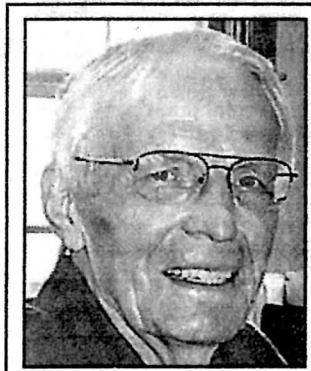


Washburn During The War Years, 1939-1945: The Home Front—5

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CS 9/22/11

Clothing was foremost among the many desperate needs of the peoples of the liberated lands of Europe and later of occupied Germany. In late 1943 the War Production Board sponsored a two week campaign to collect old clothing, with the nation's churches as the collection agencies. In Bayfield County the campaign was conducted by the county Defense Council, during which a total of 2,600 pounds of "serviceable garments" were collected through the churches. In April 1945 a one month United National Clothing Collection Campaign was launched by President Roosevelt to collect at least 150 million pounds of clothing, shoes, and bedding for people in the war devastated nations of Europe and Asia. The local campaign was sponsored by the Lions Club, with collection points in the schools and churches, while the Boy Scouts carried out a house-to-house canvass. About 10,000 pounds were collected throughout the county. A second United National Clothing Collection Campaign was held in January 1946, again sponsored by the Lions Club in Washburn, with 7,000 pounds of clothing collected throughout the county. The clothing was cleaned, sorted, baled, and shipped overseas soon after it was collected—for exam-



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ple, the Times reported that by the end of July 1945, "15 and one-half million pounds has been shipped or scheduled for shipment to Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Italy, the Philippines, Yugoslavia, China and Russia."

Letters occasionally were received by Washburn contributors from people who had found their names and addresses in donated clothing. A Washburn clothier of Norwegian descent received a letter in late 1945 from a man in Helgeland, Norway, thanking him for a pair of trousers. The man was married with four children from 14 days to eight years of age. The family lived in one room, which he said was "hard" for them, but that they were "looking forward to better times in the future." He was worried about Norway, and did not

"understand why our little country should get into such a mess," adding that his brother "was held in Germany for four years, until the Swedish Bernadotte came and released him" the prior April. He ended by thanking "all you Americans for the hard fight you put up and won, so that we may live in peace again on this earth." While the writer of this letter appeared to be doing well under the difficult conditions prevailing in post-war Norway, a letter from a woman who also lived in Helgeland was, as the Times described it, "pathetic." She wrote that she was "old, poor and destitute," had been "sick for 25 years," and that her husband was dead and she had "nothing to live from." She had relatives in the United States but did not know their address, so could not ask them for help. She pleaded for "some used clothing . . . of all kinds, underwear, dresses as well as shoes. . . . I need a coat badly too and hope you can also send a spool of thread." Despite her great burden of poverty and illness, she was steadfast in her Christian faith, writing that "God has been good to me and He has been my comfort in all my distress." The women of the Christ Lutheran Church Ladies Aid Society arranged to have clothing sent to her.

Two letters were also received from recipients of clothing in Germany, which was almost totally devastat-

ed and jointly occupied by the four victorious Allied powers. One letter was received in the fall of 1946 from a man in Nuremberg in the American zone of occupation. After thanking the donor "most sincerely, also in the name of my family, for your kindly act in contributing clothing for the poor people of this country," he wrote that Nuremberg was "about 80% damaged" with living conditions in the city "very severe." He and his family had been "bombed out" of their apartment and were living with their son in "primitive conditions." Things were slowly improving in the city, however, with "public utilities . . . made available for a great majority of the city population," buildings and homes being rebuilt, and streets cleared of rubble. But for Germany as a whole "conditions . . . are by no means rosy, in fact it will take quite a number of years before they become reasonably normal again." The second letter from Germany, received in late 1946, was written by a woman in Fuerth, also in the American zone of occupation. She wrote that she and her family were "refugees from Koenigsberg, East Prussia, which is now a Russia town. We lost all our earthly goods, when the Russians took over our country." She asked for assistance in locating her relatives in Milwaukee.