



AMERICA WE THANK YOU

An Armenian Tribute to Near East Relief



The Golden Rule Sunday

The American-led campaign soon became an international objective, with 50 countries taking part in the relief efforts, as well as business, church, agricultural, commercial, fraternal, labor, educational, youth, and women's associations. It secured over 133 national endorsements from prominent organizations around the globe in securing observance of international "Golden Rule Sunday," representing more than 73 million Americans who donated food, money and clothing for the Armenian orphans and refugees.



Jackie Coogan's Circus in benefit of Near East Relief (April 1923)

The Children's Crusade

All segments of American society were mobilized into action. While government officials and even Congress called upon the American People to heed the call of NER, Armenian orphans were adopted by famous American families, including Mrs. Woodrow Wilson, Mrs. Oliver Harriman (widow of President Warren Harding), and Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt (American women's suffrage leader). Celebrities such as child actor Jackie Coogan (later known as Uncle Fester of *The Addams Family*) toured across the U.S. and Europe on a "Children's Crusade," enlisting the help of The Scouts of Los Angeles and other children's organizations, and raising more than \$1 million in clothing, food, and other contributions. American corporations such as Nestle, Inc. donated tons of canned goods to NER. American religious, labor, and other organizations led collection efforts for NER. Offices and donation centers were opened in all 48 American states.

California's Contribution to Near East Relief

Like most other states, California too was a staunch supporter of the relief efforts, mobilizing public and elected officials, celebrities and laypersons alike, to partake in this unprecedented humanitarian effort.

- Sponsored by Mayor James Rolph, Jr. and Mrs. Rolph of San Francisco, a grassroots committee was formed for gathering canned products of the orchards and fields of California, resulting in a 300 ton consignment being sent to the Near East. A novel feature of the plan was the "Glad Morning" program, where on a designated day, all persons bringing a can of food to the theatre were admitted free to a performance. Approximately 5,000 cans were collected.
- San Francisco contributed 25 tons to the 3,820,458 pounds of old clothes donated by the American people to the NER in 1923. Judge Curtis D. Wilbur, Chairman of the California State Committee (later Secretary of the Navy) was one of the many supporters who led this initiative.
- In the Fresno district, \$70,000 in cash and 30 tons of raisins were contributed by a local community. Churches throughout Fresno donated cash in sums that were outside of their annual church budget.
- Carloads of food and clothing were packed and delivered to NER centers in Northern and Southern California, in caravans called "California Canned Sunshine."
- In one year alone, California citizens gathered over \$1 million in donations of cash, clothing and food for the Near East Relief effort.

America, We Thank You!

Thanks to the generosity of Near East Relief, its participating organizations and entities, the U.S. government and state governments, and especially the American People at large, more than 132,000 orphans and 1 million refugees of the Armenian Nation were rescued, fed, clothed, and educated by this effort, and we are their grateful descendants. Near East Relief allowed us to survive, thrive, and prosper from the horrors of genocide at the hands of Ottoman Turkey. For this, America, We Thank You!



An ANCA WR Initiative



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FACT SHEET

An Unprecedented Movement of American Citizen Philanthropy

Founded in 1915, the currently-named Near East Foundation (formerly known as Near East Relief or NER) is the United States' oldest Congressionally-sanctioned non-governmental organization which for the first time in American history expressed the collective generosity and humanitarianism of the American People. The NER served as a model upon which future philanthropic organizations, including the U.S. Peace Corps and USAID, and future calls for overseas relief efforts known as "citizen philanthropy" were modeled.

The highly successful Near East Relief (NER) movement literally saved the Armenian nation from total annihilation. As a tribute to this effort, Armenian-Americans, most of whom are direct descendants of Armenian orphans and refugees rescued by NER, have initiated the "America, We Thank You" project to express our collective gratitude to the American people for the benevolence which allowed our nation to survive and thrive out of the ashes of destruction.



An Armenian orphan with a box of California figs (1923)

U.S. Ambassador Henry Morgenthau's Role in the Humanitarian Campaign

The global response to the genocide of Armenians was sparked by a cablegram sent by U.S. Ambassador to Constantinople Henry Morgenthau to the Secretary of State in Washington DC on September 6, 1915, stating, "**Destruction of the Armenian Race in Turkey is progressing rapidly**" and suggesting that Cleveland H. Dodge, Charles Crane, John R. Mott, Stephen Wise and others form a committee to raise funds and provide means to save some of the Armenians who had survived.

The Extraordinary Success of Near East Relief

Upon receiving Ambassador Morgenthau's urgent plea for assistance, President Woodrow Wilson called upon his advisor Cleveland H. Dodge to form the "American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief" (ACASR), specifically to help Armenians and other Christian minorities who were being forcibly deported from their homes and starved or killed in a systematic premeditated campaign of genocide launched under cover of World War I by the Young Turk government of the Ottoman Empire. On September 16, 1915, under the leadership of James L. Barton and Cleveland H. Dodge, the ACASR was officially launched in New York.

In order to facilitate the best possible response to the crisis, the Committee was granted unprecedented access to all U.S. government files and communications describing the religious, social and physical conditions of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, specifically the native Armenian population.

Over a period of 15 years from 1915 to 1930, the NER (renamed as such upon the Committee's incorporation by Congress), mobilized the entire American nation, and indeed the world, into a well-organized and well-funded relief effort which successfully saved over 132,000 Armenian orphans and 1 million refugees half a world away. Despite its initial fundraising goal of \$100,000 which was later raised to \$30 million, the NER ultimately raised **\$117 million**, the equivalent of \$2.7 billion in today's dollars! NER built over 400 orphanages, food and clothing distribution centers, medical clinics and hospitals, and vocational training schools throughout the Near East to house and care for the survivors. More than **1,000 American volunteers** left their comfortable lives to travel across ocean and land to dedicate themselves to the relief effort.

"[Near East Relief] received its support from all our people and was endorsed by Congress and all our presidents throughout its history; and, in its widely extended work of life and child saving, it represented the true spirit of our country... it clothed the naked, fed the starving and provided shelter, care and practical schooling for more than a hundred and thirty thousand fatherless waifs left as a wreckage from the Great War... No private enterprise ever undertaken by Americans and in the name of America has accomplished more to arouse, in the minds and hearts of all the peoples of the countries in which this organization has carried on its operations, a sincere regard and even affection for America."

-U.S. President Calvin Coolidge



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