

World War I Exhibit

The Historical and Cultural Society of Clay County has an exhibit entitled *War, Flu, and Fear* which gathers stories to explore life in Clay County and the Red River Valley only 100 years ago, on the local front, at the dawn of cultural modernism and the American century. The exhibit runs through January 2020. From the HCSCC's website "In April, 1917, Americans were thrust into the middle of a brutal global war, only months after reelecting a president who campaigned on isolationism. Few in the county supported the war, but they served when they were called. The following year, 1918, brought perhaps the bloodiest months in our history. Then armistice, peace, and a global flu pandemic striking on an unseen scale. Residents in the Red River Valley responded with courage and patriotic sacrifice, fear and paranoia, activism and political repression."

Although the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria has been cited as the cause of WWI, the true causes run much deeper. Political alliances among the Ottoman Empire, Russia and other parties were in place, but the Balkans (Bosnia, Serbia and Herzegovian) were experiencing political unrest, a struggle to end Austro-Hungarian rule over the region. A Serbian nationalist Gavrilo Princip shot the Archduke and his wife Sophie in Sarajevo, Bosnia. It set off a number of events including a secret assurance from German leader Kaiser Wilhelm proving support for Austria-Hungary. Serbia mobilized and appealed to Russia for assistance. On 28 July 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Within a week, Russia, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Serbia formed an alliance against Austria-Hungary and Germany and World War I began, the War to End all Wars. Germany attacked both France and Russia at the same time, something Hitler did in WWII. Apparently leaders do not learn from history. Germany was stopped short of France and for the next three years, we saw trench warfare causing millions of deaths. The poem *In Flanders Fields* was written about this war. The Christmas Truce also occurred during this time. On the Eastern Front, Russia invaded parts of East Prussia and Poland but were stopped short of the German border. In Russia conditions were terrible with food shortages and economic instability, leading to unrest and eventually to the Russian Revolution in 1917. The new Russian government negotiated an armistice with Germany in December 1917. The US remained neutral during much of the war. However with the German U-boat sinking of the British liner *Lusitania* with hundreds of American passengers onboard in May 1915 helped turn opinions against Germany. On 2 April President Wilson appeared before Congress and called for a declaration of war. Many of us forget that the Ottoman Empire was part of the alliance with Austria-Hungary and Germany and many battles were fought in that area. Italy was on the side of the Allies during the war. The war officially ended on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. We celebrate Armistice Day, not Veterans Day on that date each year.