

The Impact of the First World War

This section will help you meet the following objective:

8.5.06 Describe North Carolina's reaction to the increasing United States involvement in world affairs including participation in World War I, and evaluate the impact on the state's economy.

As you read, look for:

- North Carolina's contribution to the war effort in World War I
- the effects of the war on North Carolina and the country
- vocabulary terms **armistice**, **strike**, **Great Migration**



Above: Many more soldiers were killed in World War I than in any previous war. Deadly new weapons like the machine gun were one of the reasons.

In 1914, the assassination of a national leader in Europe threw that continent into all-out war involving almost all of its nations. Since European nations controlled colonies throughout the world, it became known as the World War. The principal combatants were Great Britain and France who fought against Germany and Austria. Later, when conflict emerged



again, the initial war took the name World War I. The first war lasted five years, and toward the end of it the United States took a decisive role in its outcome.

North Carolina had a significant influence on the United States's presence in World War I. It was true for both politics and economics.

North Carolinians and the World War

For the first time in American history, North Carolina exerted its influence over the United States. Woodrow Wilson, who had been born in Virginia and spent much of his youth in Wilmington, was president. He had close friends from North Carolina like Ambassador Walter Hines Page and Josephus Daniels, a Raleigh editor who was named secretary of the navy in Wilson's cabinet. This was the first time a North Carolinian had been in the cabinet since the Civil War. In addition, several Tar Heel senators and congressmen headed committees that made key decisions about fighting in the war.

North Carolinians also showed their individual courage in the conflict. Even before the United States entered the war, two North Carolinians—Kiffin Rockwell of Asheville and James McConnell of Carthage—volunteered in the Lafayette Escadrille, a squadron of that new weapon of war, the airplane. The Escadrille was made up of Americans who fought under the French flag. Both Rockwell and McConnell were killed in action.

After the U.S. entry into the war in 1917, the federal government drafted (conscripted) all single young men into service. North Carolina provided 86,000 soldiers. A little more than 2,000 died of wounds and disease. In

Above: Kiffin Rockwell of Asheville (second from left) and James R. McConnell of Carthage (far right) served in the French Lafayette Escadrille before the U.S. entered World War I.

Did You Know?

In his address to Congress, President Wilson asked Americans to fight a war “to make the world safe for democracy.”



Top: The 41st Division poses for a group portrait at Camp Greene.

Above: The Raleigh Iron Works made explosive shell casings for artillery during World War I.



this war, for the first time, North Carolinians fought in units with soldiers from other states. One army division, called “Old Hickory” after President Andrew Jackson, was made up primarily of North Carolinians. It helped break the German defensive line at a crucial point in the war.

To train all these troops, the federal government set up three enlistment camps across North Carolina. The largest, Camp Greene in Charlotte, had tents and barracks to house 50,000 troops, more than the population of the city. The other camps were Camp Polk in Raleigh

and Camp Bragg in Fayetteville. Camp Bragg, named for Civil War general Braxton Bragg, later developed into Fort Bragg.

The Economics of War

The tobacco industry in the state greatly profited from the stresses of the war. More factories were needed across the nation to make weapons and other military materials. Smoking cigarettes increased as more people worked longer hours. The breakup of the Duke family’s tobacco monopoly worked out well for North Carolina since it gave the state more tobacco companies. R. J. Reynolds Company in Winston-Salem came out with Camel cigarettes in 1913, just in time for wartime demand. The American Tobacco Company in Durham countered with Lucky Strike cigarettes. Liggett & Myers, the new Durham company, introduced Chesterfields. The three brands of cigarettes grew very popular during the war.

Because our federal government provided supplies for American, British, and French troops, many kinds of goods were needed to fight the



war. The Raleigh Iron Works made shell casings. The Cannon Manufacturing Company in Kannapolis provided sheets and towels for soldiers in the barracks. Each month for a year, the Bull Durham Company shipped thirty railroad boxcars full of tobacco—a total of eleven million sacks each time—for soldiers to roll their own cigarettes. One rail car advertised that “The Smoke That Follows The Flag Is Always Old Bull!”

The Home Front during the World War

Once again, support for the war varied in North Carolina depending upon where one lived. Folks in the countryside were generally patriotic, but they were less likely to share their meager savings by investing in war bonds (long-term IOUs issued to raise money for the war). In contrast, factory workers held contests throughout 1917 and 1918 to see who would buy the largest bonds during Liberty Loan drives. The graded schools held similar contests. Businessmen, who were finding the war-time profitable, gave back generously during the war drives to raise money.

One set of North Carolinians sometimes held back support. Many of the descendants of the Germans who settled the Piedmont did not want to fight people with the same heritage. In Catawba County, a few Germans actually protested the war, and several were arrested for disloyalty.

One set of North Carolinians was almost entirely loyal, African Americans. For the first time, blacks were drafted just like whites. Although blacks were still segregated in the army and often given menial duties rather than combat, their families back home showed just as much support as those on the white side of the tracks.

North Carolinians did without some daily comforts during the war. Children went house to house to collect pecan and walnut shells, which were made into filters for gas masks. Car owners were forced to have “gasoline-less Sundays” and were arrested if they drove anywhere. In the winter of 1917, coal ran low in many towns, and some families had heatless days.

The worst suffering came in 1918 when the worldwide epidemic of Spanish influenza hit the state. This was the worst health crisis in North

Did You Know?

North Carolinians, and other Americans, planted “victory gardens” to raise more food for themselves. Commercially grown food went to American troops and our allies.

THE ART OF POLITICS



Although North Carolina passed legislation in 1908, prohibition did not become nationwide until the passage of the Twentieth Amendment in 1920. Cartoonist Rollin Kirby created “Mr. Dry,” the black-coated, sour-faced killjoy who represented the worst elements of prohibitionists, an image quickly adopted by other cartoonists.

Carolina history. Sometimes half the workers in a factory were sick at the same time. Schools were closed for over a month in most places. Thousands died across the state during one of the coldest winters in decades.

Effects of the War

The Germans surrendered in November 1918. After the **armistice** (as the end of the war was called), many North Carolinians took almost a year to get home. At some point, each town held a special parade to honor them. Both black and white soldiers were together in the parade, but if a meal was served afterward, progressive society called for segregated tables.

North Carolina found itself richer because of the war. Farmers had gotten good prices for their tobacco and cotton. Because many men were absent, wages had gone up in many factories. All this changed with the return of the soldiers. They wanted their old jobs back, and, with the end of the war, the military needed fewer goods. North Carolina joined the rest of the United States in an economic slump in 1920 and 1921. Because so many manufacturers had made so much money during the war, they suffered only a little. Their workers, however, had their wages cut because of job competition and low demand for goods. There were some of the first real labor strikes in the state in Charlotte and Concord. (A **strike** occurs when workers refuse to work,

usually as a protest over some grievances.) The strikes soon stopped once it was apparent the owners could wait until the strikers ran out of money and food.

One of the biggest impacts of the war was the passage by Congress of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which gave women the right to vote. In North Carolina, most Democrats supported the idea, but the state legislature failed to ratify the constitutional amendment. However, other states gave the amendment its needed three-fourths majority, and women were able to vote in the November 1920 election. Some even ran for public office in 1920, but none were elected. At the same time, the Twentieth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution outlawed the sale and possession of alcoholic beverages, but North Carolina had had prohibition since 1908.

The war had an interesting and long-lasting impact upon segregated North Carolina. It created an opportunity for African Americans to leave the state and find better jobs in northern cities. In the North, black Tar

Heels could do things denied them in their native state, like vote and sit down in the same restaurants that whites used. So many blacks from across the South left that their action became known as the **Great Migration**. They moved principally to Washington, Philadelphia, and New York. By the end of the war, more than 25,000 lived in Manhattan, most of them in the growing African American community of Harlem. So many had gone to Philadelphia by the 1920s that the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company set up an office in west Philadelphia.

Some black North Carolinians became famous in Harlem, where African American art and culture flourished after the war. The artistic accomplishments of some of Harlem's residents became known as "the Harlem Renaissance." Mabel Hampton, a Winston-Salem native, became a noted dancer. Romare Bearden, who was born in Charlotte, worked at a series of jobs in New York until his paintings gained him fame and fortune. Bearden eventually became one of the most respected American artists of the twentieth century.

Although most of the black migrants lived in the North for the rest of their lives, they seldom broke their ties to back home. Many made annual visits to church homecomings and family reunions. They also continued to identify themselves as North Carolinians in their new home. Romare Bearden, even after becoming famous, claimed that he was always "at home in Charlotte" regardless of where he was or what he was doing.



Above: *Show Time (of the Blues)* by Charlotte native Romare Bearden. Bearden gained international fame as an artist of the Harlem Renaissance. Bearden's family joined the Great Migration to New York City during World War I.

It's Your Turn

1. When did the United States enter World War I?
2. Why did North Carolina and the rest of the United States experience an economic slump in 1920 and 1921?
3. To what does the term *Great Migration* refer?

CAROLINA PLACES

Chicamacomico Life-Saving Station

It has one of the longest and most unusual place names in North Carolina. Chicamacomico—pronounced “chik a ma COM ah co”—is a 400-year-old Indian name for a famous place on Hatteras Island. Between 1874 and 1954, it was home to one of the most famous Coast Guard units in history. The members of its lifesaving station repeatedly went

out into the fierce Atlantic to rescue sailors about to be lost to “the graveyard of the Atlantic.”

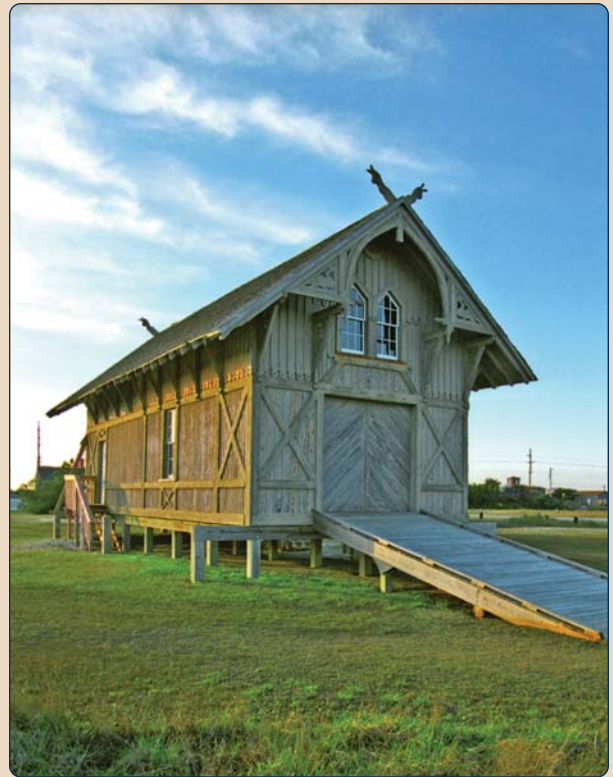
Chicamacomico is located in the village of Rodanthe. The lifesaving station building is one of the most beautiful structures in the state. The village also has a number of tiny cemeteries where the bodies of drowned sailors have been laid



to rest. One plot holds ninety sailors lost in one ship in 1891.

Soon after the Cape Hatteras lighthouse was built in 1871, Congress authorized the building of seven lifesaving stations every ten miles or so along the Outer Banks. The hope was to cut down on the great loss of life caused by the treacherous waters off Cape Hatteras, where the warm Gulf Stream meets the cooler Labrador Current.

The largest family on Hatteras Island since colonial days has been the Midgetts. The Midgetts have provided more “surfmens” to the Life-Saving Service (more than 150) than any banker family. Often, they were the entire crew at “Chicky,” as they called the station. Midgetts were said by one island resident to “know the precise instant to commit the boat, and returning from the sea, the precise instant it should be beached without harm to the boat, crew, or passengers.” During an 1899 hurricane, Rasmus Midgett went out into the sea by himself, nine times on horseback, and each time brought back a survivor from a ship cracked open



Left: The 1911 Station has been restored and is open to the public. **Above:** The original 1874 Station has also been restored.



by the waves. They are the most honored family in the history of the Coast Guard. So famous have these North Carolinians become that the Coast Guard in 1992 named a cutter in their honor.

The greatest of the Midgett heroes was John Allen Midgett, captain of the lifesaving station during World War I. German submarines, a new invention, lurked off the North Carolina coast. On August 16, 1918, a British tanker was blown up after hitting a floating sea mine left by a U-boat (as the German subs were called). The explosion set the ship on fire, and gasoline and oil began to burn on the surface of the ocean. Midgett and five other surfmen repeatedly rowed their lifesaving boat five miles out into the ocean through the flames to rescue forty-two crew members.

In 1954, the Coast Guard closed the station, and the National Park Service took over the site. In 1976, local residents joined with state officials to set up a nonprofit group to raise money for its restoration. Parts of the old 1874 station and its 1911 addition have been open to the public since 1984. There, visitors can learn more about some of the most heroic North Carolinians ever to live.