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Rochester in World War Two

High Schools and the War Effort

by Jeffrey Scott Brown

The Kodakids

by Mary Jo Lanphear Barone





Above: Campaigns to sell bonds and stamps raised significant amounts of money that were understandable by converting to buying power. This poster hung in the cabeteria at Monroe High School. (Monroe High School Library).

Cover: City-wide high schools prepared students for the military and civilian defense jobs as these students from Monroe High School learn metal work. (Monroe High School Library).

CORRECTION: The caption under the photograph on page 18 of the Summer 1993 issue titled "Remembering Front Street" should read: "The rear view of the Water Street businesses as seen from Front Street on the east side of the river in the 1960s."

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High Schools and the War Effort

The Second World War had an immediate and lasting impact on the lives of Americans. Most Americans were directly involved with some aspect of the global struggle. Millions of individuals served in the military, others worked in war production facilities, many volunteered time and energy to the war effort. For Americans at home, the war that at times seemed distant and unreal, could become an oppressive reality. Shortages, rationing, air raid drills and blackouts unsettled established routines and forced a restructuring of thought and habit. The news of the death of an acquaintance, friend, neighbor or loved one could bring the war home with devastating immediacy. The civilian war effort served both to facilitate the vigorous transformation of the economy to a war footing and to reassure and motivate a population acutely affected by events beyond its control. The ultimate goal was the winning of the war. To this end, most Americans heartily embraced the war effort. The result was a unity of purpose unique in the recent history of American society. Youth played a key role both by contributing to the wartime economy and by offering symbolic support to the troops overseas. The fulcrum of the youth war effort was the public high school. Already well integrated in communities across the country, high schools became centers of neighborhood war activity. By providing training, services, and facilities, high schools helped implement programs and procedures initiated by federal, state, and local authorities. Of equal significance was the exuberance and imagination with which high school students undertook numerous and varied war activities. Inevitably, such energy and zeal served as a stimulus to the community.

Rochester's high school war effort reflected the broad patterns of youth preparedness, participation, and enthusiasm emerging throughout the nation after 1940. Rochester teenagers, like all Americans, were caught up in the momentum of a mobilization that necessitated both psychic and material reorientation. In addition to the infectious patriotism exhorted by politicians, the mass media, and popular culture, however, high school students were subject to the specific directives of the educational bureaucracy from the federal government, to the Rochester Board of Education, to individual school administrations. Probing the nature and extent of Rochester secondary education's adaptation to war (with particular emphasis on East, Marshall and Monroe high schools) illuminates the interaction of these different strata of government authority with individual adolescents. How did the high school, with its appended superstructure of boards and bureaus, shape the lives of young men and women growing up in a time of violent change and great uncertainty? Such a query spawns a host of subsidiary questions: What were the particulars of Rochester's educational conversion? What new programs were implemented? How were existing programs altered or expanded? Were curriculums changed to accommodate the war effort? Did the change in emphasis significantly challenge traditional concepts of liberal education? What was the role of the high schools in the community at large? To what extent did Rochester students generate their own war effort?

After the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States Office of Education (USOE) began to implement procedures designed to fully mobilize the nation's school children for the war effort. By March, the USOE had replaced their nationally circulated biweekly publication, *School Life*, with the explicitly war oriented, *Education for Victory*, thus signalling a fundamental modification in Federal education policy. However, the "reorganization of curriculum" and the cultivation of "speed and precision in the work of education"¹ advocated by Federal Security Administrator Paul V. McNutt in the first issue of *Education for Victory*, were tasks underway in most school districts well before formal U.S. entry into the hostilities. Indeed, McNutt himself conceded the ex post facto nature of the USOE's efforts to galvanize American students for "total war" when he noted that the conversion of the "official publication of the United States Office of Education" (from *School Life* to *Education for Victory*) was necessary to "match the essential conversion of the educational program"² already in progress.

In Rochester, the Board of Education had begun to reorient itself, and the district, as early as 1940. Soon after the outbreak of war in Europe, federal priorities began to shift conspicuously toward economic and military mobilization. The training of a skilled labor force to facilitate the military build-up was of paramount importance. In the summer of 1940, in accordance with U.S. Commissioner of Education John Studebaker's directives, a vocational training program was set up along federal guidelines in a number of Rochester high schools. Seventy-five thousand dollars was requested from the federal government to cover initial costs. Fifty-two teachers were hired to teach courses in machine shop, sheet metal, welding, radio, auto mechanics, electric shop work, aviation ground school, woodworking, blue print reading, and pattern making. Both day and evening courses were offered to those eighteen years of age and over.³ An indication of the urgency with which the Board viewed the situation may be gleaned from their abrupt decision to convert Washington High School into a vocational school during the 1940 summer recess. The alterations were hastily completed in less than two months. The conversion was a surprise to hundreds of Washington High School students and teachers who found themselves scattered throughout the district at the beginning of the new school year.⁴

By the fall of 1940 the Vocational Education for the National Defense (VEND) program was firmly in place. The initial eight week summer schedule was extended indefinitely. Courses were offered at Madison, Jefferson, Vocational, Monroe, Edison Tech., Junior Vocational, and Franklin. Most classes were taught in the early evening and on Saturdays. When demand was sufficient, however, courses were scheduled for the late night and early morning hours.⁵ With the exception of a few minor problems (such as the allegation that VEND students and instructors at Monroe used the machine shop to stamp out slugs for slot machines⁶), this major expansion of the scope and size of the educational system in Rochester seems to have been accomplished with few hitches.

VEND expanded throughout the war years. By the summer of 1942 every secondary or vocational school in the district was participating in the program. Some schools operated around the clock. Besides training unskilled workers for employment in the defense industry, the program provided conversion training to skilled workers dislocated by the shifting wartime economy.⁷ In addition, VEND opened its doors to selected

high school students. High school seniors could receive 15 hours a week of paid training in preparation for work in the war industries or technical positions in the armed forces. The first batch of 390 high school students began training in January, 1942.⁸ Between July 1, 1942 and June 30, 1943, 561 Rochester students participated in this program.⁹

The development of the vocational program marked a general shift in emphasis for Rochester education in the months preceding Pearl Harbor, a shift equally manifest in the character and tone of student activities and publications. Area high school students focused on the situation in Europe and patriotism became increasingly conspicuous. Indeed, student discussion of the war during 1940 and 1941 seemed to assume the inevitability of American belligerency. Two weeks before Pearl Harbor the topic of discussion for the inter-high forum at Monroe was, "Must we fight Japan to defeat Hitler?"¹⁰ A January, 1941 East High *Clarion* editorial portentously considered the differences between the youth of America and the youth of the dictatorships. Physically strong, with "minds geared to racial superiority" and "every deed performed to build themselves for the state," fascist youth were portrayed as tough (almost inhuman) competition. To meet the challenge *The Clarion*, the high school newspaper, encouraged its teenaged readers to intensify their physical and mental preparedness, "loafing has a place" but one must ultimately build a "sound mind and strong body."¹¹ At John Marshall, German classes were discontinued and a boxing club was formed to "help prepare boys for the rigors of military life."¹² Clearly, Rochester educators and students, like the country as a whole, were gearing up for war.

In February of 1940 the Board of Education authorized the first of many appeals by relief organizations in Rochester high schools. The Childrens Crusade for Refugee Children was followed by various British and Canadian war relief efforts.¹³ The Red Cross called on high school students to knit sweaters and afghans. In the winter of 1941, East High pupils contributed the highest total in Rochester—130 sweaters and two afghans.¹⁴ Also in 1941, city students mounted the first in a long series of creative campaigns to sell defense stamps and bonds. An "Aid Defense Stamps" poster contest was organized at John Marshall in October of that year while the Madison and Franklin high school bands helped to publicize the newspaper defense stamp drive by performing in the newsboys parade in November.¹⁵ On August 15, 1940 the first 118 of 156 children of British Kodak employees arrived in Rochester— fugitives

from Europe's war. The "Kodakids" were placed with Rochester families and went to school with their American peers for the next five years.¹⁶

The anxious months preceding Pearl Harbor also saw a marked increase in the use of the public high schools for defense-related community activity. In October, 1940, in accordance with the new Selective Service Act, draft boards began the registration process. Schools were made available for this purpose, with teachers often serving as registration officials in their off hours.¹⁷ Making less ominous use of school facilities, the Red Cross responded to health concerns and labor shortages by conducting night classes in nutrition, care of the sick, and canteen work beginning in January, 1941.¹⁸



City and rural students and residents volunteered to harvest or plant crops on nearby farms. Sometimes the manpower shortage was relieved by prisoners of war from the Rochester area Italian and German prison camps. (Rundel Library).

Prominent amidst the hodgepodge of pre-war high school activities was the patriotic pageant, "Ring Freedom Ring." Performed at the Eastman Theater on June 6th and 7th, 1941, this extravaganza was a cooperative effort of all the Rochester high schools. About a thousand students participated. The East High *Clarion* described the production:

America's greatness to be performed through the medium of music, choric speaking, pantomime and narration. It is based not on the individuality of great men and women, but on masses of common people moving forward with America. Throughout the production the theme song, "Ring Freedom Ring" will emphasize each new victory for freedom.¹⁹

Richard McMahon, a student at John Marshall during the war and later the principal of Monroe and Marshall high schools, recounts the reaction to the pageant in his history of John Marshall and the Tenth Ward:

For two nights, the Eastman Theater was filled to capacity with crowds whose patriotism was aroused to fever pitch and who responded with prolonged standing ovations. Even today, it still ranks as the premier interscholastic drama undertaking ever.²⁰

While Rochester high school students were celebrating their rights and freedoms, the School Board grappled with the issue of censorship. On April 17, 1940 the Board first addressed the controversy surrounding the use of social studies textbooks by Columbia University professor, Harold Rugg. Rugg's publications (the latest of which, *The Conquest of America and America's March Toward Democracy*, had appeared in 1937) came under fire on the grounds that it tended "clearly to undermine the faith of pupils in the American form of government."²¹ As a pioneer of the new social sciences, Rugg sought to engage pupils in an objective examination of their society and its history. "Objectivity" for Rugg, meant the presentation of diverse sides of particular issues. Thus, controversial topics such as racism, poverty, crime, urban decay, and even the economic motives of the framers of the constitution were addressed in a manner that implicitly challenged popular stereotypes and standard historical interpretations. Rugg's pedagogical approach was undergirded by a liberal-progressive sensibility. Like other educational reformers, Rugg viewed the public school as a critical agent of social development, the essential site for the construction of responsible citizens, meaningful communities and a just society.²²

Rugg's brand of "objectivity," however, had become increasingly problematic in the aggressively patriotic pre-war months. As Mrs. Ellwood J. Turner of the Daughters of the Colonial Wars asserted:

[Rugg's text] tried to give the child an unbiased viewpoint instead of teaching him real Americanism. All the old histories taught "my country, right or wrong." That's the point of view we want our children to adopt. We can't afford to teach them to be unbiased and let them make up their minds.²³

Cited as a key member of the conspiracy "to propagate alien ideologies through the public schools" (in the company of eminent educators such as John Dewey and Charles Beard), Rugg was pilloried in emotional school board meetings and heated newspaper editorials across the country. Leading the charge in New York State were the American Federation of Advertisers, elements of the American Legion, and the New York State Economic Council—whose president assailed the books for seeking to, "undermine free enterprise."²⁴ In October, 1940 the Rochester chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution demanded that all Rugg books be eliminated at once from the Rochester public school system.²⁵ The Board of Education responded by studying the texts and issuing a questionnaire to district high school students inquiring about subversive teaching. Of 17,000 pupils surveyed, the Board found that the overwhelming majority (99%) believed that, "the American form of government should be preserved and that the schools encourage good citizenship and loyalty to this country."²⁶

This muted the controversy until two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor when the Board abruptly resolved to remove all of Rugg's books from the Rochester schools. Declining to rule on the validity of the charges made against Rugg's work, the Board stated simply that it "felt it wise to discontinue any books about which serious question has been raised." Superintendent of Schools, James Spinning explained that, "the Board feels that this is a time in which any possibility of controversy should be eliminated."²⁷ Paradoxically, the banning of the Rugg books intensified a controversy that, in Rochester at least, had previously been relatively negligible. For months the Board received correspondence protesting their decision and a flurry of letters in opposition to the Board's action appeared in the local press.²⁸

The Board's decision regarding the Rugg texts symbolized the broad transition from pre-war preparedness to wartime resolve—once the country was at war there could be no deviation, all endeavor must be focused on the unpleasant business at hand. Teaching materials fostering a critical approach on the part of students could only complicate matters. The inevitability of violence sharply clarified the task of education: pupils must be inculcated with a certainty of their country's virtue and infused with a single-minded fixity of purpose. Vocational education meant more than the training of youth for work in the defense industry—it now included the preparation of teenagers for a war that had already claimed millions of lives. Curricular adaptation, physical education, and the multitude of patriotic activities and invocations cited at the public high school took on an immediate and critical importance. The ability of adolescents to kill or die might well rest on their high school indoctrination. Rochester students and educators threw themselves into the war effort. The results included the increasing involvement of the public high school in the community, an explosion of war activity in the schools, and significant alterations in curriculum.

The use of the schools by the selective service boards in 1940 presaged a significant expansion of such use during the war. High schools became the neighborhood registration centers for rationing of such items as sugar, tires and gasoline. Once again, the teachers bore the responsibility for much of the administration and paperwork.²⁹ Also for the first time, the Red Cross began to conduct blood drives in the schools.³⁰ Civilian defense was an immediate concern especially during the early stages of the war. Public schools were an integral part of the Rochester Civilian Defense Council's plan to provide food, shelter and medical aid in the event of an emergency.³¹ As part of the civil defense effort, teachers were asked to ensure that evacuation report forms were filled out by every household in the vicinity of each high school.³² Monroe published a supplementary plan to "show pupils and parents how school and public will be taken care of in case of an air raid or emergency." The school recruited older boys to serve during air raids and drills. The boys acted as corridor guards and were formed into emergency first aid, firefighting and clean-up groups.³³ Marshall pupils formed an "air raid messenger service"; student volunteers practiced keeping the lines of communication open by receiving and relaying messages from their home phones during blackouts.³⁴

Mobilization generated massive dislocations of workers, creating alarming labor shortages. Students were encouraged to help fill the gap. Working after school in a department store was considered an important contribution to the war effort. Hundreds of Rochester students received VEND training and worked in the defense industry during vacation time. Others volunteered at area hospitals. Many students were involved in summer farm work. The Victory Farm Cadet service placed teenagers in rural areas stricken by manpower shortages. On June 21, 1942 the Democrat and Chronicle reported that between eight and nine hundred city school boys and girls would help farmers that summer. Three hundred sixty students planned to live on farms during the vacation. One hundred fifty girls from East High intended to spend part of the summer at a Sodus cherry picking camp.³⁵ Other students worked to remedy food shortages by planting "victory gardens."

Besides helping to carry on essential community activities, high school students engaged in a bewildering array of fundraising, morale boosting and patriotic endeavors. War stamp and bond drives claimed a great deal of student energy and imagination each year. These drives were organized by the federal government and affected the entire city. The quota assigned to individual high schools was a segment of the quota assigned to the community. The students undertook each drive in a spirit of competitive enthusiasm. The goal was to exceed the quota and to win the coveted "Minute Man" flag an honor bestowed on schools in which over 90% of the students bought stamps. Slogans like, "Buy a stamp and lead victory's team, make a ghost of Hitler's regime!"³⁶ and "A stamp is a bullet, a bond is a gun!"³⁷ exhorted students to ever greater efforts. Fundraisers like the "Stamp Stomp" at East were popular and profitable.³⁸ In February, 1944 the principal of Monroe promised a free basketball ticket to any student purchasing a bond. He ended up giving out 2,700 tickets. Monroe had to rent the University of Rochester Palestra for the game.³⁹ At a war bond rally at Marshall a ninth grader, Sander Bjorklund, bought a \$4,000 bond. The rally sold \$6,600 in bonds altogether.⁴⁰

High schools frequently dispensed with abstractions and made the purchase of actual weapons or military equipment the goal of a stamp/bond drive. East High held "Quack Week" in the autumn of 1943. The purpose was to raise \$2,090 for the purchase of an amphibious jeep. A large model "quack" was constructed and students

who bought two dollars or more in war stamps could have their names printed on it.⁴¹ A high point in the student war effort was the Fourth War Loan Drive in 1944. The city schools sought to buy and sell enough bonds and stamps to cover the cost of three new bombers which the students dubbed "Chester," "Esther" and "Uncle Jim" (after school superintendent James Spinning).⁴² Huge posters or models were used by each school to chart progress toward the quota. Marshall topped its \$15,000 quota with over \$91,000 in cash and pledges.⁴³ The total amount raised by the district was \$1,961,089.80 in cash for bonds; enough to procure three bombers and eleven escort bombers.⁴⁴ Appropriately, girls in the Marshall Class of 1945 carried "warsages" (made of war stamps instead of flowers) at their commencement ceremonies.⁴⁵

The following is a partial list of some other notable war-related activities undertaken by Rochester high school students:

Red Cross Drives: Students raised funds for the Red Cross.

Victory Book Campaigns: Thousands of books were collected to be distributed overseas by the USO.

Essay Contests: Students participated in numerous patriotic essay contests (such as the "Thank God I am an American" contest sponsored by the Board of Education in 1942).

Salvage Drives: Students collected tons of scrap to be melted down for use in war production.

V-Mail Campaigns: Letters and cards were constantly being sent overseas to encourage the troops.



Everyone worked to raise money for defense. Creative campaigns helped to stimulate sales after years of war made people weary. (Rundel Library).

Model Planes: Thousands of model planes were built to the specifications of the Air Corps and the Navy.

Newspapers: Student newspapers were sent to alumni in the armed forces.

Patriotic parades, plays, rallies, concerts, pageants and radio shows were prominent and celebrated elements of the student war effort. There were scores of public events that required student participation. Pupils at Monroe, for example, spent weeks training for their part in the June, 1942 "Victory Parade," a seven hour civic display of patriotism. The students carried the banners of the 27 allied nations.⁴⁶ In March, 1943 "Ring Freedom Ring" was restaged at the Eastman, a performance that acquired heightened poignancy later that year when the creator of the production, former Charlotte teacher Walter Enright, was killed in North Africa.⁴⁷ At Marshall, radio productions such as "Youth at War," "What We Defend," "I Pledge Allegiance," and "On a Note of Triumph" were prepared for broadcast on local radio stations.⁴⁸ Assemblies with such titles as, "It's Fun to be Free," "Becoming Air-Minded" and "Girls in a War World" encouraged patriotism, discussed current affairs or addressed the problems and opportunities of wartime. One such program, "America Calling" confronted the problem of flagging morale with an appeal for continued sacrifice. This is a synopsis of a central scene. It was featured in a Marshall Schools at War scrapbook:

Pat Neilson, a typical high school student, rebels at the war propaganda persistently given over the radio. When the telephone rings she declares that she'll hang up if, as she suspects, it is a call for farm labor to "pick beans." Instead the call is from one of the gang who reports that they all are coming over "because they know that there is to be a blackout." The gang noisily arrive, and there is a "jive" session interrupted by the blackout and a broadcast of the Constitution. In the darkness the spirit of Liberty appears. She tells them of their country's great needs. The young people are deeply touched: Pat softly repeats the preamble of the Constitution. From the radio a part of Lincoln's second Inaugural Address is heard. Liberty makes a final appeal: "America is calling, the line is clear, will you answer?" The spot is trained on the American flag, before which are two students, arms filled with books. Offstage "America the Beautiful" is sung as the curtain closes.⁴⁹

Such simple patriotic emotionalism was typical of the times. It had great appeal to adults as well as youth. It is significant, however, that such rallies and productions were presented at the high schools without remission. Those most immediately faced with the prospect of direct confrontation with the enemy were those most subjected to sentimental propaganda and patriotic exhortations. In Marshall's 1943 *John Quill* yearbook the "principal's message" noted the wartime curricular adaptation underway at the school:

We've seen the introduction of new courses to prepare students for the exchange of the sheltering confines of high school for the impersonal briskness of the armed forces or war work. Speeding up of the courses was also inaugurated to prepare students for spring entry into college or pre-graduation induction into military life.⁵⁰

The lowering of the draft age to eighteen in 1942 compounded the urgency of the task of preparing high school students for war. The federal government favored a comprehensive program of pre-induction training conducted at the high school level. This plan was embodied in the USOE's September, 1942 establishment of the High School Victory Corps.⁵¹ David Hanson, in his study of Portland, Oregon public schools during the war, comments that the Victory Corps "represented a far-reaching attempt to revise secondary school curriculum."⁵² The Corps was guided by "a utilitarian view of secondary education's purposes" and the "overriding imperative of meeting manpower needs in a national emergency."⁵³ Hanson attributes the rejection of the Victory Corps by Portland teachers and administrators to a lingering distrust of federal authority and a commitment to the precepts of decentralized liberal education. The failure of the Victory Corps to take hold in Rochester, however, probably had less to do with localism and educational ideals than the fact that by the '42-'43 school year the program must have seemed superfluous. In February, 1943 the *East High Clarion* reported that East's decision to forego adoption of the Victory Corps was grounded on the belief that, "just as much and possibly more was being accomplished toward the war effort without any definitely organized program."⁵⁴

At East, departments scrambled to accommodate their courses to the war effort. German classes studied "new war vocabulary so pupils may detect propagandistic literature and guard against sabotage."⁵⁵ English promised an understanding of "democracy and war and peace."⁵⁶ The

science department replaced Earth Science with training in meteorology, mapmaking, navigation and astronomy, and added a course in photography that “parallels the course outlined by the air corps.”⁵⁷ The social studies department stressed the use of, “daily press, pamphlets, current government publications as well as text books to drive home understanding of the war.”⁵⁸ At John Marshall, new course offerings included Radio Science, Aerial Photography, Aeronautic Science and Pre-Flight Math.⁵⁹ Art classes became the advertising agencies of the war effort. In addition to creating hundreds of posters, however, students in Marshall’s art and drafting classes engaged in the morbid task of producing 3,090 fireproof identification tags for the pupils of the high school and its four feeder schools.⁶⁰

The induction of youth during World War I had exposed glaring deficiencies in physical fitness. After the first draft in 1940, the military complained of similar alarming inadequacies in the health, fitness and strength of new trainees.⁶¹ This, coupled with the widespread belief that enemy schools were turning out perfect physical specimens for delivery to the front lines, spurred educators to drastically expand existing physical fitness programs. East stepped up its regimen by requiring students to take longer, more intensive gym classes. For the first time ever, seniors were required to take physical education. Courses took on a decidedly military bent—new activities included mass calisthenics and marching tactics.⁶² Marshall also expanded its gym classes. Jiu-Jitsu was offered by the wrestling club to help prepare boys for military service and a commando course was constructed to “condition and harden the boys physically, and to aid them in the development of skills under trying conditions.”⁶³

The war extended into all aspects of student’s lives. Patriotic sentiments were exploited even for the cause of order in the hallways and behavior in the lunch-room. The East High *Clarion* implored:

Let’s declare war on filth, disorder and unnecessary noise! Will you enlist for service on our home front? East High is recruiting all patriots. See you on the front lines!⁶⁴

In keeping with the tightening of regulation and control in the wartime society at large, hall monitors and safety patrols acquired a new esprit during the war, their duties newly implicated in the smooth operation of civil defense procedures.

Awareness of the realities of modern war rarely seems to have crept into the collective consciousness of Rochester high school youth. From the beginning, youth heartily embraced the war effort, an effort that despite the energy and originality with which it was taken up by high school students was ultimately defined and directed by their elders. Students competed for the honor of working the hardest or contributing the most. Boys vied for the military positions that would lead most directly to combat. Hundreds left school early to enlist. Such bravado and eagerness appeared unfazed by the steady trickle of casualty reports. However, the gradual attrition of friends, relatives and high school predecessors had to have had an affect. In the main corridor of Marshall High School, the list of Marshall alumni at war steadily accumulated gold stars indicating a premature and usually violent death.⁶⁵ The silence or, more precisely, the approval and respect with which such visible reminders of the horrors of war were met bears testimony, in part, to the effectiveness of the high school war effort.

Despite a great deal of motivation and enthusiasm, the total militarization of American schools feared by some never occurred; neither was liberal education supplanted by vocational studies. Most Rochester students and educators realized that the war would end, and most hungered for a time when life would return to "normal." In a 1943 East High survey, 70% of the boys polled were opposed to compulsory military service after the war.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, for four years the Rochester high school experience was defined by mobilization. Rochester educators strove to build an unsurpassed educational apparatus in the service of the state at war. The importance of the public high school was enhanced dramatically. It served as a wartime center for the community, a training ground for war production workers, a labor pool, a financier of military expenditures, and a dynamic reserve of morale and patriotism. Most importantly, the experience of the high school at war would help to shape the values and assumptions of a generation of American youth.



In October 1945 thousands of people attended a victory celebration in downtown Rochester. Fundraising was not yet over. (Rundel Library).

Author's Note:

Jeffrey Brown is currently working on his Ph.D. in History at the University of Rochester. The author wishes to thank Professor Ken O'Brien of SUNY college at Brockport for his counsel and encouragement. Appreciation is also extended to Judy Goldstein, the librarian at Monroe High School, and to the library staffs of Marshall, East, and Monroe High Schools. The help of Richard McMahon, who made available his personal collection of John Marshall memorabilia as well as the manuscript of his then unpublished history of John Marshall High School and the Maplewood Neighborhood, was particularly indispensable.

End Notes

High Schools and the War Effort

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- 63 John Quill, 1944.
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The Kodakids

The United States' isolationist policy, delineated by the Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937, served as a stumbling block to the well-intentioned child rescue programs of 1940. The neutrality legislation was a Congressional response to public alarm over events in Europe. Americans viewed the arms build-up with concern, remembering World War I. A 1937 Gallop Poll found that nearly two-thirds of the American people thought that United States' participation in that war had been a mistake.¹

By 1939 the map of Europe began to change. In September, Poland was overrun by the German army; in November, Finland fell to the Russians. The spring of 1940 brought further dominance by Germany as Denmark and Norway were invaded in April, the Netherlands and Belgium in May. Newspaper photos of displaced civilians and accounts of the devastation took front page prominence. France would fall in July. The English Channel no longer seemed a formidable barrier to foreign invasion.

Hampered by their government's official policy, many well-meaning Americans sought ways to assist Britain without involving the United States in the European war. Aiding non-combatants, especially children, would provide humanitarian, not military aid. Removing children from a country under siege and bringing them to safety in America was a reasonable project not likely to compromise government policy. After all, the families of European nobility and those with means had been arriving on their own in the United States for months. An organized program would help a wider, more economically diverse group of children.

Committees formed on both sides of the Atlantic with prominent citizens in authoritative positions. In a very short time the United States' impediments were removed: the Immigration law was amended and the Neutrality legislation was broadened to include "mercy ships."²

The British government screened thousands of children for immigration to the U.S. but refused to allow liners to sail without escort. Unwilling to divert military vessels from defense to the conveying of civilians, they appealed to the U.S. to supply the protection necessary to insure the children's safety at sea. Some liners were accompanied by British naval vessels for a few hours out of port, but the rest were virtually alone, avoiding the areas known to be patrolled by German submarines.

The evacuations had hardly begun when a ship carrying 230 children was torpedoed. Ships in transit were recalled; the program was postponed indefinitely.

The period from inception to termination of the program was brief, roughly June through September, 1940, and only a small proportion of the originally projected number of children actually sailed. The publicity factor, keeping England's need for aid on the pages of the American newspapers throughout the summer, was the chief benefit of the program.³ Perhaps unplanned, it nonetheless influenced an amendment to the Neutrality law and the reluctant signature of Franklin D. Roosevelt campaigning for re-election on an isolationism platform.

As early as 1931 planning began in England for an internal evacuation of women, children, aged, and disabled. The experience of World War I, especially in regard to aerial bombing and poisonous gas, and the emergence of Hitler and the Nazi party in Germany provoked war contingency plans for vulnerable populations. Those early planners even selected a target date for the completion of the evacuation: September 1, 1939, reasoning that it was preferable to make the decision themselves to move people rather than wait for enemy action to impel it. Consequently, between July and September, 1939, 825,000 school children, 113,000 school teachers, 624,000 mothers with pre-schoolers, 13,000 expectant mothers, and 7,000 blind people left England's cities for the countryside.⁴

In the ensuing months of the “phony war,” many children returned to their homes, their parents not convinced about the imminence of war. Grace Hamilton Hoad cited some of the additional reasons for the children’s return:

Children returned to the cities because of difficulties within the billet—placement in homes of different standards, illness or accident, homesickness, or the attitude of the billeting family. Inadequate plans for schools, recreation, clinics, hospitals for infectious diseases, visits from parents, problem children, and specialized personnel in the reception area are additional criticisms of the English system.⁵

Then, in April 1940, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway. Children returned to the countryside and plans were made for the evacuation of an additional 103,000. Concern for their safety overcame parents’ reluctance to entrust their children to strangers. Ben Wicks, himself an evacuee at age thirteen, described their dilemma:

Many will find it hard to understand how parents could have allowed their children to be evacuated. Although there is little doubt that such an undertaking today would be met with overwhelming opposition, the horrifying picture of bombing raids in both China and Spain had both the population and the government fearing the worst once the war did arrive. The build up in defenses served only to emphasize the possibility of what many felt lay ahead.⁶

With the resumption of hostilities in mid-1940 came new concerns that the evacuated children were no longer safe in the English countryside. Offers of assistance from private citizens in the Dominions and the United States afforded the opportunity for overseas evacuation. First to go were those with the means and the connections abroad.

The United States Committee for the Care of European Children was organized on June 20, 1940, with Eleanor Roosevelt as honorary administrative chairman. A group of relief and charitable organizations, the Committee convened in New York City with a view to bringing British, French, and other war-refuged children to the American continent (the U.S. Committee would cooperate with Canada’s plan already in place). Also in attendance was Katherine Lenroot, head of the Federal Children’s Bureau, a U.S. government

agency. Her presence, and the honorary chairmanship of Eleanor Roosevelt, contributed to the opinion that President Roosevelt “walked on eggshells” over the refugee child issue, his isolationism and his apparent reluctance to commit American aid to England pitted against the need to protect innocent victims of war.⁷

Serving as coordinator of all United States resources for the care of refugee children, the U.S. Committee addressed the strict U.S. immigration policy. Tightened in the 1930s to prevent immigrants from taking scarce jobs, the Act contained two provisions which prevented a large-scale influx of children: (1) a bond was required guaranteeing the aliens would not become public charges, and (2) a group of aliens could not be sponsored by an individual or group.

The British government developed a program to subsidize the travel expenses for all those children whose families wished to send them to safety. The Children’s Overseas Reception Board (CORB), under the direction of Geoffrey Shakespeare, processed 210,000 applications by July 4. The combination of imminent peril at home and free fare to leave the country produced this large number of would-be evacuees. Intended to cut across class lines, the program was open to five through fifteen-year-olds who attended grant-aided schools. It was felt that school-aged children would find greater acceptance among sponsoring families than would pre-schoolers whose needs would demand more time. Certain health standards were imposed: children with poor teeth were instructed to have treatment; those with scabies, impetigo, or lice were unacceptable unless cured.⁸

On July 4, CORB said it couldn’t handle any more applications and, on July 10, suspended the program. British officials were alarmed at the large number of children seeking to leave the country. Combined with the lack of escort vessels to protect ocean liners, this was enough to stop the plan dead in the water.

Three months of high-level and low-level diplomacy ensued, documented almost daily by the *New York Times*.

The matter of British versus American ships for child transport appeared frequently in the newspaper. The United States Committee for the Care for European Children assumed that U.S. ships would be sent to bring the children across the Atlantic. The provisions of the Neutrality Act made that impossible. American ships could not enter a

war zone to rescue foreign nationals, nor could they escort foreign vessels. There was no shortage of ocean liners. The problem was the British government's stipulation that all child transports be convoyed across an ocean that was rapidly filling up with enemy shipping. British battleships could not be diverted from defense to escort duty. Officials pointed to the sinking of the *Arandora Star* loaded with German and Italian internees, arguing that if that ship was sunk, no ship was safe.

The Ministry of Information said in the *New York Times* on July 12:

The government scheme for the evacuation of children has been postponed for the present. In view of the fate of the *Arandora Star* the government is unable to take the responsibility of sending shiploads of children away from the country without convoy.⁹ This directive, the Times article went on to say, did not preclude private arrangements made by parents and voluntary associations. At the same time, the British government made it clear that offers of American aid were gratifying: There is much concern here that the hitch in the government scheme should be interpreted as indicating a failure to appreciate the offers of hospitality.¹⁰ The temporary halt to the program brought a hue and cry from parents who charged that the wealthy were able to send their children away to safety but middle and working class people were not. Committees on both sides of the ocean continued to work to eliminate the barriers.

On July 14 the *New York Times* reported that the State Department had removed the red tape necessary to admit refugee children, establishing three criteria:

1. Children could be admitted on visitors' visas as long as assurances were provided that they would go home after the war. This rule eliminated the 6,500 per month quota restriction on permanent visa holders from Great Britain.
2. Corporate affidavits, supported by a \$50 trust fund per child, would be acceptable in place of individual bonds.
3. Children's names need not be approved by the State Department, merely selected by representatives from the United States Committee for the Care of European Children.

Praising the State Department's action in an editorial on July 15, the *Times* went on to plead for Congress' amendment of the Neutrality Act:

...the children still wait, although the bomb raid and the casualty lists grow more heartbreaking every day. They wait because the British Navy cannot spare warships for convoying British passenger vessels, while we are barred by an unintentional technicality of our Neutrality Law from sending any American ships to the war zone except Red Cross ships carrying food and medical supplies...the framers of the Neutrality Act never intended it to forbid missions of mercy like the rescue of children. When Congress reconvenes next week it will have an opportunity to amend the law so that this mission, the greatest humanitarian challenge we have yet had in this war, can be carried out without delay.¹¹

Two days later, New York Representative Emmanuel Celler made public his intentions of offering an amendment to the Neutrality Act when the House reconvened on Monday, July 22. His bill conveyed to the refugee children the same exemptions afforded Red Cross ships. Celler's announcement received support many people concerned with the refugee children situation, including a group formed specifically to promote the use of U.S. ships. Called the American Women's Committee to Release Ships for European Children, this lengthy title eventually became the Mercy Ships Committee. It lobbied and conducted letter-writing campaigns throughout July and August until the House and Senate passed the required legislation. President Roosevelt signed the so-called "Mercy Ships" bill on August 29, reluctantly abandoning his demand for a safe conduct guarantee from Germany. His appeals to the Reich for such assurance were reported in the *Times*, which also carried Germany's official reply on August 22:

...because of the contamination of these waters with mines over which neither Germany nor any other nation could exercise control, an assurance of a guarantee which under present circumstances could only be ineffective would be a crime against the children who are to be evacuated. The Reich government will never be guilty of such a crime. Under these circumstances the American law, the humanitarian motives for which remain unquestioned, can only be illusory. These same humanitarian motives make it impossible for a responsible government or military leadership to undertake a guarantee of safe conduct through mine-infested waters. Germany cannot

have any part in exposing to additional dangers the children of a belligerent nation. The British government itself recognized the impossibility of guaranteeing safe conduct through mine-infested waters by declining to undertake the evacuation of children through government measures at government expense. It was pointed out at the time that neither the required shipping tonnage nor the necessary convoy vessels were at the government's disposal. Only at the expense of wealthier parents were a few children able to leave England on private vessels, in which case the British government declined to guarantee safe conduct and left the risk to parents. Nor can it be in the interests of the United States and Germany to make possible incidents which are opposed to the best interests of both nations merely for the sake of a misunderstood humanitarianism. The illusory nature of the American gesture must be made unequivocally clear right now in the face of possible attempts to shoulder the Reich with responsibility for the impracticability of the plan.¹²

Throughout this summer of debate in an atmosphere of urgency, some children were managing to get to the Dominions and/or the United States under private sponsorship. The United States Committee for the Care of European Children continued its work, matching American organizations with their counterparts in England, e.g., U.S. Rhodes Scholars with British university children; the American Association of University Women with the children of British university graduates; Rye, New York, with Rye, Sussex; Yale University professors with Oxford University professors' children; H.J. Heinz Company with Heinz, Ltd.; American Theatre Wing with the British Actors' Orphans Fund; American Moose Lodge with British Moose (the children went to stay in Mooseheart, Indiana); American Friends with British Quakers; Hoover Vacuum Cleaner Company with Hoover, Ltd.; Eastman Kodak Company with Kodak's Harrow facility.

Separation from families occurred at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London for all children traveling under the aegis of the United States Committee for the Care of European Children. This included those sponsored by groups, as well as "singles" like Anthony Bailey who was not affiliated with a business, fraternal order, or educational institution. He described the preparations for evacuation:

My mother had heard from the London office of the committee that they would like to see me, naming a date in late July...My father took me up on the train...I had with me my birth certificate and ten photographs that would be needed if I was accepted for the plan...my mother had written on a slip of paper our American "connections"...The committee decided they would take me on. The cost of passage, rail tickets, and escort fees would be twenty-four pounds. My parents were warned to stand by for sudden word of a sailing. Two suitcases only would be allowed...word came by telegram stamped "Priority," ordering me to assemble at Grosvenor House on September 16 (at 8:00 a.m.) with suitcases, gas mask, passport, tickets, and identity tags...After reporting to Grosvenor House, I was on my way with a group of other children to Liverpool...We were several days in Liverpool, sheltered in a school where we slept in long brick air-raid shelters. Then to the dock and the *Antonia*. She turned out to be the last ship to set sail with children being evacuated.¹³

The day after Anthony Bailey left London, the City of Benares was torpedoed.

Raymond Feasey, a Kodakid, described his evacuation from England in a *Kodakery* article in 1973:

The war had started in England on September 3, 1939. (I remember) hearing the terrifying wail of the air raid sirens for the first time as a nine-year-old boy playing with friends in the Harrow suburb of Kenton. We didn't all have air raid shelters in our backyards. (I remember) hiding under a table. In the spring of 1940 Kodak Limited announced that Kodak families in Rochester would open their homes to children of Kodak Limited employees.

Raymond remembered his parents talking it over with him and then allowing their only child to make the move for his protection. Double-decker buses took the young travelers and their parents from Harrow to Grosvenor House in London where good-byes were said. Raymond, who was then ten, remembered seeing anti-aircraft guns as he and the other youngsters passed Trafalgar Square en route to Euston Railroad Station that August afternoon. The children "carried gas masks and cardboard suitcases."

They breakfasted in Liverpool Cathedral then boarded the Canadian steamship *Dutchess of Atholl*, and sailed with a destroyer escort through the Irish Sea to a northern Atlantic route.¹⁴

Janet Hellen, another Kodak evacuee, described the voyage to America:

I shall never forget saying good-bye to our parents in Grosvenor House, London, or the train ride to Liverpool, or my excitement at being on a really large boat for the first time in my life. On the boat, during the sea trip, we saw icebergs floating by, like stately old dowagers, and whales spouting, and although it rained and was rather dismal at the start of our journey, toward the end, as we sailed up the St. Lawrence, the sun shone on the lovely green trees along the banks of the river and it was simply wonderful.¹⁵

The first group of children under the aegis of the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children arrived on the Cunard White Star liner *Samaria* on Wednesday, August 21. Two hundred ten children were on the ship, 138 sponsored by the Committee. Of these, 84 were bound for Canton, Ohio, to stay with Hoover Vacuum Cleaner Company families. Typical of the colorful reporting that often accompanied articles about the refugee children is John Morosco III's description of the arrival of the *Samaria*:

...weather-beaten, black and buff liner...bringing to safety from bombarded England...heavily convoyed until last Monday by British battleship *Revenge* and three destroyers...Young war refugees crowded the liner's rails—210 of them of all ages, dressed in all kinds of clothing.¹⁶ According to the *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, this large group of children had been chaperoned on the voyage by eleven "volunteer shipboard mothers—British women who will shuttle across the Atlantic in the coming weeks with groups of children."¹⁷

A far cry from the 210,000 original applicants, the U.S. Committee was said to be expecting a total of only 30,000 children. They were described by the *New York Times*:

Unlike the children that have come here from well-to-do homes in the last few weeks, yesterday's contingent comes

from middle-class and working-class families, the sons and daughters of tinsmiths, cabinet-makers, lawyers, factory workers, clerks, salesmen, and even a barge captain.¹⁸

The *New York Times* reported that the children on the *Samaria* were instructed by their escorts to sing something as they were being photographed by the American press. They chose "There'll Always Be An England," heard often at home.¹⁹ This was the first of countless articles in the *New York Times* and Rochester newspapers describing interviews with the newly-arrived children. Almost every account contains some reference to the air-raids, bombings, dangerous Atlantic crossings, etc., and an accompanying comment from a "plucky little Brit," describing his or her confidence in England's ability to prevail against Germany. For example, *Samaria* passenger John Anderton related that his first thought on reaching New York Wednesday night, August 21, was "Turn out them lights!" He continued, "You see, we're so used to the blackout. Of course, we're all British and we feel certain that we will win the war."²⁰ Collectively the reported comments of the children carried the same theme: brave little children seeking help, proof that the Germans were so evil that they had to be sent away from their parents to be safe. The refugee child was the publicist for war-ravaged but indomitable England.

Ships carrying evacuated children continued to arrive at U.S. and Canadian ports during the rest of August and September. Many passengers reported submarine sightings even on the longer north Atlantic route which was supposedly safer.

The first disaster occurred on August 30 when the Dutch liner *Volendam* was torpedoed off the north coast of Ireland. British evacuee children were among the 320 passengers rescued by convoying ships. No lives were lost. It was the sinking of the *City of Benares* on September 21 that brought a permanent halt to the marine evacuation of British children. Shortly after nightfall, 600 miles out from England, the ship was torpedoed with 406 passengers, 98 of them English children. Of the passengers who survived, only thirteen were children. On October 3 the British government recalled those ships in transit and officially suspended the program indefinitely, saying that perhaps it could resume in the spring. It did not.

It is difficult to obtain a precise figure for the children who were evacuated to America. As many as 13,600 are estimated to have come over on their own, welcomed by friends and relatives in the U.S. and Canada. According to Anthony Bailey, the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children assisted only 1,315 children by war's end, not even close to its scaled down goal of 30,000. Of the 1,315, 860 were English children, 209 German, and 42 Spanish. The *New York Times* articles deal exclusively with the English children. By the time the Committee finally dissolved in the summer of 1952, an additional 2,807 children were helped. These included refugees, orphans, displaced persons, and thirteen "stowaways accepted for care."²¹

Of the 1,315 British children who came to the United States under the auspices of the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children, the 156 sponsored by the Eastman Kodak Company were the largest single group. Kodak moved rapidly to implement plans to bring the Harrow plant children to Rochester. The Company's initial request for sponsoring families was reported in the July 2 newspapers. The children left Harrow for Rochester six weeks later. Although the plans were described as "wholly tentative" and "may never be carried out," the response was overwhelming. "Offers of its Rochester employees to care for the children of its sister company exceeded 'several times over' the expected number of refugees."²²

By this time Rochester had its own evacuee committee, a local affiliate of the U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children. Called the Rochester Committee for Refugees, its activities were not reported in the local press until August 23. The *Times-Union* article listed chairman, Mrs. DeWitt Macomber, and twenty committee members, most of whom were connected with Rochester's existing refugee and welfare organizations. The committee had established certain procedures to be followed for sponsoring a child. Interested people were instructed to write a letter to the local committee at its Temple Building headquarters. The letters were to contain the name and address of the applicant, some details about the facilities that could be provided, and the age and sex of the children desired.²³

On the day of their arrival in Rochester, the Kodak children made page one of the *Democrat & Chronicle*:

The war will be brought home vividly to Rochester when 120

refugee children of Eastman Kodak employees in England arrive here within the next few days, it was disclosed today...Exact time of their arrival aboard ship is cloaked in the secrecy that of necessity hides the movements of camouflaged vessels. Even the ship's identity is unknown to Kodak officials.²⁴

The Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle* for the next morning, Sunday, August 25, was full of news and photographs of the Kodakids²⁵ who arrived the night before. The Canadian Pacific liner *Dutchess of Atholl* docked in Montreal early on the morning of August 24 with 118 children aboard. A twelve-hour train trip brought them to the Brighton station at 9:15 p.m. Sheriff Al Skinner and deputies assisted in transferring the children to four buses and then escorted the buses to the children's temporary quarters. Seventy-five children went to Hillside Children's Home and forty-three to the Strong Memorial Hospital Nurses' residence. The Nurses' Residence was available until the new nursing class arrived in the fall. The *Democrat & Chronicle* described the plans for the two facilities:

Three unused buildings will be opened for sleeping quarters at Hillside...there are ample playground facilities. Children quartered at the Nurses' home will spend the days before moving into private homes at the Harley School...where there is a large playground and adequate indoor facilities. Harley School teachers will direct a recreation program for the refugee boys and girls.²⁶

Every detail of the Kodakids' arrival was related to the newspaper audience. This was Rochester's connection to world events, the opportunity to participate, however vicariously, in a truly humanitarian operation.

Each child had a large name tag tied to his or her coat with the legend "U.S. Committee for the Care of European Children, Kodak Scheme." The tag number also appeared on the children's luggage. Many carried knapsacks or cloth bundles; some of the girls had dolls. Although they had been up until 1:00 a.m. the night before, and had awakened early for transfer to the train, the children were alert and talkative after their twelve-hour train trip.

News articles recorded what they were wearing (most wore navy blue trench coats) and their first impressions of the United States. Almost every report bore the same theme, that the war would now be brought home to Rochester: "The War Steamed Into Rochester Last Night On A Special New York Central Train...The little refugees...wore bully grins."²⁷

A young boy asked a reporter, "You know, don't you, we're having a war in England?"

Some of the children saw a submarine en route, saying that "we know that at least four depth charges were exploded and we believe the submarine to have been sunk." Arthur Spencer, at sixteen the oldest of the group, added that he was sure the submarine had been sunk, commenting that, "I don't think the Germans have many submarines left, do you?"

Dr. J.B. Wrathall Rowe, British physician who accompanied the group, declined to talk about the incident or when it occurred, "because it's a wartime secret," but others said that apparently two subs were about to attack the *Dutchess of Atholl*.²⁸ At least two of the evacuees did not recall a submarine sighting. Raymond Feasey, then ten, said "they encountered ice flows but no submarines."²⁹ Vera Goodwin Umpleby, another Kodakid, says the news of the sub may not have been circulated among all the children. Fifteen at the time, she recalled frequent lifeboat drills, including one very early in the morning. She felt that the early drill may have been in response to the submarine sighting.³⁰

Those in charge of the group were very conscious of the children's appeal to the community. The "little ambassadors," as they would later be called by British ambassador Lord Halifax, served as reminders that England was fighting a war against Germany and desperately needed American aid. Dr. Rowe "suspected" that the newspapers would like pictures of the children. He brought with him five large red letters which, when held by five small boys hanging by their knees from a jungle gym, spelled "Kodak."³¹ Six-year-old Malcolm Bonney sported a cowboy hat which, with his Cockney accent, made him the subject of several articles. Judging by the number of stories about the children in the first few weeks after their arrival, and the number of children interviewed, reporters' access to the youngsters was apparently unrestricted.

Fifteen-year-old Jean Cross spoke at length to a reporter about England's defenses:

England is under marvelous defense...Along the coastline barbed wire is stretched, and it even reaches into the water to hinder a possible landing of Nazi forces...Soldiers are always on patrol, and many places are fortified with sandbags. Even the railroad embankments have barbed wire zigzagging along the right-of-way. Ship piers also have been blown up or destroyed to prevent the landing of German panzer divisions. So, you see, England will win the war.³²

Was the Rochesterian of 1940 reassured that barbed wire would stop a German invasion, or did Jean Cross' candor subtly affect a change in attitude about American aid to England?

Other articles continued to stress the plight of the British children. The daily newspaper's picture page devoted much of its space to evacuees. Some captions:

This Was A Shelter For Such As These—English children gape in awe at their air raid shelter, damaged by a direct hit from a German dive bomber. A priest was slightly injured by the bomb. Picture was made at an unnamed British port where newsmen were invited to offset Nazi stories of "total ruin."³³

Young Britishers Swing It—with a safety pin holding together her torn dress, a little English girl swings merrily at Hillside Children's Center.³⁴

More Fun Than Air Raids—Joyce Gowers, 13, English child refugee...tosses a basketball at Harley School. Her birthday is September 3. Last year her "present" was a declaration of war. This year she's happy to be in a land at peace.³⁵

The children were housed at Hillside and the Nurses' Home for about a month before they joined their host families. Each prospective family was interviewed by the staff of Kodak's Industrial Relations Department. Of the 118 children who arrived on August 25, there were 25 sets of siblings, including the Goodwin children: Vera, 15, Kenneth, 12, and Dorothy, 9. Vera was one of the older girls who helped to supervise the younger children on shipboard. She remembers feeling

indignation when blamed by liner passengers for the misbehavior of her charges. This was an additional responsibility for the young person. Her parents had sent her along to look after her brother and sister. "That was the whole idea," she said, "that I would keep track of them and take care of them."³⁶

Siblings were placed together when possible, but living arrangements often changed during the children's sojourn in Rochester, as the expected six month stay stretched to five years. Foster parents were transferred or left Kodak; some adults and children were incompatible. For some sponsors, the novelty wore off after a few months and re-placements were necessary. Eastman Kodak employees Helen Cederquist and Sarah Nichols served as nurses/social workers/big sisters to the children from their arrival in Montreal to long after the war had ended and the children were home in England again.

Kodak maintained active concern for the children's welfare while they were in Rochester. Living expenses and spending money were the responsibility of the sponsor, but Kodak paid for all health and dental care, including several surgeries. They assisted the children in keeping in touch with their parents, gathering them regularly at Kodak for movies and slides of home. Holiday parties kept the children in contact with one another. Other than the expenses of passage, parents were unable to contribute to their children's upkeep due to a British government regulation that forbade citizens from sending currency from England.

The visit to Rochester and the Kodakids by Edward Frederick Lindley Wood in 1943 was a very special occasion. Lord Halifax, as he was known more formally, was England's ambassador to the United States. Scheduled as the speaker at the annual dinner of the Rochester Chamber of Commerce, the ambassador was the guest of Kodak for an afternoon tea with the Kodakids and their foster parents. His remarks to the children emphasized the responsibilities placed on them by their homeland. You are all British ambassadors...Your good friends here have been judging England by your good conduct, therefore you are very important people. After this war you will be a part of a generation working for a better world, a world in which there must be no more war. When you go back home—I hope you will go back—you will tell your parents what nice people the Americans are...and perhaps you will teach mother and father the American customs and expressions you have learned.³⁷

And so the children grew, went to school, took music lessons, played at games and sports, adopted American slang and a taste for hot dogs. They matured from little children to adolescents, from teenagers to young adults, all the while in the care of persons who were not their parents. They worried about family left behind in England to face the consequences of war, and they experienced guilt at being spared. They were safe in America, away from German bombs and wartime deprivation, but five years was a long period to be away from parents, siblings, family customs, and an English upbringing. Their lives were forever altered by their American experience. Comfortable and uncomfortable in both cultures, they missed England when living in Rochester, and missed Rochester after they went home.

As early as 1943 some of the children began to leave for home. According to the *Kodakery* of March 21, 1944, seven of the original 156 had left, five to return to England, two to Canada. These were Kodakids that had completed their education in Rochester and went home to shoulder adult responsibilities. Some went into military service, others to work.



Forty-three children of Kodak employees in England were cared for by Rochester Kodak employees during the German bombings of England. After five years these children returned to their homes in England. That country faced years of economic hardship after the war. (Rundel Library).

Janet Hellen, the first Kodak evacuee to return to England, left for home in the fall of 1943 and became a teacher. She wrote of her impressions of America and its people in a 1944 *Kodakery* article:

Now that I am home again, England doesn't seem to have changed nearly as much as I had expected...despite the deep scars of war, the things I love about England remain the same. The grass is as green, the same people do the same work, and everything is as it was before...While I am awfully glad to be home again, to share in whatever is going to happen to the England of tomorrow, I shall always love and remember America and my friends there, and feel as if I do belong a little bit to them, too.³⁸

Janet's father also contributed his reactions to his daughter's homecoming to the Kodak Works *Bulletin*, British Kodak publication. The article was later reprinted in the *Kodakery*.

My daughter's return to England after more than three years in Rochester, U.S.A., has brought me many blessings, some of which I could not have anticipated, for they are attributed entirely to the influences at work during her absence from home.

When she left the old country in company with the other little Kodak evacuees, I, like those other parents at Grosvenor House, felt the terrible sense of loss as we watched the band of little pilgrims depart. Then, and through the anxious days which followed, I weakened, and sometimes doubted the soundness of my decision in availing myself of the generous offer of sanctuary extended by our American colleagues. This period of doubt was short-lived, for from the announcement of the children's safe arrival I have been congratulating myself daily upon my good judgment. That we English Kodak parents have much for which we should be thankful, I now know from the evidence before my eyes.

Janet left us a school child, untrained and completely unversed in the weightier matters of life. Today she is back in her old home, still my daughter, and possessed of the characteristics for which I loved her as a small child, and yet she is a woman grown, well equipped to take the hard knocks which come to us all from time to time. What understanding, care, and patient thought have been exercised in her training during these critical years, it would be impossible to assess; all I know is that I am a grateful and happy man.

To those of my colleagues whose children are still in Rochester, I say there is much joy to which you may look forward, and we English parents owe a debt of gratitude to the American foster parents of the E.K. Company, which we shall never be able to repay.³⁹

Several Kodakids returned to the United States to live in the years following the 1945 repatriation. Still others returned for visits with their Rochester "families" or were hosts to them in England. A 1951 newspaper article described the trans-Atlantic connections:

Several families are trying to bring their former foster children back to Rochester, and, they say, others will follow suit. Conditions in Europe now are such that opportunities are few and living conditions severe, the families report. To bring an ex-Kodakid back, families have to certify there is a job or school here for them. About half of the Kodakids who return plan to stay permanently, with the others undecided or waiting to see how events develop.⁴⁰

There are no figures available on how many of the Kodakids returned to the U.S., indeed, no official records of either the sponsorship program or the children have been located. From extant copies of the company newsletter and the daily newspapers it is possible to discover what happened after 1945.

Official contacts continued for at least a few years after the children went home. The returned evacuees formed the "Cochrane Club," named for Craig P. Cochrane, head of Eastman Kodak's Industrial Relations Department. Bi-monthly meetings kept the Kodakids in touch with one another and their American customs.

Grateful parents were responsible for several tributes to their children's American families. In October of 1946, Donald McMaster of Kodak Limited presented a plaque to the people of Eastman Kodak Company, and a scroll to the Rochester community for the care extended to the Kodakids during the war.⁴¹

The plaque remains at Kodak Office; the whereabouts of the scroll have not been determined. In addition to these tangible items, some grateful parents established the Kinsman trust which enable an American boy to have a year at an English public school. The recipient

in 1950 was Mark Cowdery, 15, whose parents, Canon and Mrs. Arthur Cowdery, sponsored Kodakids. Mark spent the 1950-1951 school year at Saint George's School.⁴²

In the spring of 1946, Eastman Kodak sent Helen Cederquist and Sarah Nichols to England for five months to visit the Kodakids. They reported that the children were adjusting well to being home but they missed the United States. Rationing continued in England well into the 1950s. Dealing with shortages was difficult for the returnees after experiencing U.S. abundance, even with wartime restrictions. Reorientation to English customs was awkward at first, but for most that was overcome with the joy of rediscovering favorite toys and play yards. Although outgrown perhaps, they nonetheless conveyed a sense of homecoming and reunion to children who had to leave them behind.

In reporting on the visit of Helen Cederquist and Sarah Nichols to England, the Kodakery reiterated the expressions of gratitude which Janet Hellen and her father wrote three years before:

Sarah and Helen were generously and warmly entertained by the English families in their homes and at Kodak. They found them very much interested in a country which had sheltered their children so well and of which their children talked so enthusiastically. They wholeheartedly fall in with the plans of many of the children to return to Rochester for a visit to meet their wartime "moms and dads" and see the part of America they learned to love...Some of the parents are reading American history and novels to better understand their youngsters' "other country." Many voiced the feeling that because of their unique experience the children would have in the future a much broader understanding of the world in which they live..."We can never adequately express our gratitude for the kindness and care given our children during those long war years." The children echoed these sentiments. Many felt that now they were "grown up," they understood and appreciated more than ever what had been done for them while residing in the United States.⁴³

The policy of evacuating children from a war zone did not originate with the British in World War II. The 1940 project, however, was unique in that it involved men and women at high levels of government

on both sides of the Atlantic. And, although the eventual number of evacuees did not approach the tens of thousands originally proposed, those small groups of children dispersed to communities all over the United States kept the British cause in the public eye. The isolationist policy of the Roosevelt administration was weakened by the plight of the refugee children. Their evacuation to America became part of the American struggle with itself over what to do about the war in Europe.

Saved from an expected foreign invasion of their homeland, 156 Kodakids “invaded” the Rochester community, finding a safe haven for the war’s duration and support for embattled England.

Mary Jo Lanphear Barone is the Brighton Town Historian.

End Notes

The Kodakids

- 1 Mary Beth Norton et al., *A People and a Nation*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1986), p. 774.
- 2 "U.S. Removes Curb On Child Refugees." *New York Times*, 14 July 1940, p.1.
- 3 From the *New York Times Index*, 1940, the following separate articles, editorials, illustrations, or letters re refugee children per month:

June 6—June 30	35
July 1—July 31	177
August 1—August 31	130
Sept. 1—Sept. 30	86
Oct. 1—Oct. 29	42
Nov. 3—Nov. 26	9
Dec. 5—Dec. 29	10.
- 4 Ben Wicks, *No Time To Say Goodbye*, (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Company, Ltd., 1980), p. 39.
- 5 Grace Hamilton Hoad, "Evacuation of Children," *Survey Midmonthly*, (May, 1943), p. 137.
- 6 Wicks, p. 43.
- 7 "Orphans of the Storm," *The American Experience*, WGBH Boston, InCA Productions in association with World's Edge Films and Everyman/BBC, 1989.
- 8 Wicks, p. 155.
- 9 "British Halt Plan To Ship Children," *New York Times*, 13 July 1940, p. 11.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 "The Children Still Wait," *New York Times*, 15 July 1940, p.14.
- 12 "Reich Will Not Guarantee Safety For Ships Bringing Children Here," *New York Times*, 22 August 1940, p. 21.
- 13 Anthony Bailey, *America, Lost and Found*, (New York: Random House, 1980), pp. 19-21.
- 14 "Kodakids, Where Are You Now? A Rochester Reunion Is In The Works," *Kodakery*, no date.
- 15 "British Kodak Evacuee Gives 'Impressions of America,'" *Kodakery*, 21 March 1944.
- 16 John Morosco III, "210 British Children Land In America For 'Duration,'" Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle*, 22 August 1940, p.2.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 "210 Child Refugees Landed By Samaria," *New York Times*, 22 August 1940, p. 2.
- 19 *Ibid.*

- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 Bailey, p. 148.
- 22 "Procedure Outlined Here to Aid Refugee Children," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 18 July 1940.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 "Refugee Children's Ship Nears Haven," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 24 August 1940, p. 1.
- 25 The origin of the term "Kodakid" is elusive. It does not appear in the local newspapers until shortly before the children left for home. It may have been in use in Kodak circles before that.
- 26 "Refugee Children's Ship Nears Haven," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 24 August 1940, p. 1.
- 27 "118 Children From Britain Arrive Here As Refugees," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 25 August 1940.
- 28 "British Evacuees' Doctor Reports His People Calm," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 25 August 1940, p. 11A.
- 29 "Kodakids, Where Are You? A Rochester Reunion Is In The Works," *Kodakery*, no date.
- 30 Interview with Vera Goodwin Umpleby, 2470 East Avenue, Brighton, 8 February 1990.
- 31 "A Bit Topsy Turvy But It Spells Out 'Kodak,'" *Rochester Times-Union*, 26 August 1940, p. 3A.
- 32 "England Sure To Win War, Young Refugees Confident," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 26 August 1940, p. 11.
- 33 "This Was A Shelter For Such As These," *Rochester Times-Union*, 22 August 1940, p. 14A.
- 34 "Young Britishers Swing It," *Rochester Times-Union*, 26 August 1940, p. 8.
- 35 "More Fun Than Air Raids," *Rochester Times-Union*, 26 August 1940, p. 8.
- 36 Interview with Vera Goodwin Umpleby.
- 37 Harold Nichols, "Evacuees Thrilled to Meet Lord Halifax," unnamed Rochester newspaper clipping, no date, collection of the Rochester Public Library, Local History Division.
- 38 "British Kodak Evacuee Gives 'Impressions of America,'" *Kodakery*, 21 March 1944.
- 39 *Ibid.*
- 40 Mitchell Kaidy, "'Kodakids,' War Evacuees, Return Here," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, 19 November 1951.
- 41 "Britons Pay Honors For Kodakid Aid," *Kodakery*, 3 October 1946.
- 42 "Mark Cowdery Gives Delightful Picture Of Year In St. George's School, England," *Brighton-Pittsford Post*, 13 September 1951, p.2.
- 43 "Kodakids Seen Changing Back To Englishmen," *Kodakery*, 3 July 1946, pp.1,4.



Students learned to use factory equipment in vocational programs like this student learning to use a grinder. (Monroe High School Library).

Back cover: Rationing became a necessary part of everyday life during the war. (Rundel Library).

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