

“THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY WAR HISTORY COMMITTEE”

By Mrs. Frances M. Carlton-Harmon,

Chairman of Los Angeles County War History Committee

In presenting this account of the origin and organization of the Los Angeles County War History Committee, and in outlining its plans to the Historical Society of Southern California, I recognize that it will not be necessary to emphasize the need of such a piece of work nor the obligation which we of the present owe to those of the future that the record of this great period be preserved. Your very existence as an organization bespeaks your interest, and, may I dare to suggest, your co-operation?

It is proposed that the County record shall cover, in the broadest way, the full history of the County's participation in our history-making work, and the operations of all Federal activities, State and Local agencies, with the proper recognition of the fine men and women who have so loyally contributed to the desired end.

Recognizing the necessity for the preservation of such records, the Executive Committee of the State Council of Defense for California created a War History Committee which enlisted the services of the California Historical Survey Commission, and Dr. Owen C. Coy, the Secretary of that Commission, was loaned to organize War History Committees in the various counties of the State. Under these auspices several pieces of work were started:

(1) Pamphlets and information circulars were issued by the State Committee, among them “California in the War,” dealing with California's plan for recording her part in the Great Conflict.

(2) Biography cards were issued through the libraries, and upon these much valuable information was recorded.

(3) Photographs of soldiers were obtained wherever possible.

(4) Just before the Armistice a Casualty List was compiled. At that time all casualties had not been reported and the list in consequence was incomplete and inaccurate.

(5) Instructions were sent to heads of many departments of war work in the State, such as Councils of Defense, Liberty Loan, Food Administration, Draft Boards, etc., asking for records and history of their activities.

When, however, the State Council of Defense went out of existence, at the signing of the Armistice, its committees, of which the War History Committee was one, ceased to function officially; but the work so well begun was continued through the energy of the State Chairman, and during the recent session of the California Legislature a bill was introduced into the Senate, passed by both houses and duly signed by the Governor, placing the work of the War History Committee under the jurisdiction of the California Historical Survey Commission, with headquarters at the Doe Library, Berkeley, the personnel of the State Commission being Judge John F. Davis, Dr. Herbert E. Bolton and Mr. Edward A. Dickson.

In taking over the work of the War History Committee the Historical Survey Commission has also taken over its organization. The Committee as originally appointed in Los Angeles County was: Mrs. Frances M. Carlton-Harmon, Chairman; Dean Rockwell D. Hunt, Mr. Orra E. Monnette and Miss Laura Cooley.

This was designed to be a working nucleus augmented by appointments by the County Chairman as the work might demand. The Chairman has added to the initial committee the names of Mrs. Hancock Banning, Mr. Frank Daggett,¹ Mr. Melville Dozier, Mrs. Frank Gibson, Dr. E. C. Moore, Mr. Marshall Stimson, Mrs. Joseph Sartori, Major Walter Tuller, Mr. Lucien N. Brunswig, Mrs. Josias Evans Cowles, Mr. Jonathan Dodge, Mr. Frank F. Merriam, Mrs. O. S. Barnum, Miss Celia Gleason, and Mrs. Florence Schonemann.

The State Commission requests that each county get under headway at once and particularly urges that Los Angeles County work out a system and plan that may become a pattern throughout the State,—probably because the size and diversity of conditions in this county present practically every problem that could be encountered elsewhere in the State.

The Committee has been guaranteed the financial support of the County Board of Supervisors to the extent of office equipment and supplies and such other expenditures as may be needed to complete successfully its undertaking.

That the scope of the work is enormous,—not to say appalling,—is not difficult to realize. But there are certain very definite divisions that have been made to conform to state-wide conditions and which may and should be undertaken at once because of the surprising evanescence of ma-

1. Deceased.

terial and data. The work of each of these divisions has been assigned to a sub-committee in charge of each division.

To specify:

I. Sub-Committee on Biographies:

Purposes—To get biographies, cards and photographs, as far as possible, of every person who enlisted or who was drafted into the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the Aviation Corps, the Medical Service, the Nurses, etc.,—with especial emphasis placed upon the effort to obtain for the State's Biographical Series biographies and pictures of those who died in the service. This material as gathered becomes the property of the State, and it is the purpose of the State to publish in a series of volumes a brief biography and a photograph, where obtainable, of each person in service.

II Sub-Committee on Registration and Drafts.

Purposes—To collect data regarding the Registration Boards—with pictures and newspaper articles, also materials used; and this Committee also shall, after it has gathered this information and material, compile and prepare a history of this work.

III. Sub-Committee on Activities of Various Organizations.

Purposes—Material of interest to be gathered for the Historical Research Committee and a history of the several organizations secured from the heads of those organizations,—e. g., Red Cross, Liberty Loan Committee, Food Administration, Fuel Administration, Four-Minute Men, Councils of Defense, Farm Labor Committee, Medical and Dental Aid, Nurses, Boy Scouts, Soldiers' Welfare, Religious Welfare, Committee on Reconstruction, Women's Organizations, Public Schools' Co-operation, Public Libraries, Co-operation, etc. In short, any organized war work done in the County.

IV. Sub-Committee.

To see that information and interesting historical matter is collected and a short historical account compiled on the following subjects: (1) Repression of Enemy Plots; (2) Pacifism; (3) I. W. W. Activities; (4) War Legislation—Federal, State, County, Local; (5) Public War Meetings; (6) Visits of Notables during War Period.

V. Sub-Committee on Collection of Posters and War Publications.

Undoubtedly other work has already suggested itself, but this much under way at the moment gives us ample

opportunity for the development of our organization plans and to put the work in running order.

The work of proving and correcting the Casualty List of the County has been taken over by the American Legion, acting under the War History Committee, and it will also undertake to gather biographical data and photographs of those who died in the service. This list embraces about a thousand names.

Obtaining the Biographies of the non-casualty group, containing names of all who entered the service of their country, will be a much greater task and will need helpers recruited from all sorts and conditions of organizations. This is the piece of work most likely to attract the public notice, and will call for the most detailed labor. It seems a stupendous task, and yet it must be attacked with courage because the students of the future will search eagerly to discover what part their community or their progenitors took in this great struggle. This is an obvious obligation.

But to students of history such as are represented in this group there are of course many other angles of research,—the gathering of records of war organizations, of describing temporary or emergency measures, of gathering and preserving what lies about us today as commonplace material, of gleaning data regarding pre-war conditions and preparedness plans, of recording post-war developments,—these things of course give room and scope for the energy of every history enthusiast.

The President of the Historical Society of Southern California heads one of the sub-committees which will carry out this program. Would it be out of order to suggest, or at least express the hope that your Society resolve itself into a committee of the whole to help your President in his patriotic undertaking?