

Archival Minute

January 2011

WAYNE LADY WRITES FROM THE WAR ZONE

The Wayne lady referred to in this headline from the August 27, 1914 issue of the *Wayne Herald* is Edith Stocking. Edith Stocking (1866-1944) had taught in public schools in Dodge County, North Bend and Wayne before joining the faculty of the State Normal School in 1910. She served as the First Primary Training Teacher / Primary Supervisor in the training school for 25 years. The 1919 *Spizzerinktum* describes her as having “a broad outlook on life and a sympathetic understanding of childhood. She is methodical and conscientious in her work, and practice teachers feel that in her they can find a most willing helper if they are truly in earnest about their work.”



Stocking happened to be travelling in Europe in the summer of 1914 when the First World War broke out. She wrote two lengthy letters to the *Herald* (appearing August 27 and October 1, respectively) in which she provided her perspective on events.

In the first letter, written on August 14, she begins “Though not a ‘war correspondent’ for your paper, yet thinking you might like news from the ‘front,’ I send you this short article from London, which I reached after a thirteen day’s stop in Paris.”

Stocking writes that:

“Our party of four drifted happily through Germany, Switzerland and Bohemia since June 21, hearing occasional rumors of war, which were always discredited when we made inquiry with regard to the actual situation. The people did not want war. ‘Simply a war scare’—so we went on our way rejoicing. In Cologne, the night of July 27, we saw our first street demonstration. In Amsterdam, being uneasy about being so far removed from Paris, whence we were bound, we made careful inquiry, and our fears were quieted, and we thoroughly enjoyed peace-loving Holland, until the whole situation burst upon us, and we realized to some extent the impending events.”

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*A Man in World War I
Infantry Carb. ¹*

She continues to recount how they made their way from Holland through Belgium to Paris, describing the war preparations. She remarks, “I had never realized the different phases of war until we entered the excited mass of soldiers already mobilizing at the Antwerp depot, preparatory to entraining early in the morning.” They started for Paris on a train “loaded with frantic people—some heartbroken at leaving relatives going to the front, others, like ourselves, anxious to reach Paris, a city from which it is easy to reach London.”

She goes on to say,

“Words cannot describe the tumult we found at Paris when at last . . . our train pulled into the Gar de Nord depot. All France was interested in the sending out of the troops. No porters were to be had. Omnibuses ordered to the front, street cars not running. Our troubles were small ones compared to others we saw. We were finally located and since that time have spent thirteen days in Paris, during which war has been declared, and the largest armies the world has ever seen have been mobilized.”

After describing some “minor details” of what was going on in France she concludes:

“I will close by hoping when this comes to hand, peace will be declared, though I do not expect it to be.

“I will add I still hope to sail home from Glasgow, though my hope grows fainter every day.”

“With best wishes for my Wayne friends, I am, Sincerely, Edith Stocking.”

She describes the war condition in England in her second letter. Among the war preparations she notes that at Oxford, “two of the colleges were fully fitted up for hospitals, containing four hundred beds, with two hundred Red Cross nurses.” While waiting to leave London, evidently she was able to travel about England a bit as she relates that

“we found provision made for the care of the wounded in almost every town we visited. This has been done at the request of Queen Mary who has asked that all the sick and wounded shall be taken care of as near their own homes as possible. The physicians in many towns are giving lessons in ‘first aid’ to anyone wishing to learn, so there may be sufficient help in ordinary cases, should there be too few nurses. The last home we stayed in Keswick, England, has three rooms equipped to take care of sick soldiers.”

Finally, on August 28, they were able to leave by train to Glasgow where they would board a ship for home. On the train trip “we found conditions much the same elsewhere, no excitement, just a readiness to face the issue. Troops were to be seen in the fields, training as we rode from town to town. These were to be ordered to the front in six months, we were told.”

Stocking and her companions landed in Montreal the evening of September 8.

She concluded this letter:

“When I write [sic] from London, I prophesied the great battle would be fought and the issue known before my letter reached Wayne. I have no prophecy now, but hope the end is near, though I have no reason to believe it is.

“Americans have more to be thankful for than they will ever realize. Such a war as Europe is now engaged in cannot overtake our country, and peace is ours.”

Sadly, this observation proved wrong as the United States did enter the war about two-and-a-half years later.

Stocking also gave an account of her trip in the January 1915 issue of the school newspaper, *The Goldenrod*. Her focus was more on her pre-war experiences, but she did not leave out a short account of that part of her trip after the outbreak of the war. She ended the article: “Thus ended my first trip abroad and through it has come a larger outlook upon life and a keener sympathy for suffering.”



Houses of Healing, Paris (c.1915).²

1. http://www.credoreference.com/entry/heliconhe/world_war_i_infantry
2. <http://www.flickr.com/photos/32008531@N08/3329344564>