On April 7, 1917, following votes in the House and Senate, President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation formally declaring war against Germany. The most famous dissenter was Montana’s own Jeannette Rankin, who cast her first vote—in fact, the first vote cast by any woman in Congress—against the war. Rankin was not alone; forty-nine of her colleagues in the House and six senators also voted no.

Significantly, many Montanans agreed with Rankin. Montana was still a young state and largely populated by recent immigrants. In 1910, two-thirds of Montanans were either immigrants or the children of immigrants, and many of them retained strong ties to their home countries. Montana’s second-largest immigrant group (after Canadians) was the Irish, many of whom vehemently opposed any alliance with England. Over 8,600 Montanans had been born in Germany and another 8,300 in Austria (though not all Austrians supported the empire). Additionally, the Russian-German Mennonites who homesteaded in eastern Montana had a religious commitment to pacifism.

Outspoken opponents included some industrial labor unions and socialists who embraced the concept of syndicalism, where workers owned and profited from the means of production. They strongly opposed participating in what they saw as a “rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight” and promoted the idea of international brotherhood. The Industrial Workers of the World, established in 1905, proved the most ardent proponent of this ideology. Vehemently objecting to the war and a universal draft, they pushed for a general strike in mining, logging, and agriculture to achieve their goal of industrial democracy.

On the other hand, many other Montanans strongly supported the war. Outraged at German U-boat attacks on American ships, beginning in 1915, and by reports of German atrocities, including “the rape of Belgium,” they believed that—as President Wilson claimed—the United States had no choice but to enter the fight to make the world “safe for democracy.” Roughly 12,500 Montanans voluntarily enlisted in the armed services, and by war’s end another 23,000 had entered military service as draftees. As families saw their fathers, brothers, neighbors, and sons head to France, patriotism—and anti-German sentiment—grew, as did hostility toward people and organizations who opposed the war.

The result was a Montana in conflict with itself. In this, Montana was not alone. According to historian David Kennedy, “the war came at a time of peculiarly...
intense disagreements about the principles . . . American society should embody.” Americans fiercely debated the appropriate role of government in the economy, the effects of immigration on American culture, and the proper relationship between individual freedom and the common good. Thus, Kennedy claimed, “Americans went to war in 1917 not only against Germans in the fields of France but against each other at home. They entered on a deadly serious contest to determine the consequences of the crisis for the character of American economic, social, and political life.”

In Montana, that contest came to a head with the August 1, 1917, lynching of Industrial Workers of the World organizer Frank Little in Butte and, beginning in April 1918, the arrest and imprisonment of seventy-nine people for “sedition,” defined by the Montana legislature as uttering, printing, writing, or publishing any disloyal, profane, violent, scurrilous, contemptuous, slurring or abusive language about the form of government of the United States, or the constitution of the United States, or the soldiers or sailors of the United States, or the flag of the United States, or the uniform of the army or navy of the United States . . . [or any speech] calculated to incite or inflame resistance to any duly constituted Federal or State authority in connection with the prosecution of the War.

At other times, the conflict was less explicit: advertisers quietly withdrawing their support from
the *Montana Staats-Zeitung* (one of Montana’s German-language newspapers) or men choosing to marry to avoid service since the military only drafted single men.

Faced with the task of interpreting this complicated history, the Montana Historical Society (MHS) is commemorating the centennial of this transformative historical event in a variety of ways. A web-based project, “Montana and the Great War,” highlights the diversity of Montanans’ experiences, expectations, and ideologies during World War I. At the heart of this project are a series of ArcGIS Story Maps. These interactive maps feature seventy vignettes from forty-one of Montana’s fifty-six counties in addition to providing data on military enlistment numbers and ethnicity. The brief vignettes reflect the ways the war changed the lives of Montanans both at home and while serving overseas—as well as ways the war continued to impact Montanans’ lives into the 1920s.

The “Montana and the Great War” web page also provides links to pertinent articles regarding Montanans’ experiences during the war, including twenty-one from *Montana The Magazine of Western History*; information on World War I-era archival

**Native American Courage** In 1917, the U.S. government considered most tribal members “dependent wards” rather than citizens. Nevertheless, an estimated ten thousand Indians served and, once in France, were often assigned the most dangerous duties. They suffered casualty rates five times greater than the American Expeditionary Forces as a whole, and many, including Peter Barnaby (right) of the Flathead Reservation, earned citations for distinguished service. Barnaby (Co. I, 26th Inf., 1st Div.) received the Croix de Guerre for his heroism in the bloody battle of Meuse-Argonne.

**Mob Action** In March 1918, an angry Lewistown mob pursued men they believed to be “pro-German,” demanding they prove their allegiance by waving and kissing the flag. Among their targets was George Anderson, whom they threatened to Lynch because he had refused to buy Liberty Bonds on religious grounds. The mob also seized and burned the high school’s German textbooks. The newspaper reported, “Fully two thousand people joined the evening parade, which served as a finale to the day’s events.”
Montana’s Birdmen  World War I was the first major conflict involving aircraft. Of the eight thousand U.S. fliers, five hundred served in observation squadrons, conducting dangerous reconnaissance missions over enemy territory in flimsy airplanes that many described as “flaming coffins.” Glasgow’s William Belzer, one of five Montana observers, served in the 135th Aero Observation Squadron and saw action in the Saint-Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives. He received the Distinguished Service Cross for completing multiple reconnaissance missions while fighting off German fighter pilots.

collections in the MHS Research Center; clips from oral histories, also held in the Research Center; lesson plans; and links to twenty-six Montana newspapers that have issues from the World War I period available online through the MHS’s newspaper digitization project. Creating this digital project required contributions from every MHS program and demonstrated the staff’s impressive range of expertise—from research and writing to using ArcGIS mapping software and editing sound recordings. The “Montana and the Great War” web page and the ArcGIS Story Maps can be found at http://mhs.mt.gov/education/wwi.

The World War I centennial extends through November 11, 1918, and the Montana Historical Society’s examination of the centennial and its impact continues as well. The Original Governor’s Mansion, which MHS curates, has focused its tours

The “Bonus Expeditionary Force”  In 1924, Congress authorized bonuses for World War I veterans, to be redeemed in 1945. Suffering during the Great Depression, forty-three thousand veterans and their supporters marched on Washington in 1932, demanding an early payout. Police and regular army troops destroyed the marchers’ camps after months of unsuccessful protest. Afterwards, the Bonus Expeditionary Force continued to hold rallies, including one in Dillon. Veterans finally received their bonuses in 1936—nine years early but too late for many.
on home front activism for the course of the anniversary. Titled “Doing Our Bit: Montana’s Home Front during the Great War,” this anniversary tour offers a hands-on look at how Montana women and children supported the war. In late 2017, the Museum will debut a more comprehensive exhibit, “Times of Trouble, Times of Change: Montana and the Great War,” that will run through the spring of 1919. Throughout the year and a half centennial, MHS will feature special programming exploring the war and its consequences. World War I also fits into the theme of the forty-fourth annual Montana History Conference: “Montana, 1917: Time of Trouble, Time of Change.” The conference is scheduled for September 21–23, 2017, in Helena.

The Montana Historical Society has also been digitizing archival World War I material, making it available online through the Montana Memory Project (montanamemory.org). With the assistance of MHS volunteers, the World War I military service cards from the Montana Attorney General’s Office records are already available. Recently, the MHS Research Center began digitizing the Montana Council of Defense records. Established during World War I to coordinate county war efforts, the Council of Defense also investigated cases of alleged disloyal activities and passed several ordinances that had the force of law. These ordinances included making it illegal to hold church services in German, prohibiting parades and demonstrations without a permit, and requiring “every adult person having the necessary physical and mental capacity and ability to do so, to work and engage in some legitimate occupation for at least five days during each calendar week for the period of the existing war.”

Researchers from across the country will be able to access these digitized records, but we hope, especially, that digitizing them will help high school students and teachers engaged in authentic, primary source research. With support from MHS staff, high school classes in over a dozen Montana counties will conduct research on how the war affected people in their communities to create web-based projects of their own. We will link these county-based projects on the “Montana and the Great War” web page as the schools complete them.

Pulling together this multifaceted centennial project has provided an opportunity to reflect on history, memory, and the relative significance (or insignificance) of anniversaries. It has also led to discussions about ways history can shed light on contemporary politics. Many of the issues Montanans struggled with during World War I we still debate today: What does it mean to be a “good” American? Are immigrants living in the United States a threat to our security or way of life? Does our economic system work for everyone—and, if not, is there anything we can do to fix that? What does it mean to “support our troops”? Should there be any limits on dissent or freedom of speech? What is patriotism?

We invite you to participate in this centennial commemoration by exploring the Story Maps and the “Montana and the Great War” web page. Check out the newly digitized archival resources and enjoy touring the exhibits. We hope you will listen to the voices of our shared past—of war supporters and war opponents, Red Cross workers and German parishioners, miners and railroad workers, pacifists and soldiers, farmers and nurses, leaders and gold star mothers—and then ask yourself what has changed, what has remained the same, and what might we learn from examining the history of World War I.

guardianship of Anna. Dedman and Newell, Empty Mansions, 48.

22. Excerpts of the letter are in Mangam, The Clarks, 102.

23. The letter is paraphrased by Mangam and supposedly dated July 6, 1904. Mangam claimed that the elder Clark wanted the letter destroyed after his son read it. No other record of the correspondence exists. Ibid., 102, 111.

24. Gordon notes, in reference to Clark’s backstory, that “[t]he secret to getting away with a big lie is making sure all of the minor facts are straight.” Gordon, Phantom of Fifth Avenue, 68.

25. Butte Weekly Miner, June 17, 1901.


27. Ibid., June 7, 1901.

28. In late May 1900, for example, he footed a wedding for his oldest daughter, Katherine, that included a guest list in excess of six thousand, including the entire New York social register, and was catered by Del Monaco’s, New York Herald, May 29, 1900.


31. The lengthy story also contains an elaborate fiction about a long, idyllic honeymoon the pair spent immediately after the May 1901 marriage. A search of New York City Municipal Archives conducted by staff on March 11, 2011, produced no record of marriage deposited by LaChapelle.

32. The court later determined that the three women were not Clark’s children. “The matter of the estate of William A. Clark, deceased, Alina E. Clark Hines, Effie L. Clark McWilliams, and Addie L. Clark Miller, plaintiffs, v. Anne E. Clark, Huguette Marcelle Clark, Mary C. de Armbrant, Katherine L. Morris, Charles W. Miller, William A. Clark, Jr., et al.,” 1926, case 7594, Montana District Court of the Second Judicial District, Silver Bow County. Transcript located in the Butte-Silver Bow County Archives, Butte, Montana.

33. Gordon, Phantom of Fifth Avenue, 63.

34. Quoted in Malone, Battle for Butte, 12–13.

The Great War

1. Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken In The Year, 1910: Statistics For Montana . . . (Washington: General Publishing Office, 1913), 588. Total population of Montana in 1910 was 376,053.

