

COHIST

World War II and Morehead, Kentucky

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Hometown Research

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FOREWARD

This paper is dedicated to my father, Denver Mabry, who passed away almost nine years ago. Although he never fought in a war, I am dedicating this paper to him because he is still so special to me. Daddy set a good example for me by being a hard working, loyal employee; he believed in doing a job right the first time. He taught me to be conscientious in all endeavors, and I admired and loved him with all my heart.

**My Hometown Paper
World War II and Morehead, Kentucky**

The year was 1941 and Morehead was a thriving town in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains. The Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, and the United States was thrust into World War II.

How did Morehead change after that fateful day? What were the mental attitudes of Morehead's population? What were the moral standards at that time? Was the Morehead of 1941 anything like the Morehead of 1992?

Yes, the 1941 town of Morehead was similar to the 1992 town of Morehead.

The War Brought About Changes

When World War II began some drastic changes occurred in the town of Morehead.

Many women's husbands were drafted, taken for training, and sent overseas. Many of these women left their own home and returned to their parent's home. They were hoping for the love and support of their family, but, unfortunately, for many women they did not receive the needed support. According to Ferne Pennington, "You think you can go home but you never can. I didn't have my family's support."

In December 1941 The Rowan County News stated, "The biggest industry and the biggest single interest in Morehead is without an

argument The Morehead State Teachers College. It is the center of interest and the heart of the community: It is the pulse and the artery of continued life and growth in this section. It is the heart and blood, the bone and fiber of Morehead." In May 1942, Morehead was transformed into a Navy training center, The Morehead State Teachers College was used as a naval school for 3,600 men until September 1944. They occupied one-half of the floor space at the college. Morehead had been invaded by the Navy; what a change! Morehead State University is still the heart of the community; it employees over 900 faculty and staff and continues to grow.

Job Availability and Wages

Jobs were not plentiful in the Morehead area, but The Rowan County News did have job advertisements listed throughout the war. Some of the positions listed were: stenographers for the U.S. Service, machine operators with machine shop experience, stitchers for the Red Cross, and track laborers for the railroad. Many of the positions were out of town and paid a high wage of \$.65 to \$.70 per hour. In the town of Morehead and surrounding areas, the hourly wage was much lower. Women were hired to do many jobs that men were accustomed to doing.

For residents that lived out in the county, farming was their source of livelihood. "It was a tough time," Ella Crisp said.

Leona Wilson worked as a teacher during the latter half of the war. She did not have a teaching certificate, but did have a high school education and had completed a business course at the Ashland

College. A member of the school board told her, "It's wartime and we don't have any teachers," Leona said. "They were really scarce of teachers," she said. Leona taught at the Rosedale Road School on the CCC Trail, grades one through eight.



"First tell me about the production line. Is it anything like a conga-line?"

Ferne did not have a job during the war because she was busy caring for her two young children. The army gave Ferne \$80.00 per month while her husband was overseas. She paid \$25.00 per month for rent; the remainder paid the bills and bought the necessities. Ferne said, "We really scrounged, we learned a lot of lessons. We were very poor, very, very, very poor, a bottle of pop would have thrown our budget. I mean it was that bad." Ferne would cook dinner for her landlady so she and the children could have the leftovers to eat.

Employment is still hard to find in Morehead. Larger cities have more positions to offer, especially in the industrial field.

What Was Morehead Like

Morehead was an average size town with paved streets and many of the same businesses that are in town today. Some of the businesses in Morehead during the war were:

Golde's Department Store	Caudill Tire*
A & P Store	Carr Lumber*
People's Bank*	Western Auto*
Day's Oldsmobile	Bus Station
Amos & Andy	Dr. Blair*
Lee Clay Products*	Trail Theater*
Citizen's Bank*	Big Store*
Bishop Drugs	Post Office*
Morehead Ice Company	Brown Motor Company
Dixie Grill*	Regal Store
Midland Trail Garage	

(* Businesses still in Morehead)

During the war the Peoples Bank enjoyed steady growth and paid one percent interest on savings accounts. Today interest rates are 3.50 percent on savings accounts; that's not much better than 50 years ago.

Marriages fell off 75 percent after the war started. When the men went to war, who was left for the women to marry? Younger women started marrying the first thing they saw in pants, usually an older man, and that was a big mistake. World War II was the beginning of the divorce rage; divorce hit an all time high. Most of the divorces were from couples that married after the war began,

but there were also many "Dear John" letters from wives who wouldn't wait for their husband to return.

Today the divorce rage continues; there are almost as many single parent families as traditional families.

Cash Crops

The major cash crop in Morehead during the war was tobacco. Women labored hard in the tobacco alongside the men even before the war began. In December of 1941, tobacco brought \$35.00 per hundred weight compared to December of 1991 when tobacco brought \$181.00 per hundred weight.

Another cash crop was hemp (marijuana). Hemp was used to make rope for the war effort, and farmers were taught how to raise it by the county agent. Today it is illegal to raise hemp; rope is now made from nylon.

Sweet potatoes were also grown as a cash crop; they sold for \$1.15 per bushel. In grocery stores today sweet potatoes cost \$.29 per pound.

Transportation

Many families had cars but could only drive periodically because of gasoline rationing. Families that lived in the country walked where they wanted to go or hired someone with a car to take them to town. There was a bus that ran from West Liberty to Morehead twice a day. Ferne would ride the bus six miles, for a

fare of \$.25, to visit her mother. A few people rode horses, an outdated form of transportation.

Today transportation is sophisticated. There are many types of cars, trucks, and vans on the market for personal transportation. Public transportation is available for people unable to drive or who don't own a car, but is only accessible to people within the city limits of Morehead. Most people have their own transportation.

Rations

After the war began deficiencies of many items existed. Some items were rationed (a set amount allowed for each person in a family per month).

Some of the rationed items were: sugar, tires, coffee, shoes, meat, cheese, fuel oil, gasoline, lard, butter, commercially processed vegetables, fruits, and soups. Residents had to register each member of their family at the schoolhouse in their community to obtain rationed items. Each family was allowed a fixed number of ration coupons each month. If they ran out of a rationed item before the next month's coupons were issued, they had to do without that item. Many people would give away or trade ration coupons they didn't need. Ella's family would give shoe coupons to other people. Shoes were rationed at three pair per year.

Leona and her friends would put gasoline coupons together to get enough gasoline to visit friends and family. When Leona's

husband passed away, Lane's funeral home could only drive a set number of miles to get his body. Since he was farther away than they were allowed to travel because of gasoline rationing, an ambulance from another town brought his body part of the way to Morehead.

The Regal Store had changes in operations due to the inability to buy tires. They started operating on a strict cash and carry basis; delivery was unavailable.



Items in Short Supply

Some items were not rationed but were in short supply. Those items included: candy, gum, dry goods, sage, ammunition, fertilizer with chemical nitrogen, milk, coal, and cigarettes.

Coal was in such short supply that residents were ordered to conserve electricity. Outdoor lighting was prohibited and electric companies were not allowed to run any new lines.

Since meat was in short supply, many people hunted, trapped, or raised hogs, chickens, or cattle. Farmers had to place an application with the Game and Fish Association to get shotgun and small rifle ammunition for hunting.

Fertilizer that contained chemical nitrogen could not be purchased during wartime. It was conserved for use on crops raised for the war effort.

Residents Asked To Collect Items

Residents were asked to help with the war effort by collecting: scrap rubber, kitchen grease fats, waste paper, and burlap bags.

Anyone collecting scrap rubber was paid \$.01 per pound for their efforts. Scrap rubber was used to recondition tires.

Housewives saved kitchen grease fats because it was critically needed to produce war materials.

When Japan attacked the Far East, imports of burlap bags were drastically reduced. Two-thirds of the burlap bag imports were taken for military use, leaving the general population short; people had to save and reuse burlap bags.

The nation's number one shortage was waste paper. It was needed to make cartons, containers, and supplies for the armed forces. There were collection days regularly in the town of Morehead.

Today, if you have the money, you can buy anything you need. Periodically, the oil market gets tight and the government asks citizens to conserve gasoline.

Prices of Items

During World War II inflation was low. Townspeople could buy so many more items for so much less money, compared to today. Below are some comparisons of prices:

	<u>World War II</u>	<u>Today</u>
Coffee	\$.53/3 lbs.	\$ 2.39/12 oz.
Sugar	\$1.49/25 lbs.	\$ 1.69/5 lbs.
Flour	\$.89/24 lbs.	\$.89/5 lbs.
Crackers	\$.18/2 lbs.	\$.89/1 lb.
Leather Jackets	\$3.95	\$ 99.99 & up
Men's Suits	\$9.98	\$100.00 & up
Men's Dress Shoes	\$1.89	\$ 40.00 & up
Lady's Dress Slippers	\$1.59	\$ 25.00 & up
Men's Shirts	\$1.19	\$ 10.99 & up
Permanent (Hair)	\$2.00 to \$6.50	\$ 40.00 & up

Doctors and Home Remedies

Morehead had at least two family doctors, a dentist, and a chiropractor, but home remedies were widely used.

Ferne said, "doctors were worn out" running to all ends of the county making house calls. Women had babies at home, and when Ferne's son was born the doctor had already delivered two other babies that day. The army paid Dr. Blair \$40.00 or \$50.00 to make the house call and deliver the baby. Ferne explained that people knew nothing about diet and exercise, and there was no preventive medicine practiced.

Leona's family used home remedies such as aspirin and black draught. Her grandmother made her own salve, boiled down from tree roots; the salve was a cure-all.

Ella had to have her tonsils removed in 1942. She went to Dr. Blair's office for the operation. She sat in a chair while he reached back in her throat with a pair of pliers, pulled the tonsil out slightly, and clipped it off. The other tonsil had so much scar tissue that he had to remove it in small pieces. She was given no type of anesthesia for the surgery, but he did insist she spend the day in a little back room at his office. Ella swallowed so much blood during the surgery that she was sick at her stomach. "He was an awful good turned doctor," Ella said.

Today there are many doctors in Morehead and a modern, expanding hospital.

Entertainment

Entertainment was very different during World War II than it is now. There were no televisions, video cassette recorders, or nintendos; the electronic craze had not hit the United States.

There were parties given on the college campus by the USO and the Trail Theater was in operation. In 1941 when the war began, movies such as *Outlaws of Cherokee Trail* and *The Shepherd of the Hills* were showing at the Trail. In 1944, movies showing were: *This is the Army* and *The City that Stopped Hitler*. Today movies are more outrageous and crude. Recent hit movies include: *Silence*

of the Lambs, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and Terminator 2: Judgment Day.

For Ferne, entertainment was listening to a radio she purchased for \$25.00. She would listen to it after the children were in bed at night, but she had to be conservative because batteries were expensive.

Softball was a big form of entertainment during the war. On Saturday and Sunday, Ella and a large group of young people would walk to church and then go to softball games. The games would be played in a big field; men and boys would play, women and girls would watch. Concerning the softball games, Ella said, "We all had a good time, you never heard no ugly talk in no way or nothing." She said, "We had the best time, had a better time than young people does now. Young people just jumps in the car and gets out with a bunch, they don't care much what they do, but back then everybody watched their steps, I can tell you."

Leona kept herself occupied by visiting friends and caring for her two-year-old son. Reading True Story was a good way to pass the time.

Crime and Cheating

In July of 1942 the town of Morehead installed a Blackout Ordinance for the protection of life and property during enemy air raids. It was considered a crime not to comply with this ordinance. Anyone not complying could be fined \$500.00 or put in jail for six months.

During wartime there "wasn't as much deadly crime" as there is now, Ferne said, but drinking and fighting were common problems. Occasionally, Morehead was the sight of a murder, but robbery was a more common offense.

Misuse of ration stamps, or black marketing, was against the law, but people cheated then just as they do now.

Landlords became greedy and tried to evict wives of service men so they could rent to higher paying tenants, but the American Legion put a stop to the evictions.

Many crimes occurred during the war, crimes occur now; people are the same.

Feelings on the War and Hitler and How Morehead Received War News

Shortly after the war began, a local boy named Chester Kelley wrote a letter to his parents. He stated the soldiers feelings on the war, "Most of the men are fighting mad," but he also tried to comfort his parents. He said, "Please don't have the blues. There's really nothing to be blue about. Just remember there is still a God up above who looks after his own."

Leona thought people were resentful of Hitler and worried about the entire situation concerning the Jews.

Ella said there was much talk about Hitler and "everybody was worried about it." "I thought it was horrible myself. You know I worried a lot, anybody would and times was really hard during wartime, they was really hard." "I didn't know where I'd ever see him (boyfriend) again or not." Kenneth, Ella's boyfriend, wrote

two or three letters home each week and she would answer each one. Kenneth would always say he was okay, but he couldn't tell her anything else. The army read the letters he sent home and marked out anything they didn't want him to tell. She always knew where he was stationed but that was all. Sometimes he couldn't write to her for various reasons so she would listen to the war news on the radio. "Nobody had televisions back then," she said.

"We thought he was terrible," Ferne said of Hitler. Ferne hated the war because times were very hard, very lonely, and very stressful, but she said the war was a good time for many people because they made plenty of money working in defense plants and they "lived it up." "A lot of them (people) enjoyed it (the war) because they made big money, more than they were used to making, and they were here," Ferne said. She had friends who quit their jobs and went to Ohio to work in defense plants. Ferne said, "People quit their jobs and went to defense plants to stay out of the army." Defense plant jobs were a definite way to get out of fighting in the war, a lot of it went on, and people were bitter and angry about it. During the Vietnam war people went to Canada to stay out of combat, but during World War II they went to work in defense plants; if people were contributing to the war effort by making materials they weren't drafted.

Ferne wrote letters everyday to Curt, her husband. The letters were sent to him by ship so it took a long time for them to get to him. His letters to her were censored; the army blocked out things they didn't want known and she was told never to write anything to

him that was upsetting. There were no phones, so she listened to the radio for war news.



The army would send a telegram to families of soldiers that had been killed. Delivery of the telegram was by taxi so if you saw a taxi coming your heart stopped. Ferne said, "Everyday we got up and said, will this be the day I'll hear? Will it be my brother or will it be my husband today?"

Moral Standards

Prayer was taught in schools, and church events were widely publicized. The separation of church and state were not recognized.

Many people were suspicious during the war and accused women of "stepping out" on their husbands. Ferne was accused of "stepping out" when her brother came for a visit and was saw with her. Her pastor could not come to see her or encourage her because people would talk. She was made to feel like an unmarried mother because her husband was gone. Ferne remarked that people were looked down on if they did anything wrong, but plenty went on; it was just kept quiet.

Ella said, "If you ever hear of a woman that was gonna have a baby or something nother like that, oh, it was disgrace to all the family just about, you hardly ever hear tell of it. Now it's just a common thing." Ella was referring to a woman having a baby out of wedlock; it did happen, but was kept quiet.

Women have babies minus a husband routinely now; it is not hidden and is accepted.

Civilian Morale and Conclusion

Morehead had rules on How to Keep Civilian Morale during the war. The rules were as follows:

- Don't:** We must not pass on rumors
We must not spread hatreds
We must not act jittery
We must not show fear
We must not be foolhardy
- Do:** Strive for emotional stability
Show self-control
Remain calm and resolute against all subversive
propaganda
Be willing to work and cooperate

Many of the rules on how to keep civilian morale should still be in effect today. Even though the United States is not at war, we should not spread hatreds, we should not pass on rumors, we should show self-control, we should be willing to work and cooperate.

People have always been the same; some are good citizens with high moral and family values; some will lie, cheat, and steal.

The war brought about changes, some were good, some were bad, but Morehead survived. It is still here and very much the same.

Bibliography

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Interview on September 8, 1992.
- B. Crisp, Ella. Homemaker, Morehead, Kentucky.
Interview on September 14, 1992.
- C. Pennington, Ferne. Homemaker and retired teller from Peoples First Bank, Morehead, Kentucky.
Interview on September 24, 1992.
- D. Microfilm of The Rowan County News, December 1941 - August 1945.

Appendix



Leona Wilson had three brothers in the war. Her husband died during World War II, but not because of World War II; he died of brain cancer. When her husband died she had a young son to care for, so she moved back in with her parents on Williams Branch and taught school at the Rosedale Road School on the CCC Trail. Her family had many worries about the three sons in the war and times were very hard. Leona is now 76 years old, her brothers all returned home from the war.



Ella Crisp's boyfriend was sent to war. They were not engaged, but she knew they would get married if he made it home. Her family was poor and they farmed for a living. She did work around the farm that a man would do; such as setting, hoeing, and cutting tobacco, and cutting firewood with a crosscut saw. She tried to keep her mind off the war and her boyfriend, but worry was an everyday occurrence. Ella is now 70 years old; she married her boyfriend when he returned, and they have four children and five grandchildren.



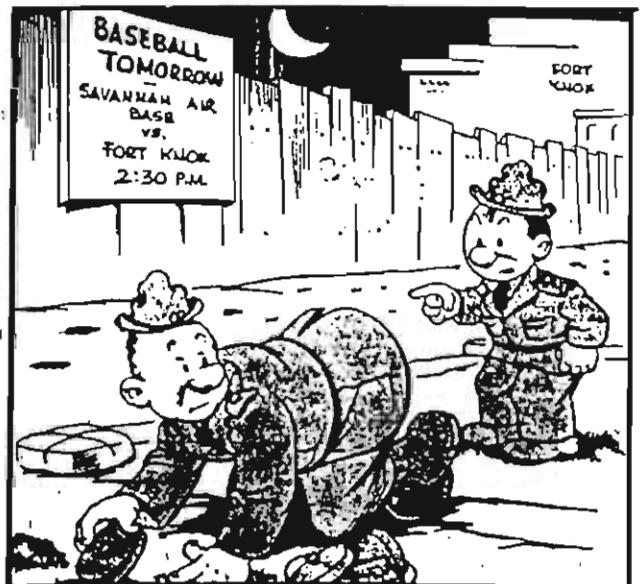
Ferne Pennington had a one-year-old daughter and was 19 years old when her husband was drafted. Her second child, a son, was born after her husband was sent overseas. She was very poor, she didn't have a job, and she had no support from her family while her husband was away. The only thing that brought her through the war was her faith in God. It was a very stressful time and was the hardest three years of her life. Ferne is now 69 years old; her husband is 73, and they have been married for 52 years.



"Are they still putting lots of pins in men's shirts?
If so I'll buy a few."



"What's the point of you and Mom appealin' to my patriotism?
I never got any pay for weedin' the garden BEFORE the war,
either!"



"Sure, you've got a tough game to pitch tomorrow, Fatso, but
planting those land mines on the diamond is not
genius help you!"