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**The Great War as Civic Engagement:
Southern California, 1916-1925**

The city of Long Beach grew from the boundaries of two great ranches established in the 1790s by Spanish conquerors. The ranches eventually passed to American entrepreneurial families in the 1860s. They bought the distressed properties for less than one-dollar an acre and introduced sheep ranching and grain production. By the 1890s transcontinental railroads brought new residents and helped the newly formed city function as a seaside resort for winter-weary midwestern visitors, and as a producer of vegetables, grains and meat for fast-developing Los Angeles. The 1900 census counted about 2,300 citizens, along with five churches, several thousand cattle and sheep, as well as numerous tourist tent resorts on its wide south-facing beachfront.

The pace of economic development accelerated as a result of several inter-related events beginning about 1902. Civic leaders, aware of the imminent opening of the Panama Canal, began developing a port facility to attract shipping companies. By 1915 the developing port of Long Beach began to attract federal money for dredging and construction, and to compete with its sister port across San Pedro bay, Los Angeles. The advent of World War I dramatically increased federal focus on Southern California in general, and Long Beach in particular. The newly formed Pacific Fleet home-ported many of its vessels in Long Beach harbor, and the Navy began constructing facilities to service its ships and personnel. Thus the canal, the war and the new port and harbor all contributed to the city's growth: its population increased to over 55,000 by 1920.

The focus of this paper is how Long Beach organized itself to meet the unexpected demands of the nation-wide military effort during the 1916-1925 era. The national war effort encouraged, and in some cases mandated, that city officials plan for growth in a more systematic way. Local citizens also responded to the national war effort, forming numerous organizations to meet these new needs. Much has been written about the effects, both nationally and locally, of World War II. As the nation plunged into a massive effort to fight a two-front war of all-consuming necessity, structural, political, economic and social alterations occurred across the country that created fundamental changes in American life. However, the outlines for those changes, the blueprint for what followed after December 7th, 1941, can be found in the way communities such as Long Beach reacted to the news of war in far-off Europe, especially after the declaration of war in April 1917.¹

Local infrastructure development such as a citywide water system, a reliable electrical grid, housing, and other vital services grew with little planning from the early 1900s. The city counted 162 telephones in 1902, and fifteen years later still had less than a thousand working phones serviced by two local companies. Despite the rudimentary state of basic civic infrastructure development during the period to about 1920, the city grew very quickly. Workers and their families, drawn by jobs in the harbor area, in the new amusement zone soon called The Pike, and in the many new businesses that developed around the city, filled in the new neighborhoods that appeared with little planning, especially to the north and west of downtown. Overburdened and newly created city departments faced delays in delivering water and gas service to these newly laid-out areas. Unpaved streets turned these new housing tracts into muddy swamps during the winter rainy season. The disastrous floods of 1914 and 1916 compounded problems, as the winter overflow from Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers turned parts of the city into lakes for weeks at a time. Flood control became a major concern of the Long Beach city council. As one researcher noted, "Long Beach was an island, cutoff on all sides by the fiercely rushing waters. Rail traffic was entirely suspended."²

The Long Beach city commission, as well as other local leaders, recognized the situation, and led by a group of civic minded businessmen and political

neophytes, many of them relatively recent arrivals in Southern California, began to re-organize local government, sponsor bond campaigns to provide funds for needed improvements, and express faith in the city's future.³ This situation of rapid economic and infrastructure development, accompanied by population growth fueled by new industries, characterized much of southern California during this period. In the two decades after 1910 the region's cities were increasingly drawn into national and international commercial networks through improved rail and ship transportation systems, including the opening of the Panama Canal.⁴

An example of the possibilities that encouraged Long Beach's business community came in 1915 when the California Shipbuilding Company received a government contract to build submarines and other vessels in anticipation of involvement in the escalating European war. Ultimately, this company merged with John F. Craig's shipbuilding firm, to form the Long Beach Shipbuilding Company in 1917. The company produced 78,000 tons of shipping by the end of the war.⁵

In the midst of this burst of economic, civic and entrepreneurial energy, the United States found itself drawn into war. Although determined to keep the country out of the deadly European conflict in 1914, President Wilson felt compelled by events to ask Congress for declaration of war against Germany and its allies in April 1917. The country began a rapid mobilization, and the new reality of world war resonated in Long Beach.

In a resolution by the city commissioners and signed by Mayor W.T. Lisenby, the city declared on April 9th, "We are with you as Americans, heart and soul, knowing that what you do is for the best and in the interests of our beloved country." That same evening, 2,500 citizens filed into the downtown Municipal Auditorium for a patriotic rally. They heard speeches from local politicians and public figures, including several ministers, sang hymns and patriotic songs, and pledged donations to the Long Beach branch of the American Red Cross. Fourteen young men enlisted in the U.S. Army during the rally, and 108 individuals joined the Red Cross and promised to help, as volunteers in whatever war work might be needed in the months to come.⁶

The commissioners also debated calling out the Home Guard, an organization of armed volunteers, to protect the city if the local military units stationed nearby were to be called away. The Coast Artillery, stationed across San Pedro bay at Fort MacArthur, could be sent to the Mexican border, one commissioner speculated, leaving the city defenseless. Any proposal might seem reasonable in the days and weeks after war was declared, but such concerns did lead public figures and local newspapers to advocate for more planning and organization to meet perceived wartime needs. A group of eager and energetic community and business leaders stepped into that role with gusto, and offered a full menu of activities and resources for Long Beach citizens to prepare themselves for any eventuality that might arise.⁷

Almost immediately, the issue of financing the war became an overriding concern. The U.S. Congress authorized the sale of \$4 billion in war bonds shortly after the declaration of war against Germany. Each state was assigned a quota to be raised, with quotas assigned to counties and cities. The bonds quickly became known as Liberty bonds. California's assignment for the first Liberty Loan Drive was \$110 million. Long Beach share of that figure amounted to \$800,000, to be collected from May 21 to June 15, 1917. The city responded enthusiastically, and raised \$935,000. Not surprisingly, the banking community took the lead, and leaders of the city's banks organized teams to canvas neighborhoods and businesses. The banks also underwrote the cost of the bonds, realizing a fee for each bond sold. The leaders of this bond drive, as well as the four that followed into late 1918, were familiar to Long Beach citizens as they also served on the school board, the water department, city commission, the local YMCA, The branch of the American Red Cross, and the Boy Scouts of America, and many other civic and fraternal social organizations.

Subsequent Liberty bond drives in Long Beach raised another \$9,372,000 for the war effort. The last of these efforts concluded late in October 1918, just weeks before the armistice ended the war in Europe. To raise these funds from a community of about 45,000 in 1917-1918, teams headed by appointed captains visited churches, schools, businesses, fraternal and women's organizations, held parades with marching sailors and soldiers from nearby bases, and enjoyed support

from local newspapers and magazines. The names of bond leaders and captains read as a who's who of the community: P.E. Hatch, Ralph Clock, John F. Craig, Will J. Read, Llewellyn Bixby, C.J Walker, D.I. Loeff, and W.T. Lisenby. They represented banking, oil companies, civic boards, large business concerns, neighborhood businesses, and the city's developing amusement sector. Long Beach's nascent organized labor organizations were about the only groups missing in this endeavor.⁸

Women took an active role in the second and third bond drives. Divided into men and women's teams, they scoured the city for contributions with great success, oversubscribing each of the five drives. Again, women who would become important community leaders in the decades that followed the war appear as captains of their teams. Adelaide Tichenor, J.A. Rominger, J.F Craig, P. F Swaffield, and E.E. Tincher all would go on to serve on public boards and charitable organizations in the community.⁹

Success in the bond drives meant that "...Long Beach was placed on the map as 100 percent efficient and loyal in all war financing campaigns." To the men and women who ran these drives, it signaled a coming of age for the city. Long Beach could be counted on to do its share in all public and civic undertakings. The development of the harbor, the arrival of Navy ships, and the creation of new industries and businesses producing food and war supplies heralded a bright future.¹⁰

The bond drives quickly led to more citywide efforts. Draft boards, headed by many of the same figures involved with the bond drives began sending out draft notices. Ultimately, about 2,000 men who lived in Long Beach in 1917 either joined or were drafted into military service. About one-third of those saw overseas duty. Thirty-nine Long Beach men died in combat, with another thirty-eight succumbing to illnesses or accidents. Most returned to the city or the area after discharge. The city awarded a participation medal to every local soldier they could contact in 1921.¹¹

The bond drives constituted one aspect of a new surge of civic engagement. The city commission, no doubt encouraged by the success of the bond drives, embarked on further plans to develop a strong civic awareness in a city that had

barely celebrated its twentieth anniversary of incorporation. The health department was ordered to record “100 percent” of births in the city with an updated registration process in which officials visited households with newborns. A “clean milk law”, passed earlier, was to be rigorously enforced by the city’s Health Officer. The city sponsored a Child Welfare Conference in August 1918 to ensure that children were healthy and attending one of five schools now open. During the conference physicians examined 894 Long Beach children, finding 84% of them to be “normal” and without deficiencies. This activity, coming in the six months after the declaration of war, addressed the feeling that the city had grown so rapidly that some basic services and structures that defined a modern American city were missing or had not been properly attended to. Thus, the new activities responding to the war effort also served to place Long Beach on a par with older, more established cities in states such Iowa, Ohio and Kansas, where so many of the recently arrived community activists in Long Beach had originated.¹²

In September 1917, the city commission created the Long Beach City Council of Defense. The council, composed of twenty-five citizens appointed by the Safety Commissioner, was to “...consider measures in public defense and security, for protection of ...communications and ...betterment of public health.” Further, the charge of the council also included ...”the elimination of waste and extravagance...and to meet the exigencies of all situations occasioned by the war.” This was quite a charge for a council that had no budget, no office help, and no regular meeting site.¹³

Over the next year the main activities of the council focused on supporting the Red Cross in its goals, supervising the training of a local ambulance corps, and organizing a campaign to send Christmas gift boxes, containing “California products”, to Long Beach men serving in the military. Over 700 boxes were sent to various training bases in California, Washington, and to Navy ships. About 100 boxes made their way overseas, mostly to France. Among the California products were fudge, fruitcake, raisins, figs walnuts, a Christmas card signed by the council, and a miniature American flag. The council received dozens of thankful replies for the Christmas boxes from soldiers and sailors.¹⁴

However, the Safety Commissioner appointed men exclusively to the council. After the Christmas box event, during which dozens of Long Beach women stepped forward, packing the boxes with loving care, and adding hand-written notes of encouragement, the city commission rather belatedly realized that more could be accomplished if women participated. Accordingly, in March 1918, a Women's City Council of Defense was organized.

Again, many of the names associated with the successful bond drives re-appeared as leaders of the woman's council. At its first meeting in April, Mrs. J.D. Humiston promptly took the gavel from the Safety Commissioner, and presided over the council for the next eight months. The council was instrumental in organizing the Child Welfare Conference, described above, helped to direct and operate a municipal cannery during the summer of 1918, and circulated pamphlets describing "sugarless and wheatless cookery" produced by the University of California. In this regard, strict rules concerning sugar consumption, among other critical foodstuffs, went into effect in the early months of the war across the nation.¹⁵

In July, the men's council and women's council launched a "rigid program" of food conservation to ensure that national guidelines were adhered to in the city. This local system became even more organized when the federal government's National Food Administration designated Bert Paul, a Long Beach business owner and member of the men's council of defense, as the Food Administrator for Long Beach. Paul possessed federal authority to oversee food resources. To ensure the efficiency of the emerging food control system, the defense councils turned to new idea for Long Beach.

The idea became "The Channel Plan". Discussed first by the women's council, it went into effect in July 1918, lasting until the end of the war. The plan called for the city to be divided into ten districts, with two for the Signal Hill district, and one more for the Los Cerritos neighborhood, north of downtown. Each district would have a chairman, and a captain for each precinct in the district, if needed. The precinct captain would be responsible for house-to-house canvassing and inspections. During the first weeks of the Channel Plan, captains made a "thorough

inventory” of the amount of sugar and wheat in local bakeries, and in household within precincts.

One report noted that, “So thoroughly was the system maintained that the exact amount of sugar and wheat consumed in each separate family was a matter of record with the food administrator...it was possible to maintain a precise ration of food stuffs...”

For his part, Bert Paul declared that “...every man, woman and child in Long Beach was more than willing to stand for substitutes for everything except peace.” Thus, the city “...complied with every provision of the National Food Administration.”¹⁶ Still, from September through November 1918, over 100 applicants lined up every day to get “sugar permits” for canning purposes. Precinct captains spent a great deal of time verifying canning needs, and reporting back to the Food Administrator.

Thus both the men’s and women’s councils of defense played an active role in bringing Long Beach into full participation with national wartime goals. Not only did local shipyards produce naval ships and freighters for the conflict, and factories produce ammunition and foodstuffs for the battlefield, but citizens also conserved food, enlisted in the military, joined the Red Cross, and started war gardens so that canned fruits and vegetables would be available throughout the emergency. Enhanced wartime revenues allowed the city to begin to address problems with the water system, and unpaved streets. However, real prosperity would arrive in Long Beach with the discovery of fabulous new petroleum resources in the 1920s.

This surge in civic engagement opened other paths for participation. In an area with shipyards, military installations and industries, the problem of security arose. In March 1917, the U.S. Department of Justice authorized the creation of the American Protective League to deal with espionage and spying. Within a few weeks state and local chapters of this largely voluntary organization sprang to life across the nation as members sought to counter spying by German agents. It became one of dozens of such patriotic groups that operated locally and nationally to ferret out disloyalty, hostile opinions of the American war effort, and, actual spying and espionage by the large and sophisticated German intelligence network.¹⁷ Arthur W.

Ellis assumed command of the Long Beach division, and by the summer of 1917 had enrolled over 500 Long Beach men as active agents. Each man swore an oath of allegiance to the United States and pledged to conduct their investigations in utmost secrecy. The city's police Department worked closely with the APL, carrying out joint investigations and following up rumors and tips supplied by the public. Several police officers were members of the APL, and the Long Beach department deputized some APL members. The Long Beach unit focused on two areas: supporting the bond drives in the city by providing security at public meetings and patrolling the area's shipyard to search out disloyal workers or, actually, spies. In the first case, those with negative opinions about supporting bond drives were removed from the meeting. In the second, the APL was very active in searching out any person with possible disloyal attitudes or opinions. The passage of the 1917 Espionage Act gave extensive powers to the government investigate and arrest persons who merely criticized the war effort in any way.¹⁸

Thus the headlines in local newspapers provide some sense of the incidents that came under the authority of local APL division. "Weeding Out Slimy Traitors", "Disloyalist is Spirited Off To Jail", "Twelve Years Resident Arrested as an Alien", "Officers of Protective League Find Hidden Papers", Pleads Guilty to Disloyalty— Pays \$500 Fine", and, "Kaiser Suspect Caught Here". The last story detailed the arrest of suspicious individual who may have been spying on shipyard activities for the Germans. Most of the cases, sensational or otherwise, appear to focus on recent immigrants or resident aliens or just people with suspicious sounding names arrested or questioned about their public utterances.¹⁹ A complete list of local agents is problematic since the Department of Justice ordered "Chief" Ellis (as he liked to be called) to return all records of the organization to Washington early in 1919. However, the names that are available suggest that few of them were active or held leadership positions in other Long Beach wartime activities. The local division of the APL thus provided another venue for citizens to express their loyalty to the war effort brought them into close contact with those of similar views.²⁰

Long Beach began developing a sense of civic engagement and identity as it progressed from seaside hamlet to a city of 55,000 by 1920. Entrepreneurial activities, port and harbor expansion, and new industries propelled that sense of self from the first years of the century to 1917. The world war, and all that meant for the nation, for California, and for Long Beach accelerated that process, laying the foundations for the spectacular growth of the 1920s and 1930s.

¹ The huge literature on the effects on communities includes, for example, H.S. Commager, *The Story of World War II*, (revised 2001), J.M. Blum, *V Was For Victory*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1976), G.C. Ward, *The War*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), and Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

² This and other persistent flooding problems are discussed in detail in Richard Bigger, *Flood Control in Metropolitan Los Angeles*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1959), 1-3. Among other issues, authorities estimated that the flooding washed four million cubic yards of silt and debris into San Pedro Bay in 1914.

³ A remarkable leader of this group of emergent newcomers, Charles H. Windham, came to southern California after a career in Central America directing railroad construction and plantation development. Elected mayor of Long Beach in 1908, just a few years after his arrival in town, he worked tirelessly for port and harbor development in the city, predicting that the port would lead to growth and prosperity for decades. Civic development projects over the next three decades benefitted by his leadership skills. Such projects included the transition to a city

council-city manager structure for the city by 1922. See, "Origin of Long Beach Harbor", *Long Beach -Telegram Press*, Jan. 1, 1940, 2.

⁴ Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 235-264 and Starr, *Material Dreams* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1990), 90-119, provides a sense of the rapid changes enveloping southern California from 1910-1925.

⁵ The new company was a forced merger by the federal government to increase wartime efficiency, although owners and stockholders did not oppose the move. Employment tripled in the new concern to about 1,500 skilled jobs. See, George and Carmela Cunningham, *Port Town*, (Long Beach, City of Long Beach, 2015) 205-210.

⁶ The crowd was extremely lively and quite vocal that evening, see "Today's Result of Patriotic Rally", *Long Beach Press*, April 10, 1917, 2, and "Resolution Sent to President Wilson", *Long Beach Press*, April 10, 1917, 12. The crowd also contributed over \$300 to the Red Cross that night.

⁷ The Coast Artillery was not called away to Mexico or any other location, although some members did serve in France later on. Among the rumors circulating that week, a newspaper story appeared reporting on the eminent departure of the Pomona Home Guard for Arizona to patrol the border with Mexico. See for example, "Home Guard To Be Called for Patrol Duty", *Long Beach Press*, April 10, 1917, 4.

⁸ Perhaps recent strikes and other labor troubles in 1917 in the local shipyards kept labor leaders off these bond committees. Bond leaders felt that Long Beach families could purchase about \$80 worth of Liberty bonds given the upsurge in employment in the area. The bond drives are discussed in detail in Denson W. Gee (ed.), *Long Beach in the World War*, (Long Beach, Arthur L. Peterson Post 27, 1921), 24-33. Hereafter cited as *Long Beach in the World War*.

⁹ *Ibid.* 23-25. However, publicity photos advertising the bond drives show dozens of men and usually just one or two women.

¹⁰ Citizens of Long Beach were "...true Americans, and fit guardians of the liberties...bequeathed to them." *Long Beach in the World War*, 26-27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

¹² So many new citizens came from the Midwest that by 1925 Long Beach acquired a nickname—"Iowa by the Sea". The transplants held state picnics until the 1970s in Long Beach city parks, drawing thousands. On one occasion the governor of Iowa showed up to politic for an upcoming election in Iowa. The idea that Long Beach should have a health officer, examine school children, and enforce milk laws meant

that the city was now modern and efficient. See, *Long Beach in the World War*, 32-35.

¹³ The council reflected the leadership of the bond drives. Led by Charles H. Windham, many of the appointed members represented the business and banking community of Long Beach, see, *Long Beach in the World War*, 33-34.

¹⁴ Ibid. 34-35. One soldier wrote, "It was splendid. When I opened the package its contents just said to me, 'California' ...the word that goes straight to every heart."

¹⁵ University of California student helped to organize and administer the cooking programs. Ibid. 32-33.

¹⁶ Meatless and wheatless days became a test of patriotism. Although local and national laws existed to ensure compliance, Long Beach community leaders took great pride in full, voluntary compliance, see *Long Beach in the World War*, 32-39.

¹⁷ There is a significant and growing body of research on these organizations, see, for example, Diane M.T. North, *California at War* (Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas, 2018), 225-246. The U.S. Attorney General gave the APL wide ranging responsibilities in 1917-1918.

¹⁸ IBID. 234-235.

¹⁹ Many of the agents of the local APL were men rejected for military service due to age or disabilities. Many of the arrests did not lead to trails or prison time, but only to fines. See, *Long Beach Press*, September-November 1917 for numerous stories about "disloyal" workers, bar patrons, restaurant workers, etc. Arrested for criticizing the war effort or Pres. Wilson. However, there was quite a sophisticated German intelligence operation in the U.S.

²⁰ *Long Beach in the World War*, 36-37

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