



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

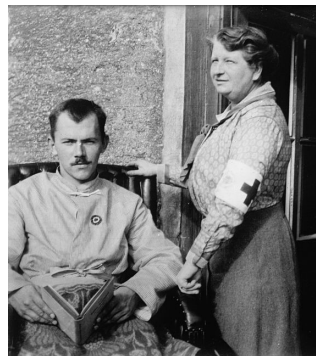
from the archives of Museums on the Green

From Falmouth to Munich during the Great War

When the Great War broke out in Europe in July 1914, the United States stayed on the sidelines claiming neutrality. Many doctors and nurses boarded the *SS Red Cross*, better known as “*The Merry Ship*,” as part of an American Red Cross mission to the continent, where they provided medical care on both sides of the fighting.

During those years of U.S. neutrality (July 1914-April 1917), the “*Vereins Lazarett von Amerikanischen Roten Kreuz*” operated in Munich under the auspices of the American Red Cross, with Drs. Franz and Sophie (Nordhoff) Jung in charge. This German married couple had spent many years studying and practicing medicine in the U.S.. Helping them out as a volunteer was Sophie’s sister Helena (Nordhoff) Gargan, whose life journey had brought her back to her native land by way of Washington, Boston, and Falmouth Heights.

Born in the town of Bielefeld in 1863, Helena immigrated to the United States in 1886 and settled in Washington, D.C. While attending a Catholic summer school at Lake Champlain, she met prominent Boston attorney and Civil War veteran, Thomas J. Gargan. They married in 1898 and took up residence on Brimmer Street in the Beacon Hill section of Boston. A graduate of Boston University Law School, Thomas served in the state legislature and was noted for his oratorical skills. For her part, Helena was acclaimed as “a woman of education, cultivation, travel, and refinement.” Together, they made an impression on the city’s Catholic and Democratic social scene.



Top: Poster in Museums' collection.

Bottom: Dr. Sophie (Nordhoff) Jung with patient, at the American Red Cross Hospital in Munich. Glass negative at Library of Congress.

The Gargans soon acquired a “cottage” at Falmouth Heights (where 6 Forest Avenue now is), on the hill overlooking the ball park. Sadly, Thomas did not have the chance to enjoy many summers there. Suffering from an incurable intestinal disorder, he traveled several times to Germany seeking treatment, but following surgery in Berlin in 1908, he succumbed to his illness. (Thomas was given last rites by Father Clemens August von Galen, who later became a bishop famous for denouncing Hitler’s policy of euthanasia for the disabled.)

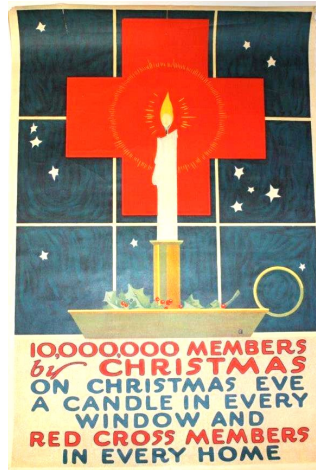
Helena’s devotion to her husband was expressed by her publishing a book entitled *Thomas J. Gargan, A Memorial*, and by her gift of the Gargan Library to Boston College, in memory of Thomas.

In 1910 Helena embarked on a two-year stay in Munich. During the first summer she was away, she rented the Heights cottage to Boston mayor John F. “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald, who vacationed there with his family, including his 20-year-old daughter, Rose, future mother of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

According to the *Enterprise*, Helena spent the summer of 1912 in her cottage at the Heights. The newspaper also places her there in September 1914 and May 1915. But in 1916, the cottage was rented out again, as Helena committed all her energies to helping Sophie and Franz at their hospital in Munich.

In October 1916, Helena wrote a letter to Falmouth tax collector Rawson C. Jenkins, explaining she was unable to pay her property taxes directly, because the war precluded transferring money from Germany to the United States. She suggested that Jenkins send the bill to her bank in Boston. In her letter, which was published in the *Falmouth Enterprise* on December 9, 1916, Helena described how busy the hospital was, caring for the wounded. She wrote, “Some of the boys when returned to the front and wounded again, have asked to be sent back to us, which is most gratifying to us.”

When America entered the war in 1917, it became



Top: Poster in Museums’ collection.

Middle: Rose (Fitzgerald) Kennedy, 1939. Photo at IJK Library.

Bottom: Heights ballfield, ca. 1920. The Gargan “cottage” is the house farthest on the right, with a distinctive gambrel roof. Postcard in Museums’ collection.

impossible to continue the hospital, and Helena and the Jungs were stranded for the duration. The *Enterprise* reports that Helena was back in her cottage in May 1919, and the Jungs also returned at some point to the U.S. After Franz Jung died in December of 1921, Helena moved to Washington to live with Sophie, and continued to rent her Falmouth cottage to others, more often than not.

Helena kept up her ties to the town, though, and when visiting, she would stay at the Gladstone Inn. As a life-time member of the Lawrence High School Scholarship Association, she contributed to scholarships for graduating seniors. Helena was also committed to St. Patrick's church in its early years. She donated an organ to the church and, being an accomplished musician, trained the choir for several summers.

Helena Gargan died in 1945 while residing with her sister, Paula Nordhoff, at the Hotel Bellevue in Boston, where she had moved after Sophie's death in 1943. Witnessing yet another war against her homeland must have saddened her greatly. In 1916, she had expressed her hope that "America [would] not allow England to drag her into [the] war. All those who have seen the unspeakable suffering we have seen will join the Peace Party and vote for Peace ever," she wrote. Her hope and prayer were not fulfilled.

*Terry White
& Meg Costello*

Learn more:

Read [Helena's 1916 letter to the Enterprise](#)

Read [Helena's 1945 obituary](#) (which gets her place of birth wrong)

Read articles about the Munich hospital in the [American Red Cross Magazine of 1915](#)



Top: Poster in Museums' collection.

Bottom: St. Patrick's Church, Falmouth, ca. 1915. Postcard in Museums' collection.