Helping Families Communicate in Wartime

Posted At : December 22, 2011 9:00 AM | Posted By : Seth Chalmer
Related Categories: diplomacy, family, J-Vault, history, war

This week, from the J-Vault: ***To Find Jews in a War Zone*** (1915)

The Great War (later to be known as World War I) had been raging for a year, with Russia and Western Europe locked in a bloody battle with the Central powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). Sending letters between the United States and Eastern Europe, naturally, was nearly impossible. Communication across the lines would require the participation of the belligerent governments and their militaries.

At this stage of the war, however, America remained neutral, and therefore American organizations, with the help of the US government, could obtain cooperation from governments of both sides. The Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of America did just that:

> The war has caused numberless instances, separation of parents from children, wives from husbands, and sisters from brothers, and has filled the hearts of hundreds of thousands of foreign born Jews throughout this country with terror, for among the 2,000,000 Jews now living in the United States are found persons coming from every town and hamlet in Russia, Austria, Galicia and Poland in which Jews dwell, and these are extremely anxious to know the fate of those members of their families whom they left behind...
>
> ...The Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of America... recently organized a Bureau especially equipped for this purpose. Judge Leon Sanders, the president of the society, made arrangements with similar national organizations in Russia, Austria, Germany, England and France...
>
> ...About 800 persons have, since the opening of the Bureau, been placed into direct communication with their loved ones, and their letters and money have been forwarded to them...
>
> ..."Help us find our only son" writes a lonely mother from Philadelphia—"We have shed all our tears in vain, and have done all we could to obtain news from him who remained behind to serve in the armies of the Czar."
>
> "We are four children" writes a group from Boston, "who supported our aged parents in Austria, by regular monthly remittances, but since the war broke out we do not hear from them."
>
> From Galveston, Tex., comes the following: "Please help me find the address of my wife and baby because it is over a year since I received word from them. How happy I would be of you could trace my dear ones! You would be

giving them and me a new lease of life."..

...Scores of similar letters are received daily by the Society from every part of the United States and Canada. Hundreds' of persons come in person to the office at 229 East Broadway to ask for word from those in whom they are interested, and every effort is made to obtain the information for which they seek.

Read more...