

“World War I Exhibition”

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By Jay Graybeal

75 years have passed since the “doughboys” of General Pershing’s American Expeditionary Forces went “Over There.” Transported by “blue jackets” and brigaded with some “leathernecks,” the Americans “kicked the Kaiser” and helped end the Great War for Civilization. While nearly all of them have passed into history, their deeds live on in publications, film, and in the memories of their descendants. Their war was one of the “good” ones; that is, as terrible as it was, Americans were nearly unanimous that it had to be fought. The Historical Society of Carroll County has mounted an exhibition and issued a publication dedicated to those men and women who offered their lives to help “make the world safe for democracy.”

The month of July 1914 ended much like prior ones in the Maryland Piedmont. Correspondents in the small Carroll County villages furnished local newspaper editors with a stream of news items from their respective areas. In Silver Run the Lutheran Men’s Bible Class held its annual outing and the participants enjoyed playing baseball and croquet, shooting clay pigeons, and eating a picnic dinner. The Ladies Aid Society in Emory held their lawn fete and in Gamber the Mt. Pleasant Sunday School held their annual picnic. Elsewhere in the county, families were enjoying a pleasant summer of get-togethers.

Half a world away, events were taking place that would have a profound impact on nearly every household in the county. The assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife by a Serbian terrorist on June 28 led to a declaration of war by Austria-Hungary against Serbia a month later. Within a week Germany was allied with Austria-Hungary against Great Britain, France, Russia and Italy. The outbreak of war in Europe was featured in the local press. The 31 July issue of the *Westminster Democratic Advocate* carried the front page headline “Austria and Serbia at War,” however, the story received second billing to the report of a local murder. In subsequent weeks readers followed the war but few thought that it would ever have much impact on their lives. This view would later change as the war news grew worse.

While the war in Europe raged, America nearly became involved in a war much closer to home. Torn by civil war, Mexico had become a bloodbath which had spilled over the border. A March 9, 1916, raid by Pancho Villa on Columbus, New Mexico, brought a strong response from the Wilson Administration. Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing was ordered to form an expedition to cross the border in search of the raiders. As relations with Mexico reached a breaking point, Wilson federalized the National Guard and sent 112,000 men to guard the border. Local guardsmen spent a largely uneventful several months on the border as relations with Mexico improved. Happily war with Mexico was averted and “the boys” came home in November.

The war in Europe took a decisive turn when Germany declared unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917. The Wilson Administration asked for and received a Declaration of War against Germany and her allies. America’s entry in the war on April 6

was met with general support by local residents. Local newspaper editors dutifully published the various governmental proclamations and calls to the colors as ministers preached the righteousness of the Allied cause.

With full knowledge of the frightful casualties already endured and inflicted by the warring Europeans, young men and a handful of women enlisted. Homefront organizations materialized almost overnight charged with coordinating civilian war work. Pre-war animosities were for the most part set aside, at least for the duration of the war. While the folks at home began their war work, servicemen and women prepared for war. It would be a war fought by former civilians who first had to learn the ways of modern war.

Great changes in warfare had taken place since America had fought greatly out-gunned Spaniards in 1898. The modern military arsenal of 1917 contained the machine gun, airplane, poison gas, submarine, and the tank. Nearly obsolete was the horse cavalry, so much a part of the American military of the late nineteenth century. Except for the Petersburg Campaign during the Civil War, the European battlefield trench was without precedent in the American military experience. All of this meant that the American military would take nearly a year of preparation before it would have an impact on the battlefield. While it cannot be said that Americans won the war, they did add materially to its end at “the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month” in 1918.

The Historical Society exhibition explores the participation of Carroll County men and women in service and on the homefront. Several hundred objects drawn from the Historical Society’s collection and loaned by other museums and by local families are displayed, including historical photographs, uniforms, weapons, war souvenirs, patriotic posters, homefront items and artifacts related to the Prohibition and Women’s Suffrage movements.

The exhibit is open to the public free of charge at the Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 East Main Street in Westminster. It will continue through March 31, 1994, during the following hours: 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays. The exhibition was partially funded by a grant from the Maryland Historical and Cultural Museum Assistance program.

The companion publication *Carroll County and the Great War for Civilization* was written by the Historical Society curator Jay A. Graybeal. It contains essays about Company H on the Mexican Border, civilian war work, military participation, letters to and from local soldiers, a reminiscence of Lt. Hugh L. Elderdice, Jr., and a Roll of Honor with service records of more than 1,100 Carroll County men and women who served in World War I.

World War I touched every household in Carroll County. The exhibition and publication provide a unique view of this critical era in our local history. If you would like additional information about these Historical Society projects, call (410) 848-6494.

ILLUSTRATION CAPTION: (illustration is the cover of the book)

The Historical Society has issued a new publication entitled *Carroll County and the Great War for Civilization*. Written by curator Jay A. Graybeal, the book describes military and homefront activities in Carroll County and includes a Roll of Honor listing service records of more than 1,100 Carroll County men and women who served in World War I. The book is a companion publication to the exhibition at the Shriver-Weybright auditorium that will be on display through March 31, 1994.