

## Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator  
for the week of November 11 – 17, 2018

Peace! Peace at last! That was the word on the street and in the battlefield on November 11, 1918, 100 years ago, when the Great War finally came to an end. The armistice with Germany was not unexpected. Secondary hostile nations had surrendered in the preceding weeks, including Bulgaria in September, and Turkey and Austria-Hungary in October. Germany itself had sued for peace in early October, but it took about a month for the terms to be agreed upon, during which time the fighting continued.

Private Alga Shivers from the Town of Forest played a part in announcing the armistice. Alga served with the 368<sup>th</sup> Infantry, riding a motorcycle all over France to relay dispatches. He wrote home, “Well, since I wrote last I have delivered the welcome message in the front line trenches for all to cease firing, and at eleven o’clock [Paris time] on the day gone by our bugles sounded the peace call along the whole front, which was echoed back by the German bugles. Since then we can sleep without the danger of being blown up at any moment....”

On the homefront, the news was received with great jubilation. The *Vernon County Censor* newspaper of November 13, 1918, proclaimed, “Germany Signs Armistice... Everybody Celebrates.” The large front-page article went on to say that “The greatest war in the world’s history came to a close at 5 o’clock Monday [morning, local time], after 1567 days of most bitter struggle....Crowds poured onto Main street [in Viroqua], cars brought boxes and wood and a rousing blaze soon painted the business fronts a ruddy glow....”

A large contingent of drafted men from around Vernon County was scheduled to leave for training camp that morning. They said their good-byes and got on the train in Viroqua, as planned. But, “their train was stopped at Westby and ordered to return to Viroqua. So fate ordained that they should be the last to go and the first to return....all November draft calls had been cancelled by the President and general staff, and the boys were honorably discharged and told they were free to go home. They left in all directions by car during the evening and the next morning.”

The newspaper goes on to list the names of the men in the contingent, under the heading, “The Last Honor Roll”. The group included people from all over the county, including Tennis A. Larson of Chaseburg, Chris Knutson of Coon Valley, Samuel A. Macauley of De Soto, Albert Krause of Genoa, Joe Novachek of Hillsboro, Leland Getty of La Farge, Fred W. Myers of Mt. Tabor, Gilbert Anderson of Readstown, Clyde Winchell of Rockton, Edward Seidel of Stoddard, William G. Smith of Valley, Pearl Wilder of Viola, Sever Lavold of Viroqua, Oscar Nundahl of West Prairie, and Sigurd Christianson of Westby.

All across Vernon County, people celebrated the armistice. Because of the influenza epidemic, which was at its height in the fall of 1918, indoor gatherings were forbidden, so people went out onto the streets to shout and cheer and wave flags. Bells rang, bands played, and impromptu parades formed and marched up and down. The *Censor* article concluded that, “Truly it was a great day, undoubtedly the greatest day in the history of the world.”