**"To See the Principles we're Fighting for Upheld:" Blue Island and the Great War**

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The First World War holds a peculiar position in America's modern historical memory. While many Europeans point to the years 1914-1918 as the formative years of modern history—indeed, many attribute these years as the beginning of modernity, or, the beginning of the twentieth century—most Americans look instead to the Second World War as the seminal event in modern history. To be sure, America's limited military involvement and distanced economic contributions, along with the formation of a post-war world where London still reigned over New York in economic and political world power, all but ensured that Americans would have to look elsewhere for their defining moment. Despite these historical circumstances, America did indeed impact the fate of the war (although not to the degree as some other belligerent nations) and, in turn, the war had a noteworthy impression on America. Blue Island, Illinois, situated just outside the southern border of Chicago, masterfully displayed both of these concepts: young men from Blue Island fought and died in France as part of America's notable campaigns and the war exhibited a profound effect on both the world-views of Blue Islanders as well as the vision they had for the future of their own locality.

**Blue Island: a Short History**

Blue Island gets its name from an ancient "island" situated within glacial Lake Chicago, the antecedent of today's Lake Michigan. When the glaciers receded, a bluff formed resembling an island. From afar, nineteenth-century American trailblazers caught a glimpse of blue wildflowers, which covered the bluff. Thus, the namesake "Blue Island" was born. Unlike many other localities on the American frontier, relations between natives of Blue Island (the Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi tribes) and Yankee newcomers resulted in little violence. In 1795, the Treaty of Greenville purchased the land where Chicago now stands from various bands of native Americans, including the Potawatomi and Ottawa—an event that sent relations between European Americans and Native Americans into deterioration. During the War of 1812, groups of Potawatomi Native Americans joined with the British cause and helped sack Fort Dearborn located in present-day Chicago. By the end of the conflict, however, most Native Americans achieved peace with the Americans, which came at the cost of accepting annuities from Chicago—an act that ultimately led to economic dependence. In the decade and a half following the war, Native Americans signed seven treaties relinquishing land to the Americans. In 1832, Potawatomi tribes rejected Black Hawk's invitation to attack American settlements in western Illinois and instead assisted the U.S. Army in the resulting Black Hawk War. Following this conflict, the remaining tribes were escorted west of the Mississippi.[1] Thus, by 1835, the ancient glacial ridge—to some, destined to become the next "city on a hill"—was covered with blue wildflowers, and little else.

Notwithstanding Blue Island's early history, most look to 1835, when Americans first considered a permanent settlement on the ancient ridge, as its inaugural year. The following year, Blue Island's first inn was established along the Vincennes Trail, one of the primary roads in the old American West. In the early years, the Vincennes Trail brought a trickling of Yankees who sought to create an agricultural community. The 1850s—a pivotal decade—altered the course of Blue Island's economic and social development considerably. The

[1] James R Grossman, Ann Durkin Keating, & Janice L Reiff, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 83.

simultaneous developments of industrialization and immigration brought Blue Island from a small, agricultural community of "transplanted Yankees" to a burgeoning immigrant town subsisting on wage labor in railroads and factories. In 1852, the Rock Island & Pacific Railroad came to Blue Island and has remained one of the bastions of the town's heritage to this day. Similarly, demand for wage labor at the Rock Island freight yards attracted German laborers while the remaining farmland attracted German farm hands.[2]

Much like the 1850s, the 1890s represented another crucial decade in the town's history. By this time, German immigrants had seized political and economic power from their Anglo-American predecessors. Moreover, the Knights of Labor attracted considerable support from Rock Island laborers and in 1893 the United Brick and Clay Workers Union was established. The following year, Eugene V. Debs sought support from Blue Island's railway workers during the Pullman Strike. A few of Blue Island's laborers rose to his call, derailing a train, toppling cars, and assaulting strikebreakers. As a result, the U.S. army was called in, imposing martial law.[3]

After the tumultuous 1890s, Blue Island emerged as a working class, immigrant town. In 1900, 7 out of every 10 of the 6,000 inhabitants were either foreign born or native with foreign parentage. Three decades later the ratio dropped to 5 out of every 10, and in 1960 the ratio plummeted to 3 out of 10. Similarly, the first two decades of the twentieth-century saw an influx of Italian, Polish, and Slovak immigrants that again forced Blue Island to reconsider its identity. These first two decades likewise represent the largest period of growth in Blue Island's history. Concurrently, Blue Island began to reassert its local autonomy, vehemently resisting annexation by Chicago in 1915.[4]

While over the course of the twentieth century fewer inhabitants hailed from outside the U.S., Blue Island's diversity managed to increase. In 1900, 99.9% of Blue Islanders were considered white, a figure which was cut nearly in half a century later. In fact, the influx of individuals from African-American or Hispanic origin followed a town culture in the early twentieth century that forbade their settlement (In 1917, Robbins, which included African-Americans excluded from Blue Island, was incorporated in the lands adjacent to Blue Island).[5]

Thus, the decades preceding the Great War were times of incredible change for Blue Island. Blue Islanders, having already witnessed the failure of their "agricultural community" in the second half of the nineteenth-century, were faced with yet another difficult question: what would the future of Blue Island look like? The years 1914-1918 would answer some of these questions of identity, but they would raise more. Therefore, while 1914 saw countless Europeans embarking on a quest for nationalism and autonomy over the fate of European society, Blue Islanders joined them, courageously fighting for their nation, their locality, and their identity.

**Blue Island and the Great War: an Overview**

Blue Island's service in the war, like many other American towns, began in April, 1917. Prior to this, as will be discussed later, Blue Island experienced only a detached interest in the European war. A month after Wilson implored Congress to declare war on Germany, Draft Board No. 7 was created, encompassing Blue Island and the surrounding localities. In total, the

[2] Ibid., 83.
[3] Ibid., 83.
[4] Ibid., 83, 1008-9.
[5] Ibid., pp. 83, 1008-9.

board registered 6,154 individuals, 588 of which were inducted into military service.[6] Along with drafting men for service, Blue Island undertook numerous initiatives aimed at supporting America's war effort, most notably the Liberty Loan drives. Furthermore, the women of Blue Island served "loyally and whole heartedly," in the Red Cross, which operated for a time in vacant rooms of the high school, as well as in various other aid societies, some of which included knitting clothes and preparing "comfort bags" for soldiers. Additionally, Blue Islanders "rounded up" forty-one "slackers" in October, 1917, and forced them to register for the draft.[7] Blue Island's two papers, the *Sun* and the *Standard*, were combined in October, 1918, in an effort to reduce paper waste and conserve materials for the war.[8] Moreover, in conjunction with a Presidential order given in November, 1917, Blue Island required all German aliens to register with the police chief—an effort which uncovered sixty-six aliens living within Blue Island and the surrounding rural districts.[9]

In total, thirteen Blue Islanders gave their lives in service of the United States during the course of the war: Raymond Eames, Stanley Fay, Ernest Fischer, Albert Hecht, Herman Klopp, Antonio Louis, George Ruff, Walter Schoenenberger, Frank Steffes, Charles Weimar, Leo Wolshon, Homer Woods, and Walter Wykoff.[10] The divergent nature of their contributions, however, speaks to the myriad roles in which Blue Islanders played during the war.

Raymond Eames, arguably the most well-known Blue Island soldier, was a "profitable and promising" businessman in April, 1917.[11] In a display of patriotic sacrifice, Eames left his business to enlist in the U.S. Marine Corps on June 17, 1917 and by August was training at Quantico. In February of the following year, he landed at St. Nazaire in France. From March 17th to May 12th, Eames trained in the trenches of the Verdun sector before going into battle at Chateau-Thierry. On May 10th, reflecting on his training in the Verdun sector and the prospect of soon experiencing battle, Eames declared, "My ambition is to come through whole and with honor (I don't care for glory), to see the principles we're fighting for upheld."[12] On June 6th, Eames got his first chance to defend those principles and plunged into no man's land at Chateau-Thierry, eventually making it to the town of Bourches, where he continued to fight for six days until his next assignment at Belleau Wood on the 13th. The Germans, acknowledging the importance of Bellau Wood, "severely shelled and gassed" the Americans, hitting the 96th company of the 6th regiment especially hard.[13] During the course of these attacks, Eames was burned by mustard gas and died on June 29th.

On November 8, 1918, Blue Islanders read of another casualty: Herman Klopp. Klopp, a private first class, was killed by a shell on Hill 281, Bethancourt on Forges Creek in France. As the *Sun-Standard* notes, it is uncertain whether he was killed while participating in an assault or by supplying his "comrades;" either way, however, his death brought honor to Blue Island.[14] Likewise, Antonio Louis was another battle casualty. A Sergeant in the 47th infantry, Louis participated in the attempt to drive back the Germans at the Aisne-Marne salient near the

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[6] John H Volp, *The First Hundred Years, 1835-1935: Historical Review of Blue Island, Illinois* (Salem: Higginson Book Co., 1998), p. 321.
[7] Ibid., 323, 329.
[8] H. A. A. Jebsen, Jr., "Blue Island, Illinois: History of a Working Class Suburb," Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1971, 70.
[9] *Blue Island Sun*, January 18, 1918, 1; Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 322.
[10] Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 328.
[11] *Blue Island Sun*, July 19, 1918, 1.
[12] *Blue Island Sun*, July 19, 1918, 4.
[13] American Battle Monuments Commission, *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe: a History, Guide, and Reference Book* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Print Office, 1938), p. 49; Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 328.
[14] *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, p. 197; *Blue Island Sun-Standard*, November 8, 1918, 1.

Vesle River. After capturing the small town of Fismes on August 4th, the 4th division repeatedly made unsuccessful attempts to cross the Vesle on August 6th-9th. On the final day of American attempts to cross the river, Louis died.[15] Charles L Weimar, too, died in France; however, the nature of his death is unknown.[16] Louis D Holmes, corporal of the 149th field artillery, survived his duration of service and received the Legion of Honor, the highest honor given to heroes by the French, on July 16, 1923.[17]

Numerous other Blue Islanders died in service to their country before reaching France. Private Arthur Harker died in December, 1917 in Ford Casey, Washington. Although Harker lived in Washington at the time of his enlistment, his parents were "formerly well-known and popular among Blue Island's younger set." Adding to his popularity in Blue Island, Harker was reportedly only fourteen years old when he enlisted. He was accepted by the military because of his "manly appearance." [18] Another Blue Island legend, Frank Steffes, was killed by a military prisoner in Hachita, New Mexico in February, 1918. Steffes was ordered to guard over two prisoners who were assigned to clean up the camp. Once they reached a safe distance, one of the prisoners, Fred Vogle, drew a revolver and ordered Steffes to place his hands in the air. Steffes refused to comply, instead lunging at the prisoner. In the ensuing skirmish, Steffes was shot in the knee and then fatally in the heart.[19] Additional Blue Island servicemen died in camp, mostly of pneumonia or influenza.

As we have seen, Blue Islanders served their country in a myriad of ways. Some chose—or were chosen for—military service. Of these men, 3 died in battle, while the remaining 10 died at camp, mostly of Spanish influenza, which ravaged young men and women worldwide during the final year of the war. In addition to these servicemen, men and women in Blue Island donated to the Liberty Loan drives and other campaigns to support the war effort—efforts which will be discussed in more detail later. From this picture, it is easy to overlook the fact that Blue Island in 1917 faced myriad issues, each possessing implications for the future of the town. Moreover, its inhabitants fought, as Raymond Eames reminds us, "to see the principles we're fighting for upheld."[20]

**Political Identity**

In 1915, the "giant that loomed over Blue Island's horizon"[21] was not war in Europe, but war with Chicago—an assertion which illustrates the town's detached observation of the war in the years leading to 1917. In the 1850s, when the Rock Island railroad began employing Blue Island laborers, some Blue Islanders harbored ambitious designs of their town overtaking Chicago as the premier city in the Midwest.[22] To today's reader, these ambitions appear ill-founded and absurd, but to individuals living in the nineteenth-century, these dreams were more reasonable. Despite this, the post-Civil War years shattered dreams of creating a big city and Blue Islanders settled instead to "combine the best of two worlds" by capitalizing on urban services provided by Chicago while preserving local autonomy.[23]

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[15] *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, pp. 41, 80; Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 328.
[16] Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 328.
[17] Ibid., 336.
[18] *Blue Island Sun*, January 25th, 1918, 1.
[19] Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 322.
[20] *Blue Island Sun*, July 19, 1918, 4.
[21] Jebsen, *History of a Working Class Suburb*, 188.
[22] Harry Jebsen, Jr., "The South Side: Blue Island," transcript of a speech delivered June 5, 1974 at the Blue Island Public Library, p. 2. Chicago's importance commenced with the introduction of the railroad and its rapid geographic expansion only began after the Great Fire of 1871.
[23] Jebsen, *History of a Working Class Suburb*, 189.

The first critical years in this transformation from village to suburb were 1891-1893, when Chicago officials decided to construct Rock Island Railroad yards on the edge of the city. Blue Islanders, eager to add an economic asset to their burgeoning industrial town, cunningly procured a tract of land and donated it to the railroad.[24] As in the 1850s, Blue Islanders had high hopes. They anticipated the expanded yards bringing "prosperity without ruining the gracious living environment," "added affluence," and "big salaried men," all while excluding the "cheap men" commonly associated with the yards.[25] In short, Blue Islanders envisioned their locality as a living space for the influential businessmen who ran Rock Island operations, not for their working-class laborers. Unfortunately, only one of the "big salaried men" moved to Blue Island. To complement him, the population increased 83% during the rest of the decade as laborers flooded Blue Island.[26]

These changes, coupled with Chicago's recent expansion, increased the threat of annexation. In 1914, the neighboring village of Morgan Park succumbed to Chicago rule. Then, in 1915, Chicago pushed further, attempting to annex Blue Island. While passing by a wide margin in Chicago, the vote for annexation failed in Blue Island by a nearly 3-to-1 margin.[27] Accordingly, during the campaign the *Blue Island Sun* and *Blue Island Standard* became consumed with the issue. Blue Islanders, too, shared in the interest of their future, pushing topics of war in Europe to the side. In 1915, therefore, Blue Island clearly reiterated the secondary status of news from the war; in doing so, they drew on the precedent set by the *Blue Island Sun* just two weeks after the war's outbreak, which articulated that "notwithstanding the European war, great interest is being manifested…in the primary campaign now in progress" and that "the present upheaval in Europe has fostered…a deeper love, a greater respect for the Stars and Stripes and a more insistent demand for the purity of the ballot."[28]

Advertisements in the *Sun*, likewise, illustrated Blue Island's detached relationship with the war. On September 3, 1914, an advertisement for Goodyear tires boasted cheap tires which they obtained from London and Singapore in the early days of the war, before prices skyrocketed. Thus, Blue Islanders had a "new, compelling reason for buying Goodyear tires," which "results from War conditions." Furthermore, the advertisement used battle metaphors to sell their product: "We were first on the ground. We were quickest in action."[29] Two weeks later, images of the war were again evoked by the Duntley Sweeper Company. According to the advertisement, "the war in Europe" was "tame" in comparison with Duntley's "Price-Slashing Demonstration."[30] As pre-1917 advertisements and concern for local politics make clear, Blue Island's initial relationship with the war was one of detached observation.

After American entry into the war in April, 1917, Blue Islanders shifted from detached observation of the war to complete consumption in the conflict. As before 1917, Blue Islanders continued their concern for control over their town and identity, yet now they ensured their autonomy with patriotism and patriotic drives, such as the Liberty Loan drives. In an attempt to avoid the apprehensions to the war effort that occurred during the Civil War (most notably the Draft Riots), President Wilson sought to prosecute the war as a "contractual agreement"

[24] Jebsen, "The South Side: Blue Island," 3.
[25] Ibid., p. 4.
[26] Ibid., p. 4.
[27] Jebsen, *History of a Working Class Suburb*, 193.
[28] *Blue Island Sun*, August 14, 1914, 6.
[29] *Blue Island Sun*, September 3, 1914, 3.
[30] *Blue Island Sun*, September 18, 1914, 5.

with the American people.[31] In theory, local draft boards and Liberty Loan drives would cultivate a friendlier and less coercive home front wartime experience. As a side effect, Blue Island, attempting to stave off encroachment from Chicago, used their Draft Board (Draft Board No. 7) and the Liberty Loan drives to exert local autonomy through their patriotism.

Draft Board No. 7 extended over a number of communities, including Mount Greenwood, Worth, Oak Lawn, Lemont, Chicago Ridge, Burr Oak, and Riverdale.[32] However, these communities represented autonomous villages and towns unaffiliated with Chicago. Moreover, it is important to note that no areas of Chicago were included in the jurisdiction of Draft Board No. 7; the Draft Board thus reflected the local administration that Wilson—and Blue Islanders who rejected authority from Chicago—desired. Moreover, in an attempt to preserve the identity of Blue Island's soldiers, men who were accepted for service were questioned about their family history by the Draft Board.[33] Clearly, the Draft Board expressed interest in the identity of their soldiers and, by extension, the identity of their localities.

Liberty Loans, donations from ordinary citizens to the government for the purpose of funding the war, additionally played a pivotal role in Blue Island's assertion of autonomy. In each of the five Liberty Loan drives, Blue Island exceeded the required allotments, including the final drive, much of which occurred after the armistice.[34] Blue Islanders, naturally, were extremely proud of their accomplishments. During the third drive, the $276,000 pledged by Blue Islanders was singled out from the remaining communities in District 7 and the city was awarded the "honor flag."[35] An editorial by Cora Rigby in the *Blue Island Sun* on January 25, 1918 demonstrated Blue Island's pride in their Liberty Loan subscriptions. According to the author, the Liberty Loans were "oversubscribed, not only willingly but joyously, and with the utmost enthusiasm."[36]

Encouragement from William Frasor, chairman of the final Liberty Loan drive, assisted in fostering Blue Islander's desire to "prove" their patriotism and, by extension, their political autonomy. In April, 1918, an advertisement provided by Frasor asked "What does 'war time' mean to you?" Furthermore, he articulated that the Liberty Loans represented an "opportunity to *prove* the patriotism that is in your heart and on your lips," and to "show yourself worthy."[37] Later that year, the *Sun* announced that Blue Island "has proven herself 100 percent loyal," and later asserted that "Blue Island is a sovereign community in the most democratic nation in the world."[38] In proving herself loyal, Blue Island, therefore, was also proving herself sovereign and democratic. Thus for many Blue Islanders, the Liberty Loan drives symbolized a struggle for control over local matters as well as the town's political identity.

Aiding the district's Liberty Loan drives were organizations and drives which similarly attempted to prove Blue Island's autonomy and establish its identity through acts of patriotism. On September 13, 1918, the *Sun* reported that the local freemason chapter would pledge money for the Liberty Loans by eliminating officer salaries and all "unnecessary entertainment and expense thereof."[39] Moreover, on February 18th, 1918, an editorial indicated that the railroads

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[31] David M Kennedy, *Over There: the First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 143.
[32] Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 321.
[33] Volp, *First Hundred Years*, 321.
[34] Ibid, 331.
[35] Ibid.
[36] *Blue Island Sun*, January 25, 1918, 6.
[37] *Blue Island Sun*, April 19, 1918, 4.
[38] *Blue Island Sun*, October 25, 1918, 5.
[39] *Blue Island Sun*, September 13, 1918, p. 1.

"have eliminated all individual interest and competitive rivalries" in response to the war.[40] Furthermore, an article entitled "Wake Up!" publicized "wheatless" and "meatless" days while accompanying recipes to conserve those ingredients.[41] A month later, the *Sun* published an article accosting parents for allowing their children to skip mandatory high school military training.[42] Finally, the *Sun* preached "daily action," "a good rotation of crops," and "plowing a deep furrow" as methods of resisting attacks from the Hessian Fly and the Cinch Bug, both of which were "pro-German."[43] In all, Liberty Loan drives, "wheatless" and "meatless" days, and the prevention of crop damage signified attempts by Blue Island to prove her patriotism and assert her identity.

**Ethnic Identity**

Like Blue Island's political identity, its ethnic identity underwent significant challenges during the first decades of the twentieth century. In the early nineteenth-century, Blue Island was mainly comprised of Anglo-Americans. In the 1850s, the Rock Island attracted German immigrants, many of whom labored in the rail yards. German agricultural laborers likewise flocked to the surrounding areas under Blue Island's jurisdiction so that by the last decade of the nineteenth-century, Germans or individuals of German decent had enjoyed economic and political power in the town. After 1910, new groups of immigrants, namely Italians, began inhabiting Blue Island. Like their predecessors half a century earlier, native Blue Islanders "had many misgivings about the Italians."[44] By the outbreak of war, stereotypes of Italians became common in Blue Island; Italian immigrants were criticized for failing to renounce their "native tongue" and increased violence became a frequently-evoked stereotype for the east side of the town, where many of the new immigrants lived.[45] Thus by 1914, Blue Island's German community was well-integrated into the town's culture while Italians struggled to achieve such a status. The Great War, therefore, both reflected these ethnic differences as well as helped transform them.

As historian Harry Jebsen notes, "Participation of both the Poles and Italians in World War I undoubtedly lowered some of the barriers" which existed in Blue Island's pre-war society.[46] As detailed previously, the death of Antonio Louis—Sergeant of Company C, 47th infantry and Blue Island man of Italian decent—was well-publicized in the town. Louis, who fought as part of the American offensives near the Vesle River in early August, 1918, arrived with his division on the 3rd of August and fought until the 9th, when he was killed. The campaign was a bloody one; in the 9 days that the division remained at the Vesle River it incurred some 3,500 casualties.[47] In the four days prior to Louis' death, the Americans attempted to cross the Vesle and establish a stronghold on the other side, before pushing farther north. The Americans, however, were hampered with difficulties in establishing suitable footbridges for reinforcements. A few men made it across—perhaps Louis—but were mauled by German fire.[48] Louis' military contributions, accompanied by immigrant participation in the Liberty Loan Campaigns, provided a foundation for greater acceptance of Italian immigrants in Blue Island. In 1919, termed "the turning point in inter-group relations," an Italian immigrant

[40] *Blue Island Sun*, February 18, 1918, p. 3.
[41] *Blue Island Sun*, February 8, 1918, p. 8.
[42] *Blue Island Sun*, March 15, 1918, p. 1.
[43] *Blue Island Sun*, May 3, 1918, p. 3.
[44] Jebsen, "History of a Working Class Suburb," p. 208.
[45] Jebsen, "History of a Working Class Suburb," p. 208.
[46] Ibid., p. 209.
[47] *American Armies and Battlefields in Europe*, p. 41.
[48] Ibid.

was elected alderman and a year later, the city began "to encourage the assimilation of these people [immigrants]."[49] Blue Islanders of Italian decent, therefore, used the war to increase their acceptance within the community.

Individuals of German decent, on the other hand, underwent myriad experiences during the war, both challenging and reaffirming their ethnicity. Prior to American entry into the war, while Blue Island displayed distanced interest in European affairs, anti-German sentiment was almost nonexistent. During the initial analysis of the events of the summer of 1914, the *Sun* placed blame on numerous nations involved, rather than chastising the Germans alone. Speaking of the French, the *Sun* emphasized their imperial designs to mobilize and "Recover Alsace-Lorraine!"[50] Similarly, the paper discussed "the mobilization of the entire Russian army and navy," which was done "in spite of his [the German ambassador to Russia] appeal to the Kaiser and the fact that he was in constant communication with him."[51] From the onset, at least, Germany was spared much of the blame in Blue Island newspapers, a trend which reflected the ethnic composition of the town.

By January, 1918, the situation changed drastically. In discussing the German occupation of parts of France, the *Sun* exclaimed that "no words can express the barbarity of this proceeding nor describe the heartrending scenes which occurred."[52] Later that month, the *Sun* included a notice obliging all "German alien enemies" to register with the police chief and political cartoons containing images of children crying out, "I want to lick the Kaiser."[53] Moreover, upon conclusion of the war, numerous effigies of the Kaiser were burned or destroyed. As the *Sun-Standard* relates, Blue Island experienced scenes of the Kaiser "hung in effigy…buried or otherwise disposed of fully twenty different ways." In one particularly grotesque incident, the Kaiser was "dragged across the Rock Island tracks in front of an approaching train." Naturally, the train conductor hastened to slow the train, however, "when he realized it was a stuffed dummy representing the most despised man in the world, he shifted his levers and the effigy quite speedily was ground under the wheels of the train."[54]

Another example of ethnic strife in Blue Island occurred after the destruction of an influential building. Prior to the war, singing groups comprised of individuals of German decent were a common feature of Blue Island society, participating in national competitions and even performing at the Columbian Expedition in 1893. On Wednesday, January 9, 1918, the Liederkranz, home of the German singing group, burned and was not rebuilt due to "war conditions." Moreover, as Jebsen suggests, "war spirit, temporarily ruined the organization."[55] Many individuals, likewise, suspected that prejudice toward German culture influenced this decision.[56]

In light of these various incidents, it is easy to make the assumption that Blue Islanders of German decent were persecuted to a significant degree during the war. This assumption, however, fails to take into consideration certain aspects of the cultural shift occurring within Blue Island's society. To begin, prejudice against those of German decent failed to reach the level of violence seen elsewhere, most notably in Collinsville, Illinois, where a German

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[49] Jebsen, "History of a Working Class Suburb," p. 209-211.
[50] *Blue Island Sun*, July 31, 1914, p. 2.
[51] *Blue Island Sun*, August 7, 1914, p. 2.
[52] *Blue Island Sun*, January 11, 1918, p. 3.
[53] *Blue Island Sun*, January 18, 1918, p. 1; *Blue Island Sun*, January 25, 1918, p. 1.
[54] *Blue Island Sun-Standard*, November 15, 1918, pp. 1, 8.
[55] Jebsen, "History of a Working Class Suburb," p. 113.
[56] Volp, *First Hundred Years*, p. 276.

immigrant was brutally lynched on February 5, 1918.[57] Instead, German culture and heritage—as well as the individuals who practiced it—was already ingrained in the fabric of Blue Island society by the 1890s. Blue Islanders of German decent, additionally, were given a method to evade persecution: patriotism.

As discussed earlier, patriotism allowed Blue Islanders to stake a claim for their own political independence from Chicago; however, patriotism also provided a method for escaping suspicion and, as a result, transformed the ethnic culture of Blue Island. To conclude, here is an article about a man who enlisted out of "hatred of the Teuton race." The *Sun* clarified that the individual "had no quarrel with individual Germans," which included "scores of them in," and presumably around, "Chicago."[58] On March 1, 1918, the *Sun* reported the extensive efforts of a local Lutheran church, which raised a "big fund" in the recent Liberty Loan drive.[59] Moreover, as an editorial on October 25, 1918 made clear, many immigrants came to America to "escape German and Hungarian autocratic rule," and that "it is safe to assert that 99 per cent of those now living in this community from Germany…have been 100 per cent backers of the last two Liberty Loans."[60] In other words, by supporting the war in some way—the Liberty Loans, for instance—Blue Islanders of German descent could prove their loyalty and escape suspicion.

Additional proof of the acceptance of individuals of German descent in Blue Island can be seen in the Honor Roll or Liberty Loan subscription postings in the *Sun.* The Honor Roll, for example, reminded Blue Islanders each week that individuals of German descent were fighting and dying for American principles. Similarly, Liberty Loan subscribers, which were published after each drive along with their amount of contribution, conveyed similar ideas. [61] Finally, the *Sun-Standard* clarified that despite the "grotesque" burning of effigies during the victory parade, the proceedings were "orderly," without "drunkenness on the streets and few 'hang-overs.'"[62]

Ethnic relationships within Blue Island, therefore, experienced some tension, but never broke. By the end of the war, individuals of German descent, already fully-integrated into Blue Island society before 1914, could preserve remnants of their former culture providing they were concurrently patriotic and supportive of the American effort. On the other hand, Italian descendants, who had not enjoyed a position similar to that of German descendants in 1914, benefited from their service to the war effort.

**Conclusion**

When news of the armistice arrived, Blue Island responded in a "spontaneous outburst of patriotic relief." The "best ordered celebration in Cook County at least; perhaps in any of the adjoining counties" came in the form of several parades as well as the closure of all businesses and schools.[63] The message was clear: as the war had seen the coming together of various European ethnicities within Blue Island (albeit with some tension), so the victory celebration would similarly involve all Blue Islanders. In fact, the nuanced planning of such an enormous and orderly event—the "greatest day in Blue Island's long history," as it was remembered in

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[57] Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German-Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), p. 10.

[58] *Blue Island Sun*, January 11, 1918, p. 6.
[59] *Blue Island Sun*, March 1, 1918, p. 1.
[60] *Blue Island Sun*, October 25, 1918, p. 5.
[61] *Blue Island Sun*, January 25, 1918, p. 8; *Blue Island Sun*, January 14, 1918, p. 5.
[62] *Blue Island Sun-Standard*, November 15, 1918, p. 8.
[63] *Blue Island Sun-Standard*, November 15, 1918, p.1.

1935—in just a few days speaks to the newfound political and ethnic unity experienced by Blue Islanders during the war. Thus, in 1919 Blue Island was ready to begin a new era in its history—a period in which political tensions with Chicago and ethnic tensions between European immigrants eased.[64] In a message to Blue Island, the *Sun-Standard* in October, 1919 appealed to "members of different…groups" to be "remade into American citizens" and to "understand American traditions and customs and the rights and privileges of American citizenship."[65] The changes requested by the *Sun-Standard*, however, began in 1914. However, as the quote suggests, some scrutiny remained for Blue Island's European immigrants. Yet, through their shared wartime experience, as well as their service to the war effort, Blue Island's European ethnic community was incorporated into the new vision of Blue Island—one that would cherish its American, rather than ethnic, qualities.

[64] Tension between European descendents and African-Americans and Mexicans, however, continued. Any casual glance at the *Sun-Standard* in 1918 would have revealed numerous prejudice remarks as well as stereotypes against African-Americans. Moreover, the 1920s saw small-scale violence against African-Americans and some influences from the KKK. However, what the war *did* represent was a coming together of various *European* ethnicities within Blue Island.

[65] *Blue Island Sun-Standard*, October 9, 1919, p. 1.