

Red Cross

The most important volunteer organization in Bayfield County contributing to the war effort was the county Red Cross chapter. While many people were members of the Red Cross, the active leadership was composed of women, plus a few men, from communities in the county, particularly from Washburn. Under its 1905 congressional charter the Red Cross was required to provide aid to the "sick and wounded of armies" and carry out relief work in the Army and Navy in time of war. To fulfill this mandate the national organization depended on local chapters to conduct fund raising campaigns and to collect or prepare relief supplies, such as clothing and dressings.

Fund raising to support the operations of the Red Cross was perhaps the most important activity of the county Red Cross chapter. From 1940 to 1945 the chapter sponsored five annual "war fund" drives. Donations were solicited house-to-house by volunteers, with amounts collected in Washburn listed by street in the Times. The county quota for the first drive in May 1940 was \$1,000, but apparently only about \$700 was collected. The second drive began immediately after December 7 1941, with a quota of \$2,700. With the nation at war, perhaps inspired by an appeal from President Roosevelt "to make this campaign an overwhelming success," the people of the county gave \$3,800. The quotas for the subsequent wartime campaigns in 1943, 1944, and 1945 were also all exceeded.

A second important activity of the county chapter was the production of garments for war victims, sewn or knitted by women volunteers. The first of several projects to produce these war relief garments began in the summer of 1940 with a shipment of 25 sweaters, 10 dresses, and "two layettes," in mid-September. From January 1941 to September 1946 several thousand garments—knitted and sewn—for war victims and servicemen were produced by dedicated Red Cross women throughout the county. A typical shipment in June 1942 included 280 garments for war victims and 55 garments for servicemen, while a report for the period July 1943 to September 1944 showed that the volunteer women in 15 communities in the county had spent 7,721 hours knitting garments and sewing "kit bags" for the men in services. A second part of the chapter's program was the preparation of surgical dressings. Material for the dressings (also referred to as sponges) was provided in the required sizes, and the work consisted of properly folding and packing them. A typical county quota, assigned to the chapter in early 1943, was for 34,200 dressings, of which Washburn women devoted over 1,000 hours folding and packing 14,700 of them in the Red Cross workroom in the library basement.

The work of the women in the many community groups of the county chapter was supplemented by that of the children in the Junior Red Cross, the membership of which was expanded through enrollment drives in the schools of the county. Sharing the enthusiasm of the adults, the children produced a wide variety of items—for example, in July 1944 the Times reported that 2,486 articles had been produced during the preceding school year, and shipped to 11 camps and hospitals. In early 1942 a "home service" unit was organized in the chapter to provide welfare and communication services to men in the armed forces. A representative of the national Red Cross was stationed at every military and naval base to serve as a communication link between the men and their families as well as local Red Cross officials. The cases handled through this unit included investigating applications for emergency leave and hardship discharges, providing financial assistance to families of servicemen, and serving as an emergency communication link between men in the service and their families. A few civilian welfare cases were also handled. Finally, the Red Cross chapter, in cooperation with local health care workers, sponsored classes in first aid, home nursing, and nutrition, held in the workroom in the library.

In the spring of 1942 the county Defense Council established a program to give every departing draftee or volunteer a "farewell gift box," to express "to the soldiers, sailors and marines the county's appreciation of the service they are rendering and the sacrifices they are making." By August 1943 over 1,300 gift boxes had been distributed both to the departing men and to those in the services who had not previously received them. The council also sponsored "farewell breakfasts" at the courthouse, volunteers serving coffee, doughnuts and apples to the men and their family and friends who were there to see them off. The Times observed that "This project has had a healthy effect on the morale of the departing selectees and has done much to relieve the tension of departure."