

THE WORLD WAR I GRAPHICS COLLECTION AT THE LIBRARY COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA

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ABSTRACT: The Library Company of Philadelphia's World War I Graphics Collection is explored.

KEYWORDS: Library Company of Philadelphia, World War I, photographs, graphic collections

Founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, the Library Company of Philadelphia served as the Library of Congress from the Revolutionary War to 1800 and as the largest public library in America until the Civil War. In the twenty-first century, the Library Company functions as an independent research library with a strong focus on Philadelphia, including over a half-million books, manuscripts, prints, photographs, and objects. We accommodate a variety of readers from high school students to emerging and senior scholars, novelists, and film producers.

Though many people think of us as a resource for early American history, we also have much material on World War I. The World War I Graphics Collection consists of over 500 items including posters, photographs, and pieces of ephemera relating to the conflict and its aftermath. During the war, patriotic posters encouraged all Americans to “do their part” and contribute to the war effort. The Library Company has over 300 colorful and vibrant posters promoting enlistment in the military, food and fuel conservation, the purchase of war bonds, and support for relief organizations, such as the Red Cross and YMCA. Also present are posters issued by the American Library Association, which collected books for the troops and set up libraries in training camps, hospitals, and overseas. This exceptional collection has a number of important artists represented, such as Howard Chandler Christy

(1873–1952), Joseph Pennell (1857–1926), Jessie Willcox Smith (1863–1935), and James Montgomery Flagg (1877–1960). Featured are Flagg’s iconic Uncle Sam “I Want You” poster; Pennell’s “That Liberty Shall Not Perish From the Earth” with its frightening scene of New York City in flames and a decapitated Statue of Liberty; and a recruitment poster for the US Tank Corps by August William Hutaf (1879–1942) with their motto “Treat ’Em Rough” and their mascot, a ferocious black cat.

Photographs, postcards, and scrapbooks in the collection document how the community pulled together during the war. They show shipbuilding at the Philadelphia Navy Yard and Hog Island, which at the time was the largest shipyard in the world. The work of women is represented, especially members of charitable organizations such as Emergency Aid of Pennsylvania. One series shows Little Wakefield, a demonstration center for the National League for Woman’s Service in Germantown that taught women how to be a “farming soldieress.” Americans needed to conserve food in order to have enough to feed the troops and starving Europe. Little Wakefield offered classes in home economics and canning and preserving, and students grew fruits and vegetables and cultivated bees. They produced peas, beans, corn, cabbage, peaches, and raspberries on four acres. Today, it is a part of La Salle University, known as the St. Mutien’s Christian Brothers’ residence (see fig. 1).



FIGURE 1 Charles Pancoast, *Horticulture at Little Wakefield*. (Philadelphia, ca. 1918). Gelatin silver photograph.

Photographs also document the many parades and rallies held around the city. They record soldiers about to leave for Europe, Liberty Loan and Red Cross parades, the chaos and jubilation of Armistice Day with large crowds and confetti swirling, as well as the homecoming of the Twenty-Eighth Infantry Division (see fig. 2). Chronicled are a number of visits by dignitaries including the former French commander-in-chief Marshal Joseph Joffre; Cardinal Mercier, who was a noted Belgian who resisted German occupation; and the Belgian royal family. After the war ended, the king and queen of Belgium and their son visited Philadelphia to show their gratitude to all who worked tirelessly to provide aid to their country. A series of images shows their visit to Independence Hall, the headquarters of the Emergency Aid's Belgian Relief Committee at 1524 Walnut Street, and Hog Island (see figs. 3 and 4). The queen had tea at the home of Mabel Brice, who was active in the Belgian Relief Committee as chair of the Packing Committee, which sorted and packed donated clothes, sending forty-three tons overseas. The Library Company purchased Brice's house in 1967, and it now serves as a residential research center providing living accommodations and offices for fellows and researchers. Two American and four Allied flags that decorated the house during the royal visit survive in the collection.



FIGURE 2 *First News of Peace! November 11, 1918.* (Philadelphia, 1918). Gelatin silver photograph.



FIGURE 3 *The Duke of Brabant, King Albert, and Matthew Brush at Hog Island. (Philadelphia, 1919). Gelatin silver photograph.*



FIGURE 4 *Queen Elizabeth of Belgium, at the Belgian Relief Committee Headquarters. Greeted by Chairman Mrs. Bayard Henry (Philadelphia, 1919). Gelatin silver photograph.*

Several items directly relate to the Library Company's role during the war. We have a four-star service flag that hung in the Library. Army captain Robert L. Queisser first created the service flag in 1917 when he had two sons serving on the frontline. Such banners became popular quickly and are still used today. The Library Company directors' meeting minutes state that a service flag with a star representing each board or staff member serving overseas would be hung. Three of them have been identified: William J. Taylor, James P. Hutchinson, and George De Schweinitz, all Library Company directors who served in France as doctors. The fourth, still unidentified, was presumably for a staff member. Maps of Europe and the Western front likewise hung on the Library Company's walls during the war.

The World War I Graphics Collection is not only available to those who can visit our reading room in Philadelphia but also can be viewed by anyone in the world through our website at <http://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/Islandora%3AWWI01>. All of these items have been digitized and cataloged. Images can be browsed or searched by keyword, creator, date, or subject heading. Additional videos, articles, and an online exhibition, *Together We Win: The Philadelphia Homefront during the First World War*, can be viewed at: <http://togetherwewin.librarycompany.org/> The Library can also be contacted at: <http://www.librarycompany.org>
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