

Clark County in WWI

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During WWI, Clark County, Illinois supplied a vast number of soldiers to the American cause. Although the United States did not get involved in the global conflict until April 2, 1917, a high percentage of able bodied young men in the county served their country. Most of these men joined the basic infantry units that went to Belgium and the Eastern Front. There were a few officers and many men who were drafted but never went to Europe. In total over 800 men and women represented Clark County in the Great War and fourteen men gave their lives serving their country. A few of these men are buried in cemeteries overseas near the battlefields.

After President Wilson convinced Congress to declare war on Germany, the men of Clark County were immediately called into action to serve their country. Soon after the declaration of war, Clark County citizens felt a sudden surge of patriotism to answer the call to duty. The students at Marshall High School took a vote after Wilson's declaration to replace their spring sports with military training. This measure was decided on entirely by the students, passed unanimously, and the school complied with their requests. A man by the name of Prof. L. S. Reiner, who was a commissioned Lieutenant, was brought in to train the group of young men, which numbered 68.¹

The act of the Marshall High School students was something similar to the wider community's reaction to the war. In the same issue of the *Marshall Herald* a massive parade was held to display the county's patriotism. That parade was held in Marshall on April 19th to coincide with the 132nd anniversary of the Battle of Lexington and Concord. It included many patriotic acts, such as a flag raising by the Daughters of the American Revolution as well as a march of soldiers and fraternal societies. Of course, at this display of patriotism a recruitment officer was available to register any Clark County man who felt compelled to enlist in either the Army or the Navy.²

The citizens of Clark County's patriotism were evident in the local newspaper stories. A school essay contest on the importance of buying Liberty Bonds (also called Liberty Loans) offered prizes such as a spiked German helmet.³ The buying of Liberty Bonds was heavily promoted in Clark County, as a parade in the fall of 1917 illustrates. In this parade the schools entered floats with the theme of patriotism in buying War Bonds.

During the period between the declaration of war and the actual shipping of men overseas the Liberty Bond drive was well documented in the county newspapers. Every so often in the fall of 1917 the *Marshall Herald* would update the amount of dollars raised through Liberty Bond sales. An order form was printed in the newspaper, stating the amount of funds raised up to that point, as well as a place to fill out one's name and amount of Liberty Bonds requested. In nearly every issue of the *Marshall Herald* this advertisement appeared and always stated how much had been raised and much more was needed for Clark County to match the amount required for the county.

The *Marshall Herald* notes that by late June of 1917 Clark County was well behind what was expected of them in regards to the sale of Liberty Bonds. The article notes that the county

¹"Boys Show Patriotism: High School Lads will Organize Military Company," *The Marshall Herald*, April 11, 1917.

²"Patriotic Demonstration!" *The Marshall Herald*, April 11, 1917.

³"Great War Memories," Undated binder entitled *Marshall History* at Marshall, Illinois Public Library, Marshall Illinois.

was expected to buy 600,000 dollars in Liberty Bonds but had only purchased collectively as a county a little over 100,000.⁴ This was a major concern for the county papers that wanted to display the patriotism of the local citizens. In future articles the editors were highly critical of the county's residents for not doing enough. They showed how much Edgar County had raised in comparison to Clark and also noted that Douglas County was leading the state in the Liberty Bond drive based on percentage. The editors tried to shame their own citizens by pointing out that Douglas County was seen as the "most patriotic spot in Illinois."⁵

Despite the apparent failure of the County to meet its Liberty Loan goals, the government set a new goal of 730,800 dollars in October of 1917 for Clark County. "The expectations for Clark County were so high," said the head of the War Bond Drive in Illinois, Mr. White, because "there was good representation present from Marshall, Martinsville, and Casey" the three hubs of the county.⁶ Westfield was not mentioned despite the continued praise for their soldiers and numerous rallies held there.

Despite the failure of the first Liberty Loan drive in the county, the second Loan drive was much more successful. Within two weeks the amount of Liberty Loans purchased in the county exceeded 300,000 dollars.⁷ By the end of the loan period Clark County finished just under 400,000 dollars, still far below the goal.⁸ Nationally, however, the second Liberty Loan was over-subscribed, and the papers did mention Clark County's improvement as a whole compared to the first Liberty Loan Bond campaign.

Along with the Liberty Loan drives the *Clark County Democrat* tells of the students of the county joining the cause. The students were persuaded by their teachers to save money to buy Thrift Stamps to help with the war effort. The introduction of Thrift Stamps in the Post Offices across the country allowed an inexpensive way for American citizens to contribute to the American cause. A story from Clark County mentions that one girl "hunted up all the old papers and worn-out clothing at her home and sold them to secure money to buy Thrift Stamps."⁹ The Marshall Elementary schools set a goal in one drive for every student in the school to buy Thrift Stamps to help with the war effort.¹⁰

Prior to the outbreak of WWI a sense of national pride had already been instilled in the minds of the people of Clark County. En-route to the World's Fair in San Francisco the Liberty Bell passed through Clark County, making a stop in Marshall on November 21, 1915.¹¹ This rare glimpse of a symbol of freedom allowed county residents to relish in the liberties they enjoyed and to reflect on what it meant to be an American. When the US entered WWI the glimpses and stories of the Liberty Bell must have still been fresh in the minds of Clark County's residents.

Besides Liberty Loan Bonds much of the monies donated to the war effort by residents of Clark County were given to the local Red Cross chapter. Soon after the declaration of war and after the Red Cross became associated with the war effort, Clark County sought to create a local chapter of the Red Cross. Starting in June 1917 donations were taken at meetings for what would be the precursor to the forming of the county chapter. The first meeting, which

⁴ "Slackers? Clark County Makes Poor Record on Liberty Loan," *Marshall Herald*, June 20, 1917.

⁵ "What's Wrong with Clark County?" *Marshall Herald*, June 27, 1917

⁶ "730,800.00; That's Clark County's Quota in the New Liberty Loan," *Marshall Herald*, October 10, 1917.

⁷ "All Must Help: Have You Done Your Bit in the Second Liberty Loan?" *Marshall Herald*, October 25, 1917.

⁸ "Over the Top: Second Liberty Loan is Over-Subscribed," *Marshall Herald*, October 31, 1917.

⁹ "Some Interesting News of Post Office Activities," *Clark County Democrat*, March 13, 1918.

¹⁰ "Results of Thrift Stamp Drive," *Clark County Democrat*, March 20, 1918.

¹¹ Joann Strange "Letter to the Editor," located in *Marshall History*. (Multiple accounts of this exist and the writer of this editorial notes that historian Dorothy Clark of Terre Haute commented on the stop.)

was attended by people from all across the county, netted \$752.50. It was noted that during the “drive” for the week the county had taken in 8,000 dollars.¹²

Besides the county meetings held at Marshall, local meetings supporting the establishment of the Red Cross chapter were held across the county. At the same time as the late June 1917 meeting in Marshall was held another local meeting in West Union. This meeting was vital to the establishment of a Clark County Red Cross chapter in Marshall due to the remoteness of several towns in the Southeast corner of Clark County. The West Union meeting attracted residents not only from West Union but York, West York, and Walnut Prairie.¹³Involving communities away from the county seat allowed for the cause to be county wide instead of being only a local Marshall venture.

By July of 1917 the Red Cross’s membership in the county had reached 1,194, still far short of the quota of 3,527. In order to help achieve the quota established by the Red Cross’s drive for one million members, the first week in August was designated as “Humanity Week.” Marshall organized many events to recruit members. During the week, church bells as well as the county courthouse bell rang constantly to remind the community of the men overseas. The Marshall chapter of the Red Cross sought to compel community members to make donations or more importantly join as members to try and meet the county quota.¹⁴

The great success of the Red Cross in Clark County, and across the nation as a whole, it naturally led to some criticism. Stories of clothes donated to the Red Cross being seen worn by collectors flooded the newspapers and may have made some people wary to donate time and money to the cause. Local newspapers picked up stories from the national press concerning the problem, which was blamed on German propaganda to try and inhibit the local war effort at home.¹⁵ Despite these accusations against the Red Cross, membership continued to rise and the membership in Clark County by Christmas of 1917 numbered nearly 2,000.¹⁶ In July of 1918 Dr. I. W. Lee of Casey volunteered his services for the Red Cross and left for France.¹⁷

Local funds from the Red Cross were needed in May of 1918 to help with a local natural disaster. The famed tornado of 1918 ravaged most of neighboring Coles County and left 88 dead.¹⁸ Donations and relief from the local communities as well as aid from the Red Cross helped to rebuild the shattered lives of those in Charleston and Mattoon. It was lucky that the Red Cross had become as popular and successful as it had so that people were in a “giving” mood, as this horrible natural disaster greatly affected neighboring counties and people were ready to give and help those affected.

The patriotism of the county toward the war effort also had a potential dark side. Although the majority of the county’s citizens were of German descent, there is virtually no information available concerning anti-German sentiments in the county during WWI. There are, however, a few interesting aspects of the county’s German population.

Throughout Clark County there were several pockets of residents of German descent. There were several churches, such as the Zion Church, near present day Mill Creek, that preached their sermons completely in German up until nearly the turn of the century. However, despite discontinuing German sermons, Sunday Schools were still conducted in

¹² “The Red Cross Drive,” *Marshall Herald*, June 27, 1917.

¹³ “Red Cross at West Union,” *Marshall Herald*, June 27, 1917.

¹⁴ “Red Cross in New Drive: Humanity Week in Progress to make Membership a Million,” *Marshall Herald*, August 1, 1917.

¹⁵ “Knocking Red Cross, the Institution whose Sole Relief Work,” *Marshall Herald*, October 31, 1917.

¹⁶ “Over the Top: Christmas Red Cross Drive is a Great Success,” *Marshall Herald*, December 26, 1917.

¹⁷ “Will Do Red Cross Work,” *Marshall Herald*, July 17, 1918.

¹⁸ “Dead in Tornado Number 88,” *Marshall Herald*, May 30, 1918.

German up until WWI. Zion Church was not the only German speaking church in the county. The Trinity United Brethren Church in downtown Marshall was also German speaking.¹⁹

In many communities across Illinois and America there was widespread prejudice against German Americans. Sometimes this prejudice turned angry and violent. Local newspapers from this time period show no such resentment towards Clark County's large German population. It was even noted in one newspaper article that in Oliver Township a man of German descent came in and bought \$1,000 worth of Thrift Stamps. After this purchase the Post Master is quoted as saying he wants "to be put on record as finding the German-Americans in the country very patriotic."²⁰ One man of German descent, George A. Shotts, gave his life on the battlefields of France and is recognized as one of the fallen on the veteran's memorial on the county courthouse lawn.

Despite the acceptance of Germans in Clark County national prejudices did sometimes seep their way into the local area. Once in a while the local newspapers would publish articles that included governmental anti-German sentiments. In January of 1918 the *Clark County Democrat* published an article informing residents that non-US citizens of German descent were required to register as "German alien enemies" of the United States if they were not already naturalized citizens. However, it was noted in this article that the Germans would be allowed to file naturalization paperwork, but the process would not start until after the war was over.²¹

In June of 1918 another notice was published in the *Clark County Democrat* which once again called for the German people to register if they had not already done so. This article stated at the top that the Eastern Judicial District of Illinois required the paper to publish this article. This particular notice was concerned with German females over the age of 14 having to register in the local Post Office if they were not natural citizens of the United States.²² This law itself, although making sense from the standpoint of registering illegal aliens, did buy into the German war hysteria and the anti-German sentiments in the country. Officials in Clark County where there was a large German population were forced to adhere to this law and register their people, despite the lack of animosity towards their German residents.

The most obvious way to display one's patriotism, of course, was to join up to fight. Some men, who were exempt from service, felt compelled to serve their country and requested that despite their deferment they be sent overseas. One example was a young man from West Union named McKinley Grubb who was given a deferment without his knowledge because he was needed to work on the family farm. Once he found out that he had been deferred he personally contacted the Exemption Board. Grubb walked all the way from West Union to Marshall, "a distance of almost twenty miles," to demand his chance to fight the Kaiser²³

Men of all types enlisted in the cause. The local State's Attorney, Olen R. Clements, volunteered his services and was sent to officers' training school in Atlanta.²⁴ Many men who enlisted in the armed services were farmers by occupation or hard laborers. As the Clark County men volunteered to serve, they were sent in groups to various locations. In 1917 many men were sent to Camp Taylor in Kentucky. In 1918 most of the men were sent to Camp Dix in New Jersey. These included men who had volunteered or were drafted early in the

¹⁹ Joann Strange, "Little Germany," *Marshall Independent*, in notebook at Marshall Public Library entitled "Marshall History."

²⁰ "Some Interesting News of Post Office Activities," *Clark County Democrat*, March 13, 1918.

²¹ "Post Office News," *Clark County Democrat*, January 23, 1918.

²² "Alien Registration Notice," *Clark County Democrat*, June 5, 1918.

²³ "Tell it to the Kaiser," *Clark County Democrat*, May 1, 1918.

²⁴ "Will Go September 1," *Clark County Democrat*, August 21, 1918.

year.²⁵ One of the men drafted soon after America entered the war in 1917 was Harry H. Kuhn of Casey. Kuhn immediately set about to write his will before being deployed. In his will Kuhn stated that he would leave all his belongings and effects to the Red Cross, including money obtained from his patented invention which was some type of picture hanging device.²⁶ Later on as more men volunteered they were sent to Fort Thomas in Kentucky, Camp Gordon in Georgia, and Jefferson Barracks Missouri.²⁷

Reflecting decades later on his time in the war Martinsville resident Harry L. Downey vividly recalled his experiences upon arriving in Europe. Downey told how as a member of the replacement division he came to the battlefields and was instructed before going to the front, to take all his extra clothing and allow the soldiers leaving to have them. Downey said, "The replacements were instructed to place all their extra clothing and change of underwear on a bed in a nearby old French castle...the battle veterans then exchanged the clean underwear for their lice-infected clothing."²⁸ Downey's reflection on the conditions of WWI allows one to appreciate the dirtiness of life in the trenches and the unsanitary conditions faced by the enlisted men.

Another man who reflected on the unsanitary conditions was Okla Lindley. Lindley left Camp Merritt, New Jersey in June of 1918 to fight in France. On the way to France Lindley stated that the boat he was on was "a regular hell hole" due to the cramped quarters and the fact that the soldiers were not allowed to leave the bowels of the ship because of German submarines in the area. Lindley also said that on the way there one soldier died of pneumonia and "was thrown overboard in the Irish Sea" because the ship's crew was unable to preserve his body to be sent back to the States.²⁹

There are many other letters from Clark County soldiers describing their war experiences that provide much valuable information. One such letter came from Everett Spivey of West York who was aboard the USS President Lincoln. After the ship was torpedoed, Spivey's description of his escape is reminiscent of a Hollywood movie. Spivey wrote, "While going up on deck the water was shooting past out one of the hatches and it nearly drowned me when I passed. The steam popping off made it difficult to hear orders and they were given by hand."³⁰ Spivey's mad dash started from the bowels of the ship and he was very lucky to escape. From his account 24 men drowned on the ship. Most of the soldiers that did escape with their lives did so by leaving behind most of their possessions such as their shoes and parts of their uniforms. Spivey explains that he was fortunate to escape with his uniform as well as his money.³¹

One of the most notable men who served his country was Herbert Huey. Huey was a private in Company A of the 125th Infantry. He was ordered to report to Georgia for training and consistently sent letters to his wife in Marshall, as well to his father. Huey was deployed very late in the war but still saw much action. In one letter he tells how he "took two[sic] bullet one in my finger and the other in my foot."³² In January of 1919 Huey said that he "got a bed to sleep in the first bed I have slept [sic] in since I have been over here."³³ Again in his

²⁵ "Untitled Article," *The Marshall Herald*, April, 24, 1918.

²⁶ "Soldier Boy Makes Will to Red Cross: Also Assigns Patent," *Clark County Democrat*, February 27, 1918.

²⁷ "Untitled Article," *The Marshall Herald*, May 29, 1918.

²⁸ "Doc Downey Remembers WWI," *Daily Reporter*, November 11, 1982.

²⁹ "Complete War Experiences of One Clark County Boy," *Clark County Democrat*, March 12, 1918.

³⁰ "Everett Spivey Ship Torpedoed," *The Marshall Herald*, July 10, 1918.

³¹ "Everett Spivey Ship Torpedoed."

³² Personal Letter, Herbert Huey to wife, Clark County Genealogical Library, December 29, 1918.

³³ Personal Letter, Herbert Huey to mother, father and all, Clark County Genealogical Library, Jan 1919, Gellerhein, Germany.

next letter home Huey complained about his sleeping arrangements stating “I have slept in a bed but three night[s] since I been over here.”³⁴ Huey eventually came back from Germany, to Camp Grant, in May of 1919 and his experiences were later described by his daughter.³⁵

Herbert’s daughter, Vera, recounted some of the stories that Herbert told the family through his letters. One instance states that while on the ship to Germany “when it was really cold, his troop[s] had to sleep out in the freezing cold, and Herbert couldn’t feel his feet. By morning they turned blue from frostbite.” Vera also stated that upon returning from war Herbert brought back with him a medical problem and could not work. Besides this problem, Vera also stated that Huey was reluctant to talk about the war and would often have nightmares, sometimes “screaming and yelling someone’s name that he knew in war.”³⁶

Another man who sent letters home was Otho Downey of Martinsville. In one letter Downey tells of some of the horrors he saw on the battlefield. His letters were published in the *Clark County Democrat*. Downey wrote, “It is a great sight to see the smoke from a battlefield with the dead and wounded lying about. When the bodies lie in No Man’s Land for about a week, it is an awful task to bring them back for burial.”³⁷

In regard to how this affected the soldiers psychologically, Downey’s attitude or mental state seemed to contrast a little from Huey’s, at least in his letters. In commenting on life in the trenches Downey states that “you may think you have seen some awful sights, but you have not seen what I have seen. We get used to it and it doesn’t seem to bother anyone.”³⁸ Downey’s account offers some insight into the lives of the soldiers in battle but also sadly illustrates how the soldiers adapted to the horrors going on around them. Downey’s letter to his parents at least showed that mentally he was doing fine in war. Unfortunately this would be his last letter. Downey was shot and killed July 19th 1918, after serving in the trenches for almost eighteen months.³⁹

It should come as no surprise that the enlisted men who were sent overseas became heroes in the local communities, especially those who died. Westfield, for example, was well known at the time for holding numerous rallies promoting patriotism and Liberty Bond and Red Cross drives. In all, despite being a small community of a few hundred, Westfield sent 62 men overseas to fight the war. There were also 36 more men who were in service but never left for war.⁴⁰ One soldier that represented Westfield in the war effort was Ralph Weeden. Weeden was killed in the battlefields of France on October 6, 1918. It was noted that twenty other Westfield men served in the same Company and because of “their close association for the last eighteen months” the knowledge of his death “cast a shadow of gloom, sorrow[sic] and foreboding over the community.”⁴¹ Weeden’s loss brought great sadness to the small community. Not only was he just 19 years of age, but was also known by everyone in Westfield. This sense of loss was experienced throughout the war in communities all over the world. It

³⁴ Personal Letter, Herbert Huey to wife and children, Clark County Genealogical Library, March 10, 1919, Gulliem, Germany.

³⁵ Personal Letter, Herbert Huey to wife and children, Clark County Genealogical Library, May 1919.

³⁶ Vera Huey Interview, “Voices from Marshall’s Past: Oral Histories collected from Residents of Marshall Illinois and the Surrounding Area Compiled by Friends of Marshall Public Library,” Marshall Public Library, Marshall Illinois.

³⁷ “Is in France,” *Clark County Democrat*, August 14, 1918.

³⁸ “Is in France.”

³⁹ “First to Fall in Action,” *Clark County Democrat*, September 4, 1918.

⁴⁰ “History of Westfield Illinois and Northwest Clark County,” *Marshall Public Library*, 1981.

⁴¹ “Corporal Ralph H. Weeden Killed in Action: Westfield’s First Loss on the Battlefield,” binder in Clark County Genealogy Library entitled *Honor Rolls and Memories WWI*.

was felt more so in Europe, where millions of males were killed. The feeling never got old and the loss of a young man from a small town was always felt by the community as a whole.

Despite the small size of Clark County, over 800 men served their country in WW1. Of these men who served their country at least 14 lost their lives. For some of there have been documented accounts of their deaths but for are a few there are not. One man that lost his life to the horrors of the war and never returned home was Robert Monk, who is buried in Flanders Field Cemetery in Belgium.

Robert Monk, who was from West Union, went overseas to Belgium and was soon transferred from the 84th Lincoln Division to the 362nd Infantry Regiment, 91st Wild West Division. On his first day of his first battle, the Battle for the Spitaal Wood near Waregem, he was hit by machine gun fire in no man's land. Due to the heavy fire, the medics were not able to tend to him until hours later when the fighting had dissipated. Sadly, by the time the medics were able to reach him he had succumbed to his wounds. He was buried in the local American cemetery at Flanders Field, near the entrance.⁴²

Monk was not the only Clark County resident who never returned home. Other men who were killed in action and never returned home included Jesse O. Burns and Harry Haddix. Burns served in the 39th Infantry, 4th Division and was killed in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Burns died during the Second Phase of the Offensive and was probably killed during the Battle of Montfaucon, as he was killed on October 14th, the height of that battle. Burns is buried in the Meuse Argonne American Cemetery.⁴³

Harry Haddix served in the 58th Infantry, also in the 4th Division, and was killed during the Allied counter offensive, probably at the Battle of Soissons in France.⁴⁴ This major counter-offensive created massive casualties for both sides amounting to nearly 300,000 combined. Haddix was one of the men who died the first day and his body was never returned home. He too, just as Burns, is buried in the local American Cemetery. Two other Clark County casualties were Harry Clem and Fred Cormican, both of whom died of the Spanish Flu.⁴⁵

A great account from the battlefield was given in 1982 by then 88 year old veteran Harry L. Downey from Martinsville. Downey describes how, during a charge to take out a machine gun nest, he was shot in the leg, shattering his femur. Downey explained that he was so sick while in the hospital that for a time he lay "blind and paralyzed." He even said that the doctors gave up on him after an operation that bloodied his mattress to the point that it "formed a puddle on the floor." Downey told how he was very weak and was only saved by the kindness of the nurses who would "walk into the countryside and [purchase] eggs at \$5 to \$6 a dozen with their own money." Downey described the conditions in the hospitals as outrageous and said that many men died of malnutrition. To combat this Downey observed that the nurses would steal rations from the officer's mess to help save the sick and wounded.⁴⁶

It should be noted that due to the close proximity of Clark County to Terre Haute, Indiana, many Clark County men who served their country did so after enlisting at Terre Haute. William E. Bohn, a Martinsville resident, chose to enlist at Terre Haute to serve his country. Although he was from Clark County he was recognized elsewhere for his sacrifices.

⁴² Research compiled by Patrick Lernout, Ypres Belgium.

⁴³ Research compiled by Patrick Lernout, Ypres Belgium

⁴⁴ Haddix's death coincides with the Battle of Soissons. He was killed in action during an offensive attack and the timing of this attack and his place in the area make it highly probable that he was killed in this battle although no mention of which battle he was killed in exists.

⁴⁵ *Certificate of Death: Fred Cormican*. Filed October, 5, 1918. State of Kentucky, State Board of Health: Bureau of Vital Statistics, Reg. Dist. No. 50, File No. 2215.

⁴⁶ "Doc Downey Remembers WWI," *Daily Reporter*, November 11, 1982.

After landing at Brest, France he died October 5, 1918 of Spanish Flu, which he contracted while aboard a transport ship. His body was shipped home and he was buried in the local cemetery in Darwin.⁴⁷

The Spanish Flu, as well as other diseases, was a major threat to the US servicemen. In many of the letters from soldiers representing Clark County the flu, pneumonia, and small pox are brought up quite often in their descriptions. One soldier, Ora L. Bohn, wrote a letter home saying that his arm was hurting from all the inoculations he was receiving for small pox because of the contamination of the unit by one soldier. Bohn noted, regarding his company, that “we have had spinal meningitis, pneumonia, measles, mumps, and smallpox.” He also stated in that “we were tested for germs the other day by running a swab about two feet long down our nose.” Bohn’s letter, which included some humor, does make clear, however, his frustration with his part in the war. He complains about the food and the fact that the soldiers had yet to be paid and were forced, due to the quarantine, to constantly sleep in tents with the other infected troops.⁴⁸

While Bohn was under quarantine, the 1918 Influenza epidemic was in full force back on the Home Front as well. In Clark County the *Marshall Herald* noted that “67 cases were reported among high school pupils” in Marshall.⁴⁹ Because of the influx and frequency of this epidemic schools were closed in the county, sometimes for weeks at a time to prevent the spread of the disease that was ravaging the world.

With the outbreak of war an agricultural area such as Clark County had a unique duty to fulfill. Clark County’s large farming structure made it possible for the area to help meet the demand for food needed in Europe. A problem with the draft was that most young men of the county were farmers and were needed in the fields in order to fulfill the large amount of work required to help feed Europe. Because of this problem many men claimed exemptions to the draft. Many were granted, but the fields were still consistently short-handed during the war, despite the governments’ demand for increased agricultural output.

Throughout the course of the war various articles appeared in the county newspapers concerning the efforts of local farmers to produce crops for the war effort. It was not unusual for the newspapers to request that farmers try to plant some crops that were unusual for their fields. Thus, the term “Potato Patriots” was created, which referred to farmers who planted potato crops alongside whatever other crops they had.⁵⁰ Another notice appeared that contained warnings concerning the slaughter of animals, and how farmers needed to let the animals mature before slaughtering them.⁵¹

Farmers in places such as Clark County played an important role in combating starvation in Europe and giving the Allies an edge over Germany. By using the United States as the provider of food for the armies the Allies had a huge advantage over the tiny Axis powers, despite the power of the German military. For this reason, areas such as Clark County became essential for the war effort once the United States entered the war. However, the issue of what was more important to the war effort for men of Clark County farming or fighting was always a topic of discussion and concern.

With the heavy emphasis on the war effort placed in the hands of farmers, the local farmers of Clark County began to organize themselves to improve their farms and livelihoods.

⁴⁷ “Obituary- William E. Buhn,” *Clark County Democrat* August 4, 1920.

⁴⁸ Ora L. Bohn, “Letters for Our Boys,” *Clark County Democrat*, February 13, 1918, p. 29.

⁴⁹ “The Influ is Here: Epidemic has Many Victims in Town and Vicinity,” *Marshall Herald*, October 9, 1918.

⁵⁰ “Potato Patriots Needed,” *Marshall Herald*, May 30, 1918.

⁵¹ “Farmers Warned of German Error,” *Marshall Herald*, May 23, 1917

When Clark County men began shipping off to war in early 1918, the farmers of Clark County began organizing themselves into a chapter of the Farm Bureau. After a few months of meetings and discussions the chapter officially joined the organization in February of 1918 with 600 members representing the county.⁵²

Quite often there were stories in the local papers urging farmers to help out the Allied Cause. Titles of articles included captions such as “Europe Needs Food” and “War Bread Costly to British Government.” These types of articles were placed side by side with instructions such as “How to make Oatmeal Bread” so as not to use up the wheat needed for the war effort. The most common caption that came with these notices included the phrase “Food Will Win the War.” These notices concerning ways to save food to be used for the war effort ran in nearly every issue of the *Marshall Herald* in 1918. Always included were articles concerning how farmers should tend to their fields and the importance of the farmer.

Despite the call for all able-bodied men in Clark County to serve their country, there was also the need to have farm laborers to work the fields. Every so often when the *Marshall Herald* would publish letters home soldiers would subtly address this issue. Ora L. Bohn wrote in one of his letters home that he would try and get a furlough to come home and help with the harvest due to the lack of “hired help” available in the community but he did not believe it would be granted.⁵³ Bohn was not alone, as many other soldiers wrote home inquiring as to how the harvest would be in the upcoming year.⁵⁴

The pressures placed on American farmers to produce were directly related to the agricultural problems in the fields of Europe during the war. Many of the Clark County enlisted men in France wrote about the agricultural deficiencies there compared to back home. Sergeant Harry Dahl in his letters said that he noticed only young boys and elderly men working the fields in France and saw absolutely no young men in the rural communities of France. Of course this is reflective of the number of young men serving their country in Europe at the time.

Dahl later noted that he saw the French people as a bit backwards. He wrote that he slept in a barn built in 1774 that was new compared to other buildings in the area and that the farm equipment used in the fields, which had very poor soil, was ancient.⁵⁵ Other soldiers from Clark County mentioned the differences they perceived between France and the United States. Sidney Cox noted:

I believe Germany would have been all over France by now if it hadn't been for the good old U.S.A. France is a good country all right but they are a hundred years behind time. They devote too much time to wine and women. They have many acres of ground which are uncultivated when they might be raising useful farm products.⁵⁶

Cox's perception of the French coincided with the common view the American troops had of the French as being a dirty, backwards type of people who needed to be bailed out by the Americans. Despite these negative views many Clark County boys had of the French they did sympathize with the people there.

⁵² “The Farm Bureau,” *Marshall Herald*, February 13, 1918.

⁵³ “Letters from Ft. Baker California,” *Marshall Herald*, April 3, 1918.

⁵⁴ Various letters published in the Clark County Democrat throughout 1918. Located in Clark County Democrat Binder at Genealogy Library, Marshall Illinois.

⁵⁵ “An Interesting Letter From a Soldier Boy in France,” *Clark County Democrat*, October 30, 1918.

⁵⁶ “Somewhere in France,” *Clark County Democrat*, October 2, 1918.

Dahl acknowledged to his parents that “you cannot at home realize what these people have and are going through.”⁵⁷ Cox also sympathized and helped to rebuild houses in France by cutting down forests to harvest the timber needed for re-building. Although he notes that “their houses are very old and all built of stone and roofed with tile,” lumber was still needed for beams and floors.⁵⁸ The American soldiers of that area, being far behind the firing lines, were helping to harvest the timber, due to the lack of young men in the area, who were off in the trenches. It appears in Cox’s letter that the timber was being used to simply help rebuild the old houses, but it is unclear whether this was due to age of the structures or if they were damaged by the war.

Some soldiers wrote of the different experiences felt they had as they found themselves in a foreign land for the first time. These soldiers were sent overseas to fight but were often enthralled by this new, strange, and exotic world of the area they were in. Thomas Livsley noted that while stationed in France he saw people of many races working together. According to the *Casey Banner Times* Livsley saw that “the French have employed negroes, Arabs, Turks, Chinese, and peoples of Europe in all labor of this kind and the American skilled labor was all that was necessary to bring into existence the modern construction work that now transforms France into an awakened country.”⁵⁹

Livsley was also one of many who mentioned the work ethics of the French. Livsley said “the French are slow. Their methods of doing daily tasks are so primitive that to the energetic Americans who strive for new things constantly quiet the persistence with which this nation clings to the past is unsatisfactory.”⁶⁰ Livsley, like so many other American soldiers, felt that France would be lost in the war if it was not for the American presence in Europe. The apparently backwards nature of the French in the eyes of the Americans led them to believe that they were in fact saving the primitive French people instead of fighting alongside them. Despite the contempt that some of the men had for the French the war did open up experiences to the men of Clark County who would have never seen the world outside of their hometown.

Grendel Bennett described how he was given orders while stationed in Hoboken, New Jersey to drive a “Liberty truck” filled with ammunition down Broadway Street in New York City across the new Manhattan Bridge to see how it handled.⁶¹ An experience such as this must have seemed like a dream to these men who had never seen a city bigger than Marshall or Terre Haute. Some of these rural boys who went overseas commented on how different the countryside was. Dennis Pendleton noted how he saw the Argonne Forest and wondered how it would have been before the war, and also noted the mountainous areas that were quite different than the land in Illinois.⁶²

When the men were sent off to European battlefields, some Clark County women went along too, serving as nurses. One of these nurses, Amy Smith, is recognized as being the first female member of the American Legion in Illinois, receiving her membership after the war.⁶³ Some other nurses that served from Clark County included Jessie Spaugh and Blanche Liffick. After leaving the county for Ellis Island in late February of 1918, they arrived in France in mid April 1918 to help care for the wounded.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ “Two Interesting Letters From Boys in France,” *Clark County Democrat*, October 2, 1918.

⁵⁸ “Busy Behind Front Line,” *Clark County Democrat*, August 7, 1918.

⁵⁹ “Tells Interesting Experiences Overseas,” *Casey Banner Times*, 1918.

⁶⁰ “The French Are Slow,” *Casey Banner Times*, 1918

⁶¹ “Letters From Training Camps,” *Clark County Democrat*, July 31, 1918.

⁶² “A Bunch of Letters From Boys in France,” *Clark County Democrat*, December 18, 1918.

⁶³ Ortman, L. K. “Clark County Hall of Honor” Last Modified 2005.
http://genealogytrails.com/ill/clark/military/ww1/ww1_vets.html

⁶⁴ “Nurses Leave for War Service,” *Clark County Democrat*, February 27, 1918 and

One letter from Clark County nurse Beulah Prust recalled her experiences in the war up to that point. Prust described how explosions and air raids were something they lived with every day and she often had to put the gas masks on the patients herself. One time, to her horror, she saw a giant unexploded bomb left from the air raid the night before. In her letter Prust notes with pride how her sense of duty keeps her at post even when the healthy soldiers take cover in the cellar during air raids. She was adamant about caring for the wounded soldiers, at the hospital unit, as she states, about five miles behind enemy lines. Prust also made fun of her dress, that included a British gas mask and iron helmet. She also joked, "I know Vogue would like to put me in their magazine" wearing her uniform.⁶⁵

The contributions of Clark County to the Great War were probably similar to most small rural counties across the nation in 1918. Clark County sent many men as well as women overseas to fight for the Allied cause. Many of these residents had never left the county before, let alone set foot on foreign soil. As the war came to a close, Clark County residents were able to experience the horrors of the war that had been going on in Europe for several years.

In this total war, the home front in Clark County contributed in any way it could to the war effort. Bond drives, Patriot rallies, and collections for the Red Cross were held across the county, so those not fighting could contribute to the war cause. Many soldiers were aware of these contributions and mentioned how important they were in helping the boys overseas and to help win the war.⁶⁶

Through Victory Gardens and accelerated crops, Clark County also made a significant contribution to the war effort and helped to feed the Allied troops. Being a small, yet agriculturally rich, area, Clark County was able to exploit its fertile soil and contribute to the war effort to a degree that many places in the country could not. Clark County through the simple act of feeding the troops gave the Allies a huge advantage over the Axis powers. As the 100th anniversary of the Great War approaches, it remains a war that, although remembered, is somewhat overlooked compared with WWII and Vietnam. America's role in the war only lasted about a year and a half, but its impact on small communities was felt for decades after. Fourteen men gave their lives representing Clark County and the Honor Roll of those who served is displayed triumphantly in the Clark County Courthouse.

Although nearly forgotten, the men who served overseas in WWI never forgot the experiences they had, or the impact America had on the war effort. Without places such as Clark County the war may have been prolonged several years and the contributions of men and women from Clark County is something to be proud of. Although not as well documented as the Civil War and WWII, WWI had a significant impact on Clark County. This war, the first to which Clark County sent men and women to foreign lands, was an integral part of the county's history and should be studied further.

"Nurse Arrive in France," *Clark County Democrat*, April 17, 1918.

⁶⁵ "Letters from Nurse and Soldiers in France," *Clark County Democrat*, August 21, 1918.

⁶⁶ "Two Interesting Letters From Boys in France," *Clark County Democrat*, October 2, 1918.