

Way We Were

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A look back at Park City in 1916

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This past year has had some pretty spectacular ups and downs, no matter which way you look at it. But as the year wraps up, let's go back in time and take a look at the "way we were" exactly one hundred years ago, 1916.

In the global context, the First World War raged. The Ottoman Empire pulled off one of its greatest victories during the Gallipoli Campaign, which officially ended on January 9. More than one million were killed or wounded later that year in the Battle of the Somme. The Summer Olympics of 1916 were officially canceled due to war. President Wilson worked hard to keep the United States off the battleground, something that became crucial to his re-election campaign platform.

Referred to by the Park Record as "the European War," Park City was nonetheless directly influenced. As fighting continued, demand for lead and silver rose, which in turn increased prices, a boon for the mining industry. The Silver King raised wages twice in 1916 thanks to improved profits.

On the national level, strides toward women's rights were being made even as many notable feminists were arrested for their work. Workers' rights also saw gains with the official establishment of the forty-hour work week. The Boy Scouts were created on June 15 and legislation creating the National Park Service was signed on August 25.

A lot happened here in town as well. The year started off with a bang when, on January 18, the Dewey Theatre's roof collapsed from the weight of snow, only hours after moviegoers had left the evening's show. A deadly avalanche killed Alma Kimball on March 6 as he worked to clear the way for teamsters trying to get down the mountains from the mines. Another deadly avalanche struck in November. Then, on Christmas day, "one of the most severe [snowstorms] in the history of Park City" struck, dumping over four feet of snow with high winds causing ten to fifteen foot drifts. The temperature plummeted to -20 degrees.

1916 also contained a contentious election. The Park Record was a staunchly Republican paper. While it reported Democratic goings-on and supported a small handful of Democratic candidates, the Record continuously lauded Charles Hughes and other Republican candidates. Of particular issue was whether or not the United States would enter the World War and voting rights for women, both of which Hughes supported. However, November brought victory for Woodrow Wilson and most other Democrats on the ticket. The results were close and remained in doubt for several days while returns were processed. Wilson won California by only 3,800 votes and New Hampshire by just fifty-six, the smallest margin in United States history.

The Record offered its customary well-wishes to Parkites at the close of the year, calling for peace and prosperity. One hundred years later, we don't know what 2017 has in store for us, but the sentiment is the same. Happy New Year from all of us at the Park City Museum!



Picture ID: 2007.11.559

Credit: Park City Historical Society and Museum, Thomas F. Hansen Collection

Caption: 1916 was a snowy year for Park City. The paper often pleaded for residents and business owners to clear their sidewalks, an obvious necessity as evidenced in this picture of Main Street. Thanks to improved snow removal, we don't see berms like this much anymore!