Honoring Those Who Served:

Citizen Archivists Documenting the Great War

Kathelene McCarty Smith and Keith Phelan Gorman



US Declares War - April 6, 1917

- Upon entering the Great War, the US found itself ill-equipped to fight and document an overseas conflict.
- Recordkeeping strategies varied from state to state and were often reacting to poor documentation from the American Revolution and the Civil War.
- Within weeks of Wilson's declaration of war, the North Carolina's Historical Commission began to actively collect unofficial documents relating to homefront mobilization.



The Impetus to Collect?

PROCEEDINGS

AND

DEBATES

CONVENTION

NORTH-CAROLINA.

Convened at Hill Bornugh, on Monday the 21st Day of July, 1788, for the Purpose of deliberating and determining on the Constitution recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia, the 17th Day of September, 1787.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED

The Said CONSTITUTION.

I man has part already withen for some of Jom Fillinghouts open enrelofes and a small lot of parting hoper. You will please send me affer pipes and a lettle Tobacco. How would it do to let William * come to see me! Do you think That he could be trusted bravelin by himself. I am glad to hel That Tom is trying to morte - gro had letter soud Frank to school if he Reminder me to all enquir friends, particularly & Comin Day to you are I my any rega lar correspondented in min that you would wrote me all the I have now visitin quite a long doth, but do not take any of that letter gat aile clon a Daper & with a spir for the to all 5m fl on Sharles

Bironac mar Folds Dear Om Gesterday I received yours of The 10th Oll. The first letter that I have received in more Than two works Um baggage has been sent for, so you may write to me here for the prosent Though it is impossible to tell how long I do not wood my boots and shoes at present. Just Beef Them subject to my order. You may keep the over cost too, a There is some probability of my gather one from The Questionnost deportions For the part his needs I have been meaning my econium this and you from and sleeping out in the open in with only a flie 2 fathering on D. (you will please have on paid pants made for me rut of some dark which you can more use of at home. you can more the shirts out of any Think That you Think Very and I

Chain of Command - Prewar

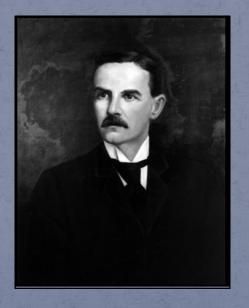
North Carolina Historical Commission

- *Secretary
 Chair, History Committee
 *Council of NC Defense History
 Committee Chair
- *Member
 *Chair of the NC
 Council of Defense

*Hall of History



D. W. Connor

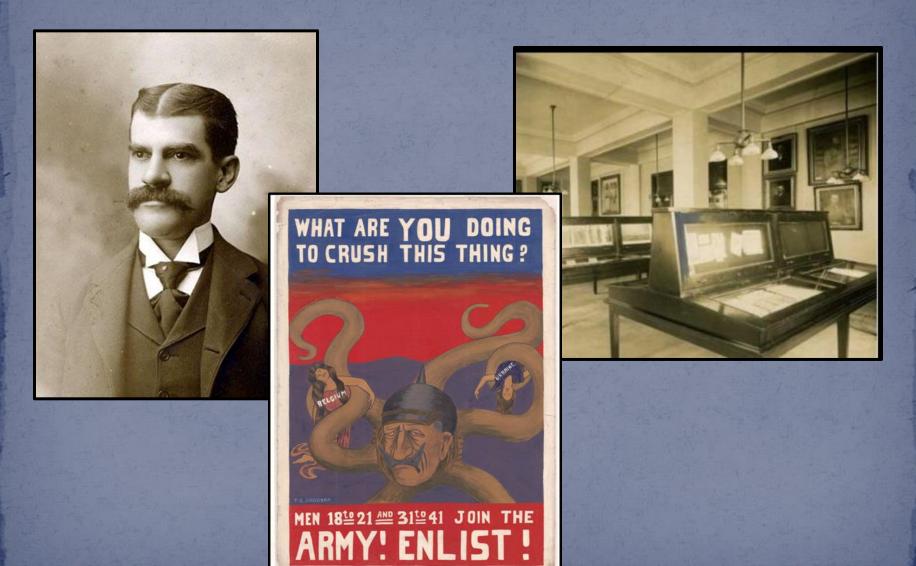


D. H. Hill



F. A. Olds

Frederick Olds and the Hall of History



Plan of Action – Post War Documentation

North Carolina Historical Commission





R. B. House Collector of War Records

Plan of Action – Post War Documentation

North Carolina Historical Commission





R. B. House Collector of War Records





Hall of History F. A. Olds

Plan of Action – Post War Documentation

North Carolina Historical Commission

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R. B. House, Collector of War Records

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County Historians/Archivists White and African American Representatives

Government Organizations

Service Groups 1

Women

1

African Americans

Veterans

Religious Groups

Aid Organizations

"Every Scrap of Material"

- After the Armistice in 1918, the North Carolina state legislature created the position of "Collector of War Records" that relied on a network of "citizen volunteers" to broaden the reach of the project.
- Citizens were charged with gathering "every scrap of material" related to the Great War.
- House attempted to educated the people of North Carolina the importance of preserving their wartime participation.
- There was a specific push to chronicle the collect material that illustrated "the spirit of the people and their contributions to the cause."
- "I have the formal reports, I want color and North Carolina character." He sought not only the soldiers but also every community's "quiet hero."



Reaching Out to Underrepresented Populations

- House contacted "citizen archivists" from each county to head regional efforts in gathering war efforts, instructing them in basic methods.
- Both Connor and House were committed to an inclusive approach to outreach, cutting across gender, racial, and religious lines, actively seeking material, and assistance from women, African Americans, and Jews, to provide a more detailed understanding of North Carolina's participation during the War.





Positive:

- Significant strides with war time documentation, with one centralized office
- Set the stage for further collection opportunities
- Shaped a more inclusive approach to documenting underrepresented populations
- Created an effective model for chronicling America's participation in World War II



Results

Negative:

- Participation by citizen archivists "spasmodic and ineffective" producing uneven results
- Overburdened by administrative obligations – it was difficult to venture out into the field to meet with meet with collectors and donors
- Was not able to write the official history of North Carolina's participation in the Great War



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- House, Image courtesy of the Digital North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, UNC Libraries. Available from http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/dig_nccpa/id/3664/rec/83 (accessed June 17, 2013).
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- "The War is Over," The Martha Blakeney Hodges Special Collections and University Archives, Historical Print Collection.