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The Hoboken Historical Museum Newsletter

OF BY And FOR MuSeum MemberS.

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Hoboken Unit of Red Cross



THE HOBOKEN UNIT OF THE RED CROSS WHICH FUNCTIONED THROUGHOUT THE WAR. WHETHER NIGHT OR DAY, THESE WOMEN WERE ALWAYS ON HAND WHEN NEEDED.

FIRST WORLD WAR RED CROSS PHOTO DONATED

The Museum is grateful to have been given, via the Mayor's office, an original photograph related to the period of the First World War when Hoboken was the country's military Port of Embarkation. The group photo, reproduced here, was donated by Jean Eicks Holt of Pelham Manor, N.Y., and shows the Hoboken Unit of the Red Cross Emergency Division in 1918.

In her interesting letter of transmittal to Mayor Patrick Pasculli, Ms Holt writes: "I was born in Ho-

[Continued on next page.]

boken on November 26, 1903. During World War I, my mother and father were active in volunteer work, since Hoboken was a key city in the transportation of troops.

"The New York Chapter of the American Red Cross formed a special unit in Hoboken. To be a member of it was a great honor since each woman had to prove to their satisfaction that she was a loyal American. Before the war, Hoboken was a very 'German' city and women of this unit knew the exact sailing [time] of every American transport ship.

"My father, W. Lindley Eicks, was the first president of the Eleventh Hour Bowling Club in the Elks Club. I attended the Academy of the Sacred Heart for ten years. Hoboken was a happy place for a child in those days!

"Sincerely,

"Jean E. Holt."

In the black and white photograph, taken in the studio of Manewal, 520 Washington Street, which claimed to be the largest in Hudson County, Jean's mother, Agnes Scott Eicks (Mrs. W. Lindley Eicks) appears in the rear row, fourth from the left.

On the reverse of the photo, Jean Holt writes: "Transport ships sailed from the Hoboken piers for France (AEF) [American Expeditionary Forces]. These women were on 24-hour call. They served food to the embarkation soldiers in the middle of the night before the ships quietly left--hoping to avoid German subs lurking outside the harbor. Whether there was sleet, snow, or ice--or sizzling hot weather--these women never failed a call. They later served as a guard of honor when President Woodrow Wilson sailed [to Europe] to discuss the League of Nations*..I know these facts because I was an eager 13-year-old at the time. Our family was sealed to silence because spies tried to learn the exact time of sailing for the transport ships.--Jean Eicks Holt"

The photograph appeared in a 1927 book titled "As They Passed Through the Port," by Major General David C. Shanks. The 351-page volume was dedicated "to the 1,777,109 American soldiers, officers and men, who passed through Hoboken to serve their country in the great struggle beyond the sea, and to the vast throngs of patriotic women all over our land who in camp, in rest houses, in hospital and on our piers served their country by serving those who wore their country's uniform."

WM. MANEWAL

520 WASHINGTON STREET

Leading Photographer of Hoboken

Largest Studio in Hudson County 1906

CARBONETTES - $4.00 and $5.00 a Dozen

COLLEGE WORK A SPECIALTY. Reduced Rates for Colleges

*[Museum member Dr. Nathaniel Coyne informs us that on February 21, WNYC, Channel 25, broadcast a program showing footage of President Wilson departing from Hoboken to Europe on his visit on behalf of the League of Nations.]

One of the most impressive statements by the General concerning the Red Cross and other welfare workers on the Hoboken piers was that there were many women among them "of great wealth and social distinction." Never before in American history had there been a time when the illiterate mountaineer from West Virginia or Kentucky, the cowboy from the western plains, or the ignorant lad fresh from the cotton fields of Mississippi found themselves waited upon by women whose wealth, culture, and social standing were among the very highest in the land.

"Not alone did these women serve refreshments and dispense a cheery smile, but they distributed a 'Safe Arrival Card' to the soldier at the same time that they served him his coffee.

"An astounding number of our men could neither read nor write," claimed Gen. Shanks, "And here these welfare women helped many a poor soldier who could not himself make any use of even so simple a message as the 'Safe Arrival Card.'

"It is true that not much information could be given on a card, but it did serve to let the folks at home know that their soldier had arrived overseas. These women wrote many a last message back home for our illiterate soldiers. They could discuss personal affairs, but give no information.

"When our wounded began to come back, a Tennessee mountaineer found waiting for him from his wife a letter confiding to him the cheery news that he would find something running around the yard besides the fence when he got back home. Although illiterate he was a man of fine character, and one of the Red Cross workers wrote a letter at his dictation sending his love and some messages of affection."

MASSIVE UNDERTAKING

To give the reader some idea of the massive undertaking of the this operation of sending the troops "Over There," we quote Gen. Shanks once more. "The little handful of officers and men on duty at Hoboken when I arrived there was steadily expanded until, at the peak, there were at the port and the embarkation camps 2,500 officers, 17,000 enlisted men, and 14,000 civilian employees."

ONE FOR THE RECORD BOOKS

During World War I, in one day, August 31, 1918, there took place the maximum embarkation of troops in history when 51,356 soldiers were embarked from Hoboken on 17 vessels.

So well had the Army Transport Service systematized its methods that the Leviathan carrying 10,000 troops could be loaded within two hours.*

*David C. Shanks, "As They Passed Through the Port," The Cary Publishing Co., Washington, D.C. 1927, p. 187.

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THE HOBOKEN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

CITY HALL
WASHINGTON AND FIRST STS. HOBOKEN, N.J.

MUSEUM MUSICAL BENEFIT A BIG $UCCE$$

More than $2700 was earned at the Museum's third annual fund-raiser, held at the Hoboken Elks Club and organized by Jim Hans and Perry Robinson.

THANKS!

Volunteers at the door included Chris and Avery Brighton, Betty DeMarco, Virginia Fenner, Bob Foster, Hugh Kilmer, Kathy McBrady, and Joyce Tatom. Behind the bar were Paul Drexel, John Earl, Beverly Hans, Hugh Kilmer, Guy Riotto, Carol Rogers, Susan Shaftan, Lorraine Walsh, and Jeff Wilson. Thanks to all the Musicians and a special thanks for their extra help: Frank Fame, Luke Faust, Joey George, Robert Miller, and The River Rats. Also helpful were Jennifer Braun, Mare Pott, and artist Helena Berger. Plus many thanks to the Clam Broth House and Bill Kadish.

MEETING NOTICE

Our next meeting is Wednesday, May 17 at 7:30 P.M. in the Clam Broth House on Newark Street in Hoboken. All members are invited and potential new members and guests are always welcome to sit in without obligation. Arrive hungry and order some seafood from the Clam Broth House menu.

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