

Anna Gillette

by Lynne Belluscio

A few months ago, I was looking at a calendar from LeRoy. It listed many people - men and women who were serving in World War I. I was particularly interested in the seven women on the list. So I turned to Mary Bryant, and said "See what you can find out about these women." So for most of the winter, Mary searched the files and read the *LeRoy Gazette* and discovered some women's history that has been forgotten.

One of the women, Anna Gillette, turned out to be Frank Davis' mother. She was born in LeRoy on November 26, 1888. In 1917 she carried a card issued by the State of New York, Military Census and Inventory that indicated that she was on the Inventory of Military Resources.

At the beginning of World War I she was working as a cashier at the Bank of LeRoy. She decided to apply for service overseas with the Y.M.C.A. and submitted her resignation which was accepted with a \$35 check of appreciation. Her two sisters also volunteered, but their service was here in the United States, entertaining the troops at Fort Dix while the soldiers were under quarantine.

Anna arrived in Europe in November 1918 and was assigned to the 52nd Infantry of the Sixth Division, where she served for four and a half months. Her housing facilities were in an old barn but later she moved into a barracks.

The French town was very small and the 100 inhabitants were overrun with over 500 American soldiers waiting to be shipped back home. She later remarked that the French had to rent land from the government and their homes had been devastated by the war. Their plight was pitiful and they had little use for the Americans other than what they could gain for demands for damages or wear on the buildings.

Prices for food were 'beyond belief.' She was the only woman serving in the cantonment. In April she was transferred to

the Rhine Valley in Germany. In May she received a letter from the Divisional Director of the 6th Division, Y.M.C.A: "Now that the days of the 6th Division are drawing to a close, I cannot let this opportunity pass to congratulate you upon the success of your work with the Y.M.C.A. I am proud to have been associated with such young ladies as yourself and the other girls of our Division. You have by your actions held up the high ideals of American womanhood, and by your thoughtfulness and care for the men of the A.E.F. (American Expeditionary Forces) helped to bring the sunshine into their life."

In a file of papers is a letter addressed to the Women Members of the A.E.F. signed by General John Pershing: "While the achievements of the American arms are still fresh in our memories, I desire to express my sincere appreciation of the work done by the women of the American Expeditionary Forces. The part played by women in winning the war has been an important one. Whether administering to the sick or wounded, or engaged in the innumerable activities requiring your aid, the cheerfulness, loyalty and efficiency which have characterized your efforts deserve the highest praise. You have added laurels to the already splendid record of American Womanhood. It is a privilege to testify that your glorious accomplishments in the war have given you a new place in the hearts of officers and men of the Army and have earned for you the admiration of a grateful nation."

Anna returned on the U.S.S. *Leviathan*. The *Buffalo Sunday Times* carried a photo of the women from Western New York that had volunteered for the Y.M.C.A. which included Anna and Elizabeth Bacon of LeRoy and Miss Clara Roeper of Warsaw, who was a sister of Mrs. James Quinlan of LeRoy.

When Anna returned to LeRoy, she remarked that she regarded "her experience as a most valuable one and has the



satisfaction of having done her duty along with other women from all parts of this country."

On June 24, 1920, she married Alfred Rice Davis, who she probably met while working at the Bank of LeRoy. He had served in World War I with the 335th machine gun battalion in France. They moved to Bridgeport, Ontario, Canada, where Mr. Davis became the manager of the Canadian plant of the Genesee Pure Food Company (Jell-O). They had four sons:

Daniel, Lewis, James and Franklin. During World War II, Anna served at Mitchel Field, New York, as part of the Army Air Forces Aircraft Warning System. She died in 1967 and is buried in Machpelah Cemetery.

On June 24, 1919, she was presented with a medal for her service during the war and for helping with five Liberty Loan campaigns in LeRoy. The medal was cast from metal from a captured German cannon.

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