

Bucklesberry, Back in the Day

Christmastime 1917

The Christmas of 1917 was like no other since the Civil War period. The national mood was less than festive. Our country had declared war on Germany in April that year, catapulting the nation into worldwide military conflict. Called the Great War, more than 25 million people around the globe were either killed or wounded in World War I (WWI), an astounding number not exceeded by any other war to date.

Although WWI was fought from 1914 to 1918, the first battle action for the U.S. did not occur until November, 1917, when two Navy destroyers, *Fanning* and *Nicholson*, captured a German U-boat. Sadly, our nation saw its first significant loss of life in early-December. Sixty-six of the crew onboard the Navy destroyer, *Jacob Jones*, were killed when the ship sank in the Atlantic Ocean after being torpedoed by Germans.

Christmastime 1917, then, was not so joyous for American soldiers serving abroad. Nor was it very merry for their families back home. One local report published three days before Christmas noted the scarcity of soldiers on leave in our area:

1917, December 22: "In the midst of the pre-holiday rush and bustle the lack of uniformed men on the streets and trains is significant. The Army is not permitting many of the soldiers to go home for Christmas. A couple or three battery men and a sanitary corps man or two were all to be seen here Saturday. Only one or two soldiers can be seen on most of the trains passing through Kinston." (*The Daily Free Press*, Kinston)

Christmas traditionally includes delectable food, but the U.S. and the world faced major food shortages in 1917 that were attributable to the War. Local Bucklesberrian, Kirby E. Sutton (1866-1930), chief registrar for the WWI selective draft in Lenoir County for a time, implored local farmers to help the national cause:

1917, December 11: "Bucklesberry is waxing patriotic. That is what is to be expected of Bucklesberry. The section has given its manhood freely, and now K[irby]. E. Sutton, a prominent planter there, is urging his neighbors and farmers beyond the neighborhood's confines to plant more foodstuffs the coming year. Mr. Sutton recalls that an army fights on its stomachs, and he would join with the Nation's agriculturists in a campaign to insure the Sammies' stomachs being well-filled during 1918, when, it is generally conceded, they will be busy—millions of them—punching the boches in their breadbags. Mr. Sutton addresses the following to *The Free Press*—and other farmers:"

"In view of the fact that there is a world war upon us, and that the United States will be called upon to furnish the Allied European countries with the greater portion of their food supplies, it behooves all American farmers to raise all the produce of every kind possible the coming year. There is going to be a powerful drain on our food supplies until the war is over to feed our own people and the balance of the world and it is our patriotic duty to put forth every effort possible to accomplish what we must. The greatest help we can give our Government is to raise supplies."

"The coming year, let all of us raise all the potatoes, corn, meat, hay, wheat and oats and do all else in our power to aid our Government in a successful termination of this horrible war upon us. The Irish potato crop is one of the most important factors in the food supply of the world, and as it comes first, I am asking our people to plant them. Our food administrator, Mr. N. J. Rouse, is giving all his time to this good work, and I sincerely hope that the farmers of Lenoir County will do their duty and assist him, and do themselves honor by making the largest food crop in this County's history. Yours truly, K. E. Sutton." (*The Daily Free Press*)

Wartime caused many Americans to be more spiritually inclined during Christmastime 1917. They not only celebrated the birth of the Savior, they prayerfully pleaded with Him to watch over their sons and daughters in harm's way. Would that we were as singularly focused on the Reason for the season during peacetime. *O Come let us adore Him!*