

June 4, 2020

Pennsylvania Community works to Aid Starving Belgians during World War I

(Pennsylvania Military Museum, J.Gleim, Museum Curator)



Photo of Cookbook, Interior.

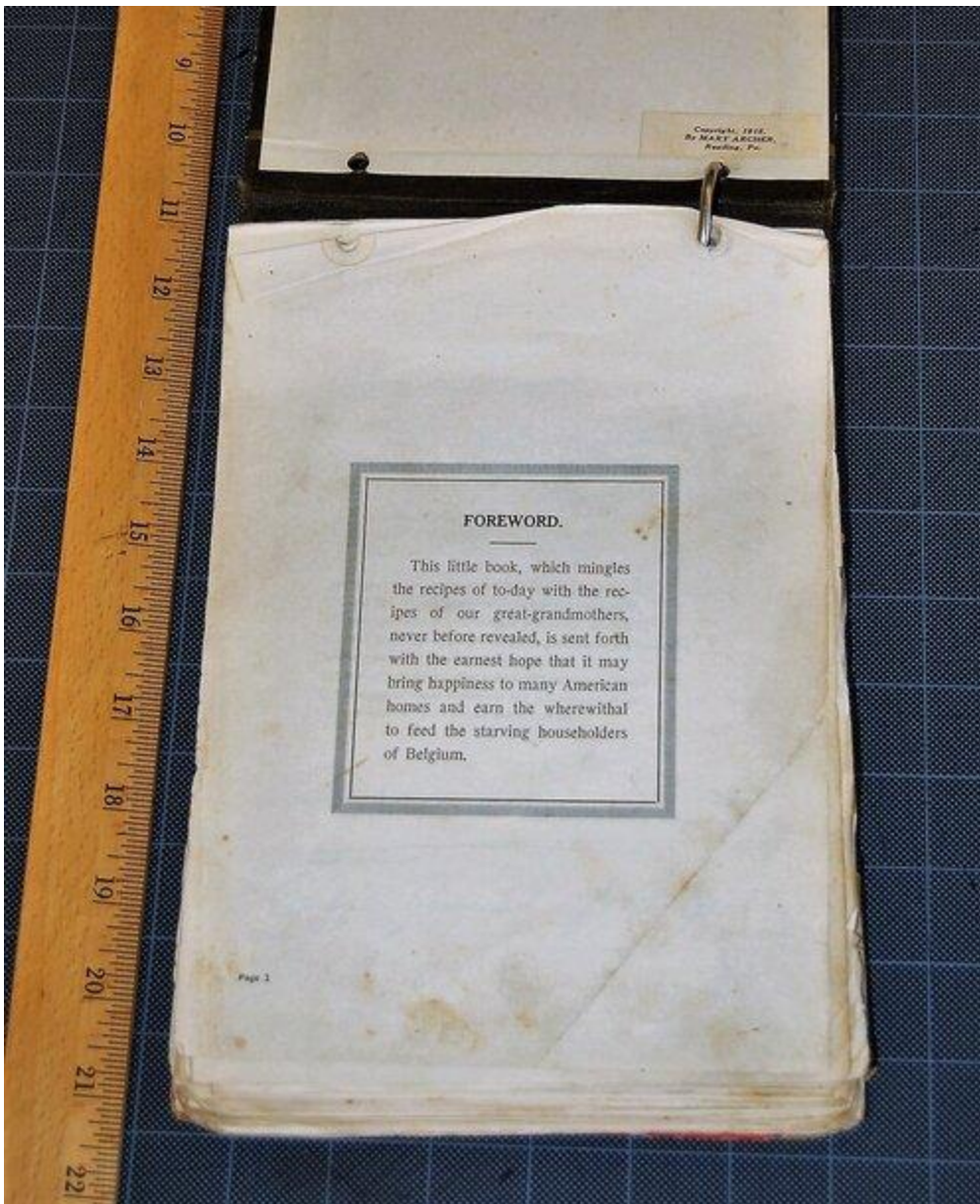


Photo of Cookbook, Foreword.

This 1915 Belgian Relief Cookbook is an example of how Pennsylvanians participated in relief efforts for European communities prior to American military involvement in World War I. The cookbook, featuring recipes collected from households throughout Berks County, was compiled by prominent Reading philanthropist Mary Archer, with the help of the Women's Belgian Relief Committee of Reading. The book's foreword states the aim of its publication, and provides insight into how the European conflict was viewed by a predominately German-American community: "This little book, which mingles the recipes of to-day with the recipes of our great-grandmothers, never before revealed, is sent forth with the earnest hope that it may bring happiness to many American homes and earn the wherewithal to feed the starving householders of Belgium". The cookbook sold for \$1.00 and the proceeds were given to the Commission for Relief in Belgium.

Organized in 1914 and chaired by Herbert Hoover, the Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) was a multinational humanitarian organization founded to provide aid to starving civilians in German-occupied Belgium and northern France. At the outbreak of World War I, Belgium was among the most urbanized nations in Europe and grew only 20-25% of its own food, relying heavily on imports to feed its people. Following German occupation, and the ensuing British blockade of German-occupied nations, Belgium struggled to provide nourishment to its people. Comprised entirely of volunteers and funded first through donations and later by a

combination of donations and government aid, the CRB's network of volunteers and ships worked to organize the transport of foodstuffs and clothing into Belgium.

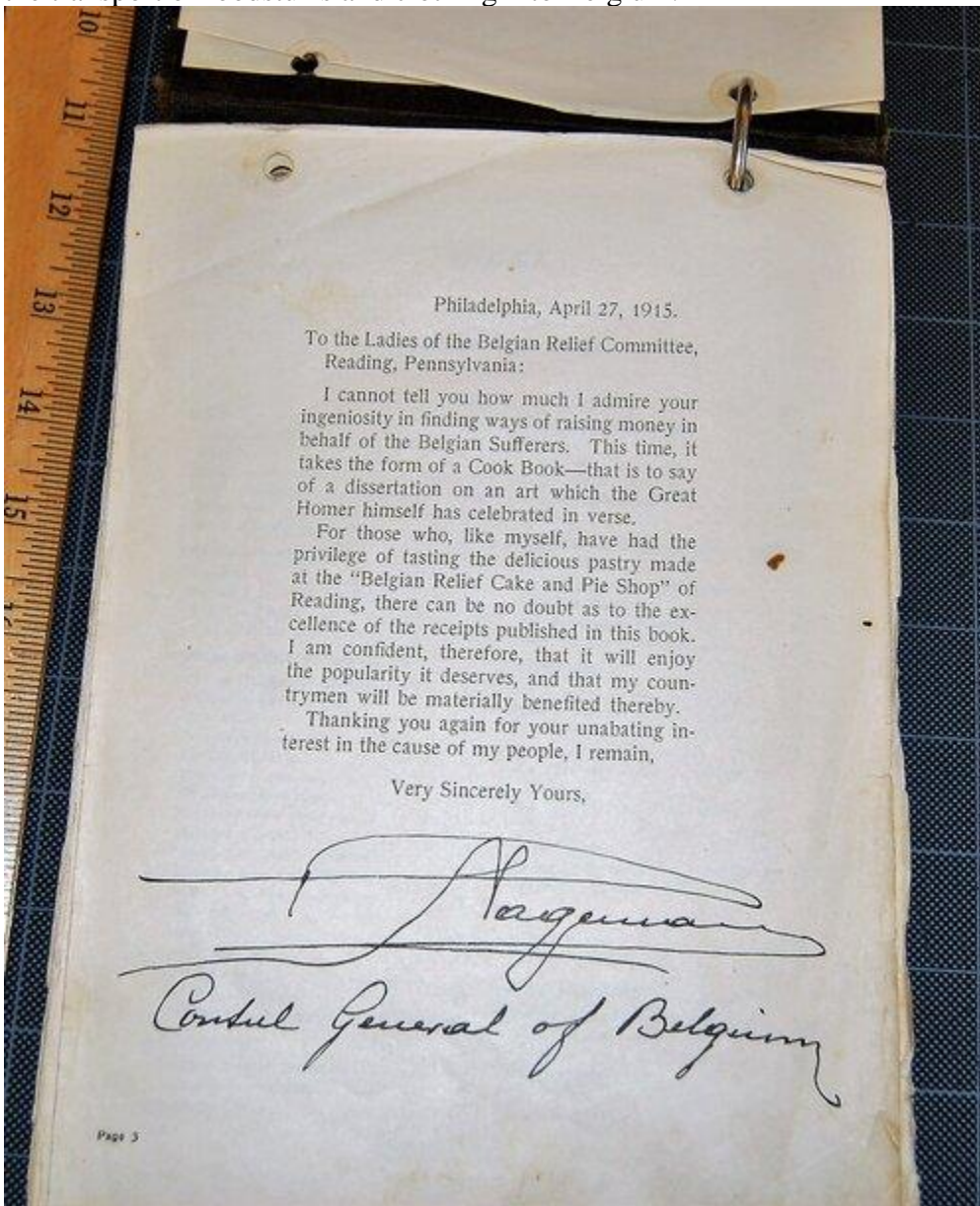


Photo of Cookbook, Consul General Thanks.

Despite its goal of providing humanitarian aid to civilians, the Commission encountered resentment from Allied powers, particularly Great Britain, who felt that feeding the people of Belgium was now Germany's responsibility and that foodstuffs provided by the CRB would, in fact, aid the German army. The CRB was undeterred and using neutral channels its ships avoided seizures and submarine attacks, successfully delivering more than five million tons of aid to more than eleven million Belgian and French civilians.