

## The Great War Comes to Wisconsin: Sacrifice, Patriotism, and Free Speech in a Time of Crisis

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In this new guide to decoding the symbolism found on grave markers, longtime Iowa historians Loren Horton and Michael Zahs draw on their experience exploring the midwestern cultural landscape. In separate chapters, they examine different symbols, from doves and gates to trumpets and urns, before looking at what particular types of flora, crosses, and military emblems mean. All of these are well illustrated with photographs and biblical references. A nod to Jewish and Muslim iconography, perhaps when looking at hands, stars, or moons, might have hinted at other traditions. The authors also explore the materials used for markers and add two interesting chapters on zinc monuments (called “White Bronze”) and Andera iron crosses cast in Spillville, both commonly found around the state. A glossary of cemetery terms and a bibliography of nineteenth-century books on funerary symbolism complete the book.

Other works, such as Douglas Keister’s *Stories in Stone* (2004), delve into this topic more exhaustively, often with an eastern focus, but this field guide is a valuable resource for any midwesterner interested in reading the historic landscape and deciphering this lost language of symbols.

*The Great War Comes to Wisconsin: Sacrifice, Patriotism, and Free Speech in a Time of Crisis*, by Richard L. Pifer, with Marjorie Hannon Pifer. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2017. 296 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, index. \$26.95 paperback.

Reviewer Matthew Lindaman is professor of history and chair of the history department at Winona State University. He is the author of *Fit for America: Major John L. Griffith & the Quest for Athletics and Fitness* (2018).

Coinciding with the centenary remembrance of America’s entry into the Great War, Richard L. Pifer provides a thorough account of how numerous individuals, ethnic groups, and institutions in Wisconsin negotiated the first “total war” of the twentieth century. His goal was to capture “the essence of the home front experience” in all its complexities (1). As a result, the book does not contain a strong thesis but rather a strong central message: that “the experience of Wisconsin’s people during World War I suggests that fighting a major war, particularly a ‘total war’ requiring mobilization of the entire society is a complex and risky business” (240). Of course, that held true nationwide but was particularly acute in the Badger State, which hung its hat on the tradition of midwestern isolationism, contained multiple ethnic groups, and boasted a strong Progressive wing of the Republican Party, along with an active Socialist Party.

The author's appreciation of Wisconsin's diversity shines throughout the book. That diversity included a rich agricultural and industrial heritage, immigrant groups such as German Americans and Scandinavian Americans, and a palette of political ideas ranging from moderates to progressives and socialists. The sum of these threads made the mosaic fabric of Wisconsin productive and strong while ever evolving. An open attitude toward diverse opinions and a tolerance for new or competing ideas was the key, but that tradition was put under threat as America entered the war.

Chapter one of the book begins with an overview of Wisconsin in 1914, detailing the main agricultural and economic engines, the variety of ethnic groups, and the diversity of political actors, including Robert M. La Follette from the Progressive wing of the Republican Party and Victor Berger, a key player in the Socialist Party, which rested on strong support out of Milwaukee. This background chapter is key to understanding how the evolving nature of each group, institution, or individual was challenged once America entered the war.

The remainder of the book is divided into four chapters, each of which could be a stand-alone article or merit a separate book. Chapter two covers the immediate lead-up to and America's entry into what was previously viewed as a European conflict. Chapter three moves through a step-by-step review of the wartime experience of the 32nd Division, a division containing the largest concentration of Wisconsin troops. Both chapters are supported by a diverse and creative selection of primary sources. For example, to discern the pulse of a section of Wisconsin's populace during the build-up to America's entry, Pifer uses constituent letters sent to U.S. Representative John Esch, while diary entries and letters home provide a lens through which one can view the soldier experience and its impact on families on the home front.

Chapter four surveys life on the home front. Here the author does an outstanding job of providing a succinct review of the national context before moving on to how any given issue played out in Wisconsin. This chapter also includes the nastiness associated with home front vigilantes, anti-immigrant (especially anti-German American) sentiment, and the associated threat to civil liberties, thus offering the opportunity to compare with similar events taking place in other neighboring states such as Minnesota and Iowa.

Chapter five provides an excellent summary of Wisconsin politics during the war. It is also the chapter that brings the book together as Pifer studies six prominent Wisconsin politicians and how they negotiated the politically charged atmosphere of wartime Wisconsin. He ar-

gues that four of the politicians—Governor Emanuel Philipp, Milwaukee’s Socialist mayor Daniel Hoan, founding member of the Socialist Party of America Victor Berger, and Senator Robert M. La Follette—“gave voice to reason” as “they tried to lead with humanity and respect for people and the law (238), attributes the author underscores as important for a democracy and the overall reputation of the state as “the war demonstrated the frightening fragility of civil liberties” (3).

Pifer, retired from his position as Director of Reference and Public Services for the Library-Archives Division of the Wisconsin Historical Society, credits his wife, Marjorie Hanon Pifer, as a historical analyst for the book. Together, they mined the archives of Wisconsin for a rich variety of primary sources, including photographs and political cartoons. The cartoons alone merit a separate book and make theirs all the more fascinating while underscoring the visual nature of war on the home front. The book will appeal to readers interested in World War I home fronts but also to those interested in the history of civil liberties, immigration, and politics in the upper Midwest.

*Letters from the Boys: Wisconsin World War I Soldiers Write Home*, by Carrie A. Meyer. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2018. viii, 223 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$19.95 paperback.

Reviewer Matthew J. Margis is a historian at the U.S. Army Center of Military History in Washington, D.C. He earned a Ph.D. in history from Iowa State University in 2016 with a dissertation on the evolution of the National Guard during the Progressive Era.

The United States experienced a renewed interest in World War I during the centennial of American entrance into the war. Carrie Meyer’s *Letters from the Boys* tells the story of the Wisconsin doughboy experience through their own words. She reproduces a series of letters published from 1917 to 1919 in two Wisconsin newspapers (the *Independent Register* and the *Brodhead News*).

Part one of the book recounts the experiences of various soldiers in the 32nd Division who volunteered for service in the Wisconsin National Guard, from their enlistment through the postwar occupation of Germany. Part two follows Roger A. Skinner, who enlisted in the ambulance corps in 1917. Skinner’s experience as an ambulance driver was different from that of his counterparts in the 32nd Division, but his relatively long tour of duty covers the whole of American belligerency and provides an overview of the changing nature of the war.

The letters throughout the book discuss the monotony of camp life, the dangers and harsh conditions of trench warfare, interactions with