CHAPTER THREE
Doing a Man’s Work: Normal School Women and the Great War

Part 1: The Coming of the Great War

The first decade and a half of the 20th century were prosperous years for ISNS. Under the direction of principals David Jewett Waller and James Ament, student enrollment grew steadily and extensive building projects were undertaken. The campus expanded to accommodate the needs of the growing student body. In keeping with the school’s objective to provide teachers for all programs the public schools offered, the academic trends of the day, and the opportunities presented by the changing workplace, new academic programs were introduced and older programs revitalized.

The coming of war in Europe in the summer of 1914 did not immediately disrupt developments on the ISNS campus. In fact, enrollment increased in 1915-1916 to numbers not reached again for a decade.
The *Normal Herald* shows that the war was very much on the mind of the faculty and students of the school. In 1915, it reported that normal school students were making clothes for Belgian children and attaching personal notes with words of support and comfort.

In the same issue, two essays reflected that the national debate of preparedness versus pacifism was taking place on campus. One article written by a faculty member reported on the November 1914 chapel talk of Pastor Furnejieff. According to the article, the pastor spoke so persuasively against war that the listener was convinced that “the greatest thing that any of us can do, is to help bring peace on earth and good will towards men by devoting some of our time and interest to the peace movement.”

Another faculty writer responded to the pacifist sentiments of the first writer with a quotation from military writer General Friedrich von Bernhardi. He concluded that “a large amount of the peace talk that we hear is simply an expression of selfishness and a disinclination to spend time and money on anything except luxury.”

Students and faculty would have formed opinions concerning the war through other war related lectures including ”The European War and its Lessons for America,” a lecture by William Jennings Bryan held in Indiana’s Library hall on November 2, 1915, in which he called for neutrality in the conflict.

By the fall of 1916, preparations for war were taking place on campus. Mr. Jack, the Preceptor Dean of Men, reorganized a pre-existing student military company and began training them in military drill. The students were still civilians at that point, but their training was military in nature, and many pledged willingness to join the forces should the call come.
In 1917, the Madrigal Club had a concert in the spring to raise money to purchase uniforms for the male students in training for military service. That spring many of the male students left for farm work and did not return the following year. Normal school faculty were already beginning to speak against German culture and language in chapel talks, foreshadowing the intense anti-German sentiment that would characterize the war period.

In the spring of 1917, when the United States entered the war, there was much support for the decision. The 1917 yearbook reported that on “March 4 – Wilson takes the reins and Miss Leonard rejoices.”

Those on campus undoubtedly joined with other Indiana residents, including alumni such as Senator John Fisher and John Langham, to show support for entering the war at public meetings. On March 31, a mass meeting was held in front of the courthouse to demonstrate community support. When the war was declared in April, local residents flocked to a meeting to encourage patriotism and enlistments held in front of the courthouse. The Indiana Chapter of the Red Cross was formed soon after.

That spring was the last for of Dr. James Ament’s administration. He had accepted a new position at the National Park Seminary, Forest Glen, Maryland. His replacement was Dr. John A. H. Keith, formerly principal of the Wisconsin State Normal school, at Oshkosh. Keith would have the difficult job of leading the school through the war and its aftermath.