

# New Rochelleans open heart and hearth for doughboys

As piercingly cold temperatures iced the eastern seaboard the week of Dec. 10, 1917, a drama of national proportion arrived at New Rochelle's doorstep.

When the crisis began to subside, 77 years ago today, the city had achieved nationwide fame and praise. Ironically, the rave reviews came on the heels of New Rochelle's highly publicized fall from grace.

The United States had just entered World War I. The busiest recruiting depot east of the Mississippi River was located just off the shore of New Rochelle. Daily, dozens of men from all parts of the Northeast were being ferried over to Fort Slocum — now known as Davids Island — from the city's Neptune Park dock.

The same ferry brought the men back to the mainland for evening diversions. The normally quiet, fashionable suburb of New Rochelle was grappling with the city's inflated population of pre-battle doughboys.

"New Rochelle is a hell hole of vice!" bannered the pages of the metropolitan area's leading newspapers, quoting the words of U.S. Marshal Thomas D. McCarthy. After a "spectacular raid" on the city's "resorts," the marshal's agents had found Fort Slocum servicemen "dancing with scantily clad females" and

drinking illegal liquor — all within a few doors from New Rochelle's Town Hall on Main Street.

McCarthy asserted that "conditions in the city were so bad as to be unbelievable." Suggesting that the saloon owners were intentionally corrupting the servicemen, six proprietors were arrested, including the owner of Germania Hall, Jacob Grab.

On Dec. 4 and 6, The New York Times carried editorials blasting New Rochelle. Community leaders demanded an investigation and called for the dismissal of city officials cited as impeding the raid. The citizens were outraged.

However, all attention was abruptly diverted with the Army's announcement that voluntary enlistments would be accepted only until Dec. 15. After that, all eligible men would be subject to the draft. The city was told to expect an onslaught of recruits on their way to Fort Slocum.

On Dec. 10, the first train into the New Rochelle station brought several hundred men. The next train brought even more, and the next, more. By the end of the day, nearly 800 men had entered the city. In the bitter cold, they waited at the dock as the ferry continuously shuttled its capacity to Fort Slocum. By dusk, the ferry stopped run-



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ning. The fort could hold no more.

Hundreds of men were stranded. And this was just the first day — thousands more were due to arrive in the coming days. The word spread like wildfire through the community.

The people of New Rochelle efficiently mobilized with unprecedented generosity.

That night, 250 men were housed in Germania Hall, where Jacob Grab supplied toasty boarding, supper, breakfast and continuous music. St. John's Methodist Church and Salem Baptist Church, along with several private homeowners, took in the remainder. Mrs. Bedros Kazanjian's Canteen ladies rolled up the sleeves of their white and blue uniforms and began a Herculean cooking marathon that continued for days.

Dec. 11 brought 2,000 more recruits, as did Dec. 12. On Dec. 13, several thousand more arrived in the midst of a major blizzard. Each train-load was

warmly greeted and the men were marched to the headquarters that had been established at the Knights of Columbus Hall.

There, the recruits were organized and transported to their temporary homes — churches, temples, firehouses, schools, private houses, the YMCA, the YMHA and every community hall.

Also, at least 500 men were housed in Mount Vernon, 200 in Pelham and 100 in Larchmont and in Mamaroneck.

It was said that every New Rochellean contributed in one way or another. Shopkeepers kept their stores open round the clock. Mrs. H.A. Hamburger prepared 10 gallons of clam chowder. Jules Delmar brought in vaudevillians to entertain. A butcher donated 200 porterhouse steaks. Other meat purveyors gave cold cuts. Dairymen came through with unlimited milk and butter.

Through the snow, the city's residents brought money and provisions. As a result, the Red Cross and Canteen ladies doled out free post cards and stamps, bedding, sweaters, cigarettes and other "comfortables" to each of the city's newly adopted sons.

"I never knew that such people lived," said a young recruit from Maine. "I never heard of anything like the way people of

New Rochelle worked their heads off, spent their money, dug up great supplies of food and thrown open their beautiful homes for a bunch of boys they never saw before. . . . They made us feel so doggone welcome."

By the end of that frigid, snow-blown week, New Rochelle had successfully housed, fed and entertained nearly 8,000 men. The citizens' efforts were heralded by a flood of appreciative letters and telegrams from the recruits' parents and hometown mayors, and in a lofty bunch of exalting editorials from the country's leading newspapers.

The most meaningful plaudits, however, were from the hearts of the young men who received the extraordinary send-off into the war. With nickels and dimes, the recruits mustered up gifts of bronze plaques, silk flags, handsome watches and holiday bouquets for their hosts. With sweeping emotion, they inundated their foster city with speeches and letters of appreciation.

Next week: a look at a New York City newspaper editorial lauding the good work of New Rochelleans in 1917.

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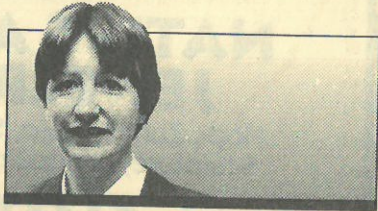
# A city shines in time of national crisis

Last week, we looked at the dramatic events in New Rochelle during the week of Dec. 10, 1917, as thousands of World War I recruits poured into the city during a blizzard.

The following editorial was reprinted in New Rochelle's Evening Star on Dec. 26, 1917. It originally appeared in The New York Evening Mail newspaper on Dec. 21.

"The last 3,000 enlisted men to whom New Rochelle has been giving homes are leaving for Fort Slocum. With their departure closes, perhaps, the sensational part which New Rochelle will play in the war. It may be that the town has been in the headlines for the last time. But the things that New Rochelle has done will not be forgotten, either there or in the country at large. The forces for good which New Rochelle released will go on working, providing an example for the rest of the United States, as long as the war endures. . . .

"... New Rochelle was not satisfied with the place allotted to it. Before many days, its real citizens had their chance. The



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end of the recruiting period approached; the time was coming when the men of draft age would have to submit to conscription. As a result, there was a rush from all parts of the country to enlist for training at Fort Slocum, adjacent to New Rochelle. The men poured into town faster than Fort Slocum could accommodate them. To complicate matters, the blizzard burst upon the city. New Rochelle found itself with 7,000 homeless recruits, with nowhere to go. This was the town's chance and its salvation.

"The Red Cross, the YMCA, the Knights of Columbus, every form of organization in town, adopted these men. Up to capacity, they were taken into

the homes of the citizens. Beyond that capacity, they were provided for in churches, clubs, lodge rooms and public buildings of all sorts. The townspeople supplied them with a thousand little personal comforts — the men had come on with practically no baggage, being assured that everything would be supplied at Fort Slocum. The women of the town cooked and served the meals of these 7,000 men. Rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, Christian Scientist and Unitarian, worked side by side.

"That was not all that New Rochelle did for the soldiers. The secretary of war, learning that the men had arrived in New Rochelle beyond the capacity of Fort Slocum to care for them, ordered that they be disbanded and be given transportation back home. The men saw themselves faced with the prospect of becoming conscripts instead of recruits. New Rochelle intervened on their behalf and its citizens obtained from the secretary of war revocation of the disbandment order, the New Rochelle people promising to

continue to care for the soldiers until Fort Slocum was ready for them. Now at last they are in the government service, preparing to go 'over there.'

"It was a fine piece of Americanism. It did the soldiers good, but it did New Rochelle still more good. Its people will never be quite the same. Classes and sects and political parties will never be quite so intolerant of each other; they have had the wonderful experience of finding that they had in common something bigger than their differences. The relationships established with the men at Fort Slocum are not of temporary character. Many a man will spend his furloughs with the friends he made at his new home in New Rochelle. The entente establishment between camp and town is being used by the local authorities of the War Camp Community Recreation Service to provide healthy, clean amusement for the men when off duty, amusement and recreation that will include social contact with the sort of people that the men knew at home. This is our army, our boys. We owe to the

men encamped near us the same sort of treatment that we should want our sons to get where they are. We all say this, New Rochelle proved its faith by works.

"New Rochelle has done a service to the whole country. It has demonstrated the soundness of American social life. It has shown that, roused and organized, the forces of good in America are infinitely superior to the forces of evil. It has demonstrated the vast capacity which we possess for co-operative work in a common cause. When once the whole country gets the spirit that New Rochelle has developed, we shall be on the way to attain that brotherhood, which our democracy professes, though our performance falls far short of it. And we shall have an army atmosphere to which we shall trust our boys, unafraid."

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