

The Minute Women of Washington. By Shanna Stevenson

In Washington State as in many other states, women organized for home front service before and during World War I.

This paper will outline the activities of women in Washington State during World War I as part of the Council of National Defense, the State Council of Defense, Woman's Work, (known as the Minute Women) and the National League for Women's Service. The effectiveness and cooperation of these organizations among themselves and with parallel men's groups will also be discussed and some analysis regarding the differences for Washington women from other states because of their status as voting women will be explored. Also, the role of the Minute Women after World War I and their legacy in keeping alive the memories of the men who fought in the war and serving the needs of veterans will be outlined.

World War I

President Woodrow Wilson declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917. This was after a period of neutrality of the United States. However anticipating a war, a Council of Defense had been created in August 1916 by Act of Congress which included the Secretaries of War, Navy, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce and Labor to coordinate home front support for a conflict. This group created a Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense on April 21, 1917, chaired by noted suffragist Dr. Anna Howard Shaw.

The creation of the Woman's Committee was pre-figured by a meeting of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in February, 1917. This meeting was called at the request of Carrie Chapman Catt. By resolution, it was determined that NAWSA would offer their war service by forming a National Committee of

representatives from each national organization of women. The resolution outlined the areas of work for such women's groups—Women's Employment; Food Supply; Red Cross; Americanization and a Conference Committee.¹

These home front efforts were aimed at creating support for a war which many Americans did not understand and a war in which America had remained neutral. The government has also been cited as promoting propaganda and restricting civil liberties in the effort to create a mobilized country. This was also true in Washington State.²

The following information summarizes the roles of the three woman's home front groups in Washington.

National League for Woman's Service

In January, 1917 the National League for Woman's Service was created from the Woman's Department of the National Civic Federation readiness and relief activities. It was modeled on a similar group formed in Great Britain, the Voluntary Aid Detachments, and was formed at the National Security League Congress of Constructive Patriotism.

Generally, the NLWS was predicated on a military-type regimen of training and drilling. When unrestricted submarine warfare was initiated by Germany in January, 1917, the NLWS accelerated their plans to register women and prepare them to take the place of men that would be needed for fighting. The NLWS anticipated that they would be designated by the Council of National Defense as the official women's home front administrators. But after making a proposal to the Council of Defense, they were

¹ Stanton, Elizabeth Cady, Susan. B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, Ida Husted Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, NAWSA, 1922. Vol. 5. pp. 720-724, Bank of Wisdom electronic version, 1999.

² Hall, Margaret, Henry Suzzallo and The Washington State Council of Defense, Master's Thesis, University of Washington, 1975, pg 3.

rebuffed. Nevertheless the group determined to continue. Some members of the NLWS wore uniforms and used military designations. They also spearheaded a registration campaign. Unlike the Woman’s Committee of the Council of Defense, the NLWS was not dominated by pro-suffragists.³

The Washington chair for the NLWS was Mrs. Winfield (Susie) Smith who also chaired the State Division of the Woman’s Committee, Council of National Defense (NCWD) and was a member of the leadership of the Woman’s Work Committee, Washington State Council of Defense (Minute Women). The latter group of women appear to be unique to Washington State since they were organized as a somewhat parallel group to the State Division of the National Council although part of the State Council of Defense, and eventually took over the work of the Woman’s Committee of the National Council in the state. There was considerable overlap among of the women involved in these three relief agencies in Washington⁴:

National League for Women’s Service (NLWS)	Woman’s Committee, Washington State Council of Defense (Minute Women)	State Division of the Woman’s Committee, Council of National Defense (Merged with Minute Women end of 1917)
Susie Smith Chair, Seattle	Susie Smith, Food Production Department	Susie Smith, Chair
Mrs. Ernest Lister, Olympia	Honorary Chair, Mrs. Ernest Lister	Mrs. Ernest Lister, Honorary Chair
Mrs. Milo Loveless	Mrs. J. S. McKee, Olympia, Chair	Mrs. Milo J. Loveless, Seattle, executive secretary
Mrs. S. Aronson	Mrs. N. S. McCreedy, Snohomish, Maintenance of Social Agencies Department,	Mrs. N. S. McCreedy, Snohomish, Vice-Chair.

³ Steinson, Barbara J., American Women Activism in World War I, New York: Garland Publishing, 1982, pp. 299-310.

⁴ Additionally, Washington women worked during World War I through the Red Cross and the Woman’s Section of the Navy League whose work is not detailed in this paper.

Mrs. Eliza Ferry Leary, State Commandant	Mrs. Eliza Ferry Leary, Member at Large	Mrs. J. H. Mendenhall, Seattle
Mrs. Stuart Rice, Tacoma	Mrs. C. D. Stimson, Seattle, Allied Relief Department	Mrs. L. B. Steadman, Seattle
Mrs. Stephen Chadwick, Olympia	Mrs. Helen N. Stevens, Seattle, Associate—Commercial Economy	Mrs. Helen N. Stevens, Seattle
Mrs. Robert Coontz, Bremerton	Mrs. J. C. Todd, Tacoma, Child Welfare Department, NCWD	Mrs. J. C. Todd, Tacoma, Vice-Chair
Mrs. John L. Hayden, Fort Worden	Mrs. A. H. Albertson, Seattle, Educational Propaganda Department	Miss Sue Lombard, North Yakima, Vice-Chair
Mrs. William Jones, Tacoma	Mrs. O.G. Ellis, Tacoma, Associate—Liberty Loan and War Savings	Mrs. O. G. Ellis, Olympia, Vice-Chair
Mrs. L. H. Hadley, Bellingham	Mrs. R. C. McCredie, Sunnyside, Health and Recreation Department	Mrs. W. P. Harper, Seattle Vice-Chair
Mrs. Horace Kimball, Spokane	Miss Agnes Craig, Pullman, Food Administration Department	Mrs. Mary G. Ewing, Pullman, Vice-Chair
Mrs. John P. McChesney, Everett	Mrs. W. S. Griswold, Seattle, Women In Industry Department,	Mrs. W. S. Griswold, Seattle, publicity
Mrs. Solon Shedd, Pullman	Mrs. Solon Shedd, County Councilor	Mrs. Solon Shedd, District Chairman, Pullman
Mrs. Richard Ballinger	Mrs. N.E. Walton, Tacoma, Americanization Department	Mrs. R. A. Ballinger, Seattle, corresponding secretary
Mrs. Edmund Bowen	Mrs. W. J. Patterson, Aberdeen, Secretary	Mrs. A. O. Downey, Seattle, treasurer
Mrs. Josephine McLaughlin		Mrs. George N. McLaughlin, Seattle, parliamentarian
Mrs. Thomas Burke		
Mrs. J. C. Haines		
Mrs. J. D. Lowman		
Mrs. Henry Lung		
Mrs. Robert H. Boyle		
Mrs. Livingston B. Stedman		

Mrs. Henry Suzzallo		Mrs. Henry Suzzallo. Honorary Chair
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In a report cited by Ida Clyde Clarke in 1918 regarding Washington activities for the NLWS, Mrs. Smith described the classes which were established to train women to take over positions of men joining the military including telegraphy, salesmanship, running elevators, general office work and classes in French; motor driving, cooking and canning, as well as preparing for Civil Service examinations. She also noted that women were being trained in the use of firearms as well as working to provide gifts for men in the military.⁵

NLWS in Washington focused their efforts in Social and Welfare, Home Economics, Motor, Home and Overseas Relief, General Service; Cooperation; Supplies and Publicity. They had branches in 34 towns and county auxiliaries with 88 organizations.⁶

In their report of Washington activities from 1917 to 1919, The Washington NLWS detailed their types of service including the prodigious amount of canning and jelly and jam making that benefited Camp Lewis near Tacoma, the coastal forts near Pt. Townsend, and the Navy yard at Bremerton. They provided hospitality through the Soldiers and Sailors Clubs.

Their work was often focused on Europe and the NLWS worked with the Belgian Relief and American Committee for Devastated France.⁷ One of the more interesting

⁵ Clarke, Ida Clyde, *American Women and the World War*, D. Appleton and Company, New York, London, 1918. Accessed at <http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/comment/Clarke/ClarkeOOTC.htm>

⁶ National League for Woman's Service, *Washington State Report For 1917-1919*, NLWS, n.d., author's compilation of narrative.

⁷ "The American Committee for Devastated France (ACDF) had its origins in the Civilian Division of the American Fund for French Wounded (est. 1916) and was organized in 1918 to provide emergency relief and restoration aid to the citizens of post-World War I

projects of the NLWS was the “re-chickening” of France and some branches sponsored whole chicken farms in France to aid in the food shortage there.

Many of the branches worked in providing clothing for Belgian refugees, particularly children. They collaborated with the Woman’s Section of the Navy Service League in knitting, not only for American soldiers and sailors, but also for needy overseas. The women also participated in the “kid glove” project in which they donated their kid gloves which were made into vests and jackets for American servicemen.⁸

They also participated in the NLWS efforts for food conservation and provided food during the influenza epidemic in 1918. In Spokane, women opened a special kitchen during the influenza epidemic and provided food for the Fort George Wright and city isolation hospitals. The women arranged for harvesters for fruit crops and met troop trains to provide fresh fruit particularly in Eastern Washington. The motor division often transported fruit and vegetables to the communal canning kitchens.

The NLWS operated their own “Hoover Kitchen” at Camp Lewis to prepare food and many of the branches adopted wards at Camp Lewis to provide for their needs.

Funds for activities were raised through a White Elephant Shop in downtown Seattle.

France. Its original stated purpose was to establish a community center which would determine the needs of French citizens, and act as a liaison between them and American relief workers. The group was also to “further understanding and friendship between France and the United States.” The ACDF, staffed primarily by American women of a professional background, set out first to provide basic necessities: food, clothing, shelter and day care. Beginning in 1919, it concentrated on more constructive aid, such as vocational, educational, and physical training, providing farm equipment, housing and building restoration, public health facilities, libraries and scouting camps. The organization collected nearly five million dollars from over one million U.S. donors and members through canvassing and fund-raising benefits. ACDF received numerous awards, including the Gold Medal of French Reconnaissance (1920).

In March 1924, ACDF announced that it had completed its work and officially disbanded. All assets were liquidated and remitted to French organizations to carry on projects begun by ACDF, such as the Camp-École de Scoutisme and the Comité Francais de la Bibliothèque Moderne.” Accessed at <http://diglib.princeton.edu/ead/eadGetDoc.xq?id=/ead/mudd/publicpolicy/MC026.EAD.xml>

⁸ Summary from narrative in State NLWS report.

They sponsored a desk in New York for returning Washington servicemen at the end of the war.

Because some women acquired skills through NLWS training, they substituted for men in lumber mills and supplied workers during the Seattle General Strike in 1919.

In all, the Washington women of the NLWS raised \$3,450.21 for the “re-chickening” of France and \$8,771.95 in other funds. They also provided thousands of garments and hundred of pounds of canned fruits and vegetables along with canteen sandwiches and entertainment for soldiers and sailors.⁹

The women worked with the Red Cross, the National Committee for Woman’s Service in food pledge activities and with the state woman’s group in census work.¹⁰

Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense:

This group was organized as part of the efforts of the Woman’s Committee, Council of National Defense, chaired by Dr. Anna Howard Shaw. In Washington State, Mrs. Winfield (Susie) Smith was the chair of this group, which was charged with carrying out federal directives at the state level.

The Woman’s Committee had several areas of emphasis: Americanization, Child Welfare, Educational Propaganda, Food Administration, Food Production, Foreign and Allied Relief, Health and Recreation, Registration, Women in Industry, Maintenance of Existing Social Agencies. The Woman’s Committee struggled with establishing its authority over this work because of lack of clear direction from the federal government.¹¹

⁹ NLWS, pg. 67.

¹⁰ Compiled from NLWS report.

¹¹ Breen, W. J. Uncle Sam at Home: Civilian Mobilization, Wartime Federalism and the Council of National Defense, 1917-1919. Contributions in American Studies, Number 70. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984, pg. 116-136.

Ida Clyde Clarke summarized the work of this group in Washington State in her 1917 report quoting Mrs. Smith. Their work included registration of women in the state, assisting with Liberty Loan Bonds and with the November, 1917 food pledge. Mrs. Smith also stated that the women worked with saving fruit crops and supporting soldiers at Camp Lewis and sailors at Bremerton.¹²

Mrs. Ruth Karr McKee, the head of the Minute Women, stated that Mrs. Smith was out of the state for some of this work and described the “tentative character of her organization.”¹³ The outcome was that the entire Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense in Washington State resigned in late 1917 and its work was taken over by the Minute Women, who effectively operated as the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense for the duration of the war.

Washington State Council of Defense

The Washington State Council of Defense was organized June 1917, headed by Henry Suzzallo, the then President of the University of Washington. He was appointed to the Council by Governor Ernest Lister and elected chairman by his peers on the Council. Because the group formed outside of a legislative session, they operated without legislative direction, accountability or funding. However, the Washington group was described as a “first class” operation.¹⁴

¹² Clarke, Ida Clyde , American Women and the World War, D. Appleton and Company, New York, London, 1918. Accessed at <http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/comment/Clarke/ClarkeOOTC.htm>.

¹³ McKee, Ruth Karr, “Woman’s Work in Connection With War Activities” in Report of the State Council of Defense Covering Its Activities During the War, June 16, 1917 to January 9, 1919, Washington State Legislature, 1919, pg.111.

¹⁴ Breen, pg. 71.

A former President of the Washington General Federation of Women's Clubs, Ruth Karr McKee was chosen as only woman member of the state board. Mrs. McKee was a member of the Board of Regents of the University of Washington and well-known to Henry Suzzallo.

Mrs. McKee undertook the work to organize a Woman's Work Committee within the State Council. It is unknown if Suzzallo distrusted Mrs. Smith or merely knew Mrs. McKee, as one of the University of Washington Regents better.¹⁵

To begin her state-wide work, Mrs. McKee set out to survey the work that was being done by women in the war in England and France. Mrs. McKee stated that the decision was made not to divert women to "men's work" unless the war lasted from three to five years, despite what she called a "mania in the nation for registration." She noted that it was difficult in some instances to convince women the woman's work was important war work.¹⁶

Clubwomen played important part in both the Washington and National Councils of Defense. Club women were well trained organizationally and could draw upon the existing clubs for woman-power. By July, 1918 the Washington Federation of Women's Clubs had inaugurated a campaign to raise funds for the War Victory Commission of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. Margaret McCready was the State Federation of Women's Clubs President in Washington and served in both the Minute Women and Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense for the state. Federation

¹⁵ Breen says on page 134 that "Only in two states, Utah and Washington, was it impossible to reach a working agreement between the two state organizations. In both cases, the chairman [Mrs Smith] of the state division was unacceptable to the state council."

¹⁶ McKee, Ruth Karr, "Woman's Work in Connection With War Activities" in Report of the State Council of Defense Covering Its Activities During the War, June 16, 1917 to January 9, 1919, Washington State Legislature, 1919, pg.110

clubwomen helped in food conservation and “Americanization” in Washington.¹⁷

The Washington Woman’s Work Committee of the State Council was dubbed the “Minute Women.” Mrs. Overton Ellis said she and Mrs. McKee formulated the idea at her home in Olympia—“I do not recall which of us thought of the name “Minute Women” but both being descendants of Revolutionary Minute Men it was natural that we should think of it.”¹⁸

They recalled that the group was known as the Minute Women because “they, like the men of old, were to be ready at a minute’s notice to carry messages for the government.” They said “America’s business requireth haste.” Henry Suzzallo designed a special insignia pin for the women—it featured Washington’s Coat of Arms with “Woman’s Committee, Council of National Defense,” with red, white and blue enameling.¹⁹

One of the controversial aspects of the Washington State Council of Defense was their role in suppressing the radical International Workers of the World union (IWW) and mediating lumber camp strikes. The State also organized a volunteer Intelligence Bureau “to concentrate on ferreting out slackers and seditious people.”²⁰ It is unknown to what extent the Minute Women aided in these efforts of the State Council. Another spy group with a similar name organized in Seattle as the “The Seattle Minute Men” during World

¹⁷ General Federal of Women’s Clubs, *The First Hundred Years*, Margaret McCreedy, President. Accessed at <http://www.washingtonwomenshistory.org/themes/clubs/wsfwc/mccreedyMargaret1917-19.aspx>.

¹⁸ Jennie Wilhite Ellis letter to Mrs. W. N. Hunt, September 22, 1928, Minute Women Association of Washington Records, WSHS, MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 25.

¹⁹ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 1.

²⁰ Hall, pg. 43. Washington’s labor situation was very confrontational at this time and the IWW was a major force in labor disruption. Coupled with the federal Espionage Act of 1917 and Sedition Act of 1918, the environment was decidedly anti-radical in Washington during the period.

War I and included some University of Washington professors.²¹ The Minute Women forcefully opposed radicalism and were integral to the “Americanization” efforts of the State Council.

Mrs. McKee set out to organize the state by appointing a councilor in each county who would become a member of the County Council, part of the organization of the men’s organization of the Council of Defense. There would also be a councilor in each “considerable” town. A representative was selected for every ward in a town and for each school district in the county. A Minute Woman captain was established for each ward. Further down the chain, the Ward Captain appointed a precinct Lieutenant who in turn appointed sufficient Minute Women to carry out house-to-house canvass of the precinct. The rural communities were organized on the basis of voting precinct or school district with a Minute Woman Captain appointing women for house-to-house canvass.

In fall and winter of 1917 and 1918 State Chairman McKee visited 26 of the 39 counties of the state, working with “patriotic” women to survey the work done there.²²

The Minute Women organized their work around five areas:

1. Gathering and dissemination of information that would lead to understanding and support of the war and counter-acting enemy propaganda.
2. Aid to Red Cross by securing memberships and selling Red Cross seals for Anti-tuberculosis Association.
3. Liberty Loan and War Savings.
4. Food Administration.
5. Training Camp activities---generally providing hospitality to soldiers.

²¹ Newsome, Susan, “The Seattle Minute Men: Amateur Spies, Gossip and Lies,” accessed at <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/strike/newsome.shtml>; Farrell, Patrick, “The Campus Kaiser” accessed at <http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/strike/farrell.shtml>.

²² McKee Report, pg. 111.

Because of their organizational prowess, the group was often called upon for all sorts of work and had to limit local work to carry out work of the State Council of Defense. By end of 1917 work was organized in all but one county of Washington and included 5,000 women in the state.

Late in 1917, the members of Washington Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense tendered their resignations. Also the National Committee asked Mrs. McKee to undertake re-organization of the state division. The Minute Women constituted the state-wide membership and the national group merged with the state body by January 1918, at the request of Mrs. McKee. This merger was not without controversy. Mrs. McKee told Suzzallo in a December, 1917 letter that she did not think Mrs. Smith wanted to resign her position with the State branch of the National Council.²³

The National Committee had adopted a broader agenda than the State Minute Women--Americanization, Child Welfare, Educational Propaganda, Food Administration, Food Production, Foreign and Allied Relief, Heath and Recreation, Registration, Women in Industry, and Maintenance of Existing Social Agencies. Mrs. McKee and the Minute Women deemed that this agenda seemed "more comprehensive than conditions demanded or warranted in this state."²⁴

The Minute Women directors excluded the work of Registration and rejected Maintenance of Existing Social agencies as not being part of their program. They detailed Foreign and Allied Relief to the Red Cross and Women in Industry to the

²³ Letter to Henry Suzzallo from Ruth Karr McKee, Henry Suzzallo papers. Special Collections, University of Washington Libraries, Seattle, Washington, Box 4, Folder 38.

²⁴ McKee Report, Pg. 113

Federal Employment Service. After the merger of the two groups these efforts were eliminated from the purview of the Minute Women. Mrs. McKee organized working committees around the remaining subjects. The Minute Women also had a Central Committee which met with all state women's organizations--lodges, churches, as well as unorganized women monthly to coordinate war work.²⁵

Americanization work was done with the general State Council's Educational Propaganda Department. The women distributed, for instance, an outline study of the war prepared by Committee on Public Information of the state body.

The Minute Women organized classes and institutes—including conferences at Rolling Bay and the University of Washington in Seattle and also at Yakima at State Fair.

Their work in child welfare was performed under the direction of Children's Bureau at Washington, D. C. Some of their work was to implement the Federal Child Labor Law which went into effect on September 1, 1917 and to work with schools to help with keeping children under 14 in school and healthy. This was part of the National Committee directive.

In 1918, the Minute Women registered children below school age and recorded their weights and heights. There was also a back-to-school drive in 1918 to get children back to school after harvest.

Food Administration Committee:

The idea and slogan of the Food Administration Committee was "Food Will Win the War." Because of the devastation to European crops because of the war, there was a tremendous need to supply food from the United States. Women were approached as

²⁵Ibid.

helping the war effort in their own kitchen through thriftiness and substitution of foods. Herbert Hoover was appointed as the National Food Supervisor and made his first appeal in June, 1917 asking women to sign a food pledge card. In Washington, the State Council of Defense printed and distributed cards through county councils. The term “Hooverizing” came to mean economizing for the war effort. Even before this official food program, Mrs. McKee issued suggestions about saving of wheat, meat, fats, and sugar.

The Federal Food Administration issued bulletins and war cook books. Because the first food pledge drive was not successful in Washington under the auspices of the Council of National Defense, the Minute Women were detailed by State Food Administrator (Mr. Charles Hebbard) to conduct a house-to-house canvass to talk to women about the seriousness of the need for conservation. The Home Economics Departments of the University of Washington and Washington State College helped with the efforts as did the corps of home demonstration agents.²⁶ Hoover started a second food campaign for food conservation in November, 1917. In Washington, this later effort was under the direction of Miss Agnes Craig, a home economist at Washington State College in Pullman, who was the State Chairman of the Food Administration of Minute Women.²⁷

The Minute Women also participated in the campaign for war gardens, canning and conserving of foods. In the summer of 1918 they participated in the “no-wheat until harvest” pledge which secured signatures pledging that the families would use no wheat except for children and invalids until harvest of 1918. Nationally some women objected

²⁶ McKee Report, pg.114-115.

²⁷ Clarke Report for Washington.

to this call because grains were still being used in alcohol which was generally served to men, although in Washington, prohibition had been enacted in 1915, effective January 1, 1916.

Committee on Health and Recreation:

The work of this committee was to provide hostessing for military camps and a wholesome environment in the areas surrounding the camps. In Washington, the Minute Women worked with the State Board of Health and Commission on Training Camp Activities. They worked with the Army, Navy and Civilian Health officers.

Committee on Women In Industry:

At the request of State Council, Dr. William Fielding Ogburn at the University of Washington made survey on impact of working conditions of women by the war to determine if there was a shortage of labor that would require women to join war work.

The results of the survey determined that there was no need for intervention in work except for women working in section gangs and trucking in freight sheds “Condition later remedied.”²⁸ It is not clear what the outcome of this remedy was.

It was determined that there may have been a need for women to work in fruit crops but there was already a State Harvesters’ League. The Harvesters’ League was established in the summer of 1917 by the state council. The idea was to encourage urban residents to help on farms as part of their summer vacation. A movie was prepared for propaganda and Mrs. Katherine Blackall traveled the state helping to set up the labor camps. Registration for harvesting work was done in Seattle. Eventually the program came under the auspices of the U.S. Employment Service—it is unknown how many

²⁸ McKee Report, pg. 115. The author has been able to find this report by the noted sociologist Ogburn.

women participated in this effort. The state report is vague on whether or not it was used extensively.²⁹

The Minute Women through their field work helped to raise \$100,000.00 for YWCA. In May, 1918 the Minute Women assisted the Red Cross. They conducted conference and programs in Seattle and Spokane Conferences on Americanization and Child Welfare. In 1918, the Minute Women set up booths at the State Fair at Yakima focusing on child welfare where they weighed and measured children. They also distributed literature for Americanization; participated in food demonstrations and publicized the upcoming Liberty Loan drive.³⁰

Another job, assigned by The War Department was for the Minute Women to enlist student nurses. They registered 320 women, although the training was at least two years for the nurses.

Liberty and Victory Loan Activities:

To lead the effort of Washington women in selling Liberty Loans, Mrs. O. G. (Jennie Wilhite) Ellis was appointed July 28, 1917 by the Secretary of Treasury, William McAdoo as the State Chairman for Washington of the National Woman's Liberty Loan Committee. This was a nationally organized group chaired by Mrs. Eleanor Wilson McAdoo, wife of the Secretary of the Treasury and daughter of President Wilson.

During World War I, Secretary William McAdoo conceived of the idea of "capitalizing patriotism," through bond sales. People from all walks of life from boy scouts to movie stars were part of the effort which was publicized through posters, drawn by well-known artists. The effort in hindsight was not successful because the yield on the

²⁹ Report of the State Council of Defense, pp. 47-50.

³⁰ McKee Report, pg. 116.

bonds was low, but during the war, it was considered part of citizens' patriotic duty to purchase them.

Mrs. Ellis had been a prominent clubwoman in Tacoma, leading the pure food efforts there. She was the wife of Washington Supreme Court Justice, Overton Ellis. Unlike other states, in Washington, the Liberty Loan and the State Woman's Work group joined forces and were basically the same organization. The war bond work in Washington State was substantial.

With the weakness, according to Mrs. McKee, of the National Woman's Committee in the state for the Second Liberty Loan drive, Mrs. Ellis asked for and was given authority to use the state Woman's Work Committee for campaign. It was at that juncture, according to Mrs. Ellis, that the joint organization of the Women's Work Committee and the Liberty Loan Committee was dubbed the "Minute Women."³¹ Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. McKee appointed the Minute Women County Chairwomen to lead the bond sales in each county as well. This arrangement differed from other states since the work of Washington's women for war bond sales was consolidated under the Minute Women, without conflict.

Mr. J. A. Swalwell of Seattle was State Chairman of Second Liberty Loan and he organized the state into six districts—Seattle, Tacoma, Wenatchee, Spokane, Yakima, and Walla Walla. Additionally, Mrs. Ellis appointed a District Chairman for each district and together they became the executive Committee of the State Woman's Liberty Loan Committee—many of these women represented existing women's organizations.

³¹ Ellis, Jennie Wilhite, "A Report of the Women's Liberty Loan Committee of the State of Washington for the Second, Third, and Fourth Liberty Loans," in Report of the State Council of Defense Covering Its Activities During the War, June 16, 1917 to January 9, 1919, Washington State Legislature, 1919, pg.122.

Sometimes the women sold bonds but generally promoted the Liberty Loan plans during the Second Liberty Loan drive which started Oct 1, 1917. (The organization was not in effect during the first drive starting April 24, 1917 which was called the “Emergency Loan Act.”) Mrs. Josephine Corliss Preston, the State Superintendent of Schools, collaborated with the women to bring in the school children as part of the organization.

During the Third Liberty Loan (starting April 5, 1918), there was more organization of Minute Women and more cooperation between the state men’s and women’s bond committees. Generally, the chairman of Woman’s Loan Committee for each county was also a member of the County Liberty Loan Committee—cooperating with the men. In 25 counties women were made salesmen and all but two counties took active part. Separate sales of men and women were not tabulated except in Spokane where Mrs. Herbert Witherspoon was chairman. In Washington, 1200 committee members sold \$1.3 million worth of bonds and women sold \$2,474,300 or about 43% of bonds.

By the Fourth Liberty Loan (September 28, 1918), the Minute Women had strengthened their organization by adding Finance Committee Chairman and a Publicity Committee Chairman. The women worked in concert with the men of the State Liberty Loan Committee. Again the women who were on the county committees were also members of Liberty Loan Committee in 37 out of 39 counties. The women sold \$10,741,207.50 worth of bonds, which was 18.4% of state quota.

The summary report submitted by Mrs. Ellis credited the bond sale experience with increasing the activities of women into the field of finance and enhancing their

knowledge of war finance as well as strengthening the bonds between men and women in the counties.³²

One of the outstanding bond speakers was Mrs. Grace Manners Brougham who spoke throughout the state starting April 7 to May 10 addressing loggers, shipyards, farmers, churches in 115 meetings which drew 50,000 people.

A fifth campaign Victory Liberty Loan Campaign from April 7 to May 10, 1919 resulted in the sale of bonds totaling \$29, 902 442.00 credited to Woman's Victory Loan Committee which was 67.4% of state quota.³³ The printed report from the campaign shows the well-organized nature of the campaign after the other three loan drives. By the time of this campaign in 38 counties, there were 8000 Minute Women in state.³⁴

The women cooperated with men's committee which operated under the Washington Liberty Loan State Central Committee for both Liberty Loan and Victory Loan campaigns. To promote the sales, the Minute Women organized children's parades and held "Liberty Fires" throughout the state under auspices of Women's Liberty Loan Committee.³⁵

By late 1918, the men's and women's committees of the Council of Defense in Washington and nationally were joined into a Field Division of both sexes but the impact of that re-organization was negated by the end of the war.

The final assigned task to the Minute Women was during Christmas 1918 "of helping Red Cross place on its Christmas Roll the name of every loyal American."

³²Ellis, Liberty Loan Report, pg. 125.

³³ Counties were assigned quotas for bonds based upon average percentage of assessed valuation, bank deposits, and school population for each county in proportion to those of the state at large. (Hall, pg.52)

³⁴ Ellis, Mrs. Overton, "Report of the Women's Committee of the State of Washington for the Victory Liberty Loan Campaign, April 7, to May 10th, 1919," in MSSC72, Box 1 Folder 3.

³⁵ McKee Report, pg. 112.

Individual counties conducted various activities aside from the prescribed state roles of the Minute Women. In Pacific county, the women collected sphagnum moss for bandage dressings from Raymond, South Center, and Tokeland and then transported it to South Bend to be dried and baled.³⁶

In Thurston County the women were headed by the formidable Ada Sprague Mowell. A former teacher and prominent clubwoman, Mrs. Mowell headed an organization of 140 women. Despite their worthy work, they met with some opposition as the March 18, 1918, Olympia Morning Recorder newspaper reported on page 1:

There is a mistaken idea in some districts about the Minute Women. The women are thoroughly loyal and the work they are doing for the government is of exceptional value. They are not secret service operatives. They are not engaged in any campaign to run down slackers or to get information as to the loyalty of Thurston county citizens. They are taking it for granted that everybody is loyal and true. They work on that principle. Of course sometimes they find outright disloyalty and they report such cases directly. But these cases are few. I believe that if everybody understood the work of the Minute Women the workers would have not difficulty.

The pledge card drive in Thurston County required all residents over the age of 15 contribute 10 cents or more per month (towards war bonds). The women handed out information about the pledge drive and then followed up on the collections. Evidently, this was quite onerous task—“The collection of these subscriptions meant continual work. Every month the rounds were made of practically every house in the county and too much praise cannot be bestowed upon the rank and file for the faithful performance of this disagreeable duty, for insult was often the portion given.”³⁷

³⁶ MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 22 Pacific County.

³⁷ Thurston County—Olympia Division Records Minute Women, T-59/6 SCM Collection, Washington State Historical Society, Ada Sprague Mowell, Final Report, pg. 2.

Although the weighing and measuring of children was touted in the official reports, in Thurston County's summary, Mrs. Mowell described it as "An instance of wasted effort, for many [reports] never were filed in Washington [D. C.]"

Mrs. Mowell summarized her work in Thurston County—"About 300 letters are on file all of which were answered and many more written. Over nine hundred personal calls were made by the County Councilor in forty districts—several times to many districts. She spoke at 26 gatherings as well as to many small groups. She spoke for the Liberty Loan, and other campaigns." Multiply this work by the 39 counties in Washington and it was indeed an enormous undertaking.³⁸

It appears that the Minute Women had really only just gained significant momentum when the war ended in November, 1918.

Whether because they had the vote since 1910 or because of their organization incorporated already-existing women's clubs, Washington women were more collaborative and achieved more cooperation from the state Council of Defense than in other states. Although, there were two state organizations affiliated with the State Council of Defense program in early 1917, by the end of the year, the Minute Women had taken over both state and national roles.

Women in Washington like in other parts of the county were anxious to contribute to the war effort and were equally anxious to receive recognition for their work. Unlike other states where women did not vote and nationally, Washington women had already achieved that status which may have influenced how the state was organized and its success. Additionally, the federal work and the war bond sales were consolidated under

³⁸ Mowell, Final Report, pg. 3 and 4.

the auspices of the Minute Women which made the work in Washington less fragmented. Many of the same women were involved in the NLWS and the Minute Women, obviating the competition in some other states.³⁹

By 1919, the organization of the State Councils of Defense was faltering, although there had been an attempt to keep the framework in place for the work of “community organizations,” which would help with post-war efforts. But it seemed to fizzle. Dr. Shaw and other women’s groups were loath to give up their momentum. “To garner the fruits of victory . . . it is imperative that there shall be no demobilization of the woman power of American. It must remain organized, equipped and ready for action.”⁴⁰

Washington women determined to stay in existence after the war—unlike in other states like Illinois where the work of the Woman’s Council was parceled out to other organizations.

Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. McKee called a meeting in Tacoma in September 1918 to explore continuing the Minute Women. At a second meeting in August, 1919 they determined to form a constitution for a revised organization with 17 counties represented.⁴¹

In the fall of 1919 District and County Councilors were called together in Tacoma to take first steps toward effecting a permanent organization of Minute Women. Their goal was to continue to perform community welfare in times of peace. They wanted to “perpetrate the fellowship of war service, guard the memories of the war and the war

³⁹ Both Breen and Steinson detail conflicts in their accounts of the state efforts during this period. It is unknown whether or not the NLWS and Minute Women were in conflict in Washington State but many of the same women served in both groups.

⁴⁰ Breen, pg. 195.

⁴¹ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 1, Typewritten History, pg. 9, no author. Also in Box 1, Folder 3, Ellis Scrapbook.

dead and promote Americanization.” Some Washington counties—Lewis and Benton-- had already permanently organized.

The first meeting of the group was held in Seattle in 1920 and they determined they did not want to affiliate with other organizations. The organizers again were Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. McKee.

Membership was extended to those who were registered as Minute Women prior to November 11, 1921 and then daughters of these women over 18 became eligible. The dues were 10 cents per year.⁴² The goals of the group were: “Perpetuate the fellowship of service and memories of the World War; engage in community service; familiarize its membership with the new ideals and responsibilities of American Americanization among all classes; guard the memory of the heroic dead and hold free safe-guarded by their sacrifice.”

The women eventually invited anyone who had done war work to join the organization and they also invited the mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of WW I Veterans to become associate members. The name of the group as incorporated was “Minute Woman Association of Washington.”⁴³

A primary goal of the organization was to donate to veterans, particularly those in veteran’s homes. Everything from canaries and carpet rags to jellies, jams and radios were solicited. They provided cigarettes, cards, magazines, Christmas cards, candy and scrapbooks to hospitalized veterans. Their most important work came in supporting disabled veterans through their “Forget Me Not Fund.” They also supported veteran’s

⁴² Ibid, pg. 10.

⁴³ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 3, “Report of State Councilor, Mrs. Overton G. Ellis, From October 27, 1921 to October 27, 1922.”

families—supplying food, paying bills and providing clothing. They sent magazines and wrote letters for veterans and baked cakes for hospitality of visiting military. They also placed wreaths on veteran’s graves. They planted five elms in honor of unknown soldiers of Washington and a memorial tree at Sand Point in 1931.⁴⁴ They sold goods made by former service men in Port Townsend and Cushman Hospitals and worked with the American Legion in selling poppies.⁴⁵

Besides remodeling a common room there, they adopted a ward at Cushman Hospital in Tacoma.⁴⁶ They also worked extensively at the veteran’s home at American Lake near Lakewood, eventually planting a large garden there as a 15 acre “Minute Woman’s Observation Garden” in 1929. The garden is no longer extant.⁴⁷

The women planned to fund a recreational camp for disabled soldiers at Bainbridge Island in the 1920s. [No evidence has been found about the camp except for plans in the records.]⁴⁸ The women served all Washington veterans even those in other states. In 1924, Mrs. H. D. Hurley, President of the King County Minute Women served on a committee investigating the treatment of veterans.⁴⁹

The women also worked with the Tuberculosis Association, supported the Tercentenary of Landing of Pilgrims and planted of trees along the highways, as well as supporting more arcane issues such as the preservation of huckleberries and promoting the rhododendron as state flower.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 7, Report for 1931.

⁴⁵ MSSC72, Box 2, Folders, 15, 16, 17, Hospital Committee Reports, 1921-1934.

⁴⁶ MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 16 1925 Hospital Committee Reports

⁴⁷ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 6.

⁴⁸ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 14, 1924 Report.

⁴⁹ MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 25 Scrapbook, December, 1924.

⁵⁰ MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 26, 1925 Annual Report in Scrapbook #3.

At their state meetings, they supported resolutions for world peace and the international court of justice but favored compulsory military service.⁵¹ They supported the work of former legislator and Bellingham resident Frances Axtell in the Committee for Reduction of Armament by International Agreement. They also continued their work with the Red Cross.

Later the Minute Women supported such causes as not abbreviating the name of Washington; promoting health and nutrition through public schools; support for Children's Orthopedic Hospital; the Sheppard-Towner bill; County Library Bill; Extension Agents; "Tiny Yank"; Americanization; Towner-Sterling Bill Separate Citizenship for Women; home for feeble minded; and funding for Woman's Industrial Home and Clinic.⁵² The group discussed birth-control and favored child adoption legislation.⁵³ In 1923, they requested a survey from the Department of Labor on children working in fruit and vegetable industries and worked in pre-natal education for the department of child hygiene.⁵⁴

Individual clubs such as the one Friday Harbor worked with other women's organizations for memorials such as the Fountain Memorial Park in Friday Harbor, dedicated on November, 20, 1920.⁵⁵ In Waterville members participated securing a Memorial Building for WWI Veterans.

The Minute Women contributed to the Gold Star Flag in Volunteer Park in Seattle which had a gold star for each soldier killed from King County dedicated in an Armistice

⁵¹ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 4, Resolutions for Fifth Annual Convention, 1923,

⁵² MSSC72, Annual Reports, Box 1, Folder 7, 13.

⁵³ MSSC72, Annual Reports, Box 1, Folder 9, 1935.

⁵⁴ MSSC72, Annual Reports, Box 1, Folder 4.

⁵⁵ MSSC72, History Scrapbook 2, Box 2, Folder 2.

Day program in 1920. They also recognized war work. In 1919, the Minute Women presented the women who assisted in Liberty Loan drives with a medal made from captured German cannon. The group was also given a gavel made of oak and elm and French and German shells from Belleau Wood in France—a gift presented by Mrs. Theodora M. Hurley through the efforts of the French and the French Consulate in Seattle.⁵⁶

Marker project:

An enduring project of the group was a marker placed at Dixmude on Victory Road near Chateau Thierry and Belleau Wood in France. This was part of an effort of by the Touring Club of France to mark the line where the German advance was stopped by soldiers reinforced by American troops in July and August, 1918.

The project was announced when Mrs. Edgar (Anne) Ames met Marshall Joffre at the Peace Monument in Blaine in 1922. Mrs. Ames presented him with letter and initial check to erect a monument or memorial mile stone on the line of battle from North Sea to Swiss Border in memory of Washington soldiers. Eventually \$350.00 was raised around the state for the war memorial. The Washington Minute Women were the first American group to participate in the project. Mrs. Ames had the position of the marker changed to reflect where Washington troops were involved in the fighting and also requested that rhododendrons be planted around the marker.

⁵⁶ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 3, Ellis Scrapbook.

When it was dedicated, Mrs. Ames had her Minute Women badge embedded in the stone. It was put in place on January 9, 1924. The marker was one of 240 planned milestones. The four-foot- high Alsatian granite markers were designed by Paul Moreau-Vauthier. The inscription is “Here the invasion was arrested in 1918. In honor of the heroic deed: from the women of the state of Washington.” The marker has a soldier’s helmet resting on a wreath. Amazingly, after nearly 85 years, it still stands outside the Chateau Thierry cemetery. The marker is the only one funded by Washington State and one of 119 markers that were built.⁵⁷

The Minute Women organized lectures on American history and organized into several Committees-- American Government, Americanization, and Public Health. They continued many of the some programs as during their war work but also branched out into Civic Fine Arts and legislative advocacy for women’s issues. As they were during the war-years, Minute Women were organized into districts with chairmen for each district.

They worked with the Daughters of the American Revolution in Americanization activities as well as with the League of Women Voters on legislative matters. They distributed certificates of citizenship on July 4 to those attending their majority during the year.

In some counties, such as Douglas, the organization fell apart because of apathy, weariness from the war; competition from existing organizations and rural distances. In other areas, the American Legion Auxiliary took the place of the Minute Women.

⁵⁷ “Report Milestone Fund,” MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 25, 26. E-mail March 3, 2008, from Lillian Pfluke, Private Memorials Administrator, European Region, American Battle Monuments Commission. MSSC72 Scrapbook material, Seattle Times? January 27, 1924.

Although the organization endured until 1943, the numbers of active counties steadily dwindled. State Councilors included: Mrs. Ruth McKee, 1920; Mrs. O. G. Ellis, 1921; Mrs. R.C. McCredie, 1923; Mrs. Edgar Ames , 1924-26; Mrs. W. F. Docories, 1927; Mrs. B. E. Padgett, 1928-9; Mrs. W. T. Holloman, 1930-31; Mrs. E. G. Whitmarsh, 1933-34; Mrs. Wilson, 1935-36; Mrs. Miller, 1937-38; Mrs. Hazelton, 1938-1940; Mrs. Mita Dorotnig, 1941-42; and Mrs. Harry Westfall, 1942-43.⁵⁸

The Minute Women opposed “radicalism.” In 1921 they backed the Lewis County Minute Women who protested the appearance of “radical women at a Women’s Legislative Council of Washington Convention.”⁵⁹ They were present and placed a wreath at the marker dedication of Armistice Day Heroes marker in Centralia for Warren Grimm, Ben Casagranda and Arthur McElfresh who were killed in an Armistice Day parade in 1919 by IWW gunmen.⁶⁰ They also called for loyalty oaths for teachers in 1935.

Throughout the 1930s they focused their work in Veteran’s Hospitals—at Cushman in Tacoma, Steilacoom, then at American Lake when it was completed in 1924, the Bremerton Naval Hospital and in Walla Walla. By the mid 1930s only five active branches remained---in Pierce, Thurston, Snohomish, King and Lewis Counties. In many areas of the state the American Legion Auxiliary had taken over their work.

The women took their work for the hospitalized veterans very seriously. Besides providing jams, jellies and other food stuffs, they produced slippers, socks, quilts, robes, and bed jackets. They donated radios and razors and arranged for glasses and shoes to be

⁵⁸ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 2.

⁵⁹ MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 25, 26.

⁶⁰ MSSC72, Box 1, Folder 4, 13.

repaired. They advocated for a change and expansion of American Lake from purely psychiatric hospital. They made drapes and cushions and upholstered furniture for the veterans.⁶¹

Despite this important work, as time went on the women, who had restricted their membership to those actually serving in war work, aged. Their minutes become fraught with illness and inability to drive to state-wide conferences. Although they hobbled on through the early 1940s— and anticipated they would be called on again when war was declared⁶², they seemed to just peter out from all of their services.

Summary:

The focus has seemed to be in recent years on the service of women in World War II—often in active service or replacing men as “Rosie the Riveters.” The story of the great mobilization of women in World War I in Washington has not been widely explored. HistoryLink has presented a fine story about knitting in World War I—indeed that was an active part of service but the work of women in home front and European relief has not been fully documented.

These women poised for service and energized by their organizational abilities honed through women’s clubs jumped in full force to fulfill the directives of the federal and state government for war services and to provide international relief. The National League of Women’s Service worked with the State and National Committees but branched out to international relief, influenza service and even as substitute workers during the Seattle General Strike.

⁶¹ MSSC72, Box 1, Folders 15, 16, 17 Hospital Committee Reports.

⁶² A scrapbook view from 1939 shows them anticipating remobilization. MSSC72, Box 2, Folder 25.

Using both their new-found and traditional skills, Washington women contributed significantly to the war effort and to their stature as partners with men in patriotism and preparedness. Washington's women were not fighting for the vote as were so many others nationally during this period, having attained full suffrage in 1910. Suffrage has often been cited as a rationale for such active service nationally and in other states. Also in Washington coordination under the Minute Women of bond sales, complementing men's work and state and national directives provided for a more collaborative effort.

It is evident that the Minute Women were called upon to carry out, at least in some measure, the anti-sedition efforts of the State Council—through their “patriotism” efforts and monitoring of war bond sales.

So well-organized were the Minute Women, that they determined to continue their work after armistice in 1918, bringing solace to the often maimed men who returned from their service in Europe. The women exerted their influence not only in matters related to veterans, but for World Peace, preparedness, radicalism and myriad other causes which were traditionally associated with the club movement—including beautification and support for legislation that benefited women. They participated in making sure that the deaths of Washington soldiers would not be forgotten through memorials in the state and in France. Finally they gave out—many having devoted more than 25 years to the cause and facing yet another test of a world at war by the end of the Minute Women in 1943.

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