

One hundred years ago, what was then known as The Great War was raging in Europe — but many area residents might be unaware of the key role a Surry Countian played in that conflict. This will be highlighted Saturday during a presentation at Mount Airy Museum of Regional History which will focus on Henry Butner, an accomplished World War I Army general who was born and raised in Pinnacle.

The program titled “General Henry Wolfe Butner: From Farm to Military Fame” is scheduled at 2 p.m. on the third floor of the museum in downtown Mount Airy and is free and open to the public. That “fame” included Butner briefly serving as the commanding officer of Fort Bragg. During World War I, he was sent to France with the American Expeditionary Force and commanded an artillery brigade as a brigadier general. Butner was awarded the Army Distinguished Service Medal and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Saturday’s program will be led by local historian Marion Venable, with the event kicking off a spring History Talks series at the museum which has been under way for more than a decade. Two other sessions are slated in March and April, including a focus on how North Carolina women aided America’s cause in World War I on March 3.

That war is being highlighted through programming this year at the local museum, which also includes its recent opening of a World War I exhibit, as part of statewide efforts celebrating the centennial of the conflict’s end in November 1918. Special programs such as the one Saturday are helping people today understand a war that in many ways has been under-represented compared to the wealth of material produced about World War II and the Civil War. But that century-old conflict has special significance, according to Sonya Laney, director of education and programs at Mount Airy Museum of Regional History. “World War I was nicknamed ‘the war to end all wars,’” Laney said, “which ended up being quite ironic.” Only about 20 years later, another world war would be getting under way which proved to be the most massive conflict in the history of mankind. Harsh conditions in Germany after 1918 fueled the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party in the 1930s. Historians also consider World War I to be the first “modern” conflict. “It is really a fascinating war — the technological advances,” Laney said.

On March 3 at 2 p.m. at the museum, North Carolina Humanities Council “Road Scholar” Dr. Angela Robbins is scheduled to discuss the ways North Carolina women contributed to the World War I effort. This will include both the home front and overseas. That program is made possible by funding from the council, a statewide non-profit organization and an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

