



## War Roles



### THE GREAT WARS

"The man who was actually in it at the time will never forget the joy of the soldiers and the thanksgiving that went up when it was learned that the slaughter was over. I believe that Armistice Day is the biggest day in the world's history," said ex-Captain Fred F. Moore, Traverse County's Distinguished Service Cross hero, when asked if he thought November 11 should be celebrated following the end of World War I.

How many people in this community have felt the same sentiment after each of the wars in which our young men have participated! A history of Wheaton would be incomplete without remembering the hardships and sacrifice of lives in the following involvements.

### SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

The Spanish-American War marked the emergence of the United States as a world power. This brief conflict between the United States and Spain took place between April and August, 1898, over the issue of the liberation of Cuba. As a result, the United States won Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippine Islands.

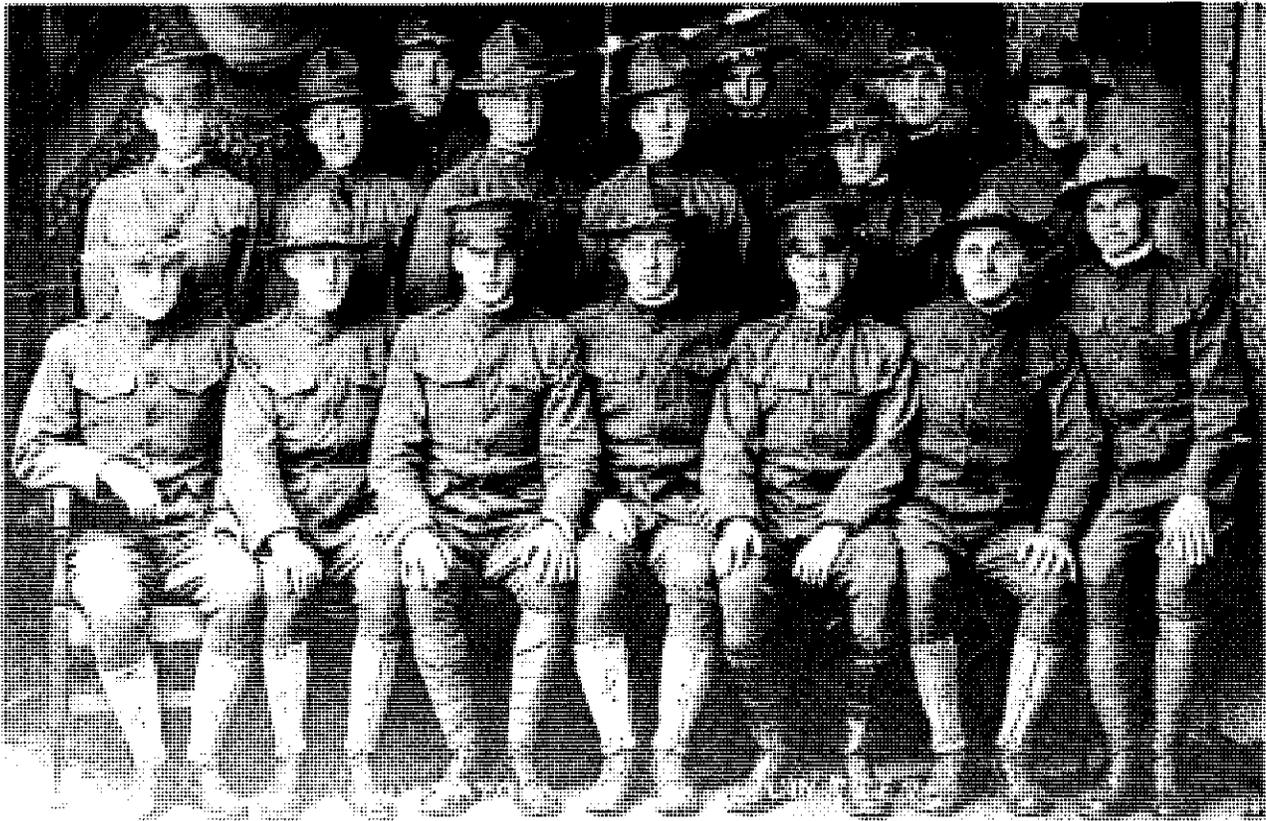
Almost immediately in this short conflict, H. B. Cory received word to report for duty. On June 20-21 sixteen Wheaton men volunteered to complete the volunteer company organized in Browns Valley, and they

went to St. Paul the following week to train for the 15th Regiment. On July 1 an additional fourteen men volunteered from Wheaton. Only twenty-two of the first thirty were actually inducted. Since many in the regiment failed the physical, a call went out and an additional twenty reported from here to fill the ranks, among them many of Wheaton's prominent young men.

After training at Camp Ramsey in Minnesota, the regiment was sent to Pennsylvania and eventually on to Havana for garrison duty. They were to serve for two years. One death occurred among the Traverse County volunteers, which was due to typhoid fever. The victim was William Kenney, son of John Kenney of Tara Township.

### WORLD WAR I

World War I ranks second only to World War II as the most bloody and most costly war in modern history. Two pistol shots killing Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife of Austria-Hungary on June 28, 1914, actually started the war. The shots were fired by a student from Serbia, and war was declared on Serbia July 28, 1914. However, the underlying causes of the war included growth of nationalism, the system of military alliances that created a balance of power, the competition for colonies and other territory, and the use of secret diplomacy. At the beginning of the war Austria-Hungary and Germany planned to conquer



**This photo was published in the "Traverse County Traveler" on September 12, 1917, under the heading "Wheaton Enlistees Home for the Fair." The Wheaton soldiers were part of the 135th Infantry home on leave after training at Demins, New Mexico, before being sent overseas to enter combat during World War I. Pictured front row, left to right: John Lancaster, Fred Fortune, Jesse Bissonnette, Sidney Odenborg, Roy Erickson, Harry Allanson, and George Konop; back row, left to right: Kenneth Cummings, Sylvanus Allanson, Emil Sorenson, Oliver Anderson, Leslie Davidson, Wayne Williams, Albin Hammersten, Wendell Odenborg, Louis Lundgren.**

new territories and colonies, but they were opposed by the Allies, consisting of Belgium, France, Great Britain, Russia, and Serbia. Other countries, including the United States, were drawn in later.

Using his constitutional authority, on March 12, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson ordered that American merchant ships be armed, and he also called a special session of Congress for April 16. On April 6 the American steamship Aztec, the first armed ship to sail from an American port, was sunk by a German submarine. Wilson immediately delivered his war message before Congress, asking for an army of 500,000 and universal service.

In Wheaton a great patriotic rally was held in the high school auditorium on April 14, 1917. The American Defense League of

Traverse County was organized and officers elected. A telegram to President Wilson from the new association was dispatched the next day pledging support during the war for human freedom. At once twenty-one of Wheaton's patriotic young men answered their country's call with six entering naval service and fifteen mustered into the First Minnesota National Guards.

A selection conscription law was passed by Congress, and June 5 was the date set for all male citizens between the ages of 21 and 31 to register for the draft. The law provided that ages of volunteers would be from 18 through 40, and the term of service for the period of the emergency. In Traverse County 739 men registered at this time. By June, 1918, so many men from the villages had been called into service that it was

necessary to start taking men who had been previously deferred because they were working on farms. In August young men who had reached 21 after June 5 were requested to register. A new law was passed extending the registration to include the age range of 18 through 45, which brought the total registered to 958 in Traverse County.

To finance the war, Congress passed a War Revenue Bill of \$1,800,000.00 to be raised from income taxes and all other types of taxes and tariffs. At the same time bankers were asked to superintend the sale of Liberty Bonds, which were sold at three different times. The first local sale raised \$24,400, which fell far short of the quota, due to partial crop failure the past three years. In October, 1917, the second sale of Liberty Bonds raised \$114,000, again considerably under the county allotment of \$175,000 for that drive. As a result of a great patriotic rally held in the Twin Cities in December,

1917, the "America First" association was formed to carry the message of loyalty to every corner of the state with each county to have a War Board to promote loyalty sentiments. When the third Liberty Bond sale took place in March, 1918, a total of \$286,500 was subscribed, far surpassing the \$175,000 goal. The post office was also selling thrift stamps and war savings certificates to the public to raise money for the war effort. A drive for thrift stamp pledges held June 3, 4 and 5, 1918, was immediately subscribed at \$184,720.00 locally.

Very active during World War I was the Red Cross Society. Organized May 23, 1917, county-wide membership grew to 2,542, and it was one of the most active chapters in the state. There were 1,079 students enrolled in a Junior Red Cross. Red Cross workers raised money and also were busy five days a week providing articles such as bandages, splints, pads, drains, surgical dressings, and gar-



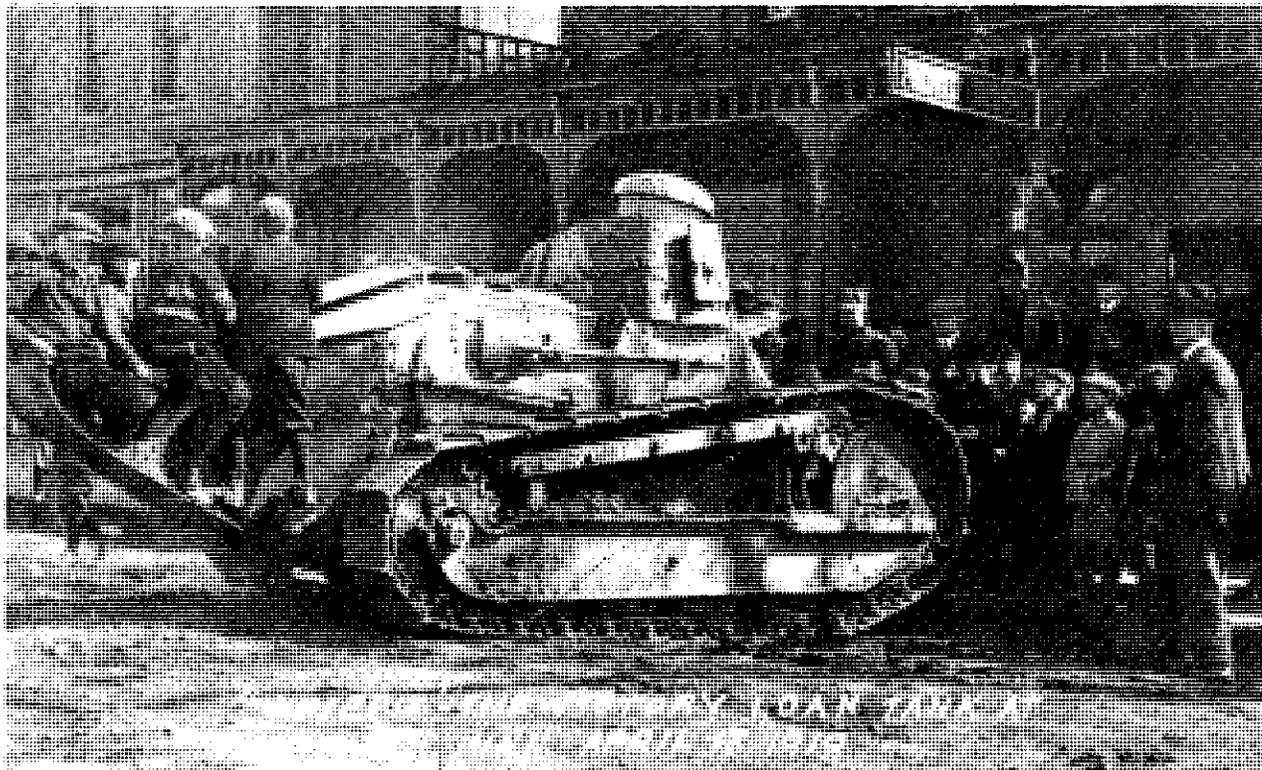
**A procession passing through the streets of Wheaton in 1918 was not a happy occasion for the community. Wheatonites turned out to bury a native son, the first military funeral held in Traverse County. No identification was given on the photo, other than to mark it as the county's first military funeral. Veterans of the era, however, have determined that this must have been the funeral of Amandus Schultz. The photo was taken as the casket passed in front of the old Wheaton high school building.**

ments worn by the wounded. In addition, knitted articles were needed due to conditions in the frozen trenches. The local chapter was asked for 150 sweaters, 150 mufflers, 150 pairs of wristlets, and 150 pairs of socks, but workers far exceeded these amounts.

The winter of 1917-18 found discomforts at home, too. With munition plants running 24 hours a day, using huge amounts of coal, and with trains being diverted for war purposes, there was a serious shortage of coal for heating. Wheat flour and sugar were also very short, and recipes were furnished to utilize barley flour in baking. Hotel and restaurant keepers received orders that every Monday and Wednesday and every supper were to be wheatless, Tuesday was meatless, and every breakfast and Saturday were porkless. It was expected that homes would also observe these restrictions. Every vacant lot was expected to be planted with a war garden.

This war was characterized by much anti-German sentiment. In Wheaton High School the German class books were taken out and burned in the streets in the spring of 1918. The class managed to complete the school year by sharing the few books taken home by students for class preparation the night of the burning. In January, 1918, the federal government ordered all unnaturalized German men to register at their local post office for purpose of identification and thereafter to carry a certificate card until the war ended. Then they could proceed with citizenship efforts. Shortly thereafter other aliens were also required to register under state law. These registrations showed that many people who had been voting had not been eligible to do so.

Dale Fish was the first casualty of the war from this area. He was among troops on the transport Tuscania which was sunk by a German submarine on February 5, 1918. The first Traverse County boy to die on the



**This piece of military equipment proved to be a big attraction as it traveled from town to town, particularly for young lads of the day. The machine was called "Whippit", the victory loan tank that promoted financial support for the war effort. This photo was taken in downtown Wheaton on April 18, 1919, shortly after World War I had come to an end.**

battlefield was Willie Cordes, who died September 3, 1918. Frank R. Weisser died September 19, 1918, from wounds, exactly one year from the day he left Traverse County for service. Merton Kay met death September 30, 1918, when the U.S. Ticonderoga was fired upon and sunk by an enemy submarine. Charles H. Fuhrman, John Larson, and Christ Lampe were killed in the last month of the war, as was Albert F. Anderson who was killed one day before fighting ceased. Others killed in action were George Walz and Louis Kath. Other servicemen who died were Amandus Schultz, Dominick Piechowski, William Hass, Albert Blad, Arlo Lucas, Austin Fortune, Lawrence Hammerbeck, Paul Peickert, Axel Boom, Jayhard Anderson, and Linsey Young.

On November 11, 1918, Wheaton joined the world in celebrating the greatest victory which the world had ever witnessed. There was joyous celebration with bells ringing and dancing, and the Kaiser was burned in effigy!

## WORLD WAR II

World War II killed more persons, cost more money, damaged more property, affected more people, and probably caused more far-reaching changes than any other war in history. Men fought in almost every part of the world. The chief battlegrounds included Asia, Europe, North Africa, the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea. Between September, 1939, and September, 1945, more than ten million Allied servicemen and nearly six million military men from the Axis countries died. World War II brought a total cost of more than \$1,150,000,000,000. More than fifty countries took part in the war, and the whole world felt its effects.

This most devastating war began with the invasion of Poland by Germany on September 1, 1939, and ended six years later almost to the day, September 2, 1945. The formal surrender by the government of Japan took place in a ceremony aboard the American battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay. The major participants were Germany, Italy and Japan, the Axis, on the side which lost, and the United States, Great Britain and the Commonwealth, Russia, France and

China, the Allies, on the side which proved victorious. The main issue was the putting down of the aggressions of the former group by the latter. This object was accomplished, the three nations being completely stripped of their military power when the war ended.

In order to build our armed forces, the United States Selective Training and Service Act became law on September 16, 1940. One month later all men 21 to 36 years of age had to register. The draft lottery was to begin October 29, 1940. Joseph Drinkwitz was the first man called from Traverse County. A total of 1,011 men registered for the draft in Traverse County.

In January, 1943, a United States Cadet Nurse Corps was established. The government was seeking 65,000 student nurses. Subsequently about a dozen women served in this important role from this area, including Severna Arens, Silence Bartz, Gladys Gustafson, Elayne Hervert, Lorraine Jenson, Gladys Saterbak, Katherine Tucker, Orpha Strong, Violette Hanson, Wanda Krenz and Mabel Peyton. Women other than nurses joined the armed forces and served in almost every theatre of war as clerks, cooks, mechanics and drivers, and filled other positions to release men for combat. They enlisted in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), which later became the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and the Women Appointed for Voluntary Emergency Service in the Navy (WAVE). WACs included Nina Bowyer, Magdalen J. Herman (of Tintah, and the first member to enlist from Traverse County), Gertrude Koch, Susan Koch, Virginia Redday and Vitaline Stassen. In the WAVEs were Betty Jean Johnson, Doris Neuman, Margee Peyton and Carolyn Strader.

On April 1, 1943, the first Traverse County World War II casualty was Lt. Leslie Heidelberger, killed when his plane crashed in the European theatre. Joint services were held in St. John's Lutheran Church of Dumont for Heidelberger and Sgt. Raymond Behrens, a drowning victim while stationed at Orlando Air Base, Florida. Lt. Wesley Peterson, a co-pilot, was reported missing, the first Wheaton boy on the casualty list. He was later found to be a prisoner of war in Germany. Barrett Gustafson died in the Pacific area in September, 1943.

Six Traverse County families had the stressful distinction of having four sons in active military service at the same time. They were Mr. and Mrs. Ed Schoenrock, parents of LaVerne, Arnold, Kenneth and Lyle; Mr. and Mrs. John Tobeck, parents of Augie, Vince, Mark and Norman; Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Moerer, parents of Ewald, Reinhard, Waldemar and Bert; Mr. and Mrs. Jentoft Johnson, parents of Arnold, Roy, Clarence and Wayne; Mr. and Mrs. Jake Schmitz, parents of Victor, Donald, Reinhard and Eugene; and Mr. and Mrs. Ed Hanson, parents of Carlton, Kenneth, Melvin and Donald.

People on the home front helped win World War II by building weapons, producing food and clothing, paying taxes, and buying war bonds. The people in North and South America did not suffer hardships comparable to those of the fighting forces or of people in war-torn areas, but they provided the tools that gave the Allies victory. Traverse County was asked to raise \$385,000 in War Bond sales in the month of April, 1943, to meet its share of the \$17,000,000,000 needed that month for lend-lease and other war expenditures. War savings stamps were sold in the school.

Early in 1943, an expanded food rationing list was announced along with a point rationing system on fuel oil, gas for trucks, tires, shoes, sugar, coffee, and a 48-point per person monthly allotment for groceries. The War Production Board (WPB) ordered elimination of nonessential frills on shoes, limited height of heels on women's shoes and restricted colors to four. In mid-June, 1943, the Commercial Club and townships organized "Scrap Corps Day" to collect scrap iron for the war effort. Business places closed so all able-bodied citizens could help meet the six hundred ton quota. Chester Tetzlaff was county salvage chairman.

On May 8, 1945, the fire siren sounded at 9:00 A.M. indicating that VE Day (Victory in Europe) had arrived. It was quietly observed in Wheaton with special services held in the churches that evening and a public program held immediately after in the community auditorium. Victory over Japan (VJ Day) followed on September 2, after the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima August 6, 1945, and Nagasaki two days later.

Sorrowful memories linger on in the hearts of many as they recall the agonizing days, nights, weeks, months and years that our men served their country in all areas from the "foxholes to the cockpits" in all the battles of land, air and sea. Those men who made the supreme sacrifice from Traverse County were Theodore A. Anderson, Raymond Behrens, Stanley L. Boe, Arthur C. Borsheim, Harvey L. Cook, George M. Conner, Ralph D. Conroy, Leo S. Deal, Einer Gronski, Barrett Gustafson, Leslie Heidelberg, Garis Jacoby, Vincent W. Johnson, Reed Kerling, Francis E. Kochie, Martin C. Monson, Robert M. Peyton, Albert L. Sanford, Melvin Saxton, Harold Schmidt, Herbert Schmidt, and Clifford Solheim. These names appear on the memorial wall of the Wheaton Merton-Dale Post of the American Legion.

Additional World War II casualties listed in the **Wheaton Gazette** included John Van Hovel, H. L. Barrett, John Redday, Lavern Nigg, Vernon Hanson, Stanley Duffield, Louis Roark, Howard Layden, Luvern Kaus, Donald Young, Waldemar Schmidtke, John Allison, Norman Redthunder, Noel Goodrich, and S. F. Gustafson.

Here at home the selective service board ended activity on March 31, 1947. Two thousand ninety-seven had registered for service. A total of 836 people entered service, with 688 of them drafted and 148 enlisting.

Volunteers by the score in support of the war effort could now relinquish their time and thoughts to personal needs. Best of all, seeing our brave and courageous men returning to their homes and families helped to partially fill the deep vacuum within us. Though many hearts were heavy that would forever bear the loss of loved ones, those who died did so defending our precious freedoms. Life must go on to preserve the peace!

## **KOREAN WAR**

The Korean War began June 25, 1950, when troops from communist-ruled North Korea invaded South Korea. The United Nations, organized only five years earlier in

1945, called the invasion a violation of international peace and demanded that the communists withdraw. When they kept on fighting, the United Nations asked its member nations to give military aid to South Korea. The United States sent 90 per cent of the troops, military equipment, and supplies.

The Traverse County Selective Service Board was reactivated in July, 1950, with E. J. Zetterstein the board clerk and board members Neville Pearson and Reuben Heggen of Wheaton and A. T. Garberick of Browns Valley.

The first contingent of Traverse County men were inducted into the armed services September 28, 1950. They were Raymond Blank of Wheaton, Donald Fuhrman of Graceville, and Andrew Johnson of Tintah. In April, 1951, four Air Corps reservists from Wheaton were recalled to active duty: Glenn Nielson, Arllis Schmitz, Elmer Worner and Carl N. Lundquist. All were subject to at least 21 months of training under the reserve program.

The first casualty from Traverse County was Robert Kraft. Also killed in action were Leonard Walz and Dewain Donald Smith.

Between October, 1948, when the draft was reactivated, and September, 1953, there were 103 inductions and an additional 115 enlistments from this county.

Unlike World Wars I and II, when there was intense commitment and activity in support of the war effort, little local interest was shown aside from Defense Savings Bond drives in 1951 and 1952, and appeals for whole blood, with the Red Cross Blood Bank being organized in the fall of 1950. Special appeals for blood donations were made in 1951 and 1952. With the plasma reserve depleted in the armed forces, the local quota in 1952 was 367 pints of blood.

The war ended July 27, 1953, when the United Nations and North Korea signed a truce. A permanent peace treaty has never been signed.

## VIETNAM WAR

Forces supported by communist North Vietnam began attacking the government and its officials in South Vietnam in 1957. The fighting started on a small scale, but grew into a savage, full-scale war that threatened world peace. In 1965 combat units of the United States Armed Services began to take part, with the U.S. furnishing both military and financial assistance to the South Vietnamese. The United States never officially declared war.

Many young Wheaton men were drafted or enlisted and saw action in Vietnam. Three men from this area made the supreme sacrifice of losing their lives in combat: Lance Corporal Victor A. Rabel, PFC Dean R. Johnson, and Captain William Lorimer IV. Other deaths were those of Lee Kenney, Carr Strader, and Kenneth Schwagel. Many others were injured while on active duty.

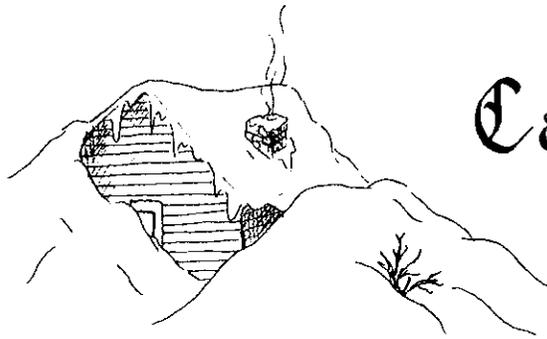
There was no particular patriotic action requested of people in the community — no special blood bank drives or fund-raising bond sales as in the previous wars. There were no announcements made as to how many were in service from this community at any time.

In 1969 the United States began withdrawing troops, which continued during the early 1970's. A cease-fire agreement signed in January, 1973, ended U.S. involvement. However, fighting continued until April 30, 1975, when South Vietnam surrendered to the communists.





**The most devastating fire ever to hit Wheaton came on April 1, 1972, when an early morning blaze destroyed a good portion of the high school, and brought damage extensive enough to require complete razing of the balance of the building. Wheaton residents stood in awe as they watched the 15-year old modern auditorium portion of the building go down in a blaze.**



# Calamities



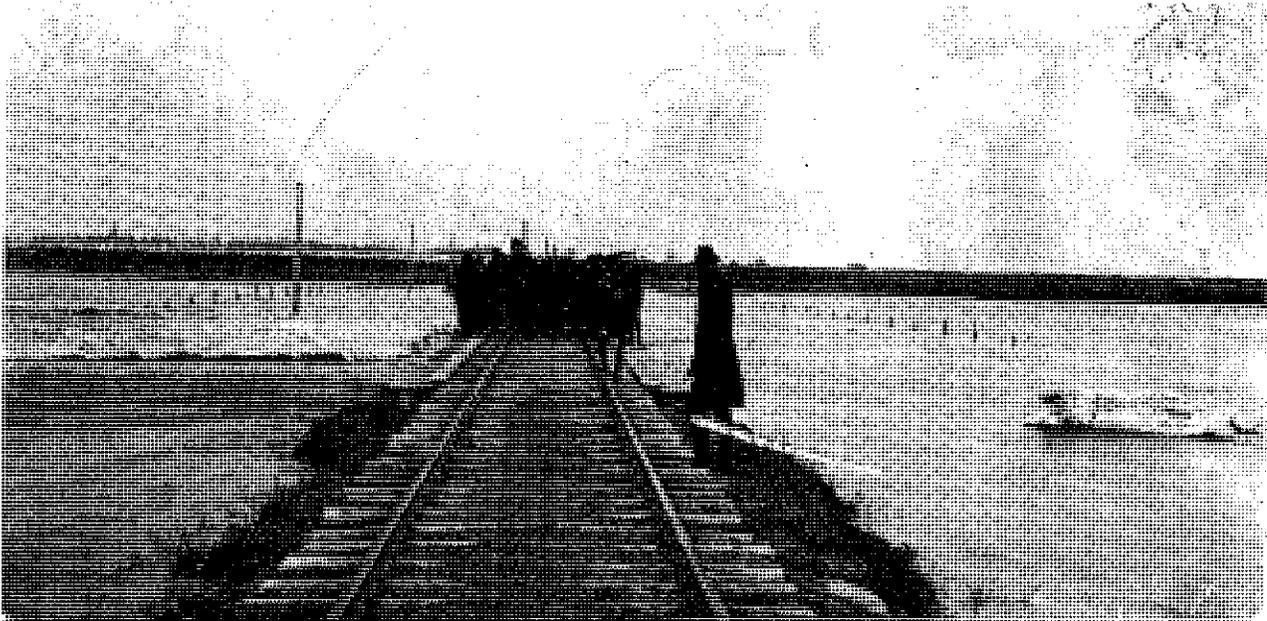
## FLOOD OF 1882

Three deaths occurred in the spring flood of 1882. At that time three carloads of horses which had arrived by railroad at Ortonville from New Hampshire were being brought to the large Henry stock farm at Tintah. Twelve Mile Creek was a mile wide at flood stage, and the horses and most of the harnesses and other gear had been safely rafted across the flooded creek. With

only two harnesses and other small items to transport, a decision was made to transport the balance in a small boat instead of the slow moving raft. The small skiff was meant to accommodate three men, but to save time, the five men in the operation decided to go in one trip. The boat capsized in the deepest part in midstream and three of the five men drowned, including Mathias Schuster, the first settler of Tintah Township.



**The flood of 1916 was one of the first of a number of recorded spring floodings in the Wheaton area. This photo shows a farmer attempting to reach town, traveling on the K.T. road north of Wheaton.**



**A crew of volunteers turned out to help save the railroad bridge north of Wheaton during the 1916 flood. Water levels reaching the base of the railroad bed allowed dangerous ice chunks to pose a threat of knocking out the bridge, and those ice chunks are what workers concentrated on in protecting the bridge. Note the near absence of trees on the prairie land of the area.**

#### **FLOOD OF 1916**

A raging torrent filled the entire Mustinka valley, making a stream about three miles in width. It took considerable riprapping to keep the railroad grade from washing out. Trains from both north and south stopped at the edge of the valley and transferred mail and passengers with a handcar. Ben Cunningham, the Star Route

carrier from Wheaton to Diamond, would leave his team at the old Lindval farm west of Wheaton and take a boat from there to Diamond. He was forced to carry the mail in this way from April until late in July. One could go in a boat all the way north to the business section of White Rock, South Dakota.



**The 1916 flood washed out a bridge between the Lupkes and Johanson farms near Wheaton.**

### **MOTHER AND TWO CHILDREN CRUSHED BY GRAIN**

While loading wheat into a wagon, Mrs. John Larson, her son George, 17, and daughter Gladys, 4, were killed when the floor of the upper story of the granary collapsed upon them with several hundred bushels of oats. Another daughter, Alice (Mrs. Chester Anderson), heard the crash from the house and telephoned for aid; but when neighbors arrived the victims were beyond help. The crop in the year 1924 had been particularly abundant, and apparently the granary could not support the weight. The accident occurred on a farm five and one-half miles northwest of Wheaton.

### **TEACHER SAVED 24 STUDENTS IN SCHOOL FIRE**

Lydia Larson, age 24, proved a cool heroine in February, 1925. The kerosene stove on which she was cooking a hot school lunch for her students set fire to the building, allowing her but a few seconds to get her charges out-of-doors. The stove Miss

Larson was using was being primed with gasoline. The primer leaked fuel onto the burner, then onto the floor, and soon the flames ignited the lace curtains on the window. As soon as she noticed the fire, Miss Larson marched the children from the building. They had no sooner vacated when there was a sharp explosion and a puff of flame and smoke belched from the doorway. The wood frame school of District 47 was no more.

### **FIREMEN SAVED TOWN WHEN ELEVATOR BURNED TO GROUND**

Only the heroic efforts of the Wheaton Fire Department and a fortunate change in the direction of the wind saved the whole business section of Wheaton from almost certain destruction in early 1925 when the Kellogg Commission Company elevator burned to the ground.

Fire from an unknown cause was noticed issuing from the top of the elevator at two o'clock, and in less than two hours the whole structure, containing almost 10,000



The 1969 flood provided evidence of the power of moving water. A great many roads in the county were heavily damaged by flood waters, including this stretch along the K.T. northwest of Wheaton. The blacktop, only three years old, was virtually ripped in half as water poured across it for several days during the flooding.

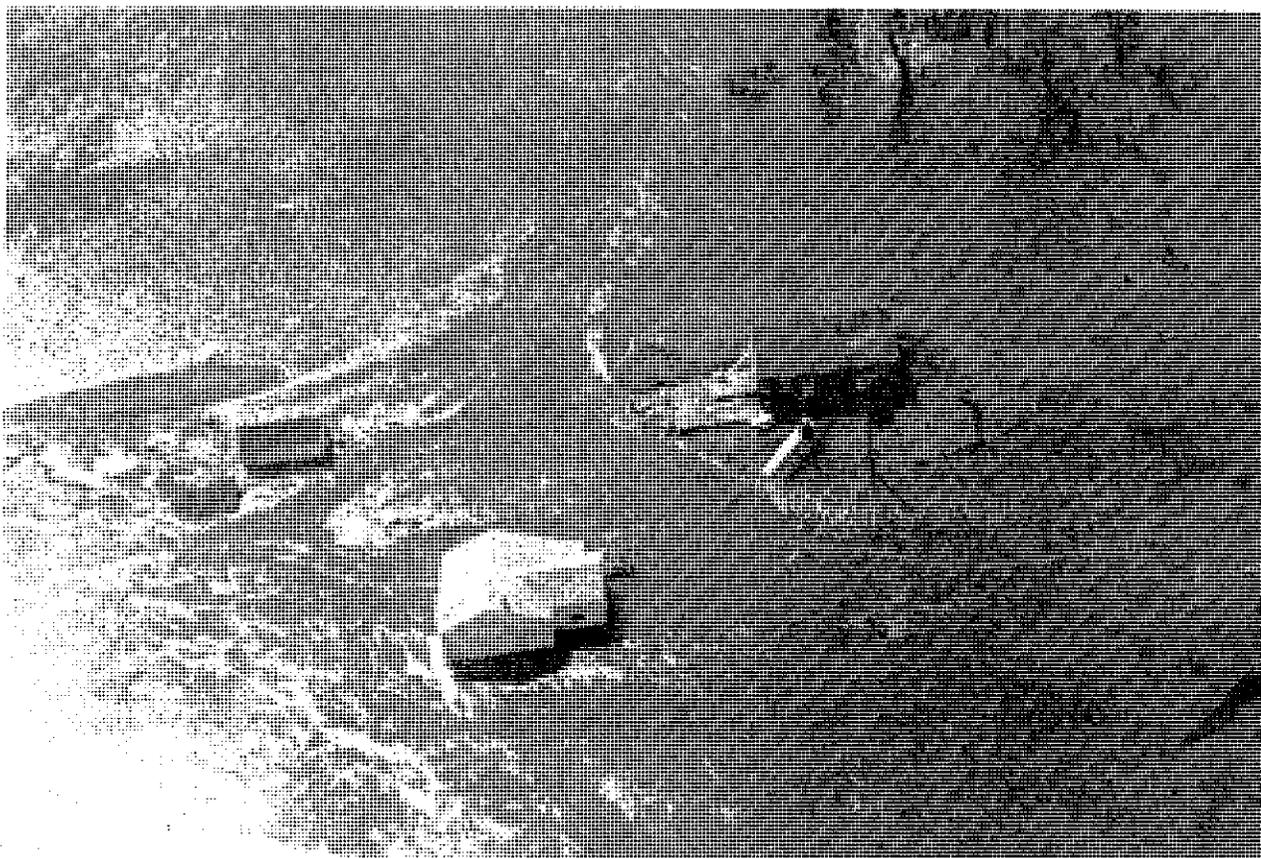
bushels of grain, was completed burned. The fire was discovered by employees of the Ideal Creamery, who turned in the alarm. With a straight south wind blowing the firemen decided that there was grave danger to the Hanson elevator, thirty feet to the north. H. J. Friedrich, assistant chief, was in charge and directed the firemen to confine their efforts to saving the Hanson elevator and the buildings north of that, since the fire had too great a headway before being discovered to save the Kellogg elevator.

When the fire started, there were only seventeen feet of water in the water tank and the fire department had to be careful to conserve the water supply. The wind veered about fifteen degrees to the west before 2:30, and the flames were then swept across the road to the east. Many small blazes were

started on roofs of the Fleischer blacksmith shop and several dwellings, but these were quickly put out by the firemen and volunteers with buckets of water.

#### **GAZETTE OFFICE AND FORD GARAGE LEVELLED**

On November 24, 1950, flames engulfed the buildings housing Traverse Motor Sales and The Wheaton Gazette. The blaze started early in the morning in the motor sales building on the corner of Broadway and Front Street. Strong northwest winds spread it to the frame building of the Gazette next door. Both businesses rebuilt at once. The Gazette resumed publishing by January 1, 1951, after getting new equipment and setting up temporarily in the King Pin Lanes across the street.



**Flooding in 1969 left many farmsteads surrounded by water, including this property of the Don Fridgen family just west of Wheaton. A flowing ice chunk knocked one small building down on the property. Although cut off by high water overflowing the banks of the Mustinka, the Fridgens remained in their home, using a boat to get from their house to the highway.**



**While flooding has been almost a perennial problem in parts of Traverse County, there was a time when quite the reverse was the case. In the "dirty thirties" there was a dire shortage of water for crops in the area. Much of Lake Traverse was bone dry. This photo shows a mother and her children sitting on rocks on the dry lake bottom of Traverse.**

### **THE GREAT DEPRESSION**

While the Great Depression is considered a worldwide business slump of the 1930's, its causes started during the 1920's when bank failures and low farm incomes set the stage. In 1929 banks in Tintah, Dumont, and Browns Valley were closed, and in Wheaton the National Bank of Wheaton consolidated with the First National Bank under the name of The First National Bank. On October 24, 1929, "Black Thursday", the stock market crashed and the Great Depression had begun. More than 5,000 banks were to close between 1929 and 1933.

Like other farm communities, Wheaton and its trade area were at the same time experiencing the devastation of drought. The years between 1931 and 1934 were especially difficult. With a serious shortage of moisture and temperatures ranging over 100 degrees (in July, 1931, temperatures were as high as 110 degrees), practically no crops were produced, and the entire area was a huge

dust bowl with dust filling the air and making it appear like nightfall in the middle of the day. Rural school children were trapped in their schools overnight, as visibility prevented them from returning to their homes. Tumbleweeds blew across the hot, dry land, and in sandy soil areas sand dunes formed. During this time Lake Traverse and Mud Lake were completely dry.

Coupled with the drought was the serious problem of low prices for grain and livestock. In 1932 oats was selling for 11 cents, rye for 22 cents, barley for 21 cents, wheat for 36 cents, and corn for 8 cents (prices were to go even lower); farmers organized to strike over prices, burned corn for fuel rather than coal. Prices for cattle and pigs were so low that it hardly paid to ship them to market.

These prices also reflected on business in the town where times were also very difficult. Early in 1932 the village council cut salaries. Already at the low rate of \$10 a



**In 1935 the dried and overgrown bottoms of Lake Traverse and Mud Lake provided fuel for raging fires.**

year, councilmen cut their salaries to \$9 a year, the village treasurer's from \$50 to \$45, and the clerk's from \$250 to \$225. Every dollar counted!

In 1934 drought conditions brought a cattle killing program with the government buying cattle to assist farmers who had no feed to keep them alive. Nearly 5,000 cattle were purchased here for the government. To prevent cattle from coming in from South Dakota to be pastured, National Guard troops came to Wheaton to patrol the state border. The Commercial Club arranged to help farmers who chose to keep their cattle in locating hay for the winter. In June hog prices reached the high point of the year at \$4.20 to \$4.50 and beef sold for from \$8.00 to \$8.35 per hundredweight.

During this difficult time there were numerous farm foreclosures, and at the same time many new people moved into the area from Iowa, Nebraska, and other states, hoping to find better conditions here.

Upon the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, many new laws were passed and

programs set up to relieve the depression. His plan was called the "New Deal". Among the many projects created were the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to create employment, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) to help regulate farm production, and Public Works Administration (PWA), all of which had an impact on Wheaton, its business community, and the area it served. In 1933 Governor Floyd B. Olson declared a mortgage moratorium, pending legislation. Also that year all Minnesota banks were closed for a four-day holiday, along with all the banks in the United States. Only those in sound financial condition were allowed to reopen.

With the new government programs providing work for people, with moisture to raise crops, and with improving prices for farm products, conditions started to improve in 1935, but it took many years for people in town and country to recover from the devastating effects of the depression and drought.

## AIRLIFT OF 1951

Five storms in March deposited 41½ inches of snow, halting traffic, marooning travelers, and activating a Civil Air Patrol operation assigned to Wheaton. CAP pilots Ike Haugland, Nels Roman and Lars Roman delivered food to snowbound persons, brought an expectant mother to the hospital, and conducted a search for a missing man

who was later found frozen to death on the river just north of Wheaton. The nerve center for the CAP rescue mission was Larry Hokanson's short wave radio. A trailer house located on Lawrence Jacobson's field at the east edge of Wheaton served as headquarters for pilots and others assisting in the rescue operation. After the emergency Haugland entered a Minneapolis hospital for treatment of exhaustion.



While normally not a calamity, snow has piled high in the downtown streets of Wheaton almost every winter, an example of which is provided by this photo looking west from the corner of 11th and Broadway. Interesting to note in the photo, however, is that this block of business buildings, battling only snowbanks here, was to be hard hit by disaster in years to come. The building on the corner is the Wells building, destroyed by fire in 1983. The two buildings on the far end of the block housed the Ford Garage and the Wheaton Gazette. Both were to be destroyed by fire in November of 1950.

## HIGH SCHOOL DESTROYED

A disastrous fire occurring on April Fool's Day, 1972, was no joke! Discovered during the early morning hours of April 1, the fire completely destroyed the 1916 section of the school and the 1957 auditorium. The Wheaton Fire Department was aided by departments from five neighboring towns. Firemen Milton Larson and James Henkes were credited with entering the building and closing the fire doors on the first and second floors, which proved to be the key in saving the 1899 building to the north. Firemen managed to save yet another addition to the east of the 1916 section, although it was heavily damaged. Spectators assisted in removing school records, band instruments, and heavy woodworking equipment in the industrial arts department. This is considered the biggest, most costly fire in the history of Wheaton.

School resumed on April 10, utilizing the old 1899 building, various churches and the municipal library building, so that the remaining eight weeks of the school year could be completed.



Paul Nelson had nowhere to go when he reached the waterline on this bridge across Twelve Mile Creek. The bridge crossed the creek, alright, but flood waters had spread far beyond the banks of the creek, putting the road out of commission. The photo was taken in May, 1962.



An early morning fire completely gutted the modern Hartz Super Market in Wheaton in November of 1957. The building, the entire inventory and all interior fixtures were destroyed by the blaze.

## WELLS STORE LAID WASTE

Sixty-five firemen from six departments managed to control a raging fire in downtown Wheaton on August 25, 1983. The inferno, which threatened human lives, completely destroyed the turn-of-the-century building on the corner of 11th Street and Broadway. Originally housing the Wells Company Store, the structure in 1983 contained an insurance business, two dental offices, and a prosthodontist laboratory on the first floor. The second floor had seven apartments, five of which were occupied. Resident Mardi Jenson awoke coughing. She smelled smoke and immediately alerted other occupants. All escaped unharmed. Damage to nearby buildings was slight although there was a time during the blaze when it appeared the entire downtown block would be swallowed up in flame. Records and a good deal of equipment were removed from the Gazette building near the west end of the block when it appeared a near certainty that the blaze would spread. But firemen managed to contain the fire to the Wells building, with some damage to the adjoining Hunder building.



**Wheaton firemen battled throughout the night on August 25, 1983, in a fruitless effort to save the historic Wells building in downtown Wheaton. The blaze, which leveled the building and endangered an entire downtown block of business buildings, left three businesses without quarters and destroyed seven upstairs apartments, five of which were occupied at the time.**

#### **ADDITIONAL FIRES AND WEATHER EXTREMES**

- 1880 - Widespread blizzards.
- 1891 - A drought so severe that the lake bed of Lake Traverse was dry all the way from the old Maudada townsite and to the north.
- 1898 - Storms and heavy snow — no train came through Wheaton for two weeks.
- 1904 - A January 1 fire destroyed Sorenson & Mork Hardware, J. A. Carlson's Millinery Store, the **Footprints** office located at the present Corner Drug site, and H. B. Cory's Land Office.
- 1906 - Fire destroyed the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul depot.
- 1919 - Two cyclones hit the county, one causing \$100,000 damage and one death in Dumont, the other completely destroying the John Carlson farm buildings eight miles north of Wheaton. The same day a third cyclone killed 52 people at Fergus Falls.
- 1923 - A life-threatening "white-out" storm hit the area.
- 1934 - The Grand Theatre and the A. H. Peterson Furniture Store were destroyed by fire.
- 1935 - A July 4 cyclone severely damaged ten sets of farm buildings in Monson and Clifton townships. An oddity was that the cyclone plucked Ed Zetterstein out of the doorway of the Henry Cole house, carried him over a large building, and deposited him in the grove unharmed.

- 1936 - Heavy snows and storms blocked roads, interrupted mail service, and postponed basketball games and other events. A rotary plow opened roads which had been closed for several weeks. For a month the average temperature was minus 12.86 degrees.
- 1939 - Lake bottom fire threatened farm buildings along Mud Lake. Earlier an eight square mile tract had burned.
- 1940 - Armistice Day storm trapped travelers and hunters — 33 died in the state.
- 1952 - Fire razed the Peavey Elevator.
- 1954 - A "straight tornado" with winds exceeding 80 miles per hour heavily damaged trees, antennas, and electric power; a semi-trailer and truck blew over on the highway, two hangars and a plane were wrecked, and a snow plow was used to clean stones from the roadway between Lake Traverse and Mud Lake.
- 1957 - Fire destroyed the Hartz Super Market building.
- 1965 - On June 1, up to eleven inches of rain fell in Browns Valley with four inches coming in forty-five minutes, and along the eastern shore of Lake Traverse a portion of Highway 27 washed out in the area of the Abraham farm.
- 1967 - Severe blizzard conditions trapped school buses on the road with children housed in nearby farms homes, and one death resulted. Henry Lundquist perished in the storm after leaving his ditched car and attempting to walk home.
- 1968 - A record of nearly ninety inches of snow fell over the winter of 1968-69, making it the worst snow winter in the past eighty years. A "clearing house" was organized in Wheaton for emergency calls. In the spring severe flooding resulted. Later Traverse County received \$81,823 from the State of Minnesota for snow removal the previous winter, total cost of which was \$140,000.
- 1969 - In April thawing and heavy rain brought widespread flooding with roads washed out and portions of Highways 75 and 27 under water in spots; county road damage topped a quarter of a million dollar mark and water level at the Reservation Dam hit 981.03 feet above sea level on April 17.
- 1977 - Mud Lake again went dry, exposing a well preserved buffalo skull, an antique boat motor, and other artifacts.
- 1982 - A tornado ripped through Tintah and damaged several sets of farm buildings, wiping out the Keller dairy operation.
- 1984 - A sudden blinding snowstorm hit the area, trapping many people in their cars overnight and resulting in the death of one Wheatonite, Luke White.



**A tornado passing through the area in 1919 left death and destruction. Hardest hit was the Dumont community, where nearly every building in town was heavily damaged or destroyed and one man was killed.**