

MAR 23 1918

STATE OF MAINE

COMMITTEE OF ONE HUNDRED
ON
PUBLIC SAFETY



MAINE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY LIBRARY

"Committee of One Hundred on Public Safety," 1917 (Augusta, ME).
Collections of Maine Historical Society. WWI 327

FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF MAINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

BY JAMIE KINGMAN RICE

On the eve of the First World War, Maine Historical Society (MHS) was nestled into its new home at 485 Congress Street in Portland, tucked behind the recently acquired childhood home of HW Longfellow, the Wadsworth-Longfellow House. In 1914, the library building, designed by the poet's nephew Alexander, was just seven years old, but served as headquarters for an organization approaching its centennial. At this point in its history, MHS was well on its way as an established collecting institution, dedicated to not only Maine history, but a broader representation of general historical interest and scholarly pursuits. A formidable force in the historical publishing world, MHS was experiencing the twilight years under James Phinney Baxter. The "House of Baxter" had ushered MHS to its place as a cultural leader in the state.

By the end of 1914, the library of the Maine Historical Society was under the direction of Miss Evelyn Gilmore. Filled with published works, historical objects, maps, and manuscripts, the collections of MHS already included some of the organization's treasures, such as the Pejepscot and Kennebec Proprietors, the papers of Maine's first governor, and Benedict Arnold's 1775 letterbook from the march to Quebec. But beyond the history of Maine and early New England, holdings also included publications about the American West, a "Spanish Section," maps from the Orient, and the occasional relic from the Ancient World.

While collecting history broadly was an obvious choice for any historical society at the turn of the century, it was the foresight of the MHS staff during the period that would lend itself to a significant collection dedicated to the First World War. An often-overshadowed era in American history, the Great War impacted the United States in significant ways, from American foreign policy to women's suffrage. It is understandable that the shelves of MHS would later house correspondence, photographs, and manuscripts pertaining to the home front and WWI Maine soldiers, but it is the collection of national and international WWI printed materials

that demonstrates MHS's commitment to documenting this immensely influential period and contemporary history.

The World War I printed materials collection at MHS consists of two major components: pamphlets and posters. Collected independently of one another, they represent two vital aspects of WWI communication, international influence and nationalism. The pamphlet collection is comprised of over 550 titles printed in the United States, Europe, and Canada. It remained hidden in the society's backlog until nearly 100 years after its inception. The poster collection, featuring both iconic and rare examples of American nationalism, fundraising campaigns, and recruitment slogans, was absorbed into a larger broadside collection and added to over time. Both the pamphlets and posters would remain largely inaccessible until the 100th anniversary of the "War to End All Wars" would bring them to the forefront.

In 2007, MHS removed all of its library collections from the 485 address in preparation for an extensive architectural restoration and addition. At that time, the WWI pamphlet collection was tucked away in the Library's basement catacombs, housed in marbled folios dating from the war period itself. Loosely categorized and covered in soot from years near the furnace, the collection escaped repeated efforts to focus and streamline the collecting scope of an ever-growing organization. With limited Maine imprints amongst the boxes, the collection largely consisted of nationally printed American pamphlets, handbills, broadsides and leaflets, as well as a considerable amount of British propaganda sent to American libraries and collecting institutions by the "propaganda czar," Sir Gilbert Parker (1862–1932).

Sir Gilbert Parker, a Canadian novelist, embarked on a government sanctioned propaganda mission aimed at building and maintaining American sympathies for the Entente powers, specifically Great Britain. During the First World War, Great Britain excelled at propaganda, far exceeding the efforts of its German counterparts. Britain's propaganda bureau, Wellington House, mastered the art of controlled communication during the war, and agents such as Parker peppered the American media with tales of German atrocities and reasons to join the war effort. German propaganda, however, aimed at maintaining American neutrality. While this was a successful strategy for 1914 and 1915, by the middle of the war, it was far from sustainable. The sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* and the British interception of the "Zimmermann Telegram" (in which the German high command covertly sought an alliance with Mexico against the United States) were both German public relations disasters and provided fodder for Parker and his cohorts.

Additionally, several pamphlets were sent to MHS at the direction of William McNeile Dixon, an academic professor in charge of the “American branch” of Wellington House. Dixon and Parker led the barrage of pro-British propaganda which graced the doorsteps of American libraries during the first few years of the war. Not to be outdone, the German propaganda machine attempted similar campaigns, although with considerably less success. Despite its best efforts, Germany failed at swaying public opinion to its cause, but its efforts are present within the collection at the Maine Historical Society. Anti-British and anti-French propaganda can be found among the collection, although efforts to ensure American neutrality are the dominant theme for the MHS pamphlets printed by pro-German (or pro-neutrality) factions. While the British pamphlets in the surviving collection far outnumber those in favor of the Central powers, the presence of pro-German / anti-British items demonstrate the efforts on behalf of Germany to influence public opinion in Maine. This is important for two reasons; their existence shows the strategic and influential role of Maine during the years before American involvement in the war, and their retention by MHS demonstrates efforts to document a broader understanding of the period from a collecting perspective. Maine, for geographic reasons, was a focal point for the Germans and British during the early part of the war, with diplomatic arguments surrounding border neutrality, espionage, and wireless communication conspiracy theories, one example being the Fabbri brothers, who were accused of cavorting with the Central powers via their private wireless station in Bar Harbor. It is no wonder a Maine library would be on the receiving end of distributed propaganda literature from both sides.

A larger portion of the WWI pamphlet collection hails from throughout the United States, with select Maine imprints. Locally printed literature ranges from Maine chapters of the United War Work Campaign, to University of Maine food conservation leaflets, to nationalistic rhetoric referencing the golden age of George Washington. A pamphlet printed by Maine’s Committee on Public Safety (WWI 327) speaks to the Orwellian watchdog contingencies of the First World War, while a Portland guide book emphasizes resources for the city’s enormous population growth due to coastal defense efforts.

The nationally printed materials within the collection outline common themes for the era. A strong representation by the American Library Association is to be expected for the period. Also seen are the American Red Cross, US Food Administration, *The US Bulletin* (official government communication) and the ever-present Committee on Public Information, the American version of Wellington House. Additional pamphlets offer

tips on personal hygiene, warn against venereal diseases, or offer advice on surviving the army and the Spanish Flu.

Upon the return to the 485 building in 2009, the pamphlets revealed themselves once again. The fate of the collection could follow one of two paths: find a permanent home in the newly constituted archive or follow the de-accession process. Despite its rich content, the largely national and international scope fell outside of the streamlined collecting patterns of a modern MHS. However, the twenty-first-century staff recognized the broader collecting scope of the society as an asset, and of research value. Certainly, the importance of documenting collecting patterns, including obscure or niche collections acquired by MHS predecessors, represent a “Maine collection” in a unique way. And while de-accession efforts are a necessity for any collecting institution, in some instances the objective of a collection is of equal value to the content, especially when the content is rare and ephemeral.

Begging for item-level control and wanting of preservation, the collection and its fate resided with the current staff. Efforts to determine the existence of Parker and Dixon’s propaganda in other American libraries proved fruitless, although it is likely the collections were either not retained or suffered from the same lack of intellectual control as the MHS collection. Pamela R. Outwin, a recent graduate from Pratt Institute’s School of Information, spent countless hours with the collection in 2014, removing soot, tracking duplication, and inventorying the pieces for eventual consideration. In 2017, after one hundred years, MHS committed to the collection’s retention. Its trajectory concluded with a herculean cataloguing campaign on behalf of MHS cataloguer and archivist, Nancy Noble. Through her perseverance, the collection was fully processed, each with their own acid-free enclosures and item-level MARC record in the society’s Minerva catalogue. As a testament to the dynamic nature of the pamphlets, both Ms. Outwin and Ms. Noble shared their experiences with the collection through the MHS blog.

The pamphlet collection’s counterpart, the World War I poster collection, followed a different path to Maine Historical Society, although its provenance is less well documented. In the decades that followed the war, MHS amassed a collection of propaganda posters, ranging from James Flagg’s iconic “Uncle Sam” to obscure American recruitment posters in Yiddish, Polish, and Russian. Maine imprints, highlighting US Marine Corps recruiting stations in Monument Square or food conservation efforts like “Maine Potato Week” demonstrate the breadth of the collection, which understandably, is largely comprised of Liberty Bond campaigns



“Pour La Liberté, Fête De L'Indépendance,” 1918.
Collections of Maine Historical Society 1994.54.1. MMN# 103128

and nationalistic undertones. Like the pamphlets, a selection of European posters is embedded in the collection, mostly consisting of British recruitment posters. One extraordinary international example is a French poster outlining the unique relationship between the United States and France, referencing the Marquis de Lafayette (1992.54.1).

The collection is comprised of over 250 pieces. The vivid colors and striking imagery add to the allure, enhanced by years of obscurity. During the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) inventoried a compiled collection at MHS known as Coll. 463. The survey resulted in a four-volume, typed inventory of which the final volume was dedicated to the “WWI Broad sides.” The inventory, while serving as an item-level finding aid, offered the outside world little accessibility to the rich and dynamic posters, lithographs, and broadsides which laid within. In the late twentieth century, for preservation reasons, the WWI posters from Coll. 463 were transferred to the society’s museum, where they benefited from improved housing, but this did little for their accessibility. Like the WWI pamphlet collection, the centennial brought the posters into the spotlight. Curatorial efforts for MHS’s 2017 exhibition, *World War I and the Maine Experience*, recognized the need for item-level cataloguing and digitization efforts for this wonderful collection.

While the inventory for Coll. 463 outlined a portion of the collection, a large number of the posters were collected in the years that followed the WPA inventory. A young, forward-thinking MHS member, Earle Shettleworth, Jr., scooped up a large collection of WWI posters from a local secondhand store in the late 1960s and donated them to MHS, enhancing the collection considerably. Tucked into folders with their Coll. 463 companions, a paper-based list yielded the only access point to a bountiful collection. As part of the centennial efforts, a Bowdoin College intern, Matthew Swiatek, reviewed, inventoried, catalogued, and digitized the collection over the summer of 2017 under the direction of the MHS library. Accompanied by fellow intern Will Sarvis, their project resulted in item-level records within the society’s museum catalogue, each complete with an image.

Several of the posters, including three iconic anti-German propaganda posters featuring menacing Huns, appeared in the society’s exhibition. Other featured components of the exhibition included food-conservation posters, recruitment posters, and nationalistic propaganda, such as the “Are you 100% American” campaign. Also featured were examples from the less well-known efforts of the American Committee for the Relief in the Near East, aimed at fundraising for the atrocities in Syria, Persia, Greece, and Armenia. The American Library Association, Salvation Army, Red Cross,

and US Food Administration conservation posters documented the home-front communication efforts, aimed at engaging citizens in Maine and beyond.

Unlike their pamphlet counterparts, the posters presented unique preservation concerns. Their delicate nature and often oversized dimensions complicated their care. For many years, the posters lived in acid-free folders, interleaved within flat files, but their lack of intellectual control and tissue-weight paper prevented reviews for research and exhibition purposes. The newly processed collection, complete with digital images, will benefit from the accessibility of online records, while ensuring their survival. A number of the posters are featured on the Maine Memory Network, as part of an online version of *WWI and the Maine Experience*, but also as a representation of the uniqueness of the collection. Plans to enhance and build upon their Maine Memory Network presence are ongoing and shall continue through the centennial period. In fact, the collection itself continues to grow, with the 2017 acquisition of a Yankee Division 'Welcome Home' fundraising poster.

The WWI printed materials collection of pamphlets and posters personify MHS's commitment to all aspects of the Maine experience, be it documentation of participation or the embodiment of the experience itself. Communication and propaganda were an integral component of the First World War and represent a period in American history when perception and public opinion meant everything. While this too can be said of other time periods, the WWI era was a turning point in American history, ushering the United States onto the world stage, and establishing its voice in international politics. A collection of its breadth and scope at a Maine institution demonstrates the role of Maine in the national narrative and the importance of documenting the history of tomorrow.