

WWII AND NORTHAMPTON TOWNSHIP

By Marion Kane

The afternoon of Sunday December 7th 1941 I was quite bored sitting on the steps at my aunt and uncle's house, while they were playing cards with my mother and father. A baseball game was on the radio in the background; but I had not yet become a fan.

Suddenly, the game was interrupted with a newsflash. A somber voice announced that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, sinking four U.S. battleships and damaging four more. This eight year old had no idea what it all meant; but it sure did catch the card players' attention! I also had no idea how it would affect life in Northampton Township.

On December 8th, President Roosevelt called upon Congress to declare war on Japan. American citizens were united in responding to the attack and many young men rushed to enlist in the armed forces. Some married men, including my father, wanted to enlist; but were rejected because of having too many dependents. They wound up being the mainstay of the local volunteer fire departments.

Household television was still a few years away; so war news came over the radio or at the movies. Newsreels were part of cinema fare along with a Hollywood style plea to "Buy War Bonds to Support the Troops." Patriotic posters emerged everywhere. "Uncle Sam Wants You!" "A Slip of the Lip Can Sink a Ship."

Suddenly, a heap of scrap metal appeared in front of the stone elementary school in Richboro, the result of 'scrap metal drives'. The metal was to be recycled into tanks, ships and planes. Even tin foil from chewing gum wrappers and cigarette packages was salvaged and rolled into wads the size of softballs. Through an Internet search I found the tin foil was used to 'confuse enemy radar'. Aluminum and tin cans, as well as rubber, were also collected to be recycled into armaments. We hauled bags of newspapers to school to support the 'paper drives'. Lots of newspapers were needed for packing material in shipping weapons and other materials overseas.

Milkweed pods were also collectibles. Their wispy hairs known as floss provided buoyancy in life preservers, vital to the safety of our sailors and airmen.

One day a week was 'stamp day' at school. We could purchase war savings stamps for ten or twenty-five cents. They were pasted in a book and when it was full, it was converted into a War Bond. The total value of a twenty-five cent stamp book was \$18.75, which would be redeemed in ten years for \$25.00.



Women's fashions were even affected. Because of the shortage of fabric, hemlines were raised; sleeves were shortened and there were fewer collars and cuffs. Nylon and silk were used to make parachutes and powder bags; so these materials were no longer available for hosiery. Some women just chose to go bare legged; while others used leg make-up to give the illusion of stockings.

Rationing became a way of life throughout the country. Food, fuel and clothing were needed for the armed forces; leaving less available for domestic use. Rationing stamps were issued for meat, sugar, coffee and more. Sunday afternoons, I pasted the stamps into books for my grandfather who owned the Churchville General Store. You know it as the Churchville Deli. Filled stamp books were sent to a collection point in order to allow my grandfather to replenish his stock of rationed items.

Although Brazil had plenty of coffee, shipping it to the U.S. was problematic. Many ships were being diverted to military use and German U-Boats were patrolling our shipping lanes. Coffee was so scarce that some people saved the grounds to use a second time. Coffee prices rose dramatically and a grain based drink called Postum was marketed as an alternate hot drink. Chicory was also a popular additive for stretching coffee.



Northampton residents, Major Edward C. Haynes and his wife, Lillian Lennon (Marion Kane's Aunt and Uncle). June 18, 1941.