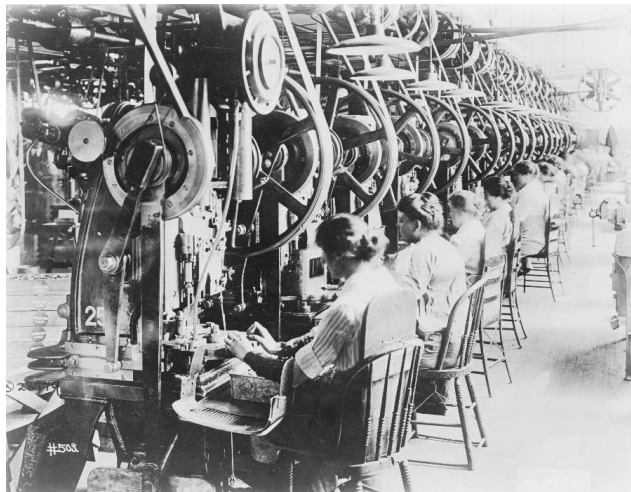


July 23



## Connecticut's Industrial Efforts in The Great War

After a brief hiatus from the *Connecticut Industry During Times of War* series to cover Connecticut's interesting and lasting tobacco industry, we return to cover the Great War (1914-1918). The fighting ignited on July 28th of 1914 when Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. The spark being the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, Austria-Hungary's heir presumptive to the throne, a month earlier by Gavrilo Princip, a member of a Serbian terrorist group called The Black Hand. This would result in the largest military conflict in human history up to that point. In terms of public knowledge, the First World War generally takes a back seat to World War Two, the Revolutionary War, and the Civil War in the United States. This is partially



*Women assembling cartridges in Remington Arms Union Metallic Cartridge Co., Bridgeport, CT (1914-1918). Source: Library of Congress.*

due to its lack of clear motivations, escalations, and causes compared to, say, Hitler's ambitions in the Second World War. Possibly adding to this lack of knowledge or popular interest is the fact that the United States would join the war quite late, April of 1917, fighting for only 19 months. Regardless of the United States comparably shorter time spent fighting in the First World War, there were numerous sacrifices and an immense amount of contributions on behalf of America and those into the fray, some Connecticut industries were tooling up for war or were already producing for the Allies. Beyond the expected production of arms and ammunition, Connecticut would commit roughly 80% of its industries to the war effort (Van Dusen 268).

To start, the most obvious industry to switch to wartime production would be Connecticut's arms manufacturing companies. Most of CT's arms industry was already producing for the allies before the US entered the conflict. We've talked about the Colt Manufacturing Company in previous articles regarding the Civil War. Again, Colt would prove critical to the war effort. Colt would be contracted to produce weapons and ammunition by Great Britain, France, and the Russian Empire in addition to US military production. Perhaps their most famous contribution, the Colt Model of 1911 pistol, would widely be used and would solidify itself as the United States military sidearm for the next 70 years. The Remington Union Metallic Cartridge Company in Bridgeport supplied a tremendous 45% of all small arms cartridges. Over in New Haven, the Winchester Repeating Arms Company would produce

roughly 20% of the entire national production of Enfield rifles for the US army. Winchester would also lend a hand in bayonet production. Many of the scabbards for these bayonets were made by the Jewell Belting Company in Hartford; in peacetime a manufacturer of the large belts used in mill factories around the state to transmit power from an overhead shaft to machines (Van Dusen 72-73).

The town of Waterbury was constantly humming with activity as the factories in the “Brass City” were almost exclusively dedicated to military contracts. By the early 1900s, Waterbury was the leading producer of brass in the world (Mattatuck Museum). The Waterbury



*Inside the Waterbury Button Museum at The Mattatuck Museum.*



*Brass military uniform button made in Waterbury. One of many buttons on display at the museum.*

Button Company and the Scovill Manufacturing Company produced mass quantities of buttons for military uniforms. Button making has been a long and storied industry in Waterbury, which can be seen at the Waterbury Button Museum on the third floor of the Mattatuck Museum. Scovill began war production of artillery fuses for the allies right at the start of the war. By 1918, Scovill had manufactured millions of time fuses, artillery shells, cartridge clips, tent fasteners, bullets, uniform buttons, and more. In total, 95% of this output went to the US or its allies (Museum of Connecticut History). The Scovill facilities and profits would increase 200% during WWI (Mattatuck Museum). Waterbury’s other brass goods producers contributed similarly, with some focusing on raw brass production for other factories, on fuse casings, or on small metal components for personal equipment. Before the war, Waterbury’s brass industry was producing just about anything with metal in it, from brass lamps, fare tokens, and plumbing fixtures to radio, camera, and automobile components.

New Britain was another important industrial asset to the United States. The familiar modern company that we know as Stanley Black & Decker was just called The Stanley Works during the WWI period. In the 1910s, their product offerings were wrought steel hardware such as hinges and bolts along with quality hand tools (nbindustrial.org). The Stanley Works turned to crafting parts of artillery shells during the war along with the hardware to transport them, valves for gas masks, and grenades. A neighboring New Britain facility called the Corbin Screw Corporation would assist in small grenade and firearm parts - pulling from their experience in manufacturing pins and screws. The saddlery and clothing accessory company of North & Judd could easily pivot their manufacturing for the war effort with little change, making various cavalry straps, spurs, and belt buckles (The Hartford Courant, May 25, 1915). The New Britain household goods manufacturer of Landers, Frary & Clark incorporated in 1862 and was producing scales, coffee grinders, percolators, food choppers, mixers, hat hooks, and cutlery by the turn of the century (nbindustrial.org). Using the L.F.&C abbreviation, the company was contracted to produce surgical equipment and over 100,000 brutal looking trench

knives for combat use. Landers, Frary, & Clark would also make mess kits and canteens so that soldiers could eat and drink in the field. Each kit would contain a knife, fork, spoon, and two-piece plate/bowl tray (Museum of Connecticut History). This type of production continued into the Second World War, shown by the image below.



*My Grandfather's WW2 mess kit knife made by Landers, Frary & Clark in 1945. Stamped L.F.&C. on the handle. WWI models would have a straight handle without the hole.*

New England still had quite the reputation for textile manufacturing during the war years. Woven materials and textile products may not be the absolute first to come to mind when thinking of war production or national defense needs, however, they are critical. Connecticut's own textile industry would obtain numerous contracts supplying the troops. Formed in 1868 in New Britain, the American Hosiery company was known for making men's and women's undergarments, such as shirts, underwear, and hosiery (1895 American Hosiery Company Trade Catalog). US troops would be supplied with underwear from this facility. Khaki colored shirts were provided by The Parker Shirt Company of New Britain, producer of very high-quality dress shirts since the mid-1800s (Drury 74). In the Northeast corner of the state, cotton thread produced by the Gardiner Hall Jr. Company in Willington and by the American Thread Company at the Willimantic Linen Company mills would be used in a wide variety of clothing and equipment production for the military as demand rapidly increased (Eves; Gardiner Hall Jr. History Museum). The Somersville Manufacturing Company in Somers, purchased in 1879 by Rockwell Keeney, specialized in woolen cloth which it provided to the military for coats and blankets (Somersville Manufacturing Company Records). The Glastonbury Knitting Company, founded in 1855, with its mill locations in Glastonbury and Manchester made two-piece, long men's underwear during the Civil War and would return to producing for the US government during the First World War. In fact, company production would peak in WWI, supplying 400,000 pairs of underwear for the army (Sterner). The Glazier Manufacturing Co., also in Glastonbury, adopted its name in 1909 but had been producing finished wool and garments since 1837. Expanding in the 1910s, it would manufacture smoking jackets, "rainy day clothes", and upholstery for Ford automobiles (The Hartford Courant, December 20, 2015). Their expertise in wool greatly benefitted the company during the war years, military uniforms were wool, and so the company was contracted to produce heavy, warm woolen overcoats for troops (Drury 74). The Wiley, Bickford & Sweet Company based in Hartford



*Trench knives and scabbards made by Landers, Frary & Clark in New Britain. On display at the Museum of Connecticut History in Hartford CT.*



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**The Wiley-Bickford-Sweet Co.**  
 Manufacturers of Footwear Specialties  
 Hartford, Conn. U. S. A. Worcester, Mass.  
 Address correspondence to Hartford office

*Advertisement for wool puttees made by The Wiley, Bickford & Sweet Co. in an October, 1917 issue of Dry Goods Economist magazine. Source: HathiTrust Digital Library.*

manufactured felt slippers, cloth gaiters, and leggings. Pivoting for the war effort, the company provided US troops with 2.5 million articles of clothing and personal equipment, such as leggings, puttees, and haversacks (Factory Inspection Department 31). Over in Middletown, the multiple mills of the Russell Manufacturing Company produced an impressive variety of products for wartime use. In business for over 80 years before America's entry into the Great War, the company represented an early textile producer, making elastic and boot webbing, straps, and suspenders, their most popular item. Entering into the 1900s, the Russell Manufacturing Company would be the first to make transmission linings for the automobile (Cunningham). When the US entered the war, the company had already perfected the production of woven cartridge belts, now for machine guns, using experience from previous American conflicts. Russell would rank second nationally in contributions in their field of woven and elastic goods production, supplying around 1.5 million woven products such as cartridge belts, haversacks, pistol holsters, canteen covers, bayonet scabbards, in addition to elastic for gas masks, aviator's goggles, and shock absorption for airplane components (Van Dusen 268).

This laundry list of manufacturers and products hardly scratches the surface of the exhaustive efforts by Connecticut's people and industry during the First World War. It cannot be overstated that Connecticut's ability to use its industrial power, mobilize quickly, and adapt to changes has been key to both Connecticut's earliest moniker of "The Provision State" and later being a major component in the United States' "Arsenal of Democracy." These wartime production capabilities would not be possible without the contribution of women who mobilized and volunteered to take roles that were formerly almost entirely done by men. These contributions will be the topic of our next article in the *Connecticut Industry During Times of War* series.

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*The Gardiner Hall Jr Museum is open to the public Saturdays from 10:00am to 12:00pm. For more information, please call 518-791-9474.*

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