

East Falls Past—World War I

The Fallser, November 2007, by Wendy Moody

In recognition of Veterans Day, this column focuses on some poignant newspaper articles written in 1917, the year the United States entered World War I. The articles convey the reaction, realities, and impact of the war as they affected Falls residents.

November 9, 1917 – Another consignment of drafted men left the Falls on Sunday morning... Our boys each took a comfy kit and other necessaries from the “White House” over which Mrs. Elizabeth Dodson Altemus presides. The men assembled at Ridge and Midvale Avenues where the Falls Business Men’s Association gathered to escort them to the district police station at Hunting Park and Schuyler Streets where they were joined with other soldiers and proceeded to the North Philadelphia station on the Pennsylvania Railroad.... It was a day of general sadness and the farewells were made with tears and cheers. After the trains pulled away the crowd gradually melted away each sharing in the burden of a common sorrow. Mrs. Richard Norris presented a pocket Bible to each of the Protestants from the Falls, and a prayer book to each member of the Catholic faith. *Chronicle*



November 9, 1917 – There was something akin to a stab came to the people on Saturday when it was learned that some of the American soldiers in France were taken prisoners by the Germans. This unfortunate news may lead to the taking of drastic measures to quiet all pro-German citizens... Anyone sympathizing with Kaiserism in this critical period should to say the least be deported to Germany and his property confiscated. It would be unjust to condemn all German-Americans as some of them are loyal to Uncle Sam.

Chronicle

November 30, 1917 – America Hall (on Conrad St.) was the scene on Wednesday night of a grand military ball held under the auspices of the Citizens Patriotic Committee, of which Charles L. Dykes is president. The hall was decorated to represent an encampment with flags, bunting and plants galore. The grand march was magnificent and spectacular and was led by John Hohenadel and Mrs. Elizabeth Dobson Altemus. The function was held for the benefit of the Soldiers and Sailors Fund. *Chronicle*

November 30, 1917 – The Rev. Charles L. Seasholes is arranging to hold a memorial service in connection with the Men’s Bible Class in the Baptist Church, for John Hill and George Merkle, members of the class who were killed in France. Hill was a member of the Royal Canadian Regiment and enlisted during the summer. Merkle was a member of the U. S. Aero Squadron Signal Corps. He enlisted April 16, and two days later was married to Alice Sorber. Mrs. Merkle, who resides with her aunt, Emily Conover, at

4177 Ridge Avenue, received a telegram from the Adjutant General, Washington D. C. which read “Deeply regret to inform you that Sergeant George E. Merkle of the aero signal corps has been officially reported as having been accidentally killed on November 17th.” With these two young men both well and favorably known here, the terrible European war is brought painfully close to the Falls. *Chronicle*

[Photo: Emergency Aid Aides, 1918]