The first war years (1917-1919)

On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson appeared before Congress to discuss the impending war with Germany. "God helping her, she (our country) can do no other," he said.

By 1918, the "war to end all wars" was beginning to be felt even in rural Minnesota, and the yearbooks of 1918 and 1919 paint a picture of the feelings and events during those days of the first global conflict.

In his March 18 letter to the class of 1918, Northwest School Superintendent, C. G. Selvig, quotes Corporal Herbert V. Anderson, a 1917 Northwest School graduate. Anderson wrote, "I hope the graduates will realize the responsibility that is placed on them to apply the knowledge they have learned at school. They are, to a certain extent, responsible for our keeping. It would be quite impossible for us to be here (at the front, in France) if the farmers of America didn't produce enough food. If the graduates apply what they have learned, then we will be able to do the rest which will bring peace and honor to all mankind."

An entire section focuses on World War I in the 1918 edition of the Red River Aggie. Forty-eight names were listed under "Northwest School’s Boys in Uncle Sam's Service."

Military drill was part of early regimen.

Two drill companies were formed on campus, and Patriotic Day was observed on December 19, 1917. The dominant theme was "save, serve and sacrifice."

A flag service dedication took place at the school in February of 1918, and was called "the most concrete demonstration of the Institution’s genuine loyalty."

During the week of February 11, students presented the Northwest Farmers’ Week. With the Farm Crops Show and Livestock Exhibit (forerunner to the Winter Shows), plus the Farmers’ Week, the rapid development of agriculture in the Red River Valley was given a boost by providing information just for farmers. Patriotism was stressed throughout the sessions. “Farm, home and community problems were discussed only in their relation to service to our country and our allies,” yearbook writers noted.

But not all of the 1917-18 year was spent contemplating a war in far-off Europe. Students viewed Mary Pickford in "The Little Princess," and basketball games were played regularly.

By 1917, there was a teachers' training course, which gave practical experience in teaching and directing household art and domestic science work in modern rural and consolidated schools. The course had begun in 1913, allowing qualified students to continue training at the Northwest School to prepare for college. Eleven persons were enrolled in that advanced course and in others offered for post-graduates.

Twenty-two seniors graduated in 1918. The freshman class was the largest yet—comprised of 118 members.

By the time the 1919 yearbook went to press, the sobering fact of war had made an impression. That year, the annual was dedicated to Northwest alumni who had "answered the call of duty and gave their lives that America might live." The service flag now had 135 stars representing graduates of the Northwest School who served during the war. Most stars were blue; seven were gold. Five graduates had died in France, and two in Army camps died from the pneumonia epidemic that ravaged the nation in 1918.

Superintendent Selvig wrote a letter to the “Boys of the Honor Roll.” Despite the verbal extravagance of the time, his letter apparently came from the heart. “You felt America meant something to you and to the millions you represented and you were willing to offer any sacrifice to make this meaning true. What a proud record you and your comrades have emblazoned for the land that gave you birth. When the news of the Allies’ successful advances came in the fall of 1918 we at home knew that some of you were in the line of battle with the flag floating proudly before you. We knew, too, that you would not come back till it was over 'over there.'”

Servicemen’s letters were reprinted on two pages. Some wrote detailed facts of life on the battlefield, some painted gruesome pictures of the casualties, some merely said they were lonely. A letter from Germany on December 28 traced one soldier’s past few months, beginning with going into the trenches from March until May. He finished, “Some of the hottest fighting of the war was done between November 1-11. We went over the top about two hours before the Armistice was signed.”

Girls’ basketball team, 1916.