

The Great War, which began in August 1914, turned Europe into a cauldron of death. The massive armies of the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance were soon stalemated along lines of entrenchments and fortifications on the eastern front, stretching 1,100 miles from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, and on the western front, along 600 miles from the English Channel to the Swiss border. While the United States remained formally neutral, it provided Great Britain and France with munitions and other war supplies. Germany conducted a submarine campaign against ships carrying war material to Great Britain, during which over 200 American lives were lost from attacks on American and Allied ships.

President Woodrow Wilson, unable to resist the calls for war from the public, Congress, the press, and from within his administration, on April 2 1917, asked Congress to declare war on Germany. Washburn had already benefited from the war through increased and steady employment at the Du Pont Company's Barksdale Works, which produced munitions for the allied powers, but now it would also experience its deprivations and sorrows.

Mobilization of the "home front," required the unity and loyalty of all of its people, and therein lay

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a problem. At the time of the Great War about one-third of the population was foreign born and native born Americans with foreign born parents. Many of the foreign born were not citizens, that is, aliens. With the war as a pretext the anti-immigrant and 100% Americanism tendencies in society came to the fore, questioning the loyalty of these people. There arose an atmosphere of suspicion of all "foreigners," citizens and aliens alike. A particular target of these suspicions were people of German extraction, who constituted a substantial proportion of the immigrant population, particularly in Wisconsin. In his address to Congress requesting a declaration of war, President Woodrow Wilson had singled out the Germans, declaring that most of them were "true and loyal Americans," but if there should be any disloyalty among them, "it will be dealt with a firm hand of stern regression." Soon the "firm hand of stern regression," tightened its grip on the nation,

applied not only to Germans, but to people in other ethnic groups, both citizens and aliens, and to anyone who voiced an unpopular opinion or did not display enough enthusiasm for the war effort. Conformity and loyalty in thought, word, and deed were ruthlessly enforced with complete disregard of people's lawful rights.

The spirit of President Wilson's "firm hand of stern repression" soon manifested itself in Washburn. In a letter to the Washburn Times, the secretary of the Commercial Club declared "let us be watchful against every stranger who cannot give a proper account of himself or may look or act suspiciously and at once report such cases to the chief of police. . . . Lose no time in doing this, even if suspicions may prove to be unfounded. The future welfare of this city, commands us to refrain from acts or words of seemingly disloyalty to the flag, or of hot discussions or untoward acts of any kind." When the federal government required German aliens to register, one of them objected to having his name published in the Times. The editor responded with a long harangue against him, declaring "The Times is American from start to finish, has been, is now and will continue to be. When any of the Pros (meaning pro-Germany) don't like our style the

sooner we learn it the better we will like it."

To counter possible threats against the Du Pont plant, an eight foot security fence topped by barbed wire was erected around the grounds, and guard force consisting of mounted and foot guards was established. The Times reported that "Powerful searchlights" were placed on top of the "patrol houses" "to flash up and down the valley during the night. The lights are so powerful that moving objects in the woods can easily be detected, thus making it impossible for any person to get close to the grounds." All employees were issued photo identification badges. Any employee who could not prove that he was a citizen was discharged. In one week four men were arrested at the plant "for committing acts against federal laws," one because he "was found to have matches secreted in his socks while on duty" and the other three for "uttering disloyal remarks." The Times reported these events with evident approval, noting that any man who made disloyal remarks "is given no time to explain but is turned over to federal officers," probably after having been "severely dealt with by the other men before the officials enter on the case."