

Liberty Loans, Red Cross Women, and the Bement Boys: A Study of a Rural America Village and the First World War

Nicholas Walsh

Crowned by large concrete grain silos as tall as the ancient glaciers that flattened this land, the tree-covered streets of Bement are similar to any number of small central Illinois towns. In the 1850s, many rural communities such as Bement were laid out in seven-mile increments along the path of the then newly constructed railroads. With most of its streets aligned in a north-east and south-west orientation corresponding with the railroad right-of-way, the progression of Bement, Illinois has been inextricably linked to the trains.¹ Another vein of history found in Bement comes from the state's most legendary resident, Abraham Lincoln. In 1858, Bryant Cottage was the scene of a brief exchange between Lincoln and his opponent in that year's Senate election, Stephen Douglas. Now a designated state historical site, Bryant Cottage is a little less than a block away from the village's veteran's memorial, located in the city park.

Constructed in 1998, the aesthetically arranged stones bear solemn testimony to the service and sacrifice of the town's residents through the history of the country. Organized by conflict, each rock is inscribed with the names of servicemen from the township. To note an individual's death whilst in military service, a star is engraved next to that person's name. At a glance, World War Two was obviously the town's most significant and consequential military endeavor. The iconic Iwo Jima flag raising picture is one of the monument's focal points. A little over a generation before, however, America's entry into the Great War also had a remarkable impact on citizens of Bement.

Like many rural Illinois residents during the First World War, Bementonians organized a local chapter of the American Red Cross, exceeded their quota of Liberty Bonds purchases, and of course, conscripted and enlisted their young men into America's armed forces. The majority of material used in this study comes from *The Bement Register*, the town's only newspaper. The sentiments expressed in this publication are always patriotic and contain not a single instance of dissent. Additionally the study uses, *The Piatt County Journal Republican*, a more widely circulated publication, printed in the nearby county seat of Monticello, which also reveals no opposition to the war by those in these local areas. While opinions would likely have never been published, there was clearly near universal support for the war in Piatt County, which surpassed nearly all of the quotas related to war-time activity. Thus in the brief twenty months of American involvement, criticism of the war or expressions of its burdens were rarely voiced.

Using Sanborn Insurance maps made of the town in 1915 and the U.S. Census of 1920, one can see that the village of Bement had much more industry and commerce than is present today. Supported by a township population of nearly 2,600 residents, early twentieth-century Bement could boast of three grain elevators, two hotels, two banks, one pharmacy, extensive lumber and livestock yards, farm implement and automobile dealers, as well as an assortment of workshops and small mercantile operations.

¹ Stanley Changnon, *America's Rural Hub: Railroading in Central Illinois in the Late Twentieth Century* (Mahomet: Mayhaven Publishing, 1991) 10.

In 1915, four denominations of Christianity were being practiced in buildings just recently constructed. Bement's homogenously Anglo-Saxon population likely attended either the Presbyterian, Methodist, or Christian churches. The eastern half of Bement Township borders the smaller village of Ivesdale, a predominately Irish-Catholic community.² Depending on their proximity to Bement, a contingent of these Catholics belonged to St. Michael's Parish. While German surnames are present among the residents, their numbers in Bement were too small to necessitate a Lutheran Church. The village men participated in fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Pythias and the Freemasons, both of which had permanent lodges in the business district. Catholic men more than likely belonged to the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Knights of Columbus, both located in Ivesdale. Women's groups, albeit informally, appear to have been organized along denominational lines as well.

The era of World War One witnessed the height of Bement's railroad activity. The Wabash Railroad sent over one-hundred and twenty freight and passenger trains through the town every twenty-four hours.³ In fact, the double track running west between Bement and the large industrial town of Decatur was the most densely traveled stretch in the entire Wabash Railroad system for a number of years.⁴ Additionally, passenger and freight runs bound for Chicago veered off onto a northbound curve located on the west end of the village. It was here that Bement's Wabash depot was located. Passengers could stay the night in a small hotel located close by. An extensive number of coal chutes, the largest that the Wabash railroad had yet built, could also be found.⁵ Another small local rail line that ran from the south formed a junction with the Wabash mainline. Bisecting these facilities by way of a trestle bridge was the Illinois Terminal Railroad. Known as the "interurban," these electrified trolley cars provided residents with transportation to Monticello as well as the nearby cities of Champaign and Decatur fifteen times a day in either direction.⁶

It was at the Wabash Depot where Bement's residents came into direct physical contact with the geo-political events from outside of the local region. On Sunday May 14th, 1916, a small force of U.S. Infantry stopped there and was greeted by a large crowd. Traveling from Plattsburg, New York, the 13th Infantry was heading to the southwest, "fully equipped to protect the border."⁷ Traveling on three separate trains consisting of sixteen cars each, 852 men passed through town. The men on the second and third trains appear to have spent several minutes mingling with the villagers.⁸ One of the troop cars caught fire, but, the flames were quickly extinguished. One of the soldiers reported to the *Register* that "a hot wiener had rolled on the floor" of the car and had smoldered on the floor.⁹

As the village's sole newspaper, the *Bement Register* was another way for residents to keep up on current events. Published every Thursday, the *Register* was typically had eight to a dozen pages. International news, dominated mostly by headlines concerning the Great War and news from the Illinois state government were generally found on the third or fourth page of the newspaper. Throughout the months of April and May 1916, many of these nationally syndicated headlines were about the battle raging at Verdun. The May 11th *Register* headline told of "Sublime Courage as it is Seen in the Hospitals Behind Verdun."¹⁰ Another story on the

² The village of Ivesdale is located 6 miles east of Bement and is located in Champaign County, IL.

³ *Bement Register* 23 February 1905.

⁴ David Sweetland, *Wabash: In Color* (Edison: Morning Sun Books, Inc., 1991) 72.

⁵ *The Bement Sesquicentennial*, 2005.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Bement Register*, 18 May 1916.

⁸ *Bement Register*, 18 May 1916.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Bement Register*, 11 May 1916.

same page declared “Trench Warfare Shatters Nerves: Horror of It All Has Lasting Effect on Victims of Titanic Conflict.”¹¹

The *Bement Register* generally printed local news on the front page. Topics generally concerned church activities, the Bement school system, athletic contests, and brief write ups about individuals traveling to and from the area. Such “visitors’ information,” reads almost like a modern-day post that one can make on internet sites such as Twitter or Facebook. They could also be of benefit to the genealogist. Unfortunately, the 1914–1915 records of the *Bement Register* are currently unavailable. Two or three pages of the newspaper were also devoted to the weekly installment of a running novel or short story, with such titles as “The Red Mist,” and “The Turmoil.” When America entered the war, these stories became primarily military themed. As the majority of its readers were involved in agriculture, the *Register* also devoted an entire page to news from that industry. These reports generally concerned grain and dairy farming.

There is much written about farming in western Canada, both before and after April 1917. “Tractors to Replace Men” told about the serious man power shortages that were caused by the war.¹² Eventually, advertisements were taken out by the Canadian Government, which offered free acreage as an incentive to encourage people to move to western Canada. While these offers were national and therefore not aimed specifically at Bement residents, there had already been a few people from the community who had headed to the north.

Andrew Swick and his brother Charles had moved to western Canada in the years before the war. Born and raised in Bement, the two brothers enlisted in the Canadian Army in December of 1915. Five years older than his brother, Charles had married a Canadian girl and started a family.¹³ The twenty-four year old Andrew was wounded in battle on December 14th 1916, making him Bement’s first casualty of the Great War.^{14*}

The headline, “Big Guns and More News from Verdun,” thundered across the state and international news section of the *Register* that fall as did pictures from the European Front.¹⁵ The November 9th issue reprinted a picture with the caption “happy British soldiers trying on their helmet caps and gas masks south of Ypres.”¹⁶ Also that week, the newspaper reported that troops from the 9th Massachusetts had passed through on the Wabash the morning of Saturday the 4th. These men were returning home after service on the Mexican border.¹⁷

Ominous national headlines began appearing in early February 1917. A report filed from Washington D.C. related that the “German government said [their] U-Boat program will be carried out regardless of America.”¹⁸ The main issue of local concern, however, was the special election that was to take place the 1st of March to decide if the village was to decide on a water works improvement bond.¹⁹ The month of February did see the nearby University of Illinois

¹¹ Ibid .

¹² *Bement Register*, 18 May 1916.

¹³ *The Bement World War One Veterans Album* has Charles Swick born 5-18-1887 and Andrew Swick born 11-9-1892.

¹⁴ *Bement Register* 26 April 1917. *The date of Andrew Swick’s wounding is conflicted in newspapers. *The Decatur Herald* (4-24-17) reports that Andrew was wounded on Dec. 16, 1916. *The Decatur Review* (4-24-17) reports that Andrew was in a London hospital due to serious wounds sustained in the Battle of Arras on April 14, 1917. The *Bement Register* (4-26-17) reported that Andrew was wounded on Dec. 14, 1916. Further research is needed to establish the exact date of Andrew’s wounding.

¹⁵ *Bement Register*, 26 April 1917 .

¹⁶ *Bement Register*, 9 November 1916.

¹⁷ *Bement Register*, 9 November 1916 .

¹⁸ *Bement Register*, 8 February 1917.

¹⁹ Ibid .

offer its facilities to the U.S. government if war with Germany did occur.²⁰ The *Register's* March issues dealt with international news such as Czar Nicholas II's abdication in Russia and the continued sinking of American ships by Germany submarines. The front page of the March 29th edition of the paper saw an article written by W.R. Camp, a local insurance salesman. Entitled "Does Your Life Insurance Remain in Force Without Payment of Extra Premiums in Case We Engage in War?" Camp's piece reassured people that their life insurance rates would not rise in the event of hostilities.²¹

There is no available copy of the following issue of the weekly *Register* published on April 5th. The entire front page of the April 12th edition is filled with war news, however. The Methodists reported that the meeting of the "Men's Forward Movement," had an interesting meeting the previous Monday. On the night of the 8th, the Methodists felt that "the state of the country necessitated a patriotic occasion."²² Homer Goddard addressed the meeting with a speech entitled "Our Country's Patriots," while the male quartet sang "Tenting Tonight."²³ Church member John Lamb then spoke about "Different Kinds of Patriotism." The evening program concluded with the singing of the song "America."²⁴

Across the city park from the Methodists, the Presbyterian Church also began to address the war. The Presbyterian leader, Reverend N.C. Shirey reported to the *Register* that the following Sunday he would begin a series of sermons on the different phases of the war.²⁵ The sermons were organized into five individual topics, each to be discussed by the pastor over the next five Sundays. They were as follows:

1. American and the War
2. France and the War: The Champion of Liberty
3. Germany's Death Struggle
4. England and the War: The Anglo-Saxon Task
5. Belgium and the War: Civilization and its Effects.

The "Church News" article for the Presbyterian Church also contended that "during every great war in our history the churches have spoken fearlessly and strongly. No other force did more than the churches during the Revolution to help prepare for the victory over England. During the Civil War the churches of the north thundered out the messages of patriotism."²⁶ Out of the four communities of faith in Bement, the Presbyterian Church was the epicenter of most war-related preaching. The Methodists and Christian Churches conducted patriotic meetings as well, but their frequency was not as great as their Protestant kin. St. Michael's parish, never a regular contributor to the "Church News" section, held prayer vigils for servicemen. While not reported in the *Register*, but apparent from the list of names on the modern war memorial, two Catholic priests associated with the village served in the war; Fr. Daniel F. Monaghan and Fr. Terrance O'Conner.

Bement was quick to establish a recruiting center during that first week of war. U.S. Post Master Mr. Cloyd told the *Register* that he was ready to take measurements for interested

²⁰ *Bement Register*, 22 February 1917.

²¹ *Bement Register*, 29 March 1917.

²² *Bement Register*, 12 April 1917.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

men.²⁷ The article stated that “[I]f you feel a spell coming on and want to show up some of the real ‘patriotism,’ drop around at his place and get your papers to lick Old Bill Kaiser and then too our P.M. will get a “five-spot” out of every application for enrollment.”²⁸ Accordingly, eight local men had enlisted before the month of April was out.²⁹

Bement’s State Bank began to run advertisements during the first month of the war. Their message, a frequent one during the war, encouraged people to open up a savings account. Tying their product to the war, the State Bank’s blurb read “Financial strength is to nations as important as military strength. No nation can survive a war if it cannot finance itself. The man who fortifies himself with an account in a savings bank does more than prepare himself – he contributes to the preparedness of the country.”³⁰

As mentioned, young men from the village began to join up in the first month of the war. The April 26th *Register* reported that Boynton Conkey, Bus Martin, and William Dye had entered the Navy, while Richard Newbanks and Ed Foran were in the Coast Artillery. Harold Fisher, Will Neil, and Thomas Cole joined the newly formed Aviation Corps.³¹ Sadly the month of April 1917 also witnessed the first Bementonian to fall in battle. Mrs. H.W. Mills of Decatur, received a British Government Telegram informing her that her brother Charles Swick, the older half of the two brothers who had joined the Canadian Army, had been mortally wounded while attacking Vimy Ridge on April 13th 1917.³² The story, entitled, “Bement Man Dies on Arras Front,” also mentioned that the fallen Charles left behind his younger brother Andrew, still dangerously ill from a wound he had received, a sister Mary Swick, who still resided in Bement, and his wife and son in Red Deer, Alberta.³³

Local land owners were caught up in enthusiasm for the cause during the first months of the war. William Dighton, a land owner associated with the First National Bank of Monticello had been approached by the Federal government to sell 640 acres of land for use as an airfield. Robert Allerton, the son of Chicago millionaire Samuel Allerton, had established a sprawling complex of farms around the Sangamon River, just over seven miles north of Bement. During the first month of the war, Robert Allerton wrote President Wilson to offer the “proceeds above the cost of raising crops to be used by the government during the war.”³⁴ Allerton contended that “this is the time for every good citizen to do his duty. This is the time for practical manifestation of loyalty and patriotism.”³⁵ While the government’s plans with Dighton later fell through, Allerton Farms significantly contributed agricultural materials to the war effort. The exact arrangement of the exchange, however, is unknown. At the close of May, the Presbyterian Church took charge of leading what today would be called an “interfaith” Memorial Day service. The event, entitled the “Union Memorial Service,” was to be attended by members of all churches following a program at the Presbyterian Church. The services would then conclude in the respective buildings of the attending denominations.³⁶

The last week in May 1917 also saw the first printing of a servicemen’s letter home. At Aviation School in San Antonio, Texas, recruit Harold Fisher shared a large tent with men from Washington, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. He thanked the folks back home for their

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Bement Register*, 26 April 1917.

Bement Register 19 April 1917.

³¹ *Bement Register*, 26 April 1917.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid .

³⁴ *Bement Register*, 10 May 1917.

³⁵ *Bement Register*, 17 May 1917.

³⁶ *Bement Register*, 24 May 1917.

letters and packages and said that he would like to take pictures, but that he had “no kodak.”³⁷ Fisher also closed by saying that he and the men had not been able to take a bath after going on a “rattlesnake” hike because of the fact “that four thousand men are serviced by one well.”³⁸

This particular issue of the *Register* also explained the procedures that men were expected to follow when they began to register for the draft. Twelve questions were provided to readers with a brief description of what information was to be given by the inductee. Draftees were asked for their date of birth, their citizenship, their trade or occupation, their marital status, and whether they wished to claim an exemption.³⁹ The registration day was set for Tuesday, June 5th. Using the east to west alignment of the Wabash railroad tracks, Bement Township was divided up into a northern and a southern precinct for the affair. All males who were born between June 6th, 1886 and June 5th, 1896 were required to register.⁴⁰ “For the next two weeks,” the *Register* reported, “this [draft registration] will be the chief topic of interest among citizens of all classes.”^{41*}

March 31st's *Register* ran a large story on the storms that had recently devastated Charleston and Mattoon in Coles County that week. Liberty Loan bonds were made available for purchase at the local banks. The children of Mr. and Mrs. W.W. Bower purchased \$100 worth of Liberty Loan bonds that week. Dewey Long, another Bement serviceman in San Antonio, Texas, described his new job. He wrote, “I carry gas to the machines. They take 22 gallons of gas per hour. I got to fly with Ed Stinson. I only rode about 5 miles at the rate of 60 to 95 miles per hour. We have good feed now. The first week we lived off hash and water.”⁴² In the same letter, it becomes apparent that some of Long's information has been censored. He related that “there were several men called to **** for a couple of weeks training and then to France. **** carpenters and electricians but no men from Bement.”⁴³

In June 1917, published letters written to those back home in Bement became quite common on the front pages of the *Register*. In a letter addressed to the *Register*'s editor Mr. R.R. Lane, the Air Corps recruits down in San Antonio, Texas related some details of camp life to the people of Bement. The author of the letter declared “as far as army life is concerned, we all are in love with it.” Demonstrating some of the regional differences between Texas and Illinois, the author wrote that “[T]he main trouble is the girls. The girls down here powder and paint. We boys think this is awful because the Northern girls don't do that.” The letter's author then gave everyone back home a brief update on the men from the town. He wrote:

Harold Fisher gets along fine with them (the girls). He has a cute little mustache. They are all in love with him. Tom Cole does fine in all the drill and exceptionally well when they call ‘rear march’. Believe us, he's right there. Elmer Kelley is a regular dare devil with his new Curtis aeroplane. He went up yesterday and turned white four times. John Carlin is getting along fine only he always gets so much to eat that he always has pains in the stomach. Ray Slevin is one of the boys alright. We all believe he will be a general someday. Jasper Pervis has got a snap. He gets to go to bed early and gets up early. Tell all hello for us and have them write. We

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid * The *Piatt County Republican* (6-14-17) contains an extensive list of all males in the county eligible for the draft.

⁴² *Bement Register*, 31 May 1917.

⁴³ Ibid.

still eat candy and cake. Well we are all 'rearing' to get to go to drill so better close.
 – A Bement Boy

While it is unclear who the author of the letter was, the term Bement Boy was from then on, used to identify the village's men in uniform.⁴⁴

The Bement Boys were not just to be found in Texas. Carl Eaton, a seventeen-year-old Bement resident had joined the Navy and was completing training in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. In his letter home, published in the same edition as the Bement Boys from Texas, Eaton described how he had been vaccinated for small pox and typhoid. "It don't hurt very much," the teenager claimed. Relating some new military jargon, Eaton wrote that "bread is called punk and coffee is call java."⁴⁵ Although his phrasing is more than likely misinterpreted, Eaton related how during shore leave in Portsmouth, where "they have a dance every night. I got acquainted with some swell chickens. I took one home." Being so far away from home could certainly be an exciting time for these Bement Boys.

By the 14th of June, Bement had organized a local chapter of the American Red Cross. This executive committee met at the National Bank and was led by president William Hughes, secretary Mrs. Katherine Fisher, treasurer R.M. Fleming, and assistant treasurer J.W.B. Stewart.⁴⁶ The article called on people in the community to serve and contribute their time and work to the organization. The local chapter declared that "all of us cannot serve our nation in the trenches or on the sea, and it will be the duty of those remaining to assist in every way possible to provide comfort to those who go."⁴⁷ While the Red Cross executive committee met every Monday at the National Bank, meetings held for the rank and file members had been held in Opera Hall on Wednesday evenings.⁴⁸ The Red Cross's permanent quarters in the village were set to be opened on Monday June 18th, in the first floor of the Masonic Building, located across the street from the Opera Hall.⁴⁹

Another article related to the local Red Cross chapter reported that 1,000 members were needed to fulfill Bement's obligation. Individual residents could become members of the local chapter for one dollar.⁵⁰ One-hundred and thirty three names appeared on the *Register's* "Roll of Honor," that week for having joined.⁵¹ The newspaper reported that starting Saturday the 16th, fifty women of the Red Cross chapter would be soliciting "every person appearing on Bement streets," during the membership drive. Additionally, the organization would began a systematic canvassing of the city and countryside the following Tuesday. "Do not wait until the shells begin to whistle and our boys begin to fall," the Red Cross implored, "- get in now. Many men will be saved by a through preparation behind the line."⁵²

War news from around the world took up an entire page of the *Register* that week. This would be a standard practice throughout the war, although certain editions would have sparser coverage. On page four of the *Register* there was a large advertisement for the "Great National Movement to Swat the Rat." Because of the fact that rats ate the grain and killed small livestock such as pigs, Bement citizens were encouraged to buy rat poison. The advertisement

⁴⁴ *Bement Register*, 7 June 1917.

⁴⁵ *Bement Register*, 31 May 1917 .

⁴⁶ *Bement Register*, 14 June 1917.

⁴⁷ *Bement Register*, 31 May 1917 .

⁴⁸ *Ibid* .

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

⁵² *Ibid*.

carried a coupon that was good for five cents towards the purchase of a fifteen cent cake of the toxin at the local Bodman's Drug Store.⁵³

On page four of the June 14th *Register*, the names of 179 men who had registered for the draft from Bement Township were printed. While not all the men who registered would be called up, the possibility of the draft meant that many men of military age began to enlist on their own accord. Throughout the war, the *Register* printed the names of local men who had joined the colors. No effort was made to distinguish who had been drafted and who had volunteered. Taking part in registering for military service was a part of the public life of men in the community at this time. During the draft period, few men are ever publically listed in the newspaper as being absent from the registration or from being unable to serve. It is worthy of consideration, perhaps, that it was the intimate nature of personal relationships within the town that encouraged young men to willingly serve.

According to the June 21st *Register*, the efforts of the Bement Red Cross to register were mostly successful. Some people refused to join because they did not understand the purpose of the organization. The newspaper article assured the reader that the organization was one "in which no salaries are paid."⁵⁴ Additionally, the local chapter was quick to point out that "not a cent of Red Cross contributions are going to Germany."⁵⁵ Regardless of some confusion, there were enough Bementonians who had registered for membership in the organization to fill up an entire page of the *Register*. Under the headline "This is Red Cross Week. Let Everybody Get Busy," the *Register* related how members of the local chapter had made a trip up to the county seat of Monticello to become familiar with some of the different articles that were to be made by the organization. These articles included a wide variety of bandages and hospital clothing.⁵⁶ Pictures of the tornado damage suffered by Coles County were also published that week. A story accompanied these photos that explained how the organization was helping to cope with this nearby disaster.

Bement's citizens were busy buying Liberty Loans during the month of June as well. The *Register* reported that Piatt County, with twenty thousand dollars' worth, had oversubscribed its quota for Liberty Loan purchases by one-third.⁵⁷ While it is unclear how much the village of Bement contributed to the effort, both of the local banks reported that there had been a great turnout for the Loan drive. The local news section also related that the construction of an Army Aviation camp in the nearby city of Rantoul was nearly complete.⁵⁸ In the coming year, the residents would form a hospitable relationship with the pilots who were training there.

The Presbyterian Church announced that their pastor was going to give a sermon for the young men of the town entitled, "Should I go to College This Fall or Should I Go to War."⁵⁹ From the *Register's* Roll of Honor that week, it appeared that many of Bement's young men had already decided on the former. Bement enlistments for the week of June 21st, 1917 are as follows:

Albert Parker
Leland Brawner
Bus Martin

Roy Adams
Orville Green
Carl Eaton

Eugene Evans
Richard Scott
William Dye

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Bement Register*, 21 June 1917.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Chas Dove
Ed Foran
Purvis
Thomas Cole
Henry Shipman

Richard Newbanks
Clarence Burns
Will Neil
Raymond Slevin
Dewey Long

John Carlin
Harold Fisher J.A.
Lester Alexander
Boyton Conkey
Ed Newbanks

The following week's edition of the *Register* proudly declared that the people of the community were ahead in both their Liberty Loan and Army enlistment quotas.⁶⁰ With nearly 800 members of the community now in the local Red Cross chapter, Bement's next goal, the paper declared, was to "now strive for a record in food conservation."⁶¹ The June 28th *Register* brought the readers up to date on the happenings of the Bement Boys, who were still training in San Antonio, Texas. Printed on the first page of the paper the letter described how the men were tanned and well fed. Mr. Ray Slevin, Jasper Purvis, and Harold Fisher has "gained a lot of weight," in their new job as soldiers. Additionally, John Carlin, Thomas Cole, and Earl "Dewey" Long had all grown mustaches.⁶²

Another Bement Boy, Albert Parker, who had enlisted in the U.S. Army before the war at the age of fifteen, arrived back home in Bement on a ten-day furlough. This would be Albert Parker's last visit to Bement before his unit shipped out for France. Albert reported to the *Register* that at his base near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the Army was "working hard to whip new recruits into shape."⁶³

People from Bement often submitted stories or updates about their male relatives in the service. Miss Luella Bingham brought the town up to speed on her nephew, "former Bement Boy" Ernest Bingham, who had recently received his commission as a second lieutenant.⁶⁴ Bingham's name, as well the names of several other "former Bement Boys" mentioned in the *Register* are not included on the modern war memorial.

Also found in the June 29th edition of the *Register* was a reprint of the local Presbyterian minister Reverend N.C. Shirey's sermon entitled "Belgium and the War." The lengthy address concerned itself primarily with the Roman Catholic nature of the Belgian people. Reverend Shirey proclaimed "I am not a Roman Catholic. I never can be. But I take my hat off to these people who laid down their lives for us." The Reverend went on to justify the war as being not a test of manhood, but rather a "struggle that was necessary for the welfare of the race."⁶⁵

The month of July saw an increased amount of involvement in the local Red Cross chapter. Local youth groups such as the Camp Fire Girls and the Presbyterian Sunday School contributed \$5.00 and \$22.42 respectively to the Red Cross.⁶⁶ The Red Cross chapter was now headquartered in the Masonic Hall. Ten to fifteen women usually worked each day from the hours of 2 to 6 PM making "sixty dozens of gauze sponges, several dozens of muslin, twenty dozen bed socks," and numerous bandages.⁶⁷ The *Register* would often print the weekly tally of Red Cross work done by the local chapter. Sometimes, explicit instructions concerning the number of stitches needed to complete an article of clothing were included as well. Red Cross

⁶⁰ *Bement Register*, 28 June 1917.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ *Bement Register*, 5 July 1917.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

lapel pins had also arrived in town by early July 1917. Members of the Red Cross, who up to that time had worn buttons, could now exchange these for one of the new pins.⁶⁸

Letters were also published from Bement Boys, who by the summer of 1917, were stationed throughout the United States. L.S. Brawner, a man whose name does not appear in either the list of servicemen that was compiled shortly after the war or on the modern war memorial, wrote to *Register* editor R.R. Lane. Stationed in Fort Moultrie, South Carolina, Brawner wrote that “the people here in South Carolina are not as patriotic as they are in Illinois. They hardly notice a soldier. Everyone here talks very funny to you. I can hardly understand them.”⁶⁹ It must be remembered that while nearly fifty years had passed since the Civil War, the memories of that conflict were alive in the memories of many people at the time of the Great War. One notice in the *Register* from this time period invited members of the 25th Illinois Infantry to their reunion, which was to be held at the local Grand Army of the Republic Hall in Danville, Illinois on September 20th, 1917. The brief article stated that “this may be our last reunion.”⁷⁰

Roy Adams wrote home to Bement from Bremerton, Washington. Roy stated that “I receive the paper often and am sure glad to get it. I like it better now than when I was at home.”⁷¹ Concerning life at camp, Adams reported “we don’t do much but drill a little, wash clothes, have inspection, and eat.”⁷² Dewey Long, a member of the Bement Boys of San Antonio, wrote to his folks that he had left Texas and was now one-hundred yards from Lake Erie at a new base outside of Detroit. He liked it much better than San Antonio as he was able to “look out the window at the good old Illinois land,” as his train made its way across the country.⁷³

By the end of July, the dramatic vignettes of fiction such as “The Red Mist,” and “The Turmoil,” had now been replaced by more militant fare. A nationally syndicated column, written by Captain Roland E. Andrews, was printed weekly. This article was generally about a factual battle and the historical narrative surrounding the events. However, the approach to the historical event was often colored by contemporary interpretation. For example, Captain Andrews’ piece “The Defense of Syracuse,” was subtitled with “the siege raising which made possible the Roman Empire and wrecked the early exponents of *kultur* on their own ambitions.”⁷⁴

Concerning local news, the *Register* reported that while the draft had identified men eligible for service, there had been “no official information as to who will be called from this township to help supply the Piatt County quota which is 93.”⁷⁵ For the first draft levee, 186 men from the county were called up in August 1917.⁷⁶ To be called did not necessarily mean that one would have to leave immediately for military service. In fact, many of the men listed at the Township level did not leave for service until the summer of 1918.

Throughout the month of August 1917, the Bement chapter of the Red Cross continued their war work. The local chapter reached their goal of having 800 paying members.⁷⁷ In fact, according to the *Register*, the village of Bement was in the running to win a silk flag for having

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ *Bement Register*, 12 July 1917.

⁷⁰ *Bement Register*, 9 August 1917.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *Bement Register*, 26 July 1917.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Bement Register*, 2 August 1917.

⁷⁷ *Bement Register*, 9 August 1917.

the largest membership in proportion to its population.⁷⁸ On Tuesday August 7th, as residents settled down to their evening meals, the church bells of Bement rang out in synchronization with other communities across Illinois to remind people to donate to the Red Cross.⁷⁹

Those Bement residents who were not in the service were encouraged to donate books and other reading materials to the war effort. With the Bement Public Library as the collection point, the article encouraged residents to “write in each book your name and address, the soldier who reads it will know that someone in Bement is his friend and stands ready to help him.”⁸⁰ It is not known if the donated books were intended solely for Bement Boys or for servicemen throughout the country. Foreign language books, mainly those for learning French, were considered to be the most vital.⁸¹

In what was to be the pinnacle of Bement’s war enthusiasm, Patriotic Day occurred on Tuesday, September 4th, 1917. The events themselves were centered on ceremonial flag raisings at both the post office and the town’s school.⁸² The *Register* proclaimed that “every person of the community is urged to be present at these Post Office exercises. Let us do our part to make these boys who have gone and who may go feel that we appreciate their service for us.”⁸³

Over one-thousand five hundred people attended the ceremonies.⁸⁴ Civil War and Spanish-American War veterans were encouraged to attend, as were all young men who had registered for the draft back in June.⁸⁵ In the school yard, a nine by eighteen foot American flag was ran up onto a new sixty-five foot flag pole by Daniel Hall.⁸⁶ The crowd joined in the singing of the song “America” and took part in a prayer led by Reverend Dawson. Following an “interesting address on the issues of the day,” by the Honorable Judge Adkins, the people of the village paraded one block north to the Post Office.⁸⁷ There Postmaster Cloyd raised another American flag. The Honorable Judge Shonkwiler gave a stirring speech “that was appreciated by all.”⁸⁸

The Red Cross chapter continued to crank out dozens of assorted items for the war. The same week as the flag raising ceremonies, the Red Cross put on the play “Miss George Washington,” as a fundraiser. Held at the Lyric Theatre, a small venue located on the western end of Bement’s business district, the play was a great success for the organization. The Lyric would begin showing war-related films in 1918.

On the morning of September 21st, 1917, over thirty seven Piatt County men left Monticello for the armed forces. Bement men would generally take either the Illinois Terminal trolley or the Wabash railroad to the county seat. It is difficult to determine whether or not the village held a sendoff for their men as they headed for Monticello, or if the people of Bement followed their boys north to support them in the county-wide event. On the night before they were to leave, a reception was held at the Piatt County Courthouse, located in Monticello’s public square. While the Bement draftees were only seven miles from home, one must speculate as to how many actually ventured south to sleep in their beds one last time, given the 6:30 AM

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ *Bement Register*, 2 August 1917.

⁸⁰ *Bement Register*, 23 August 1917.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *Bement Register*, 30 August 1917.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ *Bement Register*, 6 September 1917.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Bement Register*, 6 September 1917.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

departure time of their Illinois Central train from Monticello. The *Cerro Gordo News* reported admiringly that the Bement Township currently had thirty three men in all branches of the service. This was more than any other township in the area at this time.⁸⁹ The same week as the Piatt County event, the *Bement Register* mirrored this enthusiasm when it encouraged residents to “show your colors – put the flag in the window of your home. They fight for Americanism.”⁹⁰

Sunday October 7th, 1917 was “Go to Church Sunday,” in Bement. The Presbyterian-led program was entitled “The Flag Calls for Service.”⁹¹ The Methodist and Christian Church goers were encouraged to attend. From reading the program bill, one can gather that the participants portrayed various immigrant groups throughout American history. The Scotch-Irish, French Huguenots, and Italian peoples were all represented. Ironically, very few, if any Italians were present in Bement at this time. Later that month, the Methodist Church provided patriotic entertainment with their production of “Die Mutter: A True War Story.”⁹² The same week that the Methodists hosted their program, the Presbyterians were treated to a presentation entitled, “Life in the American Navy.”⁹³ Religious communities continued to focus on the war as the weather grew colder. The ladies of St. Michaels met in the home R.H. Smith and made several Christmas bags for the boys, while the Christian Church usually conducted a short review of the war before the Sunday sermon.⁹⁴

The autumn of 1917 saw the commencement of the Second Liberty Loan sales drive. Children were encouraged to buy loans. Piatt County’s quota for this loan was \$81,000.⁹⁵ The Register declared “there’s no ‘if’ and ‘ands’ about it, the bonds must be sold and we are going to buy them.”⁹⁶ Addressing the Presbyterian Church, a Mr. Camp spoke that the war may cost one billion dollars per month. To emphasize the mind-numbing sum, Mr. Camp declared that “there haven’t been one billion seconds since Christ was born.”⁹⁷ Friday October 26th was Patriotic Children’s Day in Bement. Topped off by a parade around the town, the students and faculty of the high school raised fifty cents apiece to buy a fifty dollar Liberty Bond in the school’s name.⁹⁸ Younger school children submitted essays to the Register that described “why everyone should buy liberty bonds.”⁹⁹

Leland Brawner, still stationed in South Carolina, wrote to the *Register* that “the only way we can win the war is by going over [and beating] the Kaiser and I hope the war is not over until the U.S. gets there and shows that we are to be feared.”¹⁰⁰ By this point in the war’s progress, most of the Bement Boys of San Antonio had been split up to various assignments. Harold Fisher telegraphed home to Bement to inform his family that he was leaving Dayton, Ohio.¹⁰¹ Dewey Long left Michigan for another post, while Ed Foran wrote to his aunt back in Bement.¹⁰² Regarding Jack Carlin, another San Antonio Bement Boy, who was leaving for Italy,

⁸⁹ *Bement Register*, 20 September 1917.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Bement Register*, 4 October 1917.

⁹² *Bement Register*, 11 October 1917.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Bement Register*, 15 November 1917.

⁹⁵ *Bement Register*, 1 November 1917.

⁹⁶ *Bement Register*, 4 October 1917.

⁹⁷ *Bement Register*, 1 November 1917.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Bement Register* 29, November 1917.

Foran wrote “You know God is everywhere and probably he (Jack) will see parts of the world he never would have had a chance to see.”¹⁰³

By December 13th, 1917 over fifty Bement Boys were in uniform. Brothers Russell and Lloyd Hill, William Ditty, Harry Lamb, and Peter Peterson all left for the service that month.¹⁰⁴ Young love had a moment to flourish in war time. That December, Miss Adelia Carlin traveled to Houston, Texas to marry her fiancé, Mr. Charles Lambert of Ivesdale. Mr. Lambert was serving in the Army.¹⁰⁵ After the ceremony, attended by another Ivesdale serviceman Corporal Frank Boland, Mrs. Charles Lambert arrived back in Bement before the start of the New Year.¹⁰⁶

As New Year’s Day approached, the Knights of Columbus and the YMCA started to actively raise funds for the war in Bement as well. Bementonians donated \$172.50 to the K of C War Fund.¹⁰⁷ Both of these organizations encouraged people to donate items that could be sold for the purpose of raising funds. “You may have already given your time, but the war may last a long time” a joint advertisement claimed.¹⁰⁸

In the first edition of 1918, the *Bement Register* printed a letter saying that Seamen Carl Eaton had written to his mother. An eighteen-year-old, Carl had made a brief stop back home in Bement the previous fall to visit his mother who was gravely ill.¹⁰⁹ In his December letter, Eaton related how his ship had been caught in a terrible storm in the north Atlantic.¹¹⁰ Even though he was unable to sleep for three days, Carl reassured his mother that she wasn’t to worry and that he would be all right. He closed by saying that it was unlikely for him to be home anytime in the next year.¹¹¹ A week later in the *Bement Register*, another Bement Boy, Earl “Dewey” Long wrote home to say that he had been in England since December 14th. However, he was unsure of his exact location.¹¹²

1918 was certainly the year where the war’s impact was felt the most in Bement. In the area of commerce, local farm implement dealer Bodman and Company held a large sale of equipment that January. While the home front would not experience the shortages felt during the Second World War, the Bodman sale bill warned those shopping for a new automobile in 1918 that they needed to act quickly.¹¹³ In the same edition of the *Register*, George L. Clark, a young Bement businessman and owner of the men’s shoe and clothing store announced a close out sale on all his stock. This sale was the direct result of his being drafted into military service.¹¹⁴ Women’s shoes which had been on sale for \$8 could now be had for \$6.15. Men’s silk dress shirts that that ran for \$5 were now available for \$3.75. Stetson cowboy hats, a popular fashion statement judging from period photographs, were now selling for \$3.50 as opposed to the usual \$5.¹¹⁵ R.R. Lane, the *Register’s* owner and editor praised Clark by writing that “he has

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ *Bement Register*, 13 December 1917.

¹⁰⁵ *Bement Register*, 20 December 1917.

¹⁰⁶ *Bement Register* 3 January 1917.

¹⁰⁷ *Bement Register* 20 December 1917.

¹⁰⁸ *Bement Register*, 3 January 1917.

¹⁰⁹ *Bement Register*, 13 September 1917.

¹¹⁰ *Bement Register*, 3 January 1918.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² *Bement Register* 10, January 1918.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

placed a price on his stock and it means great sacrifice. Clark will enter a preparatory school for aviators as soon as his stock is sold.”¹¹⁶

On January 21st, 1918, Bement observed a “heatless” Monday whereby all businesses, with the exception of grocery stores, restraints, meat markets, and the drug store, were closed down.¹¹⁷ Ironically, the week before, Bement had experienced a severe blizzard which saw the temperature drop to 26 degrees below freezing. All rail traffic for both the Illinois Terminal and the Wabash Railroad was cancelled. The night of Saturday, January 12th saw two houses catch fire as residents tried to cope with the bitter weather.¹¹⁸

The perils of the winter season did little to dampen the patriotic spirit of the village. Bement was commended in the *Decatur Herald* for raising \$2,005 in an auction held on the afternoon of Saturday February 23rd. Nearly two-thousand people from all over Piatt County were present at the event. Auctioneers Fred Lux of Monticello and Everett Heitz of Cerro Gordo donated their services as citizens bought turkeys, roosters, hogs, and calves. Red Cross Women served pie, doughnuts, and coffee while the Campfire Girls sold crackerjacks and cakes. A silk quilt was purchased by a young man for \$12.00. The young man suggested to the auctioneers that at a previous auction that bills and coins be tossed onto the quilt as its corners were held by four men. This arrangement was commenced and over \$25.00 was donated in a wave of “excitement and merriment.”¹¹⁹ Mrs. G.B. Alvard contributed a tatting flag measuring 15 by 17 inches. The patriotic craft was purchased by A.E. Moore of Monticello for \$27.08.¹²⁰

War news from the Bement Boys continued to be printed in the *Register*. F.C. Fisher, a sailor aboard the USS North Dakota thanked a “certain lady” in the Christian Church for the “cheer kit” that he had received.¹²¹ Ralph Moery and Lennie High both enlisted in the Officers Reserve of the Aviation Corps whereupon they were called to active duty in nearby Urbana, Illinois.¹²² The community was commended in the *Decatur Herald*

Sadly, Andrew Swick, the first Bement man to be injured during the war, died of an infection from the wound that he received upon his return to the front. It is unclear whether or not Andrew was wounded on two separate incidents. The *Bement Register* reported on February 21st that Andrew was wounded in France and that he had served in the same company as his fallen brother Charles.¹²³ The next week’s *Register* reported that the Canadian soldier died of his wounds on February 24th, 1918.^{124*}

The two fallen brothers were honored by a special memorial service conducted at the newly built Methodist Church on Sunday, March 10th.¹²⁵ With the national flags of the United States, France, and Great Britain displayed along the church “was beautifully decorated with flags, bunting, and ferns, and carnations.”¹²⁶ The service was attended by their father James Swick, sister Mary (Swick) Mills, both of Decatur. Their brother, James Swick of Bement, also attended with his wife and daughter. The *Piatt County Republican* also related that Pastor Rev.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ *Bement Register*, 24 January 1918.

¹¹⁸ *Bement Register*, 17 January 1918.

¹¹⁹ *Decatur Herald*, 24 February 1918.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *Bement Register*, 24 January 1918.

¹²² *Bement Register*, 7 February 1918.

¹²³ *Bement Register*, 21 February 1918.

¹²⁴ *Bement Register*, 28 February 1918. * Research of Canadian military records finds that Andrew Swick (Military ID #183766) served in the 25th BN. Can. Inf. while Charles Swick (Military ID #184246) served in the 10th BN. Can. Inf.

¹²⁵ *The Piatt County Republican*, 14 March 1918.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Wilber Dowson preached an impressive sermon titled “Greater Love Hath No Man Than This, that He Lay Down His Life For His Friend.” The service included patriotic hymns such as “My County ‘Tis of Thee,” “When the Freeman’s Flag Goes By,” and was concluded by the song “Keep the Homes Fires Burning.”¹²⁷ Reporting on the day following the memorial service, the *Decatur Herald* commended Dowson’s sermon and added that M.H. Benson sang the song “The Old Flag That Has Never Suffered Defeat.” The emotional nature of the event must have been greatly apparent as the entire congregation joined the choir in singing the final song.¹²⁸ While the Swick brothers are both commemorated on the Bement memorial, only Charles is identified as having died in the Great War.

During the month of March, the residents of Piatt County were treated to performances given by the Great Lakes Naval Training Station Band in Monticello. These patriotic programs were attended by many residents of Bement who rode the Illinois Terminal trolleys.¹²⁹ On the Wabash Railroad, a steam locomotive blew up two miles east of Cerro Gordo. The explosion could be heard in Bement and attracted much attention from residents all over the area. Miraculously, the four crew members were able to safely jump off the stricken engine in time. Because of the enforcement of government censorship at the time, no photos of the accident were allowed to be made public.^{130*}

The spring of 1918 also witnessed the implementation of Daylight Savings Time. The Register explained that the trains would run on their regular schedule. By March 21st, nearly \$13,000 had been raised by Piatt County for the American Red Cross. Bement contributed \$2,247.22 of this amount.¹³¹ Early April saw the Federal Government lifting its “meatless Tuesday” order.¹³² Seven Bement men were called for service at this time as well. Ross Taylor, Ben Adkins, Cecil Leroy Davis, Emory Arnold, Elmer Hill, Everett Ditty, and Thomas Stone left Monticello on Wednesday, April 3rd.¹³³ The Register also reported that “Bement Boys” Dewey Long and Jack Carlin had seen each other while the two were in England. Dewey Long would soon be sent to France.¹³⁴ In a letter that says as much about the experiences of Bement’s sons as the town itself, John High related how he was able to catch a fleeting glimpse of his hometown as he traveled from one military base to another. After leaving the Wabash Depot in Decatur, High realized that his route to Massachusetts would take him through Bement. As the train went through Bement at 11:00 PM on Saturday March 30th, High wrote, “I had my head out the window, but I didn’t see anyone stirring on the streets.”¹³⁵

The *Bement Register* of April 18th, 1918 informed readers that they would no longer be able to ship care packages to the boys in France as per the new guidelines.¹³⁶ Letters from Bement Boys began to flood the front page. Tony Ryan wrote about camp life in Fort Dupont Delaware, while Private Paul M. Cornelious was allowed to come home from Kelly Field in San Antonio for his grandmother’s funeral.¹³⁷ Ray Slevin, one of the original San Antonio boys was now with the 28th Aero Squadron in France as a truck driver. In a letter written to his father,

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ *Decatur Herald*, 12 March 1918.

¹²⁹ *Bement Register*, 28 February 1918.

¹³⁰ *Bement Register*, 7 March 1918.* The 4 March 1918 *Decatur Herald* ran an extensive story (along with a photograph) reporting the details of the train wreck.

¹³¹ *Bement Register*, 21 March 1918.

¹³² *Bement Register*, 4 April 1918.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ *Bement Register*, 11 April 1918.

¹³⁵ *Bement Register*, 18 April 1918.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ *Bement Register*, 25 April 1918.

Slevin related that the squadron had lost three men since arriving in France. He implored his father to send tobacco as all of his had been lost in a recent retreat.¹³⁸

The *Bement Register* of May 2nd pondered the notion that a heroic machine gunner from the 5th U.S. Machine Gun Battalion may have been local Bement Boy, Albert Parker. According to the report, “machine gun Parker” was asked by a superior officer at one stage of an engagement whether he could hold the line. He replied that he could unless he was killed.”¹³⁹ Carl Eaton, the sailor who had been through the nasty weather earlier, wrote to his mother in a letter dated April 21st, 1918. From the USS Florida, Eaton told her that “if you hear of any great naval battles, you know that I have been in them.”¹⁴⁰ Albert Parker wrote a similarly reassuring letter to his mother in that “they [the soldiers] were safer in the trenches than in the villages because they get bombed constantly.”¹⁴¹

Citizens of Bement kept the war effort moving on the home front that spring as well. St. Michael Church dedicated a silk service flag with seven blue stars for each of the parish servicemen.¹⁴² The names and locations of six of these servicemen were printed as:

John Carlin in England	Raymond Slevin in France
Elmer Kelly in Florida	Edward Foran at Great Lakes Naval Training Facility
Anthony Ryan in Ft. Dupont, Iowa	M. Loughran on Submarine Duty

Farmers began to buy war stamps at Piatt County grain elevators that spring. The Bement Elevator sold \$1742 worth, the highest in the county.¹⁴³ At the First National Bank, residents of Bement could keep up to speed on the progress of the war by means of bulletins, illustrations, and maps that were updated every Friday.¹⁴⁴

On May 23rd, Bement businesses closed their doors and hundreds of the town’s residents headed to the Wabash Depot to visit some of the Bement Boys who were delayed there by a late train. Leo Warren, Paul Flowers, Ray Arnold, Stanley Hammond, Chas. Gillespie, Francis Morrow, John Lee, and George Lass were greeted by the crowd as they waited for their train.¹⁴⁵ That same week, the Masonic Temple dedicated two service flags that were made by the women of the local Red Cross chapter.¹⁴⁶

More news from the Bement Boys was printed in the June 6th *Register*. Ben Adkins was busy in Fort Dupont, Delaware guarding fifty prisoners, most of whom Adkins related were “slackers, spies, and German sympathizers.”¹⁴⁷ Albert Parker sent a letter to Bement dated May 1st, 1918. He wrote that “we have it easy compared to the British and French at the Cambrai Front. Spring is just opening up here.”¹⁴⁸ Earl Roan, another Bement Boy in France, wrote to “tell all the girls at the post office that I was happy to have received their books.”¹⁴⁹ Carl Eaton wrote to his mother about his plans for his five day leave in London. He related that “I am

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ *Bement Register*, 2 May 1918.

¹⁴⁰ *Bement Register*, 16 May 1918.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² *Bement Register*, 23 May 1918.

¹⁴³ *Bement Register*, 8 May 1918.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ *Bement Register*, 30 May 1918.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ *Bement Register*, 6 June 1918.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

planning a fine time. I am going sightseeing and get all the pictures I can.”¹⁵⁰ Russell Hill wrote to folks in Bement about the good treatment that the Red Cross and the YMCA provided for the boys behind the lines. He was serving with the 183rd Aero Squadron in France.¹⁵¹ Carl Standler had similar praises for both the YMCA and Knight of Columbus. Neither organization, however, could do much to change his opinion about “the Godforsaken Country of Alabama.”¹⁵² Percy Hill, a serviceman in the same state as Stadler, requested that he be sent a copy of the *Bement Register*.¹⁵³

Perhaps an immigrant to the United States, Bement Boy Tony Gunich wrote to his friends back home, that the people in France “wear funny wooden shoes like we used to wear in Russia. I wouldn’t want to live that way again.”¹⁵⁴ Russell Hill told his folks in Bement that he had been taking French lessons from a nice old French lady.¹⁵⁵ Although Russell couldn’t speak very well, he wrote of how he went up to a little girl “the size of Dorthy Jane and asked her if she liked Americans. She put her sweet little arms around my neck and kissed my cheek.”¹⁵⁶ Elmer Hill, Russel’s brother, wrote to his father that he was very happy because he “finally gets to go overseas.” Elmer comforted his dad by writing “don’t worry about me because I’m real lucky in getting to go with this bunch. I know quite a few of the boys and they are dandy fellows.”¹⁵⁷

As previously mentioned, the nearby community of Rantoul had seen the construction of an Army Air Corps training field in the summer of 1917. By the summer of 1918, the field was now known as Chanute Field. Sometime in early June, planes began to fly around Bement and land in the nearby pastures as part of their training.¹⁵⁸ Usually traveling in groups of eight, the planes made their way from Rantoul to Bement in about forty-five minutes, sometimes landing at the Fisher Farm two miles west of Bement or at Totten Pasture. The newspaper made much about the good behavior of the local crowds that went out to greet the flyers. Lieutenant Ritchie was quoted after leading a flight of eleven planes to the village that “if the crowd lives up to its reputation of being well behaved, Bement can expect more flights.”¹⁵⁹ Later that summer, E. E. Cheshire was treated to dinner in the home of W.A. Strohl after making an emergency landing in the latter’s field.¹⁶⁰

At the Wabash Depot that June, the town gathered to send another group of young men off to the military.¹⁶¹ With music furnished by the Callahan Dramatics, the following men boarded the 1:43 PM train to Camp Wheeler Georgia:

John Edward Foran	Earl Proctor	Frank Sebens	Frank Flavin
Cecil Warren	Ray Hawkins	Melvin Arthur	Clarence Funk
Earl Hardin	Ben Patterson	John Ray	

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *Bement Register*, 27 May 1918.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ *Bement Register*, 27 June 1918.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ *Bement Register*, 6 June 1918.

¹⁵⁹ *Bement Register*, 20 June 1918.

¹⁶⁰ *Bement Register*, 4 July 1918.

¹⁶¹ *Bement Register*, 27 June 1918.

Shortly after arriving in Camp Wheeler, Clarence Funk wrote home to the Register to “tell the folks they can’t go wrong giving to the Army YMCA or the Red Cross.”¹⁶² According to the July 18th, 1918 *Bement Register*, 155 men from the township were now in military service.¹⁶³

Peter Peterson of the 182nd Aero Squadron wrote to his parents in Bement that he was now within the sound of the guns in France.¹⁶⁴ In early August, word came through that two Bement Boys had been wounded in the line of service. Harry Shipman of the 3rd Artillery Trench Battalion had been wounded in France, but was coming along alright.¹⁶⁵ George Dove, a sailor on the USS Connecticut was also wounded.¹⁶⁶ Dewey Long, along with another Bement Boy, Hershel Baker, still had not left England.¹⁶⁷ Walter B. Cornelius, a Bement Boy who had recently moved to Morrisonville, Illinois was training at Camp Sherman in Chillicothe, Ohio.¹⁶⁸ The *Register* of August 8th related how a Mr. Robert Long of Toledo, Ohio was recognized by Mrs. Charles Gillespie and Miss Margaret Carlin while he waited on his troop train at the Wabash Depot. The women treated Mr. Long and his friend Mr. Johnson from Mississippi to a quick chicken dinner, along with fruit and cigarettes.¹⁶⁹ That same week, Bement resident Mary Edna Burgess submitted a letter to the *Register* telling of her recent work as a nurse in Persia. Perhaps more insightfully than she realized at the time, Ms. Burgess wrote that when taking care of the “Moslem women – it surely makes one wonder who will be the next ones to seek shelter under the folds of Old Glory.”¹⁷⁰

While “Pershing’s Crusaders” was scheduled to start playing at the Lyric Theatre on August 31st, Bement residents could also opt to hear firsthand accounts. On August 17th, 1918, Bement was visited by C.I. Thompson, an American citizen and native of Springfield, Illinois who had been wounded during the Battle of Somme. Thompson later took part in the November 14th, 1917 Battle of Ypres, also known as Passchendaele.¹⁷¹ It was in this action that Thompson lost his right arm. “I’m out doing what I can to do good to the great cause by telling my experience of the war,” Thompson related. There in the city park that Saturday night, Thompson told the Bement crowd of his experience.

In the next installment of the *Bement Registry*, the village residents learned that one of their own boys, Henry Shipman, joined the ranks of the war amputees.¹⁷² In a letter dated July 22nd, Shipman wrote:

I still have my life, health, and strength, but have lost my left leg just above the knee. It was caused by a bomb dropped from an airplane. My sergeant who was next to me was killed so you can see I am very lucky. There has been a lot doing up front lately and I was with the boys awhile, but I caught mine early in the game. The Germans are getting a few of us and we are slaughtering them.¹⁷³

¹⁶² *Bement Register*, 4 July 1918.

¹⁶³ *Bement Register*, 18 July 1918.

¹⁶⁴ *Bement Register*, 4 July 1918.

¹⁶⁵ *Bement Register*, 8 August 1918.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *Bement Register*, 15 August 1918.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Bement Register*, 8 August 1918.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Bement Register*, 15 August 1918.

¹⁷² *Bement Register*, 22 August 1918.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

Another former resident of Bement was an aviator. H.H. Strauch, a former Bement High School instructor had a series of letters printed that week. In the first letter, dated on June 22nd, Strauch stated:

On the front, yet I have experienced no elements of thrill or excitement. I have absolutely lost all elements of fear. I say that this is a very moderate sort of war. In fact, I even have all the different kind of drinks at my disposal beer, French wines, champagne (sic), rum, etc.¹⁷⁴

His July 16th letter had a more excited tone as Strauch claimed:

Got my first Boche machine today. Boy! It's the greatest sport I've ever had but dangerous to say the least. One of the fellows on formation was shot down. There were 3 German Albatrosses on my tail. His machine fell east of Chateau Thierry.¹⁷⁵

Readers of the *Register* would later learn that the local teacher turned flyboy won the French *Croix de Guerre*. Bement Boy John Carlin wrote how he met Strauch while in France in his September 3rd letter.¹⁷⁶

In the August 22nd *Bement Register*, R.R. Lane explained how the newspaper was going to be forced to reduced its print circulation by 15% in the coming months because of government regulations.¹⁷⁷ To encourage people of the village to subscribe to the newspaper in advance, the Register planned to provide a photo album of area servicemen to people free of charge. Residents were encouraged to submit pictures of their loved ones in their military uniform and to provide information on their whereabouts.¹⁷⁸

Mitch Loughran, a former mechanic at the Bodman Garage, probably had the most adventurous story of all the Bement Boys. His submarine was sunk 800 miles of the coast of France by a German U-Boat. Surviving off of six crackers, Mitch and fourteen of his fellow sailors drifted nearly 170 miles before being rescued by a British ship.¹⁷⁹ Loughran wrote that upon arriving back in England, he received word that his brother had been killed in battle on July 17th.

In the same issue as Loughran's tale, a letter from wounded Bement Boy Harry Shipman was printed. Recovering from his wounds at Ellis Island in New York City, Shipman wrote "I saw some real active service and got some of those Huns. I was there for five days and they were too thick to miss many shots. I was wounded at Chateau Thierry.¹⁸⁰ A month later, Shipman would submit another letter to the *Register* about his experiences at the front. Now resting in Reed Hospital in Washington D.C., Henry wrote:

about 12'o clock the Germans decided to warm things up and they began by sending a machine gun barrage across the river. No man could stand up and keep his health. They decided to mix some big shells and some gas. Two rifle

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ *Bement Register*, 10 October 1918.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ *Bement Register* 26 September 1918.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

pits were taken out. I said to my friend, 'Jack we are in a bad place and only the Lord can save us now.' Well, we got back to a ditch with a captain in it. The rest of the boys didn't make it back.¹⁸¹

The *Bement Register* also printed a brief letter from local war hero Albert Parker. In a letter dated September 17, 1918, Parker wrote about his latest combat against the Germans:

We slipped up on them in a rainy battle along occupied France. Prisoners were 14-15 years old at the youngest and 55-60 at the oldest. In many places whole companies were taken without firing a shot while others would use a machine gun on us until we got within a few yards of them and then they would throw up their hands and yell 'kamerad.' The real mud beating the Germans is the Liberty Loan Bond.¹⁸²

Like many places across the United States, Bement was hit by the influenza virus in October of 1918. The headline "Four Bement Boys Die of Influenza," appeared ominously on the front page of October 10th's *Register*. Cleo Reeder died at Great Lakes Naval Station, while Walter Clarkson and Gust Larson passed away at Camp Grant, Illinois. Clarkson's parents were able to make the trip up to Chicago to be with their ill son before he died. Another boy, Edmund Lumsden of Monticello, also perished at Camp Grant.¹⁸³

The residents of Bement were also succumbing to the pandemic. Cecil Clyde Warren, Dr. Havery M. Vance, Mrs. Julia McIntosh, and Mart Ellars all died before the end of October.¹⁸⁴ With over three-hundred people infected by the virus, all public gatherings were banned. The public school briefly suspended classes and the burning of leaves was prohibited.¹⁸⁵ Only immediate family members and close friends were allowed to attend the funerals of influenza victims out of the fear that the illness could be spread.¹⁸⁶

In the November 7th *Bement Register*, the last paper printed before the end of the war, two letters from Charles Lambert were printed. In the first letter, dated September 17th, 1918, Lambert described how he had taken part in the drive on St. Miheil. After a fourteen hour bombardment, he was able to get into the German trench network. He was amazed at the fact that the Germans had knickknacks and electrical lighting down in their bunkers. October 4th's letter described how the Bement Boy made his way through the Verdun sector. Lambert was now the proud owner of a German belt buckle bearing the inscription "Gott Mit Uns," that the soldier "got off a dead German the other day."¹⁸⁷

The "War to End All Wars," came to a conclusion on Monday, November 11th, 1918. Bement residents received word of the armistice around 2:00 AM that morning. Large crowds gathered in the streets as whistles and church bells were blown and rang until daylight came.¹⁸⁸ Bonfires were lit in many places around town. All the town's businesses were closed on Monday.¹⁸⁹ A "Funeral Service for the Kaiser," was celebrated on Tuesday by a parade led by

¹⁸¹ *Bement Register*, 24 October 1918.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Bement Register*, 10 October 1918.

¹⁸⁴ *Bement Register*, 24 October 1918.

¹⁸⁵ *Bement Register*, 10 October 1918.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Bement Register*, 7 November 1918.

¹⁸⁸ *Bement Register*, 14 November 1918.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

John W. Smith, an eighty-eight year old veteran of the Union Army. The local Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) flag, as well the 5th Illinois Cavalry colors were carried at the front of the march.¹⁹⁰

Bement residents, whilst basking in the light of the armistice, still felt compelled to thank God for the triumph of their nation. “Victory Services” were held at an unmentioned location; however, the venue must have been large enough to hold hundreds of the town’s residents. Prayers were given by Reverend Father Selk, Reverend W.E. Olmsted, and Reverend D.M. Durham.¹⁹¹ After the ceremony, a memorial service was held in the Christian Church for fallen Bement Boy John L. Ditty.¹⁹² John was killed in France while serving in the U.S. Army on September 13, 1918.¹⁹³ John Concannon, an Ivesdale soldier serving in the same unit as Ditty, later wrote how the fallen soldier’s grave was located on top of a pretty hill in the French countryside.¹⁹⁴ Miss Betty Ditty, John’s sister, died of influenza before the end of November.¹⁹⁵

Given the communications technology that was available in the early twentieth century, Bementonians learned about the last of their fallen Boys in the month of December 1918. Albert Parker, the teenage war hero, had not written his parents for several weeks.¹⁹⁶ His parent’s fears were confirmed in the first week of December when they were informed of his October 15th death, by way of a government telegram.¹⁹⁷ Posthumously promoted to sergeant, Albert left behind his parents, six sisters and two brothers.¹⁹⁸ Herbert Halterman, another Bement Boy fighting in France was confirmed to be missing in action. Halterman went missing sometime between October 4th and the 12th.¹⁹⁹ Harry Strauch, the brave and somewhat cocky fighter pilot was shot down and killed on October 8th.²⁰⁰

As the year 1918 ended, there was little mention of the war in the *Bement Register*. There were still periodic updates on the whereabouts of local servicemen, but the residents of the township concerned themselves with the issue of providing full stime electrical service to both Bement and Ivesdale. Wounded Bement Boy, Henry Shipman made it back to town by February 6th.²⁰¹ On February 27th, 1919, a large number of returning Piatt County veterans were greeted at Monticello.²⁰² Carl Eaton continued to write letters to his mother, although they were no longer published in the *Register*. Eaton would go on to make a career of the Navy. He was killed while battling the Japanese Navy on December 17th, 1942. Henry Shipman, the wounded Bement Boy who wrote to his hometown while recovering in East Coast hospital, was the town’s last World War One battle death. While he went on to have six children with his wife, the effects of the mustard gas that he had been exposed to, made him susceptible to pneumonia. He died of that condition on December 30th, 1927.²⁰³

Bement continued to be a railroad and agricultural hub for the area after the war. The sons and daughters of the Bement Boys would grow up to fight in the larger conflagration of

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ *Bement Township World War One Veterans Album*.

¹⁹⁴ *Bement Register*, 28 November 1918.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ *Bement Register*, 5 December 1918.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ *Bement Register*, 28 November 1918.

²⁰¹ *Bement Register*, 6 February 1919.

²⁰² *Bement Register*, 27 February 1919.

²⁰³ *Piatt County World War One Veterans Obituary Record Book*

the Second World War. For both generations, military service was no doubt an eye-opening and horizon-widening event. The Great War was an opportunity for the citizens of Bement to demonstrate their patriotism and loyalty to the country. While the war was chronologically short, the impact of the conflict was no doubt greatly felt by those who lived through it. Today, the local chapter of the American Legion bears Albert Parker's name. As of 2011, a new generation of Bement Boys and Girls are no doubt proudly serving their country just as their fore-fathers did nearly a century ago.