



World War I Poster

The US government finances its tremendous day-to-day operations by various means including taxation and the sale of Treasury Bills. In wartime the financial need is even greater and more innovative measures are routinely taken. During World War I the government sponsored the sale of War Savings Certificates and Stamps. These were available at post offices, banks, and other designated locations. In late 1917 each stamp cost \$4.12 and each certificate had space for 20 stamps. For people of more modest means, Thrift Stamps could be

purchased. Costing only 25 cents, 16 of these could be accumulated to purchase a War Savings Stamp. Wealthier people could purchase bonds of higher denominations as part of the Liberty Loan program. There were five such Liberty Loans, including one after the war was over in 1918-1919, meant to pay off the tremendous indebtedness of the country, and to "bring the boys back home." These bonds were redeemable by the purchasers at a later date with accrued interest.

All of these initiatives were highly publicized in newspapers, and posters encouraging participation were displayed in public spaces such as post offices and schools. In addition, people were urged to hang posters and signs in offices and the windows of homes, appealing to the patriotism of every citizen to do his or her part to support the country in that time of great need.

The Treasury Department issued a *United States Government War Savings Stamps Handbook for Banking, Educational, Industrial and Other Interests* in 1917. It stated that "Never in its history has our country been faced with the necessity of providing for the payment of such large sums of money....This

tremendous sum is necessary for the maintenance of the Army, the Navy, the building of a great merchant marine, the construction of aircraft... and loans to other nations fighting at our side.”

Greater efforts were encouraged: “The formation of War-Savings Societies is suggested.” These may be comprised of groups of 10 or more with the idea that “these societies will be very helpful in schools, industrial establishments, and in social and other organizations.” Several societies within one school or factory, shop, mine, etc. might foster “a healthy rivalry” for total savings and contributions. The ultimate purpose is to “awaken a realization among the men, women, and children of the entire Nation that in their hands lies the key to the successful prosecution of the war; that they can render the most far-reaching, patriotic service through refraining from the purchase of all unnecessary articles....” This will also “lay the foundation of thrift and economy throughout the United States....”

Tompkins County’s citizens did their part to contribute to the war effort. Each of the municipalities formed committees to organize fund drives and monitor donations. In Danby, for example, the quotas assigned for three of the five Liberty Loans were well exceeded, and the chairmen of the committees were pleased that “no public meetings were held urging the public to buy bonds, and the response was entirely voluntary.”

April 2017 marks the 100th anniversary of the US entry into the war. Scrapbooks honoring soldiers from Tompkins County who fought in the war, as well as other World War I materials, can be seen at The History Center research library.