

The WWI Draft in Chatham County

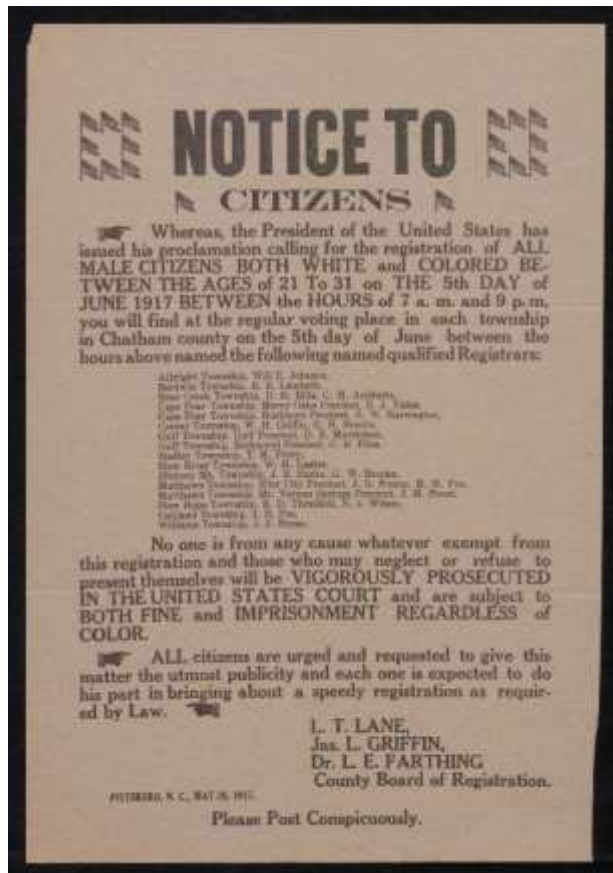
On 6 April 1917, the United States declared war on Germany and officially entered World War I. Six weeks later, on 18 May 1917, the Selective Service Act was passed, authorizing the president to increase the military establishment of the United States. As a result, adult males living in the US were required to register for the draft.

In 1917 and 1918, approximately 24 million men born between 1873 and 1900 completed draft registration cards. Registration of eligible men has been estimated to be about 98%.

A minority of the civilian men who registered were ever called up for military service. Some men served who did not complete draft cards. Those already on active duty in the military were excluded from draft registration. And some men who completed draft cards but were not called up, later voluntarily enlisted. Aliens residing in the United States were required to register for the draft although they were not subject to induction into the American military.

So, although WWI draft cards do not reflect actual WWI service, they provide valuable information on a very large proportion of adult males in 1917-1918.

Three registration days for the draft lotteries were held:



- 5 June 1917 for persons born 1886-1896. About 10 million men registered on this date. Because of specific opposition from Congress, 18 to 20-year olds were initially exempt.

- 5 June 1918 for persons born 1896-97. This group of about one million men who had recently become old enough to be drafted during the preceding year registered on this date.

- 12 September 1918 for persons born 1873-1886 and 1897-1900. Almost 14 million men registered on this date.

Shortly after the passage of the Selective Service Act, announcements about the first draft registration appeared. Multiple sites were made available in each county, often corresponding to voting sites. The precincts in Chatham are listed on the poster at left.

Chatham County, NC draft notice.
Click on the image to enlarge

On the designated registration days, businesses and schools closed down in many communities, and some places held patriotic parades on the first registration day. A search of the *Siler City Grit* and *Chatham Record* indicate no such closures or festivities in Chatham for the first registration.

Both the *Siler City Grit* and *Chatham Record* ran editorials imploring eligible men to register and invoking shame on any potential shirkers, along with instructions for registering. The *Siler City Grit*, on 23 May 1917, implored, "Let it not be said that there are cavedwellers and slackers in Chatham in 1917! REGISTER!" It also promised to publish the names of all who registered and encouraged loyal citizens to aid the Federal authorities in prosecuting every slacker to the full extent of the law.

Instructions for filling in each question on the card were posted for all to read at each registration site, and the local newspapers sometimes printed copies of sample cards in the days prior to registration. The *Chatham Record* posted instructions on 30 May 1917.

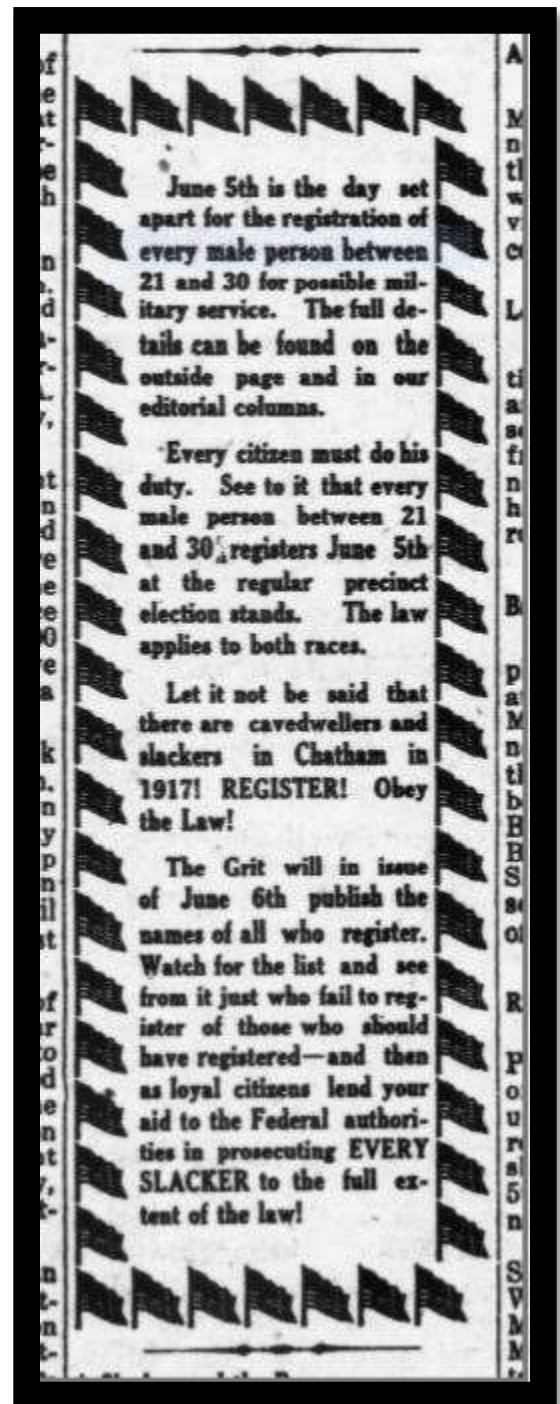
In most cases, the draft registration card itself was filled out by volunteers at the local registration offices, and the registrant then signed his name. The card formats used at the three registrations differed slightly.

Although the information gathered on the cards for each of the three registrations was slightly different, the information included name, birth date, birthplace, draft registration date, sometimes father's birthplace, name of nearest relative, age in years, and marital status, dependents, and address. All registrants were males.

WWI draft registration records can be searched for free, and images of the actual cards seen, on FamilySearch.com. [More info here.](#)

You can browse images by locality (state, county, city, draft board) or you can search the index using name, birth date, and birthplace.

Need help? CCHA volunteers are available to assist at the Chatham Community Library. Call 919-545-8086 to set up an appointment.



From 23 May 1917 *Siler City Grit*

Examples of draft registration cards (both from the first 5 Jun 1917 registration):

Form No. 1665 REGISTRATION CARD X No. 9

1 Name in full Hal Taylor Age in yrs 21

2 Home address Monroe, N.C.

3 Date of birth June 11 1896

4 Are you (1) a natural born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? Natural Born

5 Where were you born? Monroe, N.C. USA

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Laborer

8 By whom employed? Burns of Clifton 30
Where employed? Monroe N.C.

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 18, or a sister or brother under 18, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? Mother

10 Married or single (which)? Single Race (specify which)? Negro

11 What military service have you had? Rank _____ Branch _____ years _____ Nation or State _____

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Hal Taylor
(Signature of registrant)

32-2-7-A
REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? Short Slender, well built, or stout (which)? Stout

2 Color of eyes? Black Color of hair? Dark Bald? No

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)?

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

Waverly Lassiter
(Signature of registrar)

Precinct Chatham
City or County N.C.
State N.C. June 5 1917
(Date of registration)

Form No. 221 REGISTRATION CARD X No. 78

1 Name in full Proy L. Tally Age in yrs 22

2 Home address Rt. 1 Bear Creek N.C.

3 Date of birth Dec 30 1893

4 Are you (1) a natural born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? Natural Born

5 Where were you born? Chatham County N.C. USA

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Farming 1

8 By whom employed? Self
Where employed? Chatham County N.C.

9 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 18, or a sister or brother under 18, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? No

10 Married or single (which)? Single Race (specify which)? Caucasian

11 What military service have you had? Rank _____ Branch _____ years _____ Nation or State _____

12 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Proy Tally
(Signature of registrant)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? Medium Slender, well built, or stout (which)? Medium

2 Color of eyes? Black Color of hair? Black Bald? No

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? No

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

D H Ellis
(Signature of registrar)

Precinct RC
City or County Chatham
State N.C. 6/5/17
(Date of registration)

Note that registration cards indicate race and also that the bottom left corner of the card was removed for black registrants. The corner says, "If person is of African descent, tear off this corner."

Men were given certificates to prove they had registered. The certificate was embossed with an eagle at the top and merely stated who had registered, where, and on what date. This certificate was signed by a registrar. An example from North Carolina is shown below. If you have one of these from Chatham, please share an image with us for our collection!



Registration certificate example.
Not Chatham.

As promised, the *Grit* did publish lists of registrants by precinct, beginning 6 June 1917. When the *Grit* went to press at 11:00 that morning, fifteen of sixteen precincts had reported. (Merry Oaks was missing.) Along with the list of names from the Siler City precinct, the *Grit* reported precinct totals and a preliminary total for the county of 1166 whites and 564 blacks registered. See below, left, for the precinct totals.

The names of registrants from other precincts were published in subsequent issues. An example -- the list from Oakland County, published on 27 Jun 1917 -- is shown below, right.

Precinct Registrations.

The following is a list of the precincts THE GRIT has heard from up to press-time at eleven this morning:

Hadley Township.		
Whites.....	61	
Negroes.....	20	
Total.....		81
Center Township:		
Whites.....	99	
Negroes.....	83	
Total.....		182
Bear Creek Township:		
Whites.....	163	
Negroes.....	18	
Total.....		181
Siler City Precinct:		
Whites.....	137	
Negroes.....	53	
Total.....		190
Albright Township:		
Whites.....	70	
Negroes.....	6	
Total.....		76
Mt. Vernon Springs Precinct:		
Whites.....	37	
Negroes.....	17	
Total.....		54
Gulf Precinct:		
Whites.....	64	
Negroes.....	51	
Total.....		115
Richmond Precinct:		
Whites.....	81	
Negroes.....	16	
Total.....		97
Baldwin Township.		
Whites.....	65	
Negroes.....	55	
Total.....		120
Haw River Township.		
Whites.....	24	
Negroes.....	24	
Total.....		48
Backhorn Precinct.		
Whites.....	48	
Negroes.....	43	
Total.....		91
Williams Township.		
Whites.....	63	
Negroes.....	70	
Total.....		133
Michory Mountain Township.		
Whites.....	111	
Negroes.....	71	
Total.....		182
New Hope Township.		
Whites.....	108	
Negroes.....	15	
Total.....		123
Oakland Township.		
Whites.....	36	
Negroes.....	21	
Total.....		57

From the above it is seen that we have up to going to press at 11 Wednesday heard from 15 precincts out of the total of 16 that are in the county, and these 8 give a total of 1166 whites registered and 504 negroes, or a grand total of 1730, with only one precinct to hear from, namely, Merry Oaks precinct.

From Siler City Grit, 6 Jun 1917.



Roll of Honor Oakland Township

Whites registered.....	37
Negroes ".....	21
Total Oakland township...	58

WHITES REGISTERED

Bobbitt, Paul Rogers	Knight, Raymond R
Bridges, Tom	Knight, Wallace B
Burshart, Sam	Louys, Fred
Cotten, Lammie E	Luxton, Charlie
Dowdy, Curtis Van	McDuffie, Daniel
Dowdy, Graham S	Moore, John Wicker
Goldston, Albert W	Moore, Luther Leo
Gunter, Jas. R R	Moore, Edgar Lee
Gunter, John Colon	Pattishall, Colon M
Hackney, Henry H	Poe, Albert
Hall, William Cleve	Segroves, Wm. W
Hall, Walter	Stedman, John Oren
Holland, Archie	Ward, John Wesley
Howard, William C	Welch, Clyde Y
Hurley, Joseph	Williams, John S
Johnson, Milton C	Williams, Paul
Johnson, John W	Williams, Silas
Johnson, Coy Chapin	Williams, Luther
Johnson, Porter M	

NEGROES REGISTERED

Alston, Lonis Henry	McCrimmon, Will
Bryant, Robt. Gade	McCrimmon, W H A F
Currie, Shelton	McCrimmon, Jim
French, Rufus	Pattishall, Carl
Header, Ridia	Steward, Walter L
Hinton, David	Stone, Claud Swanson
Hollins, Ned	Taylor, Spencer
Lambert, Willie	Taylor, Harvey
Lee, Ed Columbus	Thomas, Calvin
Lee, Haywood	Watson, Charlie
Lee, Jas. Levander	

From Siler City Grit, 27 Jun 1917.

New Registration.

All men, white and colored, who have become 21 years of age since June 5th, 1917, will have to register for the draft on June 5th. Last year when the first registration took place the men were registered in each township, but this time the men will be registered at each courthouse, and by the local exemption board. So bear in mind that you who have become 21 since last June 5th must report to the exemption board at the courthouse at Pittsboro on Wednesday, June 5th, for the purpose of having your name enrolled on the registration lists of the United States government.

It is estimated that 800 men have come of age since last June 5th, and the big majority of these will probably come under class 1.

From Chatham Record, 22 May 1918.

By an order of Provost Marshal General Crowder all men who have become 21 since the last registration day (June 5) must register on next Saturday, August 24. Men of the new draft age must register not later than September 15, as a call for the services of some of them will be made by October 1st. When the 13,000,000 men of the new draft are enrolled, nearly 25,000,000 men will have been registered since the United States entered the war. The extension of the draft age will replenish the now nearly depleted reservoir of class 1 men by more than 2,000,000 men available for full military service.

From Chatham Record, 22 Aug 1918.

After each of the three draft registrations, lotteries were held. Those registrants whose numbers were drawn were then subject to induction unless they could show good cause why they should not be inducted. Read more about the lotteries and [who served from Chatham in WWI](#).

New Draft Law.

The 18 to 45 year draft bill has passed the senate by a vote of 75 to 0. It is understood that the 18 year-old boys will not be called to the trenches, till it is absolutely necessary. It is quite certain that the men first to be called will be between 19 and 36 years of age.

From Siler City Grit, 29 Aug 1918.

Compiled by Beverly Wiggins, 17Sep2018.