



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

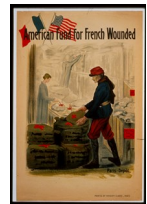
from the archives of Museums on the Green

Peace Warriors, 1917

One hundred years ago, Americans were living through their first, and only, Christmas of World War I. The war was no longer a remote European problem, ever since the United States joined the fight in April 1917. Americans' sons, friends, and neighbors were under fire on battlefields far away.

Even before the U.S. declared war, some Falmouth residents had been following the conflict as it unfolded. One of our earlier Untold Tales revealed how Helena Gargan returned to her native Germany to work in a Red Cross hospital. Now let's examine how others did their part to lessen the suffering in Allied countries.

In 1915, local women formed a Falmouth branch of the American Fund for French Wounded. About twice a month they collected and sent to Boston packages filled with vests, pillows, sponges, bandages, slings, surgical dressings, compresses, twine, mittens, mufflers, gloves, towels, sheets, and other items that could be used by a recovering soldier or by a refugee. Workers at the AFFW's Boylston Street office mailed back a postcard acknowledging the receipt of the items. In the archives we have over 50 such postcards, most of them addressed to Julia Wood or Amelia Lawrence. Usually the cards list the exact quantities received. On November 16, 1916, for example, the AFFW thanked Miss Lawrence for 16 vests, 16 pillows, 60 bandages, 10 ear and jaw bandages, and 16 packages of sponges. Such frequent large donations must have cost a great deal of time, work, and money. It is reasonable to assume that the group did at least some of its collecting and packing at Julia Wood's



Top: Red Cross poster, 1917-18, in Museums' archives.

Middle: Julia Wood, ca. 1900. Photograph in Museums' archives.

Bottom: American Fund for French Wounded, poster, 1917. Image downloaded from Library of Congress.

home, now the Wicks House at Museums on the Green.

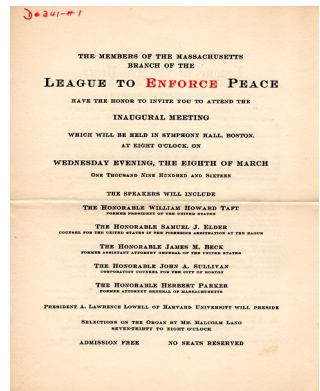
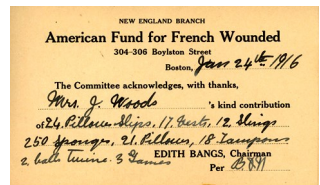
To lift the spirits of their volunteers across New England, AFFW's Boston headquarters occasionally shared copies of thank-you letters from France. In the archives, we have a typed copy of 13 stanzas written in French by Jules Hesry. He was so grateful for a Christmas package from a Brookline girl that he burst into poetry. "Merci! . . . Petite enfant du Nouveau-Monde," Hesry effused, adding:

Que de bons objets entasses
Par la main de parents complices!
Jusqu'à des bonbons, o delices!
Des bonbons des Massachusetts!

[*Trans.* What wonderful things assembled
By the hand of complicit parents!
As for the bonbons, how delicious!
Bonbons from Massachusetts!]

Congratulations to M. Hesry for finding a rhyme for "Massachusetts" — in a foreign tongue, no less!

While the AFFW volunteers were helping France, Rev. H.H. Smythe of St. Barnabas was corresponding with the American Committee for Relief in the Near East. This group was chartered by Congress in 1915 to aid Armenians and Assyrians fleeing from genocide in the Ottoman Empire. Smythe was also sympathetic towards the ironically named "League to Enforce Peace." He was invited to its meeting at Boston's Symphony Hall on March 8, 1916, where former President Taft and Harvard president A. Lawrence Lowell spoke. The League to Enforce Peace was already planning ahead for the postwar era, when its members hoped that a league of nations would be able to ensure a permanent peace. Sadly, with our hindsight, we can see why their good intentions failed. The League believed that Prussian militarism was uniquely dangerous, and had to be crushed, by violence if necessary. Only then could a lasting peace take hold. Using this convoluted logic, the League actually opposed "a premature peace," and endorsed continuing the war.



Top: American Committee for Relief in the Near East, poster, ca. 1916.

Middle: Postcard from American Fund for French Wounded, to Julia Wood, Jan. 24, 1916.

Bottom: Flyer, League to Enforce Peace, 1916.

All items are in the Museums' archives.

In 1917, with the U.S. in the fight, people in Falmouth continued their previous charitable efforts, and added new ones. Smythe, Charles Burgess, and F.M. MacNaught formed a committee to help raise \$9,000 for the Y.M.C.A. Eventually, Smythe sensed the need for a systematized approach to the ever multiplying appeals for war relief. In May of 1918, he convened a meeting at St. Barnabas to craft a united fundraising appeal. Proceeds would be shared equitably among the Y.M.C.A., AFFW, Red Cross, Camp Community Fund, and Christmas gift drive.

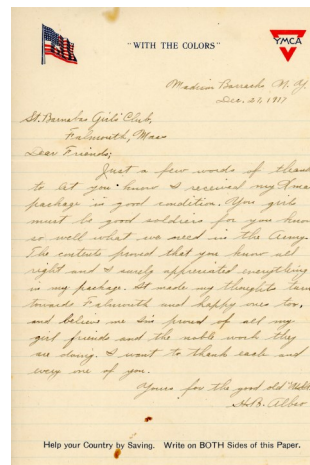
We have evidence that many Falmouth soldiers received, and appreciated, Christmas packages from home in 1917. The St. Barnabas Girls' Club received cards and letters, now in our archives, from Carleton Baker, Ernest Powers, A.O. Crocker, B. W. Wright, and H.B. Albro, thanking the girls for their gifts. One letter assured the club that its package for Manuel Medeiros would be forwarded to him at his new assignment.

Even the tight-fisted were forced to sacrifice for the war effort. Rationing and government regulations removed many comforts of daily life. The *Falmouth Enterprise* of December 22, 1917, reprinted a ditty by R.E.G. from the *Boston Herald*:

My Tuesdays are meatless,
My Wednesdays wheatless,
I'm getting more eatless each day;
My house it is heatless,
My bed it is sheetless—
They've gone to the Y.M.C.A.;
The bar-rooms are treatless,
My coffee is sweetless,
Each day I get poorer and wiser;
My stockings are feetless,
My trousers are seatless—
Je-roosh, how I hate the dam Kaiser!

This rhymester gets points for wit, but he would never be mistaken for one of the great World War I poets.

Though she is not classified as a World War I poet, Katharine Lee Bates was still writing during this period, and sometimes used the war as a topic. In her poem



Top: Poster, 1917.

Middle: Christmas card, 1917, Carleton Baker to St. Barnabas Girls Club.
Bottom: Letter, H.B. Albro to St. Barnabas Girls' Club, Dec. 22, 1917.

All items are in Museums' archives.

“To Heavy Hearts,” she captures the sentiments that must have been shared in many Falmouth homes one hundred years ago this month:

Silver chimes are on the air,
Sweet and blithe—too blithe to bear;
And what singing hearth rejoices,
Missing the beloved voices
That were merriest there?
The booming cannon are their Christmas bells;
(O Holy Child, how many a homeless waif!)
Their carols are the hiss and crash of shells.
God keep them safe!

Meg Costello

(Translation by B. Grant Willis)



Sticker, ca. 1916. In Museums' archives.