

*The exhibit of the Sisters of Notre Dame was highly commended, and at the close of the Fair, which lasted six months, a diploma and medal were awarded to fifteen of our houses in Massachusetts, Lowell's parish and day schools being among the favored ones. See the Boston Herald, Dec. 13, 1893. Columbus, Queen Isabella, and*

# Annals from the Archives

## Rationing During WWII



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Line to Receive Ration Books

Image from  
From [nationalww2museum.org](http://nationalww2museum.org)

—Being semi-cloistered until after Vatican II, the Convent Annalists for the Massachusetts Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur seldom mentioned local or national events. Despite that, a handful of the Annalists did report on the startling Pearl Harbor attack on December 7, 1941. And by the end of that month and into the beginning of 1942, every single convent Annalist recorded the sacrifices made, not only by the sisters and students, but by also everyone in the United States to aid in the war effort.

The first sacrifice required by the government was recorded by the Lowell Annalist, just a couple of weeks after the U.S. entered the war. She wrote, “As our privilege of having *Midnight Mass* had been withdrawn, due to the war, which had been declared on the seventh, after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, we had to wait until six A.M. to welcome our Divine Guest on His Birthday anniversary.”

The need to maintain darkness to prevent enemy aircraft from identifying ground sites had actually begun on the Pacific Coast before the declaration of war, due to the rising tensions with Japan. But with the advent of war, the sisters, along with the general public, worked diligently to maintain darkness as much as possible at night. In Chicopee, MA, the convent Annalist wrote in March of 1942 that, “The first ‘Blackout’ in Chicopee and Western Massachusetts left us in complete darkness for about twenty minutes on the night of the sixth. The blowing of the sirens and the planes overhead made us very war conscious and there were fervent prayers, not only for our delivery from a real bombing, but for our dear European Sisters whose ‘blackouts’ were not just trials but real terrifying experiences.”

In addition to maintaining darkness, the local authorities also asked for volunteers to be air raid wardens, to insure everyone complied with the drills. These requirements did not exclude the religious. In Chicopee, the sisters wrote that, “Since the declaration of war the previous December 8, there had been considerable talks of Air Raid Protection in case of bombing so we were not surprised when we were notified that all Religious Teachers in Chicopee would be obliged to attend courses in A.R.P. [Air Raid Protection] beginning Saturday January 24 and continuing for four Saturdays. . . . Fifteen of our Sisters attended the lectures and demonstrations, took the examination and all received a certificate from the Mayor testifying that they were Air Raid Wardens.”

In Tyngsboro, the sisters wrote of working with their boarders to be prepared for an air raid. “The Boarders were drilled to respond to the ‘Blackout Signals.’ They were awakened by electric bells after they had gone to sleep, They dressed quickly and proceeded to the basement floor where each had been given her particular safety zone.”

In addition to the blackout practices, the U.S. government began rationing, so that all food, supplies and other essential items could be funneled to the military. Towns and cities created local rationing boards to provide consumers with the required stamps to purchase goods. In January, just a few weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the first item the government

rationed were tires. While the rubber for tires, as well as the tires themselves, were diverted to the military, the reason for the rationing also had to do with the Japanese Army controlling the Pacific, and thus blocking the shipment of rubber to the U.S. Civilians learned how to patch and repair their worn tires, since new ones were no longer available. Only essential workers, such as medical personnel and the police, could obtain new tires and again only by applying to the ration board for an exemption. The following month, automobile manufacturers stopped producing new cars and shifted their factory production to building jeeps, tanks and ambulances. Ordinary citizens could not longer buy new cars. And by May, the rationing extended to practically every consumer item, from food to fuel to shoes and stockings.

To buy rationed items, everyone was issued ration books during the war. Without providing the proper ration stamp to the grocery store employees, people were unable to buy rationed items such as coffee or sugar. In 1943, for instance, bacon cost thirty cents a pound, but in addition to the cost, people also had to provide seven ration stamps for the purchase. Because most people had long experience of making due with little during the Depression, they became very creative in stretching certain items such as coffee, canned milk and sugar to last longer.

As the Annalist in Cambridge reported in 1943, *"Since the attack on Pearl Harbor more than a year ago, our lights have been darkened, our food has been rationed, and even our time has been changed, for the whole country is on a war-time schedule and the clocks are an hour ahead of regular time. A shortage of fuel oil caused our good pastor to change back to coal heating again so that we have to wait in the morning for the janitor to send up some steam instead of regulating the thermostat as has been the custom for the past five or six years. However, no one objects, all have only one great desire and that is to see an end to the terrible war . . ."*

Despite that desire, the sacrifices were difficult for most everyone. The Peabody Annalist wrote that, *"Our transportation difficulties are greater than ever this year. War rationing of tires and gas forced the city authorities to make more stringent bus regulations with the result that much bookkeeping is necessary to keep all running smoothly. Some children travel on Eastern Massachusetts, others on the Hudson buses, but now to procure free tickets for the rides the children must live at least a mile and half from school. Tickets are issued each month and do not allow for any extra trips. Thus, the arrangement does not appear too satisfactory to the pupils."*

These restrictions also prevented the sisters and students going to the yearly Tyngsboro picnics, something everyone enjoyed. The Cambridge sisters reported that, *"No picnic did we have at Tyngsboro this year nor last year either. This was a great disappointment to our pupils who always looked forward with great anticipation to the day in the country but as it was impossible to find means of transportation [we were unable to go]. . ."*

Despite the difficulties, most Americans accepted these sacrifices as one way to participate in the war effort. And by the fall of 1945, when victory was at hand, everyone knew that the struggles they had endured—doing their duty by doing without—made all the difference in bringing about the final end of the war.

One application must be made for each person who is a member of a family group, or adoption and who regularly live at the same address. Persons temporarily away from home (for a period of 60 days or less), such as students, travelers, hospital patients, etc., must be included in the family application. Persons living at the same address BUT NOT RELATED by blood, marriage, or adoption must file SEPARATE applications. If additional applications are needed, you can get them at your post office. A person may be included in only one application for War Ration Book No. 3.

The following may *not* apply or be included in any application for War Ration Book No. 3: Persons in the armed services, whether or not eating in organized messes, including Army, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, and all Women's Auxiliaries; and inmates of institutions of involuntary confinement such as prisons and insane asylums.

Print below full name and complete mailing address of the person to whom books are to be mailed. Books will be delivered by July 21, 1943, to address given below. Books will NOT be forwarded. If you are not reasonably sure of address between June 15 and July 21, 1943, do not submit application. Such applications will be accepted later.

**Print in Ink or Type**

Name STEPHEN JOHN LINDSLEY

Mailing address 70 PARK AVENUE  
(Number) (Street, R. F. D., or General Delivery)

City or post office and State BLOOMFIELD NEW JERSEY  
**909863 AL**

Print in the spaces provided below the name of the head of the family, the county in which persons included in this application live, and their complete mailing address. If you are not a member of a family group, print your own name and address.

**Print in ink or type Do Not Fold or Tear Off**

This application must be mailed between June 1 and June 30, 1943. After June 10th, applications will not be accepted before August 1. Affix postage before mailing.

Application for a Ration Book  
Image from  
National WW2 Museum

### Sources consulted for this article

- ◆ National Park Service, nps.gov
- ◆ National World War II Museum, national222museum.org
- ◆ Chicopee Convent Annals, 1938-1958.
- ◆ Peabody Convent Annals, 1912-1943.
- ◆ Tyngsboro Convent Annals, 1934-1972.
- ◆ Cambridge Convent Annals, 1940-1971.
- ◆ Lowell Convent Annals, 1938-1958.
- ◆ *Boston Globe* Archives, 1872-2020.
- ◆ *New York Times* Archives 1852-2020.