring about other friends or family members in the service, as was the case with three brothers—Privates James, Peter, and Charles Peretti, all whom wrote to their mother. James Peretti, in a letter addressed “Somewhere in France,” wrote “I have been over the top three times and came out safe and sound every time. I consider that I have been very fortunate ... I haven't heard from brother Charles since he left New Jersey so I don't know where he is but I expect to hear from him soon.”⁶³ A letter from Peter Peretti was received about the same time. After detailing his whereabouts he wrote, “I am enjoying myself the best I know how and anxiously waiting to hear from brothers Charles and James. I am so afraid that something has happened to them. If I could only hear from them I would be so relieved.”⁶⁴ Simultaneously, Mrs. Peretti received a third letter from her son Charles. He wrote:

Just a short note to let you know that I am all right ... Have you ever heard from James or Peter? I wrote both of them two months ago but haven't heard from either one of them up to the present time. I heard several weeks ago that the division James is with were holding the line when the war ended. We went through No Man's Land a few days ago and it was an awful sight. We passed through some villages that were nothing but piles of rubbish. The fields and buildings are simply blown to pieces. You can't imagine how badly it is torn up.”⁶⁵

News and letters to and from the war and home front were greatly welcomed. This was especially true for those who knew someone in the service. Intervals between correspondences often created a great deal of concern.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 10 January 1919.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

A number of local men were captured, wounded, or killed during the First World War. John Wesley of Coal City served in Company G., 131st Infantry, 33rd Illinois Division.⁶⁶ It was reported that:

He was in the heavy fighting in the Argonne Forest. On October 8 by a flank movement of the enemy he and twelve other Americans were taken prisoners. He was officially reported missing in action and it was feared that he had been killed. He was returned through Switzerland to American lines at Vichy, France, on November 9. Mr. Wesley says that during the first two weeks the food was vile but after reaching German territory they were fed by the Red Cross and were well treated ... John Pavlis who was killed in action November 9, left Coal City with Mr. Wesley. They were in training together at Camp Gordon, sailed for overseas at the same time and drilled together in France. They met for the last time October 7.⁶⁷

Corporal Albert Pohl, in a letter to his father, recounted being gassed. According to Pohl, his battalion started moving on July 15th and was situated in the rear of the French First Army just outside of Chateau Thierry. Once the Germans started to fall back, his battalion “had to ride on trucks to catch up with the Boches [Germans]. It was a lot of fun for [the] Yanks but they finally stopped and put their rear guards on the heights of the Veale River.” After being held in check for a few weeks by machine gun fire, they were taken off the front lines “on account of...heavy casualties.” After resting and receiving replacements, Pohl’s unit returned to the front near Metz where they captured “so many prisoners we didn’t know what to do with them.” Then his company was sent to the “trenches at Verdun.” Pohl continued:

Well dad this is where we started our last drive into the Argonne forest. This was the hardest struggle of all. On the morning of Sept. 6 at 5:30 o’clock we went over the top.... I was in battle from the 26th of September until the 15th of October when I was gassed. My division was there until the finish and is now marching toward Berlin. Say dad but I’d like to be with them. Wouldn’t it be great sport to see those Germans turn over all of their equipment?

I had a funny experience while in the Argonne forest that I must tell you about. I received a letter from mother one day and in it she gave me August Gross’ address and to my surprise he was in the same division as I. That night we were making an attack and August’s regiment was in the lines ready to go over the top and I ran right into him. We were mighty glad to see one another.⁶⁸

James Zambion was also gassed while in the service. The *Courant* reported that he was “the first Coal City boy to be reported injured in France. His mother Mrs. Mary Zambion received official notice that he has been gassed.”⁶⁹

A number of local soldiers never returned home. According to a local newspaper, Corporal John Pavlis of Coal City “was killed in action while going ‘over the top’ October 8, 1918.” Pavlis was born in Coal City on August 17, 1891. He went to France as part of the 330th Infantry. “He grew to manhood here and had many friends who [were] deeply grieved over his death ... His letters from overseas, which [had] been published in *The Courant* from time to

⁶⁶Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 47.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 7 February 1919.

⁶⁹*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 3 May 1918.

time, were very interesting and always cheerful. His last letter contained the statement that he expected to be home Christmas and hoped his mother would have a turkey for dinner.”⁷⁰

Frank Schwab, born in Diamond, Illinois on October 16, 1895, was with Company A of the 31st Infantry and was killed in Romanooka [sic], Siberia on June 25, 1919.⁷¹ “Accompanying him was Walter Yates, of Coal City and Joseph Pratto, of Carbon Hill.”⁷² Prior to entering the service Schwab was employed with the Big Four Coal Company, Coal City Clothing Factory, and Santa Fe Railway.⁷³ Partial information about his death was received by Reverend James A. Griffin who had requested details about the facts surrounding Schwab’s demise. The Adjutant General of the Army replied that it was not “possible to furnish details; many men were killed during darkness, or on a smoky, dusty battlefield, and no witnesses were available.”⁷⁴ He went on to reassure Reverend Griffin that “everything possible is being done to relieve the anxiety of the relatives of our soldiers, who have made the supreme sacrifice in the great cause of liberty.”⁷⁵ From what the adjutant general knew, “the latest reports from Siberia indicate only six American soldiers interred there, and twenty-seven bodies have been returned to the United States. It is expected that all of them will be returned before evacuation of the troops.”⁷⁶ A follow-up message from a zone supply officer informed the Schwabs that their son was buried in a national cemetery in San Francisco.⁷⁷ Ultimately, Frank Schwab’s family received closure and in regards to what transpired in their son’s final hours. John R. Gibbs, a man who served with Schwab, wrote to Schwab’s mother:

My Dear Mrs. Schuab[sic]: I wish to extend to you the deepest sympathy of the members of this company in the death of your son. Frank was a clean cut boy, always cheerful, which made it easy for him to play the army game uncomplainingly. A most agreeable companion at all times. Almost without knowing it, he had won the deepest respect, friendship and love of every member of his company. He will be sadly missed and reverently remembered by us all.

Your son was a member of a unit post of 72 men. Early on the morning of June 25, without warning, we were attacked by the enemy of four or five times our number. It was only through the coolness displayed by your son, along with every other member. The determination to fight them to the finish, that we were not completely annihilated, and that we were able to hold them off until reinforcements could reach us.

The end for your son came instantly; there was no suffering. He fought a good fight, and died as a soldier should, who holds up his country’s honor—and was a soldier and a son to be proud of.

Very Sincerely,
PVT. John R. Gibb⁷⁸

The skirmish in which Schwab was killed came to be known as the “Romanovka Massacre,” and was the bloodiest day for Americans during their participation in the Russian Intervention by

⁷⁰Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 40.

⁷¹Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 7.

⁷²Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 53.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the Allies following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.⁷⁹ The newspaper reported that the Americans guarding the Trans-Siberian Railroad were attacked by an Anti-Kolchak band of Bolshevik forces.⁸⁰ The seventy-four men in Schwab's unit suffered forty-three casualties (twenty-three killed and twenty wounded).⁸¹ It was reported that American forces reciprocated by committing atrocities against civilians in the nearby town of Kazanka.⁸²

John Dececco of Diamond served with the 15th Machine Gun Company. He was wounded October 16, 1918, and succumbed to those wounds November 11, 1918.⁸³ Dececco was born in Italy on November 15, 1895, and migrated with his parents to Diamond in 1898.⁸⁴ A newspaper article stated: "it is hoped that our people will demonstrate the same wonderful spirit of patriotism and reverence in receiving this dead body that was a living boy when we sent him to a strange land, far from kindred and friends, to fight and die for his country."⁸⁵ There was a large contingent of over one hundred and fifty ex-servicemen at Dececco's funeral, including John Herron, whose blue uniform from the Spanish-American War stood "in sharp contrast to the khaki clad ex-soldiers of the world war."⁸⁶ During the service, Father Parker "mentioned the fact that, according to population, a greater per cent of men were called from the coalfields than any other part of the country."⁸⁷

Both Rudolph Hajek and William Bridal were also killed in action. Hajek immigrated to Coal City from Bohemia in 1909. He went overseas to serve his new country with the 101st Infantry and was killed in action on October 25, 1918. Nineteen year old William Bridal was sent overseas after only three weeks of training, and he was killed in action in France on September 1918.

Two local soldiers died from influenza rather than combat, along with many other soldiers and civilians during the widespread "Spanish Flu" pandemic of the fall of 1918. Joseph Sisteck enlisted on July 28, 1918, and died of pneumonia "following an attack of influenza" in New Cumberland, Pennsylvania on October 22, 1918. Benjamin Kaplan met a similar fate. Kaplan enlisted on October 1, 1918 and died as a result of pneumonia in his barracks in Missouri before the month was through.

Corporal Andrew Tallman of Coal City sailed for France as part of the 58th Infantry of the 4th Division in May, landed in June, was wounded in July, and died on August 9, 1918.⁸⁸ Prior to his death, Tallman wrote to his brother:

Was wounded and entered the hospital July 19, and have undergone several operations. They have finally cut off my right leg above the knee. It was a machine gun bullet that did all the damage—it struck me below the knee and passed up into my thigh. I was wounded just as the day's fight was over, and hope and believe that I did my share of damage to the Hun to pay for his damage to me ... It looks now as

⁷⁹ "The Russian Intervention, 1918-1920," Kolchak.org, http://www.kolchak.org/history/Siberia/Russian_intervention.htm (accessed April 16, 2011).

⁸⁰ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "18 Americans Die in Battle with Russians," 53.

⁸¹ "The Russian Intervention, 1918-1920," Kolchak.org.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 7.

⁸⁴ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Military Funeral."

⁸⁵ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "The Last Home Coming."

⁸⁶ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Gold Star Hero."

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 7.

if I could do little for Uncle Sam over here, so pick out the best turkey you can find and I'll eat it for Thanksgiving.⁸⁹

In another letter, he wrote:

Am in the hospital now and having a pretty hard time writing. Came in a week ago and guess I am due to stay awhile. Was told to write to keep my mind off my body, but it's pretty hard. I can't write anymore. You will have to wait till later, when I will tell you how I am coming.⁹⁰

Unfortunately, Tallman was unable to fulfill his promises, as he died shortly afterward. According to another newspaper article, Tallman came from a "family of patriots."⁹¹ He had another brother, Henry Tallman, who fought in the same battle that Andrew was wounded in, and also had twin brothers scheduled to be shipped overseas.⁹² Andrew was initially rejected twice for service by recruiting officers, but was able to pass his physical exam on his third attempt.⁹³

A number of local women also volunteered their services. Coal City's Fannie Campbell was selected for Y.M.C.A. service in Europe.⁹⁴ Campbell was the Secretary Treasurer of the local chapter of the Red Cross.⁹⁵ Locals sent her off to France with the same celebration afforded to local men. A large crowd gathered, songs and speeches were provided, and Campbell was presented with a wristwatch as a "concrete expression of the esteem in which she [was] held by her co workers and the people of the community."⁹⁶ While stationed in Tours, France she wrote home about the conditions there:

...comforts and conveniences the common people know not. I have seen women eating food from a can which she had picked up on a heap of garbage—I'm sure an Americans must have been living in the house otherwise there would have been nothing left in the can; an old man comes regularly to the café to pick up stubs of cigars and cigarettes which he finds on the floor; for a long time we were besieged with requests for empty cigar boxes, which were to be used as firewood. I could go on indefinitely with incidents of this type.⁹⁷

Elizabeth Tessiatore was a Red Cross nurse who served eleven months in France, six months on the East Coast, and seven months in California, working and caring for convalescing soldiers.⁹⁸ In two letters home, Tessiatore recounted her travels in France and Italy.⁹⁹ She reveled in the freedom of movement that her service in the Red Cross provided. In one letter, she noted, "I received a letter from Theresa telling...about the terrible epidemic Coal City has

⁸⁹Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 29.

⁹⁰ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Taps Eternal: Letter Comes From Hero Who Gave His Life For His Country," 29.

⁹¹ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Is Wounded in Thick of Fighting," 33.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Will Serve Overseas," 29.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 39.

⁹⁷Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 49.

⁹⁸ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, "Nurse to Care for U.S. Army Convalescents," 2.

⁹⁹Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 47.

had and the fatal results. We have been very fortunate and lost very few men considering they had been gassed more or less but we did lose three nurses and one corps boy from pneumonia following influenza.”¹⁰⁰ Overall, five local women—Jessie Jiskra, June Ryan, Margaret Ryan, Elizabeth Tessiatore, and Fannie Campbell—joined their male compatriots in the services. As the newspaper explained, “Every woman in the United States, young and old, rich and poor, [was] going to tell her Uncle Sam what she going to do to help him win the war. If you are an aviatrix, or would like to be one, register...and tell your Uncle Sam about it.”¹⁰¹ These local women were prime examples of women who did just that.

Conclusion

Residents of both towns celebrated the war’s conclusion, in spite of some acute hardships remaining. Word of the armistice was received just a few days after Coal City’s emergency influenza hospital closed. The hospital had received fifty-seven patients and reported eleven deaths.¹⁰² During the epidemic, residents were scared to congregate or even go outside. Even services at the Assumption church were suspended—the first time Sunday services were not held since the church’s founding in 1892.¹⁰³ However, the paranoia over the Spanish Flu was quickly forgotten in the early hours of November 11, 1918. The newspaper reported:

When the news that Peace terms had been signed flashed over the wires in the early hours last Monday morning the honor of imparting the glad tidings to the people of Coal City fell to Miss Ethel Suffern, night operator at the central office. Within a few moments after the word was passed out hundreds of people gathered on Broadway and joined in a great victory jubilee. A line of march was formed and the principal streets were paraded ... At 6:30 o’clock the crowd dispersed to prepare for another parade at 10 o’clock. Never in the history of Coal City has there been such a demonstration.¹⁰⁴

Miss Edith Smith, who was in France when the end of the war was announced, wrote to her relatives:

My dear folks:--‘La guerre est finie!’ Thank God! Thank God! My heart is so full of praise and thanksgiving that I can’t write!

Later 7:30 p.m.

Perhaps I can write intelligently now. I’ll try to any way. I know how you are all rejoicing tonight, and Ann and I are rejoicing with you in our little lonesome hut in far away Lury-sur-Arnon. And how we long to be with our boys! But we are thankful to know that now they will never reach the front ... We were on a hill just out of town and had turned to come back. We stood there, looking at the quiet, quaint, sleepy little town and admiring the beautiful view, for it is beautiful here—when suddenly the church bells began to peal forth jubilantly and we could see the women rushing excitedly into the streets and waiving their hands. I looked at my watch and when I saw that it was 3 p. m. I

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, “Call Women to Register For War Aid,” 27.

¹⁰² Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, “Hospital Closed,” 36.

¹⁰³Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, 37.

¹⁰⁴Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, “Big Victory Jubilee,” 40.

said: “Ann, it’s over!” Oh! how the faces of those French women shown, as we passed them on our way back, and “Finie Madame, finie! La guerre finie! Vive L’ Amerik!” greeted us on all sides, and we with eyes that shown with tears of joy, gave back in response, our “Tres bon! Finie! Vive la France!”¹⁰⁵

Longtime local resident, Charles Girot, was a young boy when World War I ended. He recalled picking walnuts as a child for the war effort; the walnuts were turned into charcoal used in gas masks.¹⁰⁶ He also remembered the large funeral procession when John Dececco’s body was returned from overseas.¹⁰⁷ One of his fondest childhood memories was the celebration that took place when World War I ended. According to Girot, an effigy of the Kaiser was suspended on a wire at the intersection of the two main streets in Coal City, and to celebrate the victory over Germany a group of local residents armed with shotguns used it for target practice.¹⁰⁸

Celebrations recurred over the next several months, as residents filtered home from overseas. The newspaper commented on one such event:

...an excellent banquet was served to Coal City lads in uniform, under the auspices of the local Red Cross. Castle Hall was gaily decorated and festooned ... Thirty soldier boys and one sailor lad, each accompanied by one friend, honored the festive board and participated in the hospitality of the Red Cross. As the evening wore on, much hilarity and good fellowship, characterized the gathering ... After the banquet, all repaired to New Opera House, for the entertainment. Probably the largest audience, ever congregated within its walls, greeted the boys ... But the spirit was different [from when they left for overseas]—then it was one of encouragement, tinged with a few tears, now it was one of joy, on the safe return of beloved ones.¹⁰⁹

At the meeting, community members proposed that a permanent monument be erected and dedicated to the heroes, and they declared “that the returned soldiers [should] be the leaders in our community and... a powerful asset in making [the] community a better place to live in.” A number of local men remained overseas as members of the Army of Occupation, but the war was over for Coal City and Diamond residents. As a tribute to the communities’ involvement in the war, a German helmet, sent by John Strejeck, who remained in France, was put “on display in the window at the First National Bank.”¹¹⁰

Unfortunately, the end of the war also spelled difficult times for the communities. The First World War had temporarily revitalized the coal industry. With wartime demand for coal diminished, coal production waned. Many underground mines in the area closed in the 1920s, as a decrease in government spending fueled a post-World War I economic slump in an industry that had enjoyed high demand by the military during the war.¹¹¹ The lack of industrial

¹⁰⁵Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, “Items of General Interest to the Coal City Branch,” 40.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Girot, interview by Michele Micetich and Christopher Kernc, 15 February 2008, World War II: From Home Front to Warfront History Collection, Coal City Public Library District, Coal City, IL, available at http://www.coalcity.lib.il.us/wwii/collections/girot_chuck/girot_audio.html (accessed April 17, 2011).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Coal City Public Library Scrapbook Collections, “Soldiers Entertained,” 42.

¹¹⁰*The Coal City Courant* (Coal City, IL.), 3 January 1919.

¹¹¹ Eric Jarvis, “Toward a New Deal for Coal?: The United States Coal Commission of 1922,” *Journal of the Historical Society* 8, no. 3 (2008): 438.

demand combined with the resurgence of European coal production spelled hard times for Illinois coal producers and, consequently, their workers. As time progressed, technology provided more cost-effective alternative energy sources to coal. This was another significant factor in the demise of coal production in northern Illinois. Oil and natural gas began to compete with coal as the primary source of energy. In the mid-1920s industries around the world were shifting away from coal and turning to oil and natural gas for energy resources. The coal industry in Coal City, Diamond, and surrounding towns suffered greatly as Chicago followed this movement.

The residents of Coal City and Diamond vigorously responded to the nation's call to serve during World War I. Men were drafted or volunteered for military service, women joined the Y.M.C.A. or Red Cross, industrial workers churned out coal for the war, community members volunteered their time and labor to produce needed items and compile care packages, and others conserved and sacrificed so that the war's demands could be met. In the process, the war transformed the community. Disparate groups, through their sacrifices and patriotism, were brought together by the World War I, and although some ethnic and labor tensions existed, the number of protests or violent incidents remained low. In a sense, war helped forge the towns into a community, although many of the details of the war itself and the struggles of towns like Coal City and Diamond, Illinois, have gone from popular memory, especially with their postwar decline. These stories form a part of a fascinating, although often-overlooked, story of the United States in World War I.

APPENDIX

According to an article in the Coal City Public Library District's scrapbook collections, the local residents who served during World War I were:

William Adams	Thomas Campbell	Wilfred Hartley
John Albrecht	James Chada	James Hasal
Paul Ardisone	John Dagon	Joseph Hejda
Stephen Ayersman	Ray Dagon	Louis Hejda
Bernard Ayersman	Basil Davis	Frank Hejna
Angelo Balbinot	Victor Davis	Joseph Hejna
John Bates	Domenic D. Davito	Anton Helling
James Bell	Domenic M. Davito	William Helling
William Bennett	Samuel Davy	Bernard Herdes
John Boero	John Dececco	Fred Herron
Harry H. Bittner	Angelo Delucki	Joseph Heylik
Bernard Born	Stephen Delucki	Joseph Huml
Fred Born	John Deprat	Anton Jaicomo
Ezio Bottari	Benjamin Deprat	Pete Jiacomio
Steven Bracco	Edward Dite	Frank Jiskra
Robert Bridel	Emil Dite	Joseph B. Jiskra
William Bridel	John Domas	Benjamin Kaplan
George Brown	Hubert Draznik	Frank Kasik
Norman R. Brown	Henry Dwyer	Edward Kastl
Frank Busaytis	John Davis	Henry Kessler
Sergeant Major Francis P. Boetta	Paul Enrietto	Charles Kniepkamp
Alexander Balin	Frank Facinelli	William Kniepkamp
Domenic Baudino	Louis Fanchi	Otis Knudtson
John Bell	Domenic Favero	Emil Krahl
Domenic Biami	John Fleming	Carl Kramer
Joseph F. Boero	Daniel Franklin	William Kramer
Joseph Boggio	James Galligan	Herman Krause
Christopher Born Nicholas Born	John Geitz	James W. Kodat
Carl Bottari	Frank Giato	John Lafferty
Frank Bridel	James Giordono	James F. Lamie
Louis Briemer	Peter Giordono	Thomas W. Lamie
John Fletcher Brown	John B. Girot	William Lohmar
Charles Burt	John Girot	John Luck
W.L. Blake	John Gladders	Henry E. Lyons
James Cabodi	Felix Gomora	Anton Marchello
Byron Campbell	John Greenan	Charles Margaron
Lieut. Warren Campbell	Zacharia Galbraith	Martin Marsaglia
Louis Ceretto	Arco Guizzetti	Edward Martin
Joseph H. Chvatal Andrew Cairns	Alex Gilmour	Edward Martinec
Nelson Campbell	Fred L. Haake	Joseph Martinec
	Rudolph Hajek	Marshall Matthews
	John Haldorson	William Matthews
	James Hamilton	Tipton McCawley

Gibson McDermott
James McLuckie
James M. McLuckie
John McLuckie
John Micona
Clyde Miller
Leslie H. Miller
Benjamin Mollie
Lloyd Moore
William Morrison
Frank Motta
Adam Murphy
Adolph Nail
Russell Palmer
Peter Pastore
James Pavlis
Corp. John Pavlis
Cuthbert Peart
Joseph B. Pele[*Pelc?*]
John Perella
Charles Peretti
James Peretti
Peter Peretti, Jr.
Anton Perino
Joseph R. Perry
William Phillips
Joseph Piagno
Domenic Piagno
James S. Planeta
Joseph Planeta
Frank Planeta
Fred Planeta
James Planeta
John Planeta
Albert Pohl
Eric Pohl
Joseph Pratto
James Procarione

Frank Raiman
Martin Reano
Peter Reano
Donald Reeves
Irl Richardson
Joseph Rigaldo
Frank Robak
John Rogers
John B. Ross
Leslie M. Ross
Thomas Ross
Joseph Rossio
Frank Rolando
Torval Rosendahl
Frank Rudow
Peter Ruffatti
Thomas Sayers
Michael Jos. Sheridan
Anton Savant
Albert Schwab
Albert Schimmel
Frank Schwab
Joseph Schwatz
James Sestak
Joseph Sestak
Isaac Smith
Charles Spellman
John Stellan
Major F.A. Stockdale
James Strejeck
John Strejeck
James Strickland
Joseph Sitek
Charles Stulik
Charles Swartz
Andrew Sharpe
Andrew Tallman
John Tessiatore

Otto Toberman
Michael Tenn
Robert Thom
George Edward Trotter
Thomas Turigliatti
James Vosityka
William J. Veronda
Emil J. Vilt
Rudolph Viac
Anton Vota
Edward Vosityka
Frank Vyskocil
Joseph Yates
Samuel Yates
Walter Yates
F.C. Yeshia
Fred Wakeman
Emil Wallace
Egnatz Wallace
Matthew Wanless
Walter Watson
James Wesley
Thomas F. Wharrie
James Wiggins
Henry Wilke
Jesse Wills
Thomas Wilson
William P. Wilson
August Zambon
James Zambon

The Nurses were listed as:
Jessie Jiskra
June Ryan
Margaret Ryan
Elizabeth Tessiatore

The YMCA worker was listed as Fannie Campbell.

The source listed those “men who made the supreme sacrifice” during their service as: William Bridel, John Dececco, Rudolph Hajek, Benjamin Kaplan, Corp. John Pavlis, Frank Schwab, Joseph Sestak, and Andrew Tallman.