Akron Responds to the Beginning of World War I

by Michael Elliott, Public Service Assistant (ret’d)

One hundred years ago this summer, World War I began in Europe, eventually involving all of the world’s prominent nations and leaving a lasting, devastating legacy. Though the U.S. did not enter the war until 1917, it caused significant effects from the start. Many regarded the war as a strictly European concern, but recent immigrants keenly felt the reverberations as their homelands were torn apart. Sentiments expressed throughout the country during those first few months of the war were clearly echoed in Akron.

Prior to the war, there was a distinct and extensive German presence in Akron. Most, but not all, had come to the Akron area in the 1880s. The 1910 census for Summit County discloses a slight edge in the number of those who were born in Germany to those that were born in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales combined. However, when adding Austrian and Hungarian surnames into the mix, the numbers dwarf the number of recent English speaking immigrants to Akron. A quick examination of the 1914 Akron city directory reveals a large percentage of German surnames including the familiar Burkhardt, Selle, Pflueger, Billow, Koch, Schumacher, Rohner, Werner, Seiberling, and hundreds of others that were Germanic in origin. The directory likewise shows several German and Hungarian clubs and societies where both recent immigrants and those who had come years before could meet and celebrate their culture and customs from the old world. Membership in many of these clubs would remain strong well into the 20th century.

American sentiment in August 1914 regarding the outbreak of war was initially neutral, perhaps even bordering on indifference. Despite a large segment of Akron’s population being of German extraction, local...
public opinion essentially mirrored that of the rest of the country, favoring strong American neutrality. Still, there was considerable local interest in the ongoing European situation. “Practically all of Akron’s foreign population is interested in the latest developments in the war-stricken countries (with) the Hungarians and Serbians the most concerned,” commented the Akron Beacon Journal on July 30, 1914.

Feelings ran deep for many recent immigrants, and there were some who felt an allegiance to their home country or were still liable for service in their nation’s armed forces. “Hundreds of men are awaiting the call to come home and fight for their native lands and there is a manifest eagerness to go without delay,” announced the Barberton Herald on July 31, 1914. The column continued that “there are over a thousand Hungarians, Serbians, Slavs, Greeks and Austrians here who may leave for the war.” Similar sentiment existed in Akron for the German community. “Call For German Reserves Reaches Akron,” read the headline of the August 5, 1914 Beacon Journal. But fervor may have exceeded requirements. Walter Fischer, editor of the Akron Germania, estimated that only a moderate number of Akron Germans would be affected by Kaiser Wilhelm’s decision to call up the reserves. “Of the 15,000 Germans in Akron only 500 are said to be subject to military duty,” he said.

Alarmed with the reports of German barbarism in the media, leaders of the German-American community in Akron spoke to a standing-room-only crowd at the German Music Hall on August 30. Printer Paul Werner and funeral director George Billow made impassioned speeches imploring the U.S. to remain neutral. Hoping to give the presentation a low profile, the newspaper noted that the “meeting was tense with subdued feeling but characterized by the total absence of any inflammatory tendencies.” The message they attempted to convey was simple—don’t rush to judgment on Germany until all of the evidence was out.

But it was too late. The tipping point for the American public seems to have been the outrage at the German invasion of neutral Belgium and their subsequent occupation. Public opinion against Germany went from indignation to revulsion when reports of atrocities committed by the advancing German army were published by American newspapers. The feeling was no less evident in Akron as the Beacon Journal on December 14, 1914 reported, “in almost every case the hostility to Germany that has found lodgment in the American mind was caused by the violation of Belgian neutrality.”

Kaiser Wilhelm quickly became the symbol for German aggression. Local opinion began to coalesce, with dwindling chance of real neutrality. When the Kaiser was stricken with a chest ailment in mid-December 1914, a reporter for the Beacon Journal randomly surveyed many Akron residents who almost unanimously hoped he might not survive. The general feeling was that he was to blame for the ongoing hostilities which might be interrupted if he were no longer Emperor. The “war to end all wars” had begun in earnest for local residents. For a while, they could remain at a distance; but by 1918, their world would be a much different place.
Akron-Summit County Public Library Turns 140

by Cheri Goldner, Librarian

On January 26, 1874, Akron City Council passed an ordinance to create a free public library for the city. The Akron-Summit County Public Library has recognized our 140th year so far with an article in the spring issue of ShelfLife and regular postings of historic photographs on the Library’s Facebook page.

Here in Special Collections, we digitized the book Akron’s Library: Commemorating Twenty-five Years on Main Street and added it to the Online Books page of our website in February. Published in 1994 by former Library Director of Publicity and Display Margaret Dietz, this book documents the growth and development of the library system from the 1874 city ordinance to the twenty-fifth anniversary of Main Library on Main Street in 1994. The book was published with endowment funds left to the Library by James W. Chamberlain.

More displays and events recognizing the Library’s history are planned throughout the year. In August, Special Collections will launch a new digital exhibit on Summit Memory and install a display in our exhibit case on the third floor of Main Library. A smaller rotating exhibit will begin making its way to each of our branch libraries in the fall, and a celebration is planned at Main Library on Saturday, September 13. Watch the Library and Special Collections websites and Facebook pages as well as the next issue of Past Pursuits for details.

Can’t wait until September for our exhibits? You can browse the Library History Digital Exhibit (which will be replaced with the upcoming exhibit on Summit Memory), the photographs posted to the Library’s Facebook page, search Summit Memory, or take a look at Akron’s Library. Don’t miss the bookmark for photographs between Chapters 7 and 8.

The interior of the Akron Public Library in the former Masonic Temple in 1895. From the Library History Collection.
Free Genealogy Databases

by Rebecca Larson-Troyer, Librarian

Did you know that the Library offers access to eight unique databases for genealogy researchers? From vital records to historic maps, these resources provide our library users with a wealth of information for seeking out ancestors at no cost.

The most comprehensive and best known database we provide is Ancestry Library Edition (ALE). While not identical to Ancestry.com, this database comes from the same company and includes most of the records that would be available to paid individual subscribers, including international content. ALE is not available for home use, but is free at Main Library and all branches. With content from 1300 to present and over 200 billion digitized records, ALE is a must-use database for every genealogist.

American Ancestors is only available for use at Main Library, but descendants of New Englanders will want to make a visit for this resource. Created by the New England Historic Genealogical Society, American Ancestors includes more than 200 million vital, probate and church records for northeastern states and Canada, as well as access to genealogy periodicals with a particular focus on New England research.

No time to visit the library today? Try one of six databases available for home use. Fold3 is a favorite with its coverage of military records, as well as newspapers, city directories and historic photographs. HeritageQuest provides access to census records, Revolutionary War pension files and more, including nearly 30,000 fully searchable books and family history resources. MyHeritage – World Vital Records offers U.S. censuses from 1790 to 1940 and a selection of international records, including extensive coverage of the U.K., Canada and Australia. Find out about the research others have done on your ancestors by searching the 1.5 billion names in MyHeritage Family Trees.

Learn about the places your ancestors lived with Historic Map Works, a worldwide collection of more than 1.5 million land maps and atlases. Browse locations or search place names, with some atlases including the option to overlay modern satellite images. Locate your ancestors’ names on historic township maps, or search for “Old World” towns and villages.

For those looking for birth, marriage and death announcements, try Access Newspaper Archive, a database of digitized newspapers spanning 1607 to present with national and international coverage. Browse available newspapers by country and state, or search for names and subject matter. All newspapers are full-text searchable and you can easily limit results by date or region. Local newspaper content is also available through our Akron Beacon Journal database, which offers full-text article content from 1984 to present.

To access the Library’s genealogy databases, visit www.akronlibrary.org/databases/index.html#genealogy. For databases accessible from home, have your library card number handy, and enter the last four digits of your phone number as the pin.
Ohio journalist Ruth McKenney is best known as the author of *My Sister Eileen*, a breezy, affectionate memoir featuring her well-loved sibling. During the 1940s and 50s as the book’s success resulted in a Broadway play, a movie and finally a musical, McKenney achieved a wide audience and popular acclaim. Before she rose to that acclaim, she made history here. As an *Akron Beacon Journal* reporter and brief Akron resident in the early 1930s, she left an indelible mark—some would say scar—on the city and its people.

Born in Mishawaka, Indiana in 1911, McKenney’s family soon moved to East Cleveland. Her interest in journalism began early; she was a printer’s apprentice by age 14. She graduated from Shaw High School in 1928 and attended Ohio State University, where she was a member of the women’s literary society Chi Delta Phi. In the two short years she worked for the *Beacon Journal*, she won multiple awards from the Ohio Newspaper Women’s Writing Association, as well as both praise and criticism from local readers. She also acquired nicknames such as “Ohio’s best sob sister” for her effusive human interest stories and “the Red Gracie Allen” for her well-known leanings—Communist and comic.

Clearly bound for larger venues, McKenney moved to New York City in 1934. It wasn’t long before those in Akron who admired the spirited young journalist had that goodwill tested. In her article “Uneasy City,” published in *The New Yorker* in 1936, she described Akron as “dirty and ugly” and “an architect’s hell and a city planner’s nightmare.” It had no culture, and “its library is so small and so pitiful, so starved for funds, that the earnest men and women who run it speak about it in strained voices.” This dreary portrayal led to the article’s real issue, which was labor unrest in the city’s rubber industry. Don’t try to make union jokes in Akron, she warned. “This is a jumpy town.”

It was about to get more jumpy. “Uneasy City” was the prologue for McKenney’s book *Industrial Valley*, a journal-style, anecdotal account of the 1936 Goodyear strike and the organization of the United Rubber Workers (URW). Published in 1939, the book caused a substantial local stir, especially among those who found themselves in it. The most common criticism on all sides was her loose treatment of the subject, despite her claim of complete accuracy. Rev. Bill Denton decried the book’s “slander” and called for its censorship. The vice president of the URW complained that certain events in it “just did not happen.” Even the *New York Times* review admitted McKenney’s “probable distortion.” And the *Beacon Journal* sourly stated that its former reporter had “pilloried” Akron yet again.

Some reviewers were mystified at the extremes of McKenney’s writing. She went on to create several more books in the same vein including *Jake Home* and *The McKenneys Carry On*, but nothing brought the warm accolades of *My Sister Eileen* or the indignant scorn of *Industrial Valley*. Tragic events struck those closest to her. Eileen died in an automobile accident in 1940, five days before the namesake play opened. Richard Bransten, McKenney’s husband, struggled with mental illness and died by suicide. Later, McKenney suffered from heart disease and diabetes, and passed away at age 60 in 1972. Her daughter Eileen, named for her aunt, currently serves as a New York Supreme Court Justice. In a 2003 *New York Times* article, she acknowledged her mother’s hardships and added, “if you scratch the surface, every humorist is a tragedian.”
Eight decades later, much has changed in Akron, and McKenney’s sharp knife in its back is long since gone. Yet her barbs can still induce a defensive twitch. It’s effortless to like her as a lighthearted spinner of zany yarns, but not so much as a stinging critic who skewered serious events. Perhaps we should respect her viewpoint, however, because “Uneasy City” and Industrial Valley recreate a significant chapter not just in Akron’s history, but also in American history. Had she not written them, that singular perspective wouldn’t exist, and her works have a place in the interpretive chronicles of American industry and labor. Beacon Journal editorial writer Anthony Weitzel said it best in an astute observation about history and those who reconstruct it. Industrial Valley was a book begging to be written, he pointed out. There were plenty of people who knew more about the subject, but “they didn’t write it and Ruth did.”

For that, we can give Ruth McKenney our uneasy thanks.

**Summit County Historical Society:**
**Niney Years of Preserving Our History**
*by Judy James, Division Manager*

Ninety years ago this summer, the Summit County Historical Society (SCHS) was organized and chartered by a group of seven members of the Cuyahoga Portage Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. As keepers of their own family histories, they recognized the importance of preserving and documenting our community’s rich history. Since that time, the Summit County Historical Society has ably fulfilled this mission through educational programming, tours, exhibits, advocacy, and preservation, as well as maintaining the Perkins Stone Mansion, the John Brown House, and the Old Stone School.

Collaboration is a hallmark of SCHS, and we are proud and grateful to be one of their community partners. In 2008, Special Collections was entrusted with housing and preserving their archival collections comprised of documents, manuscripts and thousands of historic photographs. This seamless partnership benefits not only the Historical Society and the Library, but also our community.

Today’s Historical Society, led by President and CEO, Leianne Neff Heppner, and a hard-working board led by Dave Lieberth is working diligently to ensure that our community’s history is celebrated and preserved for future generations. We congratulate the Summit County Historical Society for ninety remarkable years of service to our community and look forward to many more years of partnering and friendship.

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**Summit County OGS Events**

For more information, please see [http://summitogs.org](http://summitogs.org).

**The History of the Ohio & Erie Canal**

Presented by Paul Goodwin
Saturday, June 21, 1:30 pm (chapter meeting)
Akron-Summit County Main Library
Meeting Rooms 2A-2B

**Beyond the Docket Books: Digging for Gold In Probate Packets**

Presented by Chris Staats
Saturday, July 19, 1:30 pm (chapter meeting)
Akron-Summit County Main Library
Meeting Rooms 2A-2B
Summit Memory Update
by Rebecca Larson-Troyer, Librarian

Three new collections have recently been added to Summit Memory.

The **Historic Hudson Collection** features over two hundred images of nineteenth and twentieth century Hudson, documenting numerous locales in this historic Western Reserve community. The collection was contributed by the Hudson Library & Historical Society and supported in part by an award from the Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board through funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, National Archives & Records Administration.

The **Turkeyfoot Island Collection** includes images from the collection of the Turkeyfoot Island Club, based in the Portage Lakes area. Featured in Summit Memory are photographs selected from the Club’s larger collection, which was donated to Special Collections in 2012. The photographs offer various views of Turkeyfoot Lake, a popular summertime retreat since the late 1800s.

The **Stow Woman’s Club Collection** includes a small group of images selected from a larger collection of photograph albums, scrapbooks, program booklets, record books and miscellaneous documents dating to the early 1900s. The Stow Woman’s Club, originally named Stow Culture Club, was a social club organized in 1903. This collection was contributed by the Stow-Munroe Falls Public Library.

Summit Memory is an online, collaborative scrapbook administered by Special Collections capturing the history of Summit County, Ohio. Collections include historic photographs, documents, newspapers, artifacts and audiovisual resources contributed by partner organizations throughout the county.

Community Photo Days at Portage Lakes Branch

The **Portage Lakes Branch** and the **Portage Lakes Historical Society** invite members of the community to their first Community Photo Days event August 7-9. Share up to ten photographs of the historic Portage Lakes area, which will be scanned for possible inclusion in Summit Memory. Participants will keep their original photographs and may also request high-resolution scans by bringing a flash drive or other removable media. The goal of this project is to gather pre-1980 images of locations, community events, historic landmarks, community organizations, restaurants, businesses and churches in the Portage Lakes area of Coventry, New Franklin and Manchester. Participants must register in advance for appointments. For more information or to register, call the Portage Lakes Branch at 330-644-7050.

**Portage Lakes Community Photo Days**
Sponsored by the Portage Lakes Historical Society and the Portage Lakes Branch Library
Thursday, August 7, 5-7 pm
Friday, August 8, 1-4 pm
Saturday, August 9, 1-4 pm
Portage Lakes Branch Library, 4261 Manchester Road, Akron
Civil War Commemorative Events

From now through 2015, Summit County will commemorate the 150th anniversary of Ohio’s involvement in the Civil War. For more information about events here and throughout the state, visit Ohio Civil War 150.

Ohio’s Unknown Generals
Presented by Mark Holbrook
Peninsula Valley Historic and Education Foundation
Civil War Lecture Series
June 26, 7 pm
GAR Hall
1785 Main Street, Peninsula

Fighting For Freedom: the Story of the United States Colored Troops
Presented by Anthony Gibbs
Peninsula Valley Historic and Education Foundation
Civil War Lecture Series
July 24, 7 pm
GAR Hall
1785 Main Street, Peninsula

Medical Treatment of Confederate POWs at the Johnson’s Island Civil War Prison
Presented by Dr. David Bush
Peninsula Valley Historic and Education Foundation
Civil War Lecture Series
August 28, 7 pm
GAR Hall
1785 Main Street, Peninsula

War of 1812 Commemorative Events

Although 2012 marked the 200th anniversary of the commencement of the War of 1812, the war did not end until 1815. Communities throughout Ohio continue to commemorate this conflict with ceremonies and remembrances. For more information about events taking place in our state, visit the Ohio War of 1812 Bicentennial Commission. For information about local events and projects, visit the William Wetmore Chapter Daughters of 1812.

Copley Cemetery 1812 Graves Tour
June 24, 7 pm

Croghan Park Rededication and Encampment
July 19, 10 am–9 pm
Croghan Park, Smith Road, Fairlawn (shuttle service from Dillard’s)

The Building of Perry’s Fleet
Presented by Sharon Myers, William Wetmore Chapter, Daughters of 1812
July 22, 6:30 pm
Highland Square Branch Library
807 West Market St., Akron

Colonel George Croghan and the Battle of Ft. Stephenson
Presented by Sharon Myers, William Wetmore Chapter, Daughters of 1812
August 14, 7 pm
Richfield Historical Society
3907 Broadview Road, Richfield

The War of 1812 and the Battle of Lake Erie
August 25, 6:30 pm
Green Branch Library
4046 Massillon Road, Uniontown
Glendale Cemetery 175th Anniversary Events
This year marks 175 years since Jedediah Commins lobbied to establish a cemetery for Akron that was suitable for the burial of his beloved son, Augustus. His efforts led to the creation of a charter in 1839 for the Akron Rural Cemetery which we now know as Glendale. One hundred seventy-five years later, Akron is celebrating this remarkable local landmark and resting place of many local luminaries with several events. For more information, visit Downtown Akron Partnership or contact the Glendale Cemetery office at 330-253-2317.

Trolley Tour of Glendale Cemetery
Monday, July 7, 7 pm-8:30 pm

Michele Colopy and Bill Wilkerson Talk & Walk
Monday, July 21, 7 pm (rain date Saturday, July 26, 1 pm)

Heinz Poll Summer Dance Festival
Friday, August 1, 7:30 pm
Saturday, August 2, 7:30 pm

Public Celebration of Glendale Cemetery’s 175th Anniversary
Saturday, August 2, 4 pm-7:30 pm
Sunday, August 3, 4 pm-7:30 pm

Akron Symphony Orchestra
Sunday, August 3, 7:30 pm

Bird Walk at Glendale Cemetery
Saturday, September 20, time to be determined

Unique Glendale Photo Opportunity
Saturday, October 11 (rain date Sunday, October 12)
Details forthcoming.

Questing at Glendale Cemetery
Go Questing at Glendale Cemetery: Visit Ohio & Erie Canalway’s Questing program to learn about Questing and to print the Glendale Cemetery Quest.

Postcard depicting the entrance to Glendale Cemetery, 1909. From Summit Memory.

Special Collections Main Library Class Schedule
The Special Collections Division offers several recurring genealogy classes to help you with your family research. All classes are free of charge and open to the general public. For more information and to register, contact us at 330-643-9030 or speccollections@akronlibrary.org.

Getting Started in Family History
Are you interested in discovering your family’s history or tracing your genealogy? The Special Collections Division is pleased to offer orientation sessions for new family historians. Each session will include an overview of the resources available at the Akron-Summit County Public Library, suggestions for getting started and tips for organizing your research.
Saturday, July 19, 10:30 am-12:30 pm: Main Library, Meeting Room 1
Getting Started in African American Genealogy
Do you want to trace your African American family tree? Not sure how or where to begin? The Special Collections Division presents a two-hour class for genealogy beginners who have a specific interest in African American ancestral research. You’ll learn genealogy research methods, tips and tools for getting organized, common sources used by genealogists, resources specific to African Americans, and challenges in researching African American ancestors.
Saturday, June 21, 10:30 am-12:30 pm: Main Library, Meeting Room 1

Using Ancestry in Your Genealogy Research
With more than 9,000 databases and 200 billion images, Ancestry is the premier online genealogy resource—and it’s available to you for free within any Library location. This class will introduce you to the many features of Ancestry Library Edition and show you how to do efficient and effective searches. Time for practice searching is also provided. Because electronic resources are used, basic computer skills are recommended.
Saturday, September 20, 10:30 am-12:30 pm: Main Library, Computer Lab 2

Finding Your Family in the U.S. Census
United States census records are valuable resources when you are researching your genealogy. Join us to learn more about using these records in your family research and how to effectively search the census using the databases Ancestry Library Edition and Heritage Quest. As the emphasis will be on using electronic resources, basic computer skills are recommended.
Saturday, August 9, 10:30 am-12:30 pm: Main Library, Computer Lab 2

Branching Out: U.S. Vital Records and Obituaries
In this class, participants will learn the types of information and sources encountered in genealogy research and what to expect when working with United States vital (birth, marriage and death) records and obituaries. Basic search strategies for finding these records in both online and traditional sources will also be discussed. Because this class will use internet resources, basic computer skills are recommended.
Saturday, August 2, 10:30 am-12:30 pm: Main Library, Computer Lab 2

Internet Genealogy
There are an overwhelming number of websites for genealogy research. This class will provide tips for locating online resources for family history research and allow participants some class time to explore websites. The focus will be on finding free online genealogy resources with brief introductions to the library’s genealogy databases. This class will not cover searching Ancestry Library Edition as there is a separate class for this resource.
Saturday, September 13, 10:30 am-12:30 pm: Main Library, Computer Lab 2
New Books

Several new works covering online genealogy have been published recently, including two popular titles listed below. They are available for checkout from Special Collections and several branches.

Mastering Online Genealogy by well-known genealogy author W. Daniel Quillen covers everything from genealogy databases to recommended computer software. Quillen reviews available free and subscription websites, message boards and blogs and family tree programs, while addressing the common “pitfalls and pratfalls” of genealogy research.

Now in its seventh edition, Genealogy Online for Dummies will guide researchers through using social media, mobile apps and websites to trace their family history. From getting started to sharing your findings, the authors offer information about developing a research plan, identifying appropriate resources and preserving electronic records. Also available in ebook format.

Our complete New Books list now appears on our website at http://sc.akronlibrary.org/new-books. The list will be published quarterly at the same time as Past Pursuits. If you receive the print edition of Past Pursuits, we will be happy to send a print copy of the complete New Books list by postal mail. Please contact us if you would like this service.

We would like to thank the following for their generous donations:

Akron Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution for donation to purchase a book in memory of Fredericka Lindquist and Betty McNeill

Howland S. Davis II for Massachusetts and Maine Families in the Ancestry of Walter Goodwin Davis by Walter Goodwin Davis

Michael Elliott for First Evangelical and Reformed Church Centennial Souvenir

Linda L. Harger for A Troopers Scrap Book: An Album History of Troop G 107th Armored Cavalry Regiment, Ohio National Guard

Sharon Lane for Models of Atonement by George L. Murphy

Russ Sibert for ten CD recordings of sermons of Reverend Dallas F. Billington and 4 DVD and VHS recordings of Akron Baptist Temple services

James I. Pryor II for Akron Aviation by James I. Pryor II

Wayne Sanders for 1948 and 1949 Garfield High School yearbooks

Nate Vengrow for My World in a Book of Poems by Nate Les Vengrow

Jim Carney for compiled materials from 1994 and 2004 Akron Beacon Journal veterans’ projects

Martha A. Hasenyager for 1931 Adams Funeral Home Radio Souvenir Booklet
Refrigerators and hammocks were standard summer offerings at the Loomis Hardware Co. at the turn of the twentieth century. Cuyahoga Falls Reporter, July 8, 1904.