

Youngsters Get Involved in Times of Need, by Alan F. Rumrill

Most of us have seen recent stories about children who are trying to help during this difficult and uncertain time. Children have donated their savings and raised money in numerous ways to support first responders and others in need. Our country and our region have a long history of young people coming forward to help others during trying times, although history books seem to offer little formal evidence of these efforts.

One of the earliest efforts in Keene occurred during the Civil War. The Juvenile Soldiers' Aid Society was formed during the conflict. The group raised funds by presenting plays and music programs. The funds raised from these endeavors were used to aid the troops.

By January of 1916 World War I had been raging in Europe for 1½ years, although the United States did not officially become involved until the following year. In January of 1916 the U.S. Senate passed a resolution requesting that President Woodrow Wilson issue a proclamation concerning the plight of Jews in Eastern Europe displaced by World War I. President Wilson's proclamation designated January 27th as a day for the people of the United States to collect funds to aid the millions of suffering European Jews who had been driven from their homes without warning and were destitute of food, clothing, and shelter.



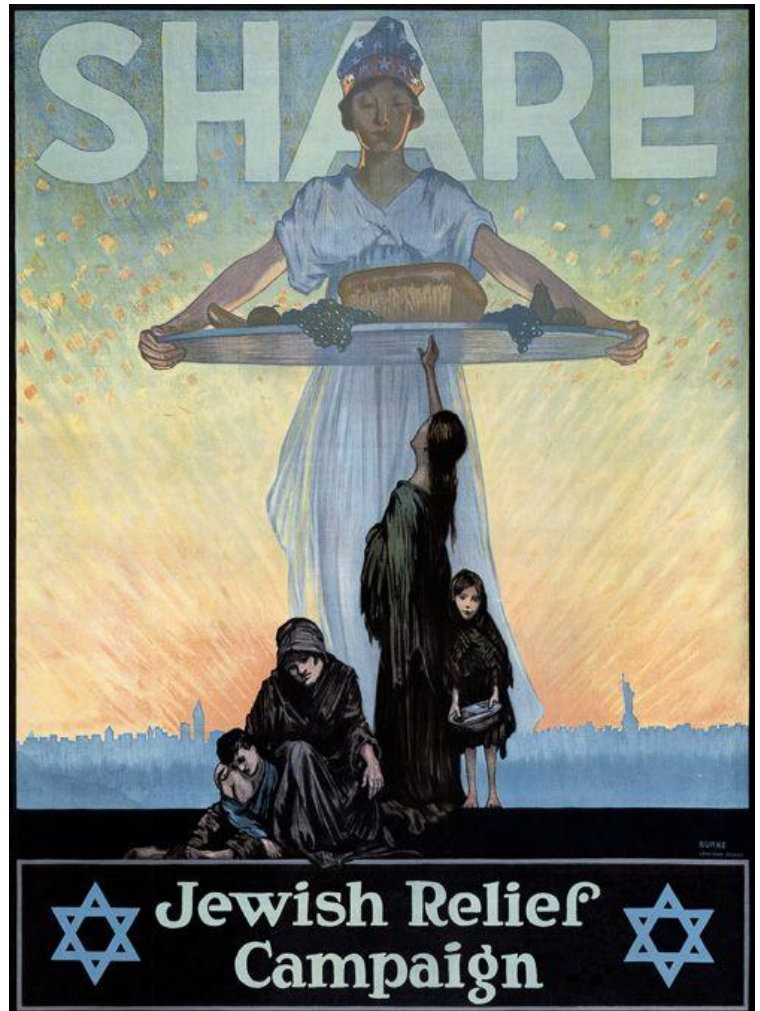
Jewish Relief dime bank

The mayor of Keene, Orville Cain, wrote a letter to the Keene Evening Sentinel asking the citizens of the city to join in the national fundraising day, and organized a local fund drive. On that Thursday in January, young boys and girls stood around Central Square with little banks collecting money for the fund. Buttons, tags, and certificates were also sold to raise money.

The day after the one-day fund drive, the Sentinel reported that the citizens of Keene donated the sum of \$300, and "It is thought that the sum realized here is a generous one for the size of the city..." Three

hundred dollars in 1916 is equivalent to more than \$7000 today, and the children of the city played a key role in the community's Jewish Relief Campaign fundraising effort.

The next world war, WWII, offered many ways for youngsters to get involved in supporting the war effort and displaying their patriotism. In a recent article we discussed the sale of Defense Stamps by young people in Keene during the war. In April of 1943 the city's school children began an effort to sell enough Stamps to buy three Jeeps for the military. Their efforts were so successful that they ended up buying 17 Jeeps! Children here also got involved in scrap drives – especially paper drives – to collect, load, and send off used material that could be repurposed for the war effort. Another initiative involved the collection of milkweed pods. Local children have recalled in recent years that they wandered the city and local countryside collecting the pods, which were then sent off to be used in the production of life preservers. The milkweed seeds were used as filler for the preservers when other fillers became scarce.



Jewish Relief Campaign poster



WWII observation tower on Frost Hill in Marlborough

One final volunteer responsibility was quite exciting for local youngsters. Middle and high school-age students were recruited to serve as airplane spotters. It was their duty to keep watch for enemy planes. One Historical Society member shared her memories of this thrilling duty. Once a week as a young teenager she went to a field in West Keene where there was a watch tower. She climbed up into the tower and watched the sky for airplanes.

The spotters had to learn to identify planes by studying images of the styles and shapes of different aircraft. When an airplane passed overhead she had to call in a description of the plane and the direction it was headed.

The nation's young people have long offered their support in times of war and emergency. Although children may have limited resources, they share what they have to help others, including their time and energy, even if they are experiencing uncertainty in their own lives.