

REFLECTIONS – NO. 10 (FEBRUARY 1, 2021)

Hand Grenades Given to Children in 1919

In the fall of 1919, just after World War I had ended, the U. S. government was in possession of about 15 million hand grenades left over from the war. Someone came up with the idea of disarming the grenades and converting them into coin banks to teach children to be thrifty and save money.

A lot of government red tape had to be overcome to accomplish this. First, the Treasury Department had to purchase the grenades from the War Department. Then they had the expense of removing the explosives from the grenades. Banks in Arkansas, Missouri, and Kentucky then purchased the grenade banks from the Treasury Department. Soon over 1200 banks in other states joined in the project.

The original plan was to require children to earn enough money during their summer vacation to purchase a War Savings Stamp which at that time cost \$4.20. The child was to write a letter to their teacher telling how they earned the money. The teacher kept the records necessary to get the grenade banks from the banks sponsoring the project.

Later, children under age 18 were allowed to purchase a War Savings Stamp directly from the bank to receive one of these hand grenade coin banks. Anyone over age 18 who wanted one as a souvenir had to purchase more than one War Savings Stamp.

It was considered your patriotic duty to purchase War Savings Stamps. The money raised was used to fund the expense of World War I. The stamps cost about \$5.00. Thrift Stamps could also be purchased at the post office for smaller amounts starting at 25 cents. When a person had enough Thrift Stamps, they could be redeemed for a War Savings Stamp. The letters W. S. S. were seen everywhere to remind people to buy War Savings Stamps.

This project was very successful and the grenade coin banks were in great demand. The supply of hand grenades was exhausted before the demand was met.

Times have changed since 1919. If such a project were undertaken today, I think there would be much resistance to the idea of giving war surplus hand grenades to children for a coin bank. In 1919, this idea was considered to be an excellent way to teach children the idea of saving money and to be patriotic by buying the War Savings Stamps. As one newspaper put it, “turning hand grenades into savings banks is the next thing to making plowshares out of swords”.

Comment from readers--

1. This is so interesting. Certainly had relatives from that era, but never heard of this. Wish I had inherited one of these. -- Irma
2. I didn't know this. Thanks for sharing!—Neva

RELECTIONS NO. 11 (FEBRUARY 8, 2021)

May I Borrow a Cup of Sugar?

Americans in World War I had to endure food rationing. To help conserve the nation's food supply, the people were asked to have one meat-less day, two wheat-less days, and two pork-less days each week. Everyone had to do their part to help the war effort and most people complied without complaining. World War I was a major war and American soldiers were involved. It was considered to be patriotic to do without certain things while the country was at war.

Sugar was another product in short supply during the war and for two or three years following the war.

In November, 1919, it was reported in the Prescott newspaper that there was no sugar to be found in the city and none was expected for at least a week.

News stories about the coming sugar shortage only made people rush out to the stores to stock up while they could. Sugar had a long shelf life and people figured they would eventually use it so they tried to make sure they had plenty on hand. Many people were buying it in fifty-pound sacks. This rush to buy sugar caused the stores to raise their prices on sugar.

This was the time of Prohibition and many people began to buy more candy, cakes, and ice cream as a substitute for the alcoholic beverages. This increased demand for products containing sugar is said to be one of the causes for the sugar shortage of 1920.

The government instituted sugar rationing. All hotels and restaurants in the country had to follow strict rules regarding offering sugar to their customers. Each person was allowed two pounds of sugar per month (about two cups). This rationing really hurt farm families who did a lot of home canning of fruit in the summer months because canning fruit and making jelly requires a lot of sugar.

In some places armed guards protected the sugar supply and in Indianapolis, Indiana several thousand people (mostly women) swarmed a Piggly Wiggly store to get some canning sugar that had been advertised as an emergency sale. Eighteen thousand pounds of sugar in ten-pound sacks were sold in the first hour. The doors of the store were then closed, but the crowd continued to grow because the women thought the store had more sugar. The police were called to stand guard at the store. The crowd then marched to the mayor's office and the governor's office demanding something be done about the shortage of sugar. A man named Stanley Wyckoff who was in charge of sugar distribution for Indiana was forced to resign his job after the invasion of "the sugar mob".

The demand for saccharin (a sugar substitute) increased because of the sugar shortage in 1920. Saccharin had been discovered accidentally in 1879 and the sugar shortage increased the demand for it.

Hoarding of things in short supply is not unusual. We have seen recently during the Covid pandemic how people bought up all the toilet paper, paper towels, and hand sanitizer. It takes a while to get back to normal when something interrupts the supply chain.

Some of those people who lived through the rationing in World War I also lived through World War II when many products were rationed. It could happen again.

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Comments from readers--

1. I had no idea this happened in Our Part of the World. Thanks for sharing – Amy
2. Interesting part of our history that I did not know about. Of course, I knew about rationing but not specifically about the sugar. History definitely repeats itself. – Barbara
3. Good news – Bill

4. So interesting- never heard of this. But I well remember the shortage in WW2. I had a friend who worked in a grocery in Prescott - Charles Mann - who would bring me some sugar on his way home down the Cale Road. I still have my grandmother's ration book. – Irma

REFLECTIONS NO. 12 (FEBRUARY 15, 2021)

The Overall Clubs of 1920

Following the end of World War I, there was a dramatic increase in prices of things in the United States. Newspapers often reported on what they called H. C. L – The High Cost of Living. One of the things people complained about was the drastic increase in the price of clothing.

A movement was started in Birmingham, Alabama in April, 1920 to organize an Overall Club in which members agreed to wear overalls six days a week and only dress up on Sundays. It was believed this would cause clothing manufacturers to lower their prices on more dressy clothing.

The movement quickly spread all over the South and into other parts of the country. It even reached into Canada, England, and some other countries. Even the women got involved. They began to wear gingham and calico dresses instead of more expensive dresses. People of all ages and occupations joined the movement. College students wore overalls to class. State legislators and some doctors dressed in overalls. Even a few preachers wore overalls at church on Sunday.

Shoes were added to the movement also as people began to wear brogan work shoes instead of dress shoes. Some people patched their old overalls instead of buying a new pair.

You can probably guess what happened. The movement did cause some clothing prices to go down slightly, but the price for overalls went up due to the great demand. A pair of overalls normally costing \$2 now cost \$6.

The movement lasted through the summer of 1920 and then gradually died out. It was an early form of protest that let people voice their dissatisfaction with the high prices they were having to pay for clothing. Nobody got hurt, no buildings were burned, and no stores were looted. It was just a harmless form of protest and was probably enjoyed by those who participated. It only lasted for a few months

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Comments from readers---

1. That is a great story! Kinda reminds me of the loungewear situation many of us have enjoyed during the 2020 Pandemic. When you don't go anywhere there is little need for a large or any new additions to your wardrobe. However, I really would enjoy a trip to Dillards about now. But certainly, am not leaving my house in this kind of weather. -- Teresa

REFLECTIONS NO. 13 (FEBRUARY 22, 2021)

The Roaring Twenties

The decade of the 1920s was an interesting time in our history. It was a period of prosperity in the United States. More people lived in the cities than in the country by that time. Movie theaters were popular and featured talking movies for the first time. Chain stores spread over the nation. The automobile was very popular by the 1920s. A Ford Model T could be purchased for \$260 in 1924. They were nicknamed "flivvers". There were some problems as automobiles had to share the roads with horse-drawn wagons. The airplane was more common by this time. Amelia Earhart was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic in 1928. American Indians were granted citizenship in 1924. The 1920s also saw the rise of organizations like the KKK which terrorized Catholics, blacks, and Jews.

There were many changes in clothing styles, new dances, the invention of the radio, young women smoking cigarettes, etc. Many young people abandoned their moral upbringing in favor of a more liberated lifestyle. Women could now vote for the first time. It was the time of Prohibition in which the sale of alcohol was prohibited. This resulted in speakeasies in the cities where illegal alcohol was sold and illegal stills in the rural areas where bootleggers got the alcohol to sell in secret. Young women in the big cities who dressed in the new shorter dresses, drank alcohol, smoked cigarettes, and wore their hair in the new "bob" style were given the name "flappers". Popular dances at that time were the Charleston, the jitterbug, the cake walk, the black bottom, and the flea hop. It was a time of rapid social change. The decade became known as "the Roaring Twenties".

Most of this social change occurred in the big cities. Of course, there was much criticism about these changes in behavior. Utah attempted to pass a law regulating the length of women's skirts. Women were wearing dresses that came up to the knee-cap for the first time. If women wore bathing suits that were considered too revealing they were escorted off the beach by the police. Preachers preached sermons about the immoral behavior of the young people.

All this partying and new lifestyle slowed down in 1929 when the stock market crashed and the Great Depression began. The country was in for several years of severe hardships, very high unemployment, and extreme drouth. Jobs were scarce and most people had very little money to waste of trivial things.

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Comment from readers—

1. I had to look up "Black Bottom" dance. It looks like another example of white appropriation of Black Culture. I have become more aware of this phenomenon since watching the recent film version of August Wilson's play "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom." – Lisa

2. Well — If the guys could do it - why not the girls, too. Besides those long dresses were hot. And with no air conditioning- - -whee - - - those dances were good exercise. And the story is that my grandfather lost a bundle in the crash. == Mary Anna

3. Course we know nothing first hand of those days. But we do know that Prescott and Nevada County had a population of over 20,000, and was thriving around those times. The railroaid had made Prescott a "major" stop. I an sure the depression started the decline. But Jerry what actually were the contributors--and why no recovery? – Dan

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RAINFALL RECORD TO FEBRUARY

7.0 INCHES PLUS 13-18 INCHES OF SNOW

TOTAL OF 11.7 INCHES OF RAIN SO FAR THIS YEAR