

Bronxville's World War I: Service Abroad and at Home During the Great War

Part One: Prelude to War

Just over a hundred years ago, in the spring of 1917, the United States for the first time in its history entered a European War—the “Great War,” as contemporaries often called it. The people of Bronxville—almost 4,000 miles away from the battle lines—did not escape the conflict, which reached across the Atlantic and drew some villagers directly into the fight and affected the daily lives of almost everyone else back home.

The catalyst for World War I was the assassination on June 28, 1914, of the heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire by a Serb who wanted Bosnia-Herzegovina to break away from the empire and become part of a new south Slav state. On July 28, 1914, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Russia, which had cultural ties to Serbia and also viewed it as Russia's point of entry into the Balkans, began mobilizing for war on July 30, which caused Germany, which was allied with Austria-Hungary, to declare war on it on August 1, and Russia declared war on Germany the same day. France, allied with Russia, began mobilizing its military on August 1, and Germany declared war on it on August 3. Germany declared war on Belgium on August 4 and invaded it. The United Kingdom responded to this invasion by declaring war on Germany, also on August 4. All the major European powers were now at war.

WWI struck with so little warning that several Bronxville residents were caught touring in areas of Europe that quickly became part of the war zone. “As a result of the declaration of war,” the *Bronxville Review* reported on August 7, “many well-known residents of this village have been stranded in various...European countries, with no possibility of returning to their home land in view at the present moment.” These included Mrs. Carl Conway of Lawrence Park and her children, who were traveling in Germany and whose family had not been able to communicate with her, and John Feldhusen of Sagamore Road, who was also somewhere in Germany and whose family was also unable to reach him. Dr. W. W. Masee, head of the Masee School, was another villager who was in Germany, but he had been able to send a telegram to his family telling them that he had found passage on a ship to bring him home. The architect William Augustus Bates was traveling, not in Germany, but somewhere in Europe—his family and friends were not sure where, maybe London or Paris; he hadn't yet contacted them.

William Van Duzer Lawrence—the founder of Lawrence Park and Lawrence Hospital, and arguably the founder of modern Bronxville as well—was among those whose European holiday suddenly took a dangerous turn. He and his wife Sarah and the several people who were travelling with them became aware that something was

wrong while they were driving from Germany to Switzerland. This was July 29, 1914. After they crossed the Swiss border, they encountered vehicles carrying Swiss troops to the border area. They went on to Zurich, where they heard stories about an expanding war that might engulf all of Europe. Zurich seemed to them too exposed to the fighting, and they went to Lucerne and stayed there for three weeks, largely cut off from the outside world.

Lawrence worried that eventually Switzerland would be drawn into the war and felt he had to make an attempt to get to the coast and find passage on a ship home. He heard that some of the Americans in Lucerne were hiring a special train to go through Germany to the Netherlands, and he decided to join them.

The train left Switzerland, passed through Austria, and then into Germany, passing through Augsburg and Coblenz. Lawrence was surprised to see that every train station they passed through had been converted into a Red Cross hospital. He was relieved when the train finally crossed into the Netherlands—"that little land of safety in the midst of a stormy sea," as he referred to it. Soon they arrived at Rotterdam, couldn't find a hotel, stayed for a while in The Hague, then moved on to Amsterdam, then back to Rotterdam.

LOCAL FOLK IN WAR ZONE

**Party of Mr. W. V. Lawrence Safe
in Lucerne, Switzerland--Gram-
atan Guests on Kronprinzessin
Cecilie Return to Bar Harbor**



*William Van Duzer Lawrence
at sea on one of his many trips to
Europe. Probably about 1910.*

Lawrence finally managed to get tickets for New York on the S.S. *New Amsterdam*. He waited a week for the ship to appear in port, then heard that it had been seized by a French warship and that the Americans on board had been taken prisoner. This proved untrue and the *New Amsterdam* arrived in Rotterdam, boarded its American refugees, and set sail for New York. Its lifeboats were hung low, ready for emergency use, and the ship zig-zagged to avoid German mines. Eventually, after a period of harrowing anxiety, the zigging and zagging stopped, and, as Lawrence later wrote, "we breathed easy again." The way home appeared clear.

On the morning of September 21, 1914, the *New Amsterdam* pulled into the Christopher Street wharf in New York harbor. Lawrence's children and grandchildren were there to greet him and Sarah. "The summer," he wrote, "had been filled with anxiety and trouble but it was all over now."

The United States, with a long tradition of non-involvement in European affairs, remained neutral for over two years after the war began. But after a time, a "preparedness" movement began. Theodore Roosevelt was one of its leaders. The United States, he and others felt, had to prepare to defend itself.

Bronxville was slow to join in the preparedness movement. By early 1916, though, some village organizations were beginning to organize their members to defend their country. In January, Christ Church formed a "Cadet Corps" for boys and young men ten years of age and older. Some of the older cadets acted as drill masters in training sessions every Saturday. The corps soon started meeting on Thursday afternoons, with marksmanship training being conducted every other Thursday.

Boys at Bronxville School were being drilled on the parade ground too. The head of the Bronxville School Board, Bertrand Burtnett, had organized a small group of boys for military training in late 1915, but he soon realized that professional help was needed. He asked the commander at Fort Jay on Governor's Island to send someone to train the boys, and before long Sergeant P. M. O'Sullivan of the 167th U. S. Coast Guard Artillery could be seen at the school athletic field on Tuesday afternoons, leading the boys in their drills. Girls were also receiving military training at Bronxville School. Mrs. Clinton Hill of Avon Road, who had had some military training when she was a girl, was their drillmaster.

About two weeks before the United States entered WWI, the Loyal League of Bronxville was organized. At the league's first meeting, held at the Gramatan Hotel, a marching club was created and within a few days league members were practicing military drill on a baseball field next to Midland Avenue. The league very quickly grew to about 100 members and posters had been put up around the village asking all loyal citizens to join. The league's constitution pledged its members "to protect the honor, lives and property of our citizens in any and every emergency...."

President Woodrow Wilson, who campaigned for reelection in 1916 using the slogans "He kept us out of war," and "America First," had by early 1917 come to the

conclusion that Germany's repeated violation of America's rights of neutrality and the danger posed to democracy by Germany's autocratic government required that the United States enter the war. "The world must be made safe for democracy," he declared in his speech to Congress on April 2, 1917, in which he asked for a declaration of war against Germany. It was a fearful thing to lead the country into war, he said, "but the right is more precious than peace."

**MANY RESIDENTS SIGN
LOYALTY DECLARATION**

April 5th, 1917.

The Editor of the Review:

This is to inform the residents of Bronxville that the Loyalty Declaration, similar to the one used in New York City, was signed by 637 persons within the Village and vicinity and that the lists have been duly reported to the President.

It is estimated that a much greater number of Bronxville residents signed a similar Declaration at their business places in New York City.

No systematic canvass was made and the result merely indicates the universal sentiment of the people, in support of our President's policy wherever an opportunity was given to express it—this without a single exception.

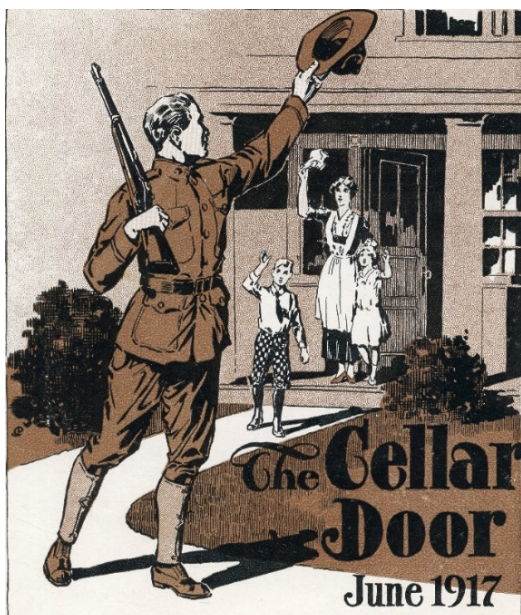
Respectfully submitted,

LEON O. BAILEY.

On April 5th, 1917, three days following President Wilson's speech to Congress, Leon O. Bailey, head of a prominent Bronxville family, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Bronxville Review*. He said that 637 villagers had signed a "Loyalty Declaration," and that many more villagers had probably signed a similar declaration at their workplaces in New York City. This indicated, he wrote, "the universal sentiment of the people [of Bronxville], in support of our President's policy wherever an opportunity was given to express it—this without a single exception."

Bailey's letter appeared in the *Review* on April 6, the day the United States declared war on Germany. In an editorial published that day, the *Review* reflected that Bronxville, like the rest of the country, was entering the war "not gladly but seriously and with a determination to win."

Bronxville was going to war.



Booklet printed by the Gramatan Coal and Supply Company shortly after the United States entered World War I.

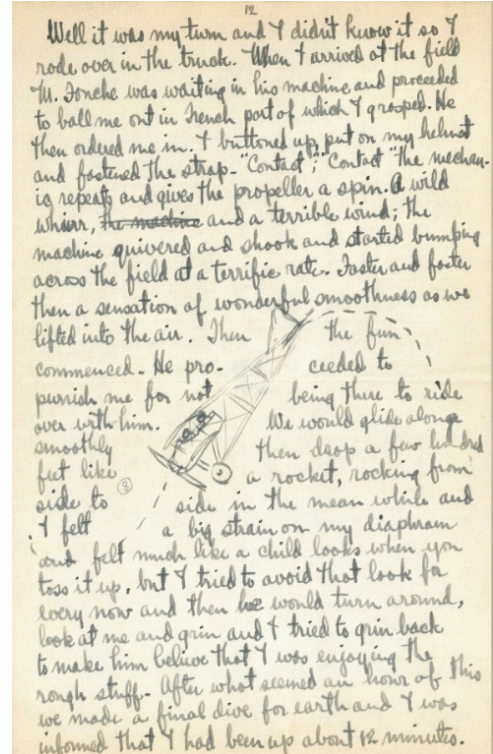
Part Two: Service Abroad

Two hundred and thirty-seven men and women from Bronxville served in the United States armed forces during World War I, and others served with British forces or as Red Cross volunteers. Among those who served were four people who sent remarkable letters home describing some of their wartime experiences. They were Penrose Stout, Irving Morange and his brother Leonard, all three aviators, and Hannah Dunlop Andrews, the leader of a Red Cross unit.



Penrose Stout was a cousin of both Frank Ross Chambers and Kate Waller Chambers, and was living with them at Crow's Nest in Bronxville when war was declared. In 1917, not long after the American entry into the war, he volunteered for service in the Aviation Section, Signal Corps, later called the United States Army Air Service. After beginning training in the United States, he was sent to France to train with French pilots. His letters home, written primarily to his mother and to Frank and Kate Chambers and their daughter Margaret, sometimes express the excitement that is often part of even an especially brutal war.

In one letter, addressed to "Dearest Family in the World," as he called his cousins at Crow's Nest, he describes his first flight in France. It was a training flight with his French instructor. He starts his description with his mechanic's turning of the propeller of his airplane, or "machine" as he always calls it. "'Contact. Contact,' the mechanic repeats and gives the propeller a spin," Stout writes. "A wild whirr, and a terrible wind; the machine quivered and shook and started bumping across the field at a terrific rate. Faster and faster, then a sensation of wonderful smoothness as we lifted in the air." Stout's French instructor gave him a rough ride, going along smoothly for a time, then diving abruptly "like a rocket," Stout writes. He felt like a child being of tossed in the in the air. The instructor looked back at him and flashed a big grin. Stout tried.at him and flashed a big grin. Stout tried to grin put it in his letter, "to make him believe that I was

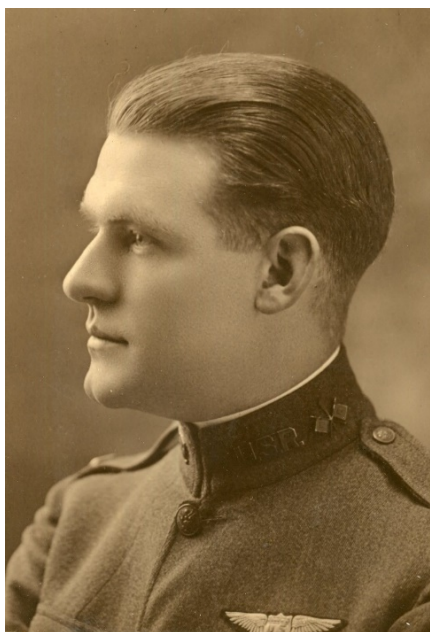


Page from Penrose Stout's letter of November 25, 1917

enjoying the rough stuff.” Then came a last dive toward earth and the plane landed. Stout’s first flight was probably the longest twelve minutes of his life.

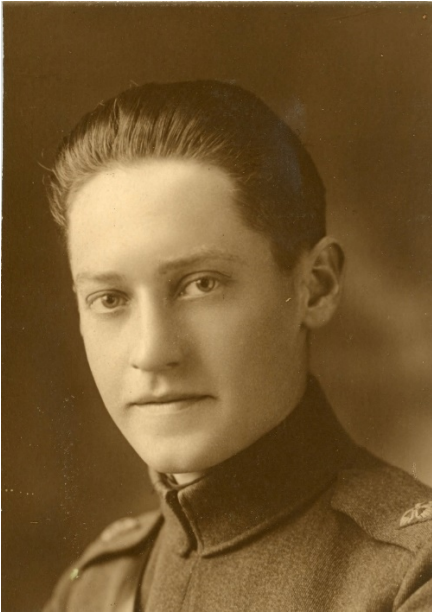
In September 1918, he wrote a letter to his mother to tell her he was now at the front and flying missions behind enemy lines into what he calls “Hunland.” After returning from one of these missions over German territory, he wrote, not about the danger he had faced, but about the joy he felt after the flight. “Oh! It’s a wonderful life,” he wrote, “a thrilling life, and a gentleman’s life.”

On September 1918, while flying alone behind enemy lines, Stout was attacked by five German planes. His plane was riddled with bullets, one of which passed through his shoulder. He returned to base, landed his plane in a field, and passed out. He spent the rest of the war in hospital. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions during this flight.



Irving Morange, the son of Broadway stage set designer Edward Morange and an aspiring actor, also volunteered with the Aviation Section, Signal Corps. He was sent to France and assigned to fly reconnaissance missions. He also had sometimes to ferry new airplanes from the factory to the front lines. He wrote a darkly humorous letter to his parents about what happened during one of these ferrying missions. “One of [my planes] was not much good when I got it where it was supposed to go,” he wrote, “because a Hun tore the back of the fuselage off with his machine gun bullets just before we got to the aerodrome.... [I] had a little argument with [this Hun]...and I succeeded in ripping open one of his wings for him, but he got away safely. The same may be said of me. It’s great fun and the [battle] lines are a mess of smoke and action and the...[anti-aircraft guns] are entirely too active.”

In another letter, he wryly expresses the complex emotions involved in his experiences at the front. “...The guns are at it all the time...,” he wrote. “All in all, I love the place—the machine—the work—everything in fact, but the Hun. I’m out after them now.”



Irving's younger brother Leonard wanted to be an aviator too. He wasn't able to get into the Aviation Section, Signal Corps, and decided to go to Canada and enlist in the Royal Flying Corps. While he was training in Canada, he sometimes enjoyed to fly into the countryside and find a train to race. "I had a machine today," he wrote in a letter to his parents, "that would walk away from a passenger train as if the train were standing still, and I came down low and raced [one].... All the platforms and observation cars [were] filled and everyone was waving handkerchiefs and hats, etc. People will never get used to aeroplanes I guess."

Leonard Morange became an excellent pilot and when he reached France, he was assigned to train other pilots. While on a training flight in August 1918, his plane was hit by a student pilot in another plane, and both men died in the crash. He was the first serviceman from Bronxville to be killed in the war.

Irving Morange suffered a mustard gas attack while serving in France, and though he survived it, he died at a very young age in 1926 partly as a result of the attack.

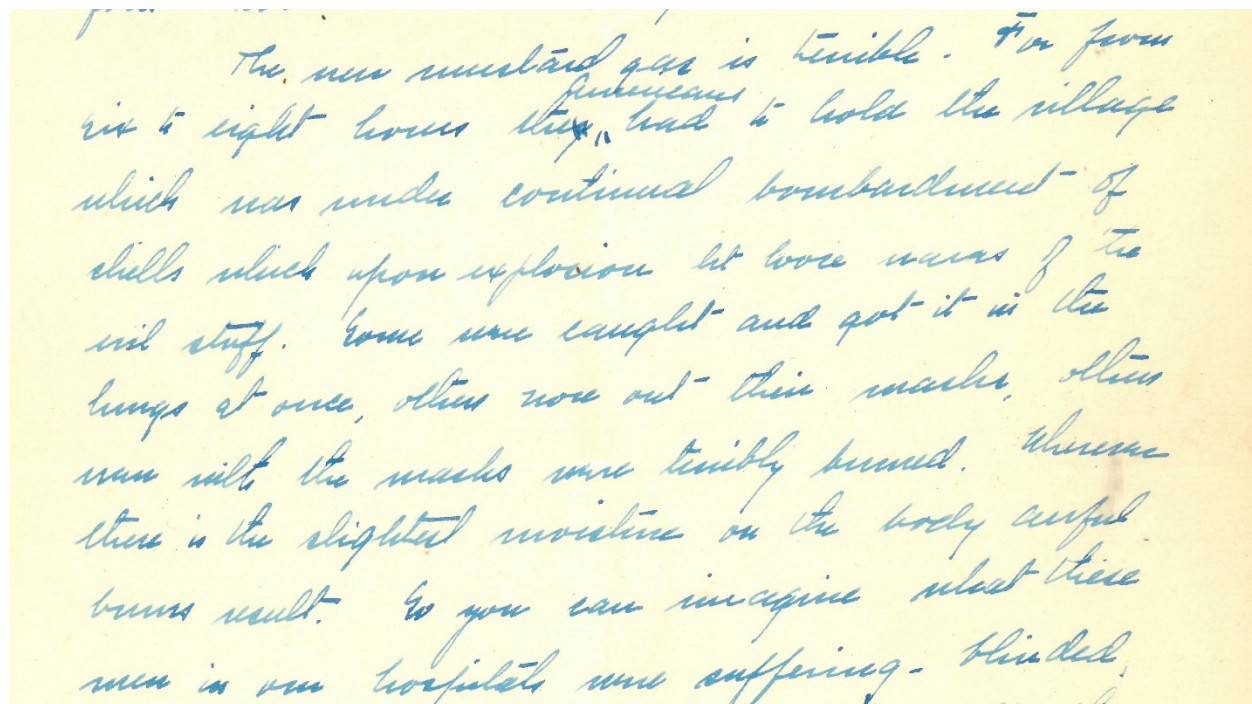


Hannah Dunlop Andrews, known in Bronxville for the latter part of her long life as Hannah Colt, came to France in 1917 to serve as a relief worker with the Smith College Relief Unit, which consisted primarily of Smith College graduates and was funded largely by donations from alumnae. In February 1918, she became the unit's director, and at about the same time it became affiliated with the American Red Cross.

Andrews' job was to help to relieve the sufferings of some of the men who were wounded at the front. Her letters home do not contain effusions about the thrill or the glory of war. She didn't experience such things. Instead she saw sufferings she probably could not have imagined until the stricken soldiers were brought to her from the battlefield.

On June 9, 1918, she wrote to Kate Chambers at Crow's Nest about an especially horrible new weapon. "The new mustard gas is terrible" she writes. "...The Americans had to hold the [nearby French] village which was under continual bombardment of shells which upon explosion let loose waves of the evil stuff. Some [of the men]...got it in the lungs at once, others...with the [gas] masks were terribly burned. Wherever there is the slightest moisture on the body awful burns result. So you can imagine what these men in our hospitals were suffering—blinded, with lungs, throat and nostrils burned, all

the tender parts of the body dreadful suppurating sores. 'What can we do for them?' asked the girls. The usual cigarettes and chocolate were both forbidden.... 'Oranges and flowers are what they need'...[the girls] replied. 'Oranges for the juice which is soothing and refreshing, flowers, especially sweet and pungent ones to smell...as they exhale the foul gas.'"

A photograph of a handwritten letter on aged, yellowed paper. The handwriting is in cursive, written in dark ink. The text describes the effects of mustard gas on soldiers, mentioning how it is terrible, how it is used to hold a village, and how it causes severe burns and blindness. The letter is dated June 9, 1918.

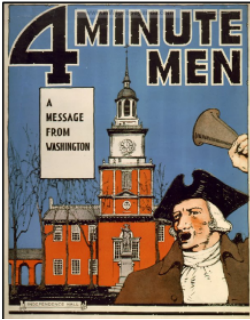
Excerpt from Hannah Dunlop Andrews' letter from France, June 9, 1918.

"The new mustard gas is terrible," she begins.

Hannah Andrews had an extraordinary meeting at her hospital with Penrose Stout and another Bronxville soldier, Elliott Bates. Bates had both arms broken and part of his left foot had been amputated, and Stout had come to see him hoping to raise his spirits. Andrews wrote to tell the Chambers family back home that Stout "was wonderful with Elliott, very quiet and gentle, and could make him forget his terrible suffering for half an hour at a time."

Part Three: Service at Home

The war imposed many duties on the people of Bronxville, and changed their lives in unexpected ways.



Wartime patriotism was essential to eventual victory, and this patriotism had to be continually renewed. The Loyal League of Bronxville, formed in 1917 as part of the preparedness movement, organized a corps of what were called “Four Minute Men” to give short speeches to build support for the war. The Picture House on Kraft Avenue was the ideal venue for these patriotic speeches in Bronxville, since the four-minute length was determined by the four minutes required to change a reel in a movie theater. The Loyal League also trained a junior corps of Four Minute Men, and Four Minute Women too, composed of local Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Bernice Evelyn Hilty of Bronxville may count as the first Four Minute Woman in Westchester County. Although she did not herself deliver a speech, her lyrics to the tune of “Over There” were sung on June 25, 1918 by the Four Minute Men Singers. The song, a newspaper article reported, “reaches the heart and excites the loyal imagination.”

Food conservation was important in wartime too. William Van Duzer Lawrence’s son Arthur was put in charge of allotting garden plots to volunteer gardeners throughout Eastchester. Bronxville’s gardeners went quickly to work, augmenting the country’s food resources, and villagers also produced a *Bronxville War Cook Book*, which contained recipes intended to conserve meat, wheat, and other foods needed by the Allied troops in France. The *Bronxville Review* insisted that “Patriotism and self-interest demand that housewives possess this book.” Many of the *Bronxville War Cook Book*’s recipes were those of prominent Bronxville women, such as Mary Fairchild Low, Gertrude Bailey, and Kate Chambers. One of these recipes was for “ringtumdittie,” which featured a cheesy, spicy onion.



The war opened new areas of opportunity for women to escape their traditional domestic roles. An organization called the National League for Women’s Service created a Motor Corps and asked women to become drivers. Driving classes were offered in New Rochelle twice a week. “All those wishing to join,” the *Bronxville Review* announced, “kindly notify Mrs. Fielder Coffin of Lawrence Park.” Once trained, the women of the Motor Corps would drive ambulances which carried wounded soldiers from arriving hospital and troop ships to nearby hospitals. There were also other duties. Two women from the local Motor Corps, for example, were sent to Detroit to pick up an ambulance—which

did not have either a windshield or a starter motor—and they bravely drove it back to Bronxville.

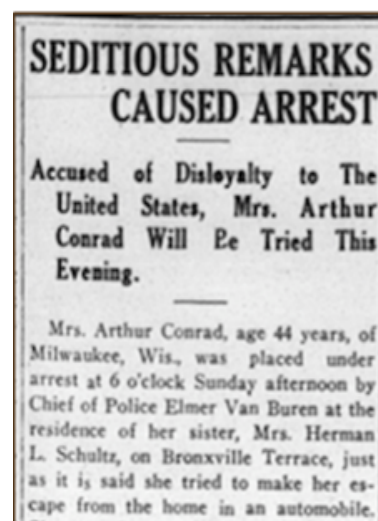
Bronxville took a leading role in Westchester County in selling Liberty Bonds to raise money for the war. Two-thirds of the money the United States needed to fight the war was borrowed from the American people, partly through four Liberty Loan sales campaigns conducted during the war. Bronxville was given quotas by the federal government for each of the Liberty Loan campaigns, and villagers always bought two or three times as many bonds as their quota called for.



The war gave rise to many fears, some understandable, others irrational. Some Americans became fearful of Germans living in the United States and of recent German immigrants—or sometimes even of American citizens who had German surnames. Germans were sometimes fearsomely depicted in wartime imagery as “The Hun,” almost a monster of evil, with the deadly spike of the German war helmet sticking up from its head. Many people feared that this monster might have his agents and sympathizers working insidiously within the country to weaken it.

People in Bronxville experienced these fears along with everyone else. Police in Eastchester and Bronxville started keeping track of all German and Austrian aliens living in the town and village. The names of these people were forwarded to the regional U. S. Marshall and it was planned to make them public.

One day in the summer of 1918, people in Bronxville wondered whether one of the enemy agents, or at least a sympathizer, had come to their village. Mrs. Arthur Conrad, on that summer day, entered the candy store on Kraft Avenue run by Mrs. Repetti. As Mrs. Conrad was looking over the candy and considering her purchase, some talk got started about the war. Mrs. Conrad said she felt the German Kaiser “was a wonderful man and a good man, and that if it wasn’t for the German people we would be uncivilized Indians.” Mrs. Repetti didn’t like Mrs. Conrad’s outburst, and she apparently said something negative about the German Kaiser. Mrs. Conrad then said that Mrs. Repetti “should be ashamed of herself to say anything against the kaiser.” Mrs. Repetti thought Mrs. Conrad was being disloyal to the United States, and she called the police. Mrs. Conrad ran



for her car, but the police caught her before she could make her escape. She was arrested and charged with uttering seditious and disloyal remarks. She went to trial in Bronxville, was found guilty and ordered by the court either to leave Westchester County or serve six months in the county penitentiary. In other words, get out of town or go to jail. Mrs. Conrad went back home to Milwaukee.

Another anti-German episode concerned Caroline Bailey, daughter of prominent Bronxville residents Leon and Gertrude Bailey. She was about twelve years old when the United States entered the war. She had had a German governess since she was five, and she had learned from the governess how to speak German. When she heard that the United States was in the war, she decided she wouldn't speak German any longer. "I shan't speak German," she explained to her parents, "because everybody hates the Germans since the war started and so do I." The Baileys fired the governess.

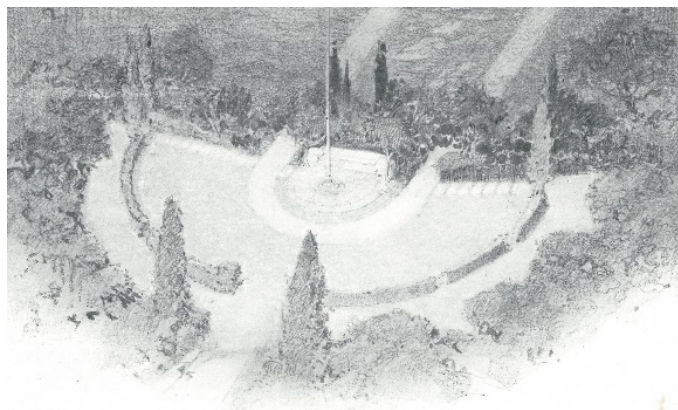
Caroline Bailey (one or the other) with her twin sister, Gertrude.



World War I ended on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month of 1918. All the students of Bronxville School came together and offered silent prayers in thanks for the country's victory. Then they saluted the flag, sang patriotic songs, and cheered the victorious Allies. The rest of Bronxville probably celebrated war's end in much the same way, adding a little noise from bells, whistles and other festive noisemakers.

It didn't take long for the question of a war memorial to arise, and the village appointed a committee to plan one. The village's memorial, the committee decided, should list all those from Bronxville who fought in the war, and it should also embody "the spirit of pure patriotism which the war evoked." The committee chose a design submitted by architects Harry Leslie Walker and Otto Faelton which envisioned a "Liberty Green" on the corner of Pondfield Road and Midland Avenue. The plan featured a flagpole set in the center of a large crescent of grass and shrubs. The village wasn't sure whether to approve this plan because they hadn't decided where to site the new Bronxville School buildings that were planned. When the school's location was

finally determined, the war memorial had to be scaled back from its original grand concept and moved down Pondfield Road to a location in front of the new buildings. The memorial was dedicated on Thanksgiving Day, 1926.



The memorial in perspective looking north from corner of Pondfield Road and Midland Avenue

The architects' plan for Liberty Green.

Bronxville had for a time another World War I memorial. It was much different from the one in front of Bronxville School, evocative of violence and destruction rather than of righteous victory and honorable service.

By war's end the War Department had accumulated a large inventory of captured German guns at a site in New Jersey, and in 1925 it offered these guns as war trophies to communities throughout the country. Two members of the Leonard Morange American Legion post traveled to New Jersey to select a gun for Bronxville. They chose a 210-millimeter long-range siege howitzer, which arrived in the village on August 10, 1925 and was put on exhibit in Station Plaza.



The great gun became part of the Bronxville landscape, reminding villagers of the role their village had taken in the Great War. But this memorial was not fated to last very long. Not long after Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941, a wartime salvage campaign was started up in Bronxville, and the village's German cannon, which had once rained down artillery shells on American and Allied troops during World War I, was melted down to make bullets to defend the America and her allies during World War II.

What happened to Bronxville's World War I gun as World War II was beginning seems a symbol of what happened to the legacy of World War I. For the people of Bronxville, as for most Americans, World War I in large measure disappeared into World War II. It was not forgotten; nor were the sacrifice and courage of the men and women who fought in the war forgotten. But World War I's legacy, its continuing importance for Americans, became obscure as the world plunged into the darkness of World War II. The searing experience of World War II, with good and evil starkly in combat for the future of humanity, provided a much clearer moral message than did World War I. Like the cannon in Bronxville's Station Plaza, whatever was left of World War I's legacy for Americans was melted down and became part of World War II's more powerful legacy.