

# The Red Cross Christmas in 1918

History always intrigues me. Every time I start reading I discover something new. In preparation for our candlelight tours, I was looking at Christmas in 1918.



*The Government asks you to do your Xmas Shopping Early*  
**DO IT NOW**

The United States entered World War I in April 1917. Many American factories were converted to the production of weapons and munitions. This included toy companies and in 1918, the Council of National Defense suggested a ban on toys in an effort to encourage people to spend their money to buy war bonds instead of Christmas presents. Before the war, Germany produced toys and Christmas ornaments that were shipped to the United States. (The War also affected the production of gelatin for Jell-O. Holland produced most of the gelatin for Jell-O and it was almost impossible to ship gelatin across the Atlantic during the War. And gelatin was used in the manufacture of some explosives. As a result, Jell-O encouraged the start of

the Atlantic Gelatin Company in Woburn, Massachusetts, where the gelatin was manufactured until recently.) The Committee on Public Information created a campaign to encourage people to buy bonds, not toys. The Toy Manufacturers of the U.S.A. asked a successful toy manufacturer, A.C. Gilbert to go to Washington to speak before the Council to convince them to change their decision. The story is told that he took some of his toys with him and the Council members were so enthralled that they ended the meeting, playing with the toys and they decided not to go forward with the planned ban on toy production. Gilbert is known for the introduction of the Erector set. The story of his trip to Washington and diverting the decision to end toy production was made into a movie a few years ago, "The Man Who Saved Christmas." (It is generally agreed that the premise of the movie took a lot of liberty with the true story.)

Christmas in 1918 certainly should have been joyous. The War had ended on November 11, and only three days before, women in New York State turned out to cast their ballots in the first national election. But December 1918 had a dark cloud lurking. Not only was the country preparing for the return of many wounded soldiers but the great influenza epidemic had taken a toll and tuberculosis was rampant. The Red Cross was called upon to help support the wounded men and women returning from Europe. And it was the Red Cross that was called to help with the influenza and tuberculosis outbreaks. It was also the women of the local Red Cross who exercised their right to vote, walking downstairs from their Chapter room in the Municipal Building to use the new voting machines on the first floor. It was the women of the Red Cross, who marched up Main Street on November 11, to assemble in front of the Municipal Building to witness the signing of the Armistice.



In 1918, each member of the Red Cross was given ten Christmas Seals. Usually, Christmas Seals were sold to raise money, but it was decided to recognize Red Cross members as "messengers of health." A little booklet accompanied the seals: "Soldiers in camps are taught how to resist tuberculosis. Health habits are taught to hundreds of thousands of children and adults. The gospel of fresh air, cleanliness and right living is spread everywhere. America needs your continued support, personal as well as financial, in this campaign for health."

The Christmas message in the LeRoy Gazette News on December 18, 1918, mentions

that December 19 was designated as Red Cross enrollment day. In LeRoy, there were 1900 adult members and 500 Junior Red Cross members. It was hoped that the membership would be doubled. The campaign was called "A Heart and a Dollar." "Enrollment is more than a duty, it is a glorious privilege that should be sought by all. The Red Cross service flag, with the additional little crosses for each member in the family should be a Christmas decoration in every window this holiday season. Let's add to our Christmas happiness and joy by helping to build renewed happiness and joy where it is now barren."

