

OVER THERE - THE WORLD WAR I YEARS

The ringing phrase "Over There" really was a definition of what the war meant to many in America, and in Yates County particularly. Despite the expansion of view that the past few decades had brought, most in the rural countryside were strongly isolationist and wanted nothing to do with the incomprehensible quarrels of the Old World.

The *Penn Yan Democrat*, obviously, favored Wilson's re-election in 1916. Though reporting largely on the Irish revolution, the editor pretty much ignored the greater conflict already underway in Europe. On November 3, while endorsing Wilson, he said the only issue in the campaign was whether the President's policy with regard to Germany and Mexico had the support of the people. His conclusion: "The people of this country do not want war."

The election was so close, and depended so strongly on the returns from faraway California, that the *Democrat* was a day late going to press in order to report who finally won. One advantage of the delay, the editor thought, was that it gave both sides time to celebrate. Even yet, Wilson's re-election was ascribed to the desire of Americans to stay clear of the European war.

Of course, American soldiers were still adventuring with Pershing along the Mexican border. The Post Office Department had to issue a directive reminding the army that it was illegal to send souvenir lizards and tarantulas via the mails to relatives at home. Evidently the troops were complaining bitterly about the conditions in Mexico, the long forced marches and the total lack of fighting. The *Penn Yan Democrat* also devoted many columns to the revolution in Ireland. Many Americans, particularly those of Irish descent, failed to share the President's anglophilic sentiments. A Christmas relief collection was taken up for the Montenegrins and Serbians. In March, front page status was given to the first-ever sighting of evening grosbeaks in Penn Yan; sharing the limelight was a recent sleet storm found to have killed more than 90 percent of the county's peach buds.

On January 2, 1917 alongside strange reports culled from a wide-eyed New York paper (much to the amusement of the local people, who knew better) that a pack of wolves made off with a 12-year-old girl in Benton and others had been sighted in Italy Valley, the *Democrat* noted Germany's announcement of unrestricted submarine warfare. "The situation appears to be fraught with danger." A week later, the paper said it would support the President, no matter what his decision was.

War was declared on April 6. "President Wilson's address was a masterly array and presentation of the facts," the paper said. "He makes it plain that our fight is against the government and not against the people of Germany. Our relations with the people of German descent in this country will continue to be friendly."

And in a startling misapprehension of the President's intentions, the editorial continued: "We can see no reason at the present time for believing that American troops will be sent to France to fight Germany."

The nation - and Yates County with it - went flag-crazy. An open display of patriotism was mandatory. Notices on "How and When to Fly the Flag"

appeared and German immigrant Jacob Bockstahler was forced to make a public denial - printed in the *Democrat* on April 13 - asserting that he had not in fact objected to flying an American flag on his feed store in the Danish Brotherhood building. An incident generated in great detail by suspicion and rumor had never even happened.

All wireless transmitters were banned, and foreigners were forbidden to own firearms, ammunition, aircraft, signalling devices or documents in code, cipher or invisible writing. "It is not wise to destroy these articles, or hide them, or turn them over to citizen friends, as people known once to have had such things would make themselves objects of suspicion."

Freedom of speech went by the wayside. U. S. Marshal John D. Lynn of Rochester requested the local papers to publish "War Rules": "Any person who tears down the United States flag, or otherwise insults or desecrates it, or insults the government or the President, its head, by hostile or abusive words or actions, will be summarily dealt with, without mercy.... There is no reason for people to get hysterical or nervous about this. It is easy to obey the law; in fact one must go out of his way to disobey it, and he has little claim to mercy if he does.... I hope no resident of this county will compel us to use summary power in this matter."

The large number of German and Danish immigrants in Yates County - not to mention the Irish, with their traditional and well-justified hatred of the English - evidently prompted the sheriff to post a notice warning residents not to interfere with their neighbors as long as they obeyed the laws. Elsewhere in the country people were burned out of their homes and in a few cases actually lynched merely because they had German surnames, but there is no record of violence or even widespread resentment against the immigrants in Yates County.

Still, the federal propaganda machine was in full cry. On 1 August 1917, for example, a U. S. government warning was issued against the use of court plaster, because, it was said, German agents were busy spreading tetanus and typhoid by poisoning the product, largely sold by itinerant peddlers.

The *Democrat* continued to be a little dubious. The paper opposed the government's efforts toward prohibition of alcoholic beverages as a war measure. "If Congress or the President should bring about legislation prohibiting the manufacture and sale of beer, we believe the greatest industrial strike in the history of this country would follow."

In July the first draft was held (basically, all the soldiers were to be chosen through a selective draft rather than by calling for volunteers). The *Chronicle's* Dresden correspondent noted on July 25 that "the draft has taken some of our best men. We hope they will be exempted for some cause." On the 3rd of August some 224 men were called for their medical examinations. The first five draftees left on Sunday, September 9, for Camp Dix.

These first five men, by the way, finally made it to the front the following April. One of them, Charles Costello, sent a letter home to his parents, "I am feeling fine and there is no cause for worry." He had already died of meningitis by the time the ship made port and his letter sent. He was 25.

Gradually the lives of people at home changed. Not only were both papers dominated by pictures and stories about draftees and, later, the fighting in France that involved them; but traffic on the lakes and railroads was choked off, automobile travel became more and more difficult, and that winter of 1917-18 a terrible coal shortage gripped the nation. In January the Penn Yan & Lakeshore Railway - which carried the mail - had to suspend service for lack of fuel. Branchport postmistress Nellie McCall arranged a liveryman to carry the mail twice a day. She had to telegraph Washington for permission to do this. Finally a big autobus was put on the route and an announcement made that the trolley would resume a limited schedule as soon as more coal arrived.

William N. Wise was the county's Fuel Administrator - the war necessitated a whole new bureaucracy - and announced that the local coal yards were practically empty but he hoped to get several carloads by the end of the week. Street lights, electric signs and show windows were forbidden to be lighted except on Saturday nights only. Later in the month "coalless Mondays" were enforced on the county's households. Local garages and service stations closed nights and Sundays, to conserve labor and fuel.

Calvin J. Huson, a local man, was the director of production for the State Food Commission. He published notices urging farmers and indeed all households to raise pigs. He noted that if fifty hogs were to be raised in every village in the state, the swine population would be increased by more than 50,000. A shortage of cottage cheese was said to have been caused by the Allies' buying it up as a source of casein, a necessary ingredient in munitions manufacture. Fruit pits and nutshells were collected to make the charcoal used in gas masks.

The *Yates County Chronicle*, which favored prohibition, published a cartoon depicting a "fat cat" complete with top hat, flashy plaid pants, cigar and a bulging vest labeled "Liquor Interests" taking the food crop from a soldier and a sailor with empty plates. The caption was "Must they go hungry?" The same theme was aired in a June 1917 editorial: "Shall we lose with liquor or win without it?" The writer went on to point out alcohol's numerous battlefield applications. Farm workers were exempt from the draft and bombarded constantly with warnings about food shortages and the necessity to farm more acreage and increase production.

Women were seen more and more as a neglected labor resource. Within two weeks of the declaration of war, local women met to organize for relief and service work. Evidently this brought people into contact who were not used to it. In June 1917 *The Chronicle* noted that, "if the work of the Red Cross is to be the success in Penn Yan that it is in many of the smaller towns in this vicinity, it will be necessary for the social barriers to be broken. Many of Penn Yan's best women ... are not doing their share simply because they feel that others will not treat them as an equal. No one speaking to another can be contaminated in any way." Nurses were much in demand and inducements were made to local women to enlist. More than once the papers mentioned the need for nurses "in great numbers."

The Metropolitan advertised bloomerettes and overalls for women, "convenient work clothes of khaki cloth and heavy blue drill." The Women's Land Army was organized, groups of women who lived in tents under the care of a

chaperone and did farmwork. They were under specific orders to house and feed themselves lest they be an added burden to the farm wives. The number of women entering the job market was higher than ever. Even the patent-medicine purveyors began to notice. "Driving the Brain Starts the Pain," asserted one ad for Dr. Miles' Nervine, embellished with a line drawing of a drooping female typist; the preparation was said to be particularly invaluable for "business women." The Associated Press was seeking women press operators. "Women, it is said, usually make good operators," was the ringing endorsement the *Democrat* made to this appeal.

In January 1918 the *Democrat* mentioned somewhat tartly that "it is no longer unpatriotic to discuss peace" now that Lloyd George and Wilson had conferred - the result being the famous Fourteen Points. "May they bear fruit before the harvest of death engulfs the young men of America." The paper had been reprimanded for mentioning that a military guard was posted in Hammondsport around the Curtiss aircraft plant there; they agreed not to print such information again but stoutly defended - bravely, under the circumstances (papers had been put out of business for less) - the sensibility of printing information that everyone knew who had eyes to see.

The shortages of coal, rubber and grain continued. Other products were aggressively advertised, with no evident embarrassment at using the war for promotion. "Your farm shelled? Do you think this could never happen? That is what the farmers thought in Northern France. If we do not win the war it may happen here," threatened one local bank selling Liberty Bonds.

Parish's Garage was selling Dodges, Chevrolets and Mitchells in the spring of 1918. "Ask boys in any U.S. Camp about Dodge Brothers cars. They have been accepted as service car of the Army. Why? Because they are reliable and economical." *The Chronicle's* readers were told that "Five Great Navies Endorse the Battery with Super-Hard Plates." These were Gould Batteries, sold at Sprague's Garage.

One of the funnier ads - to modern eyes; the humor is evidently unintentional - was one that appeared in the fall of 1917 for chewing gum: "S.O.S. Send Over Some Wrigley's" read the large black headline. The product gave lasting refreshment, protection against thirst and helped the appetite and digestion. It was "an outstanding feature of the War - All the British Army are Chewing It."

It was apparent by fall of 1918 that the war was drawing to a close. Competing for space in the papers was the dreadful epidemic of "Spanish influenza" that eventually killed more people worldwide than the war itself. Commercial interests did not hesitate to use people's fear to sell their products: "Do not wait until you feel the symptoms of the dreaded disease coming on, for then it is too late." This was for a "blood purifier" called Goldine, made by the Seneca Drug Co. in Geneva and sold locally by W. W. Quackenbush. In Middlesex Center as late as January 1919 there were 125 cases. The schools and churches were closed to prevent contagion and most businesses because of lack of workers. Dr. Chaffee in Middlesex made as many as 77 calls in one day.

Earlier, the *Chronicle* reported "many deaths" from the disease. On October 30, 1918 it was reported that the churches would be closed the following

Sunday, by Health Department decree. Church bells would be rung as usual so people could pray at home; prayers were printed in the paper for their convenience.

Word came of the war's end at 2:45 a.m. on November 11, 1918. A premature announcement a couple of days earlier had set off a demonstration then; but when the real thing came everyone went wild. The church bells woke everyone in Penn Yan and a street parade made up spontaneously, with several thousand people burning the Kaiser in effigy and dancing around a bonfire at the four corners. All places of business were closed for the day.

In Dundee, the largest parade in the village's history was formed, with more than 100 automobiles decorated and trimmed for the occasion, 20 persons on horseback and dressed in masquerade, the faculty and students of the grade and high schools, and a drum corps. A coffin - all this was supposed to represent the Kaiser's funeral - was conveyed to the four corners and there burned. Speeches went on for hours, and here too all businesses were closed for the day.

Most of the county's casualties were victims of sickness rather than battle. During the celebration on November 11, while the bells still rang and people made their uproar of relief in the streets of Penn Yan, word came to Mr. and Mrs. Adelbert Wheeler on Liberty Street that their only child Charles was dead in France of pneumonia following influenza.

The previous summer the *Chronicle* featured an editorial noting how many changes people had seen in their recent lives, with the coming of the automobile particularly. Traffic almost ceased during the war, the steamboats and the railroads no longer bringing in gay parties of excursioners. The war would end eventually, and traffic resume, and still more changes would come, the editor thought. "Perhaps the automobile will bring more people to the shores of the lake than it has taken away.... Whatever comes, the water and the hills will remain."

BARRINGTON

1933

State Routes 230 and 14A - the latter still following its erratic early course - were paved by this time; so was Route 54. The last was rebuilt a little later in the decade somewhat farther from the lake, to allow more room for cottages. The right-angled turn on 14A at Porter's Corners was the scene of many accidents. In July of 1920 a new Studebaker bearing a party of seven back home to Corning failed to make the turn. Joseph Porter stood on his porch and watched the car - he swore it was moving at 60 mph - go through the siding of his barn and crash through the floor into the cellar. Two women were seriously injured, and liquor was found in the car.

Barrington (as Warsaw was now called) and Crystal Spring were small centers of population at this time; Crosby was smaller still, maintaining its church but no longer the center of a basketmaking industry.

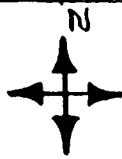
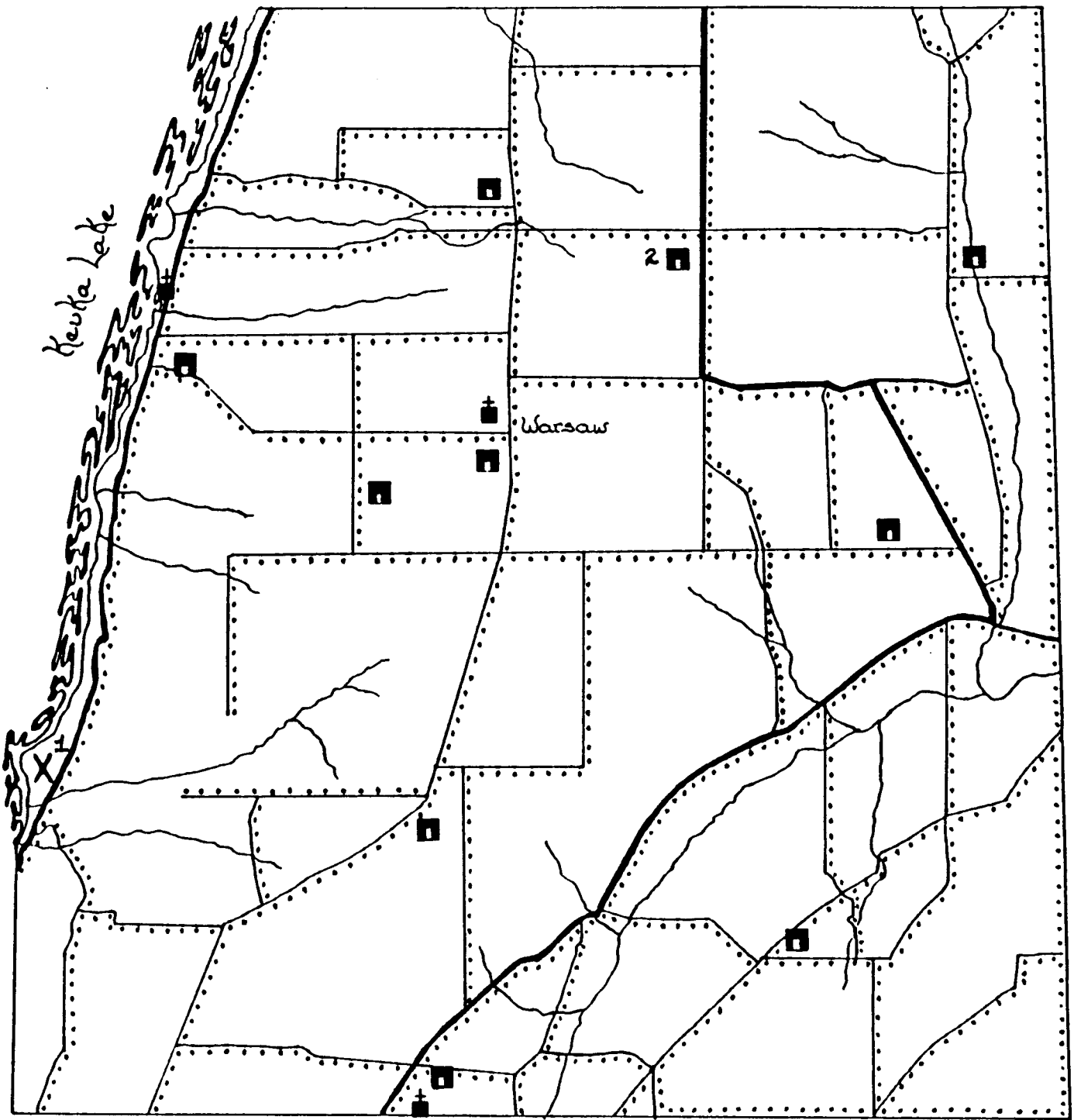
Camp Arey was in its fresh-air girl phase at this time.

Ten country schools served the population of the town.

In 1919 William Knapp and Horace Kenyon set up a sawmill on the Knapp Road. This business continued for 60 years and was the forerunner of the Knapp & Schlappi Lumber Co. business that operated first on the Sturdevant Road in the town and now on Lake Street in Penn Yan.

Camp Arey (1) is now a seasonal trailer park. The beautiful glen uphill from the highway is on private property.

One of Barrington's rural schools (2) was moved to the campus of the Dundee Central School. It has been restored to its original condition and is now used as an educational exhibit.



Barrington
1933

□	schools
⊕	churches
⋮	roads
—	paved road