During the spring semester of 2015, two undergraduates from UNC Asheville participated in a unique course called “Century America: Campus and Community During the Great War.” This digital history project explores the experiences of 15 colleges and universities and their communities during World War I and through the crippling Spanish Influenza that followed the soldiers back in 1918. Students from each participating public liberal arts institution met via videoconference each week and conducted archival research on their respective institutions and surrounding communities. Then the students told these local Great War stories with website projects. At UNC Asheville, Ashley McGhee and her student partner Benjamin Jarrell uncovered information about individual contributions from Asheville locals during World War I, including mountain farmers, women, African Americans, and church leaders. Activities on the home front have often been overlooked in histories of the Great War, therefore this path-breaking research invites additional study. Ms. McGhee and “Century America” co-teacher Dr. Ellen Holmes Pearson of UNC Asheville’s History Department will discuss this project and the local impact of the Great War on Asheville and the surrounding mountain communities.

Ashley McGhee is a senior at The University of North Carolina Asheville and will graduate in December with her Bachelor’s degree in History and a minor in Environmental Studies. She is completing her senior thesis on the Wilderness Act of 1964 and will be presenting her research at the State of North Carolina Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium in November. McGhee is also currently a peer mentor for UNC Asheville’s National Parks History class. In addition to her course work, McGhee has worked in UNCA’s Special Collections to digitize the Isaiah Rice Photograph Collection, and she recently published a paper on her work with the John Brown Speculation Lands Collection. She will be attending graduate school in the Spring.

Ellen Holmes Pearson, Professor of History at The University of North Carolina Asheville, teaches early American history, Native American History, and Public and Digital History. She is the co-principal investigator for COPLACDigital, a Mellon Foundation-supported initiative to broaden the impact of digital liberal arts and distance pedagogy in public liberal arts institutions. Pearson received her Ph.D. in Colonial and Revolutionary American History from The Johns Hopkins University and is the author of Remaking Custom: Law and Identity in the Early American Republic, as well as several articles and book chapters on early American legal culture and digital liberal arts pedagogy.

This program is free, however RSVP is required. To reserve a seat, please call: (828) 296-7230 ext. 221 or email angela.jervis@ncdcr.gov

Visitors may view the exhibit, “North Carolina in the Great War” currently on display at the Western Office both before and after the program from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.