

# **The Near East Relief's Caucasus Branch Operation (1919-1920)**

By Shaloma Gauthier  
Ph.D. Candidate

[shaloma.gauthier@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:shaloma.gauthier@graduateinstitute.ch)

and

Davide Rodogno  
Professor

[davide.rodogno@graduateinstitute.ch](mailto:davide.rodogno@graduateinstitute.ch)

Both Gauthier and Rodogno:  
International History Department  
The Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies,<sup>1</sup> Geneva

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## **Introduction**

This report intends to expand our knowledge as well as to contribute to the existent historiography on the Near East Relief (NER), an American humanitarian organization, which has been understudied. We wish to pinpoint three main aspects of the NER's early history. The first being tension between one of the main ideological assumptions of the organization—i.e., to carry out rehabilitation programs that went beyond short-term emergency relief—and the absolute necessity to undertake vast relief operations. The NER's Caucasus Branch operation illustrates this tension. Second, the 1919-1920 relief operation in the Caucasus sheds light on why it was necessary for the NER to cooperate with other American organizations, such as the American Relief Administration (ARA) and the American Red Cross (ARC). We will provide details about this complex relationship later in the report. Finally, this research report provides an opportunity to reflect on the ideology(ies) and working methods of NER workers. Contrary to what one might think, the NER was far from being a monolithic organization. The Board of Trustees, the executives, and the men (and women) on the spot had different views on the NER's objectives as well as on how they

should be achieved. In 2009, Sarah Miglio wrote a Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) research report entitled “America’s Sacred Duty: Near East Relief and the Armenian Crisis, 1915-1930.” It was based on some of the sources referred to in our RAC research report. Miglio focused on America’s “Sacred Duty” in the Near East and more specifically, on the Armenians during and after the genocide. Our objective is to offer a closer look at the operational work carried out by the NER. Miglio focused on the significance of the Armenian crisis for the American public, whereas our objective is to look into more pragmatic aspects of the programs of the NER for Armenians and other civilian populations.

Before delving into these components, we wish to address a problem that scholars working on the NER face. No central archives of the organization exists. As a result, the NER collection at the RAC is of crucial importance for those interested in its history. The NER sources are unprocessed. The boxes contain heterogeneous material, including diaries, unpublished manuscripts, memoirs, pamphlets, and a vast array of propaganda material, as well as pictures (with and without captions). Further information on the NER is to be found at the National Archives in Washington, the American Board Committee of Foreign Missions (ABCFM), located at the Houghton Library at Harvard University, and in the archives of various other organizations that interacted with the NER such as the International Labour Organization, the League of Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the League of Red Cross Societies. The ARA archives are also of relevance for the Caucasus operations, including William Haskell’s papers, located at the Hoover Archives, Stanford University, as well as the ARC archives, which are dispersed among at least three different archives. Although we have already visited a number of these archives, the sources at that RAC on the NER are of vital importance for our research. This research report will only take the research carried out at the RAC during the summer of 2011 into account.

## **The Broader Context of Humanitarian Operations in the Aftermath of WW I**

In the aftermath of the First World War, a number of secular and faith-based organizations, including philanthropic foundations and inter-governmental organizations, such as the League of Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO), established various humanitarian programs on behalf of civilian populations. There were a number of organizations who focused solely on fundraising or those that took part in relief operations. As far as the provision of relief was concerned, there were organizations that focused on short term-relief, comprised of food, clothing, provisional shelter, and medical aid. Some organizations sought to extend this further and combined short-term relief with medium-term programs. There were also a number of umbrella organizations that centralized fund-raising campaigns.

The NER was one of the main organizations in the Near and Middle East that carried out both short-term operations and medium-term programs. It is estimated that over one hundred and ten million dollars was donated to the NER by American individuals, American philanthropic foundations and other organizations, for the cause of relief and rebuilding during the interwar period. The vast majority of these funds were intended for the relief and rehabilitation of the Armenians. This organization also undertook programs on behalf of other ex-Ottoman Christian populations, mainly Greek Orthodox refugees in Greece after 1922, and the Assyrians scattered throughout the Middle East. On August 6, 1919, the U.S. Congress incorporated the committee known as the Near East Relief and officially approved the NER's efforts to organize food, medicine and refugee administration in the Near East.<sup>2</sup> In 1918-1919, President Woodrow Wilson granted his support to the NER and became involved in the political settlement of the "Armenian Question."<sup>3</sup> Wilson encouraged the federal government to donate relief supplies to the NER and this remained unchanged under President Harding's administration. The incorporation of the NER by the U.S. Congress was

not exceptional. The ARA, led by Herbert Hoover, was incorporated in February 1919. It should also be noted that Wilson was the president of the ARC.<sup>4</sup> Similar to the ARA and NER, the ARC was closely connected to the White House and the U.S. federal government, more specifically to the State Department. This was a characteristic of U.S. humanitarian organizations, the NER included.<sup>5</sup>

As Miglio and other scholars have pointed out, the Armenians captured the United States imagination and prompted the nation to action.<sup>6</sup> The genocide of the Armenians during the war and American organizations' aid to the Armenians is not the purpose of this paper. It is, however, important not to forget the long-term "special" relations between the Armenians and the Americans, which has been examined in various academic works.<sup>7</sup> The religious dimension has been emphasized in all scholarly work on this organization. This was visible in the programs undertaken by this organization on behalf of the Armenians and in other programs the NER set up on behalf of the Greek Orthodox communities of the ex-Ottoman Empire. This archival report will not claim the contrary, however, we draw the attention of the readers to the fact that various strands and visions within the organization existed. Although there was an intimate connection between Charles Vickery, the secretary of the NER, and the representatives of various Protestant American colleges in Turkey, it is also true that many secular "experts" of education, rural education and health, brought a different perspective on the scope and meaning of NER programs. This is particularly clear when one reads unpublished sources found in the NER papers at the RAC, such as Barclay Acheson's diary.

Therefore, it would be wrong to hastily conclude that the NER was an anti-Islamic or anti-Turkish organization. Some of the documents located at the RAC demonstrate that the NER would have undertaken further relief work on behalf of Muslim populations, though the political conditions in Turkey after the military victory of Mustapha Kemal hindered such

programs. Western humanitarian organizations were perceived as violating Turkish sovereignty and they had a difficult time continuing their operations within Turkey.<sup>8</sup> In fact, after 1922, the NER conducted the bulk of its operations on the fringes of the ex-Ottoman Empire: in Transcaucasia, Syria, Lebanon, and Greece. The major exception was Constantinople, as it was an internationally occupied city. These operations took place because the bulk of Armenian communities had been deported or had fled from their villages and towns during the war. Moreover, as the NER depended on the funds raised within Protestant as well as Catholic communities in the United States, preference was given to Christian populations.

The NER was not immune to Orientalist stereotypes, which had been proliferated in Europe and in North America since the mid-nineteenth century. It shared the same paternalist/imperialist disposition towards local populations both Christian and non-Christian. NER relief workers often interpreted their mission as the rescue of “progressive” Armenians from “barbarian” and “degenerate” Turks. Sarah Miglio notes that the Americans often had a contradictory perception of the Muslims.<sup>9</sup> For instance, Muslims were sharply criticized for their perceived practice of polygamy, their resistance to Christian missionaries, their failure to modernize Islamic society, and the persecution of Christians and Jews as well. At the same time, Muslims were also revered for their ancient faith, temperance, hygiene and piety. This ambivalence is reflected in many reports and diaries located at the RAC.

### **NER Relief Workers**

One of the characteristics of the NER was the recruitment of its workers. The organization was comprised of women and men who were familiar with the region. As we shall see below, the NER-Caucasus branch was composed of both missionaries, ARC, who were mainly women, working as nurses, and ARA workers, as well as many other “experts.”

Barclay Acheson, executive secretary of the NER and later of the Near East Foundation, highlights this aspect

The employed staff on the foreign field who were tussling with the problem of making strawless bricks were veterans, battle-scarred by many a hard campaign against disease and starvation. Some were well-trained specialists, who gave us the accumulated experience of the United States in medicine, sanitation, welfare work, orphanage organization, and child care. A few had been trained in the hard tradition of military camps. They contributed discipline. Fifteen or twenty were missionaries.<sup>10</sup>

The humanitarianism of these missionaries was biased and selective. An examination of their work as medical doctors in various Anatolian villages reveals a discrepancy between the Christian rhetoric used in various fund-raising campaigns in the U.S. and the daily work carried out by missionaries, doctors, and NER relief workers.<sup>11</sup> Although the NER used religious imagery in some of its publicity and fundraising campaigns, the organization also evoked secular themes and issues, such as self-help and modernization. Our argument is that the programs and objectives of the NER were not dissimilar from the objectives of other secular organizations, both American and European. That being said, the anti-missionary rhetoric of Hoover and other secular humanitarian workers in the aftermath of World War I was not evoked by the NER. According to the ARA, the latter was generally, but not systematically, deemed to belong to the group of “modern” humanitarian organizations. To secular humanitarian workers of the ARA or the ARC, “modern” meant to base one’s work upon “scientific” methods. Accordingly, relief workers in these organizations were supposed to be “experts” in nutrition, medical relief, logistics, etc. In 1940 Acheson, who defined himself as a “professional humanitarian”, wrote,

Most of the Americans received technical training in the United States. To that must be added the practical knowledge gained by years of experience and constant contact with welfare workers from Europe. Some of our best collaborators were hard-headed local government officials. We could not always trust political officialdom with our money, but we could depend on them to find the weak spot even in our most cherished plans. In addition, many of our policies and much of our technical knowledge came directly from American advisers recognized internationally as authorities in their respective fields. Several leaders in agriculture, sociology, education, and welfare work spent months in the Near East giving careful study to our problems and advice to our personnel.<sup>12</sup>

The NER experts were paternalist and believed that they were culturally superior. Their “civilizing” perspective, reminiscent of Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mills, is visible in their reports and memoirs. Howard Bailey McAfee, one of the experts who worked for the NER, reflected in his July 26, 1937, “Notes on Salonika” upon the NER’s experience in Greece, and on its principles and methods. The NER placed a high importance on the idea of self-help and self-reliance. This is a point that our research project intends to examine in-depth. Many American and European humanitarian organizations feared the political, social and economic consequences of the pauperization of masses of refugees and the unintended consequences of prolonged charity. McAfee and the NER—as well as any other European organizations, including the League of Nations-High Commissioner for Refugees and the ILO—shared the idea of giving refugees work. This would enable the best possible use of the limited funds at the organizations disposal.

Concretely, McAfee informed himself of the available businesses in Salonika. He decided that agricultural work was the best solution for the 5,000 refugees there. In his notes, McAfee does not indicate which options he had discarded and for what reasons. Moreover, he stated, “farmers did not know how to make the best out of the land that was available.”<sup>13</sup> In spite of this, the NER established fifty-four villages. The organization was confident that by using “well-proven scientific methods,” the refugees would become much more efficient. McAfee’s principles are summarized in the following passage,

Tell Macedonia story first to show the way the theory was developed and then follow up the story with the way conditions are five years later, and up to date.... Here is something that America has to give, - scientific knowledge of all kinds. We have great resources. We have spent money to find out these things. One man set down over there can tap these reservoirs of knowledge and adapt them to local needs in the villages. Instead of trying to solve things with a palliative that would leave them paupers we set out on the more constructive means of creating a well-to-do hinterland that would provide markets.<sup>14</sup>

Acheson confirmed this viewpoint in his diary and in the unpublished typescript, as he wrote, “Give those Greek peasants ten acres of land on the Mississippi delta, or even in a less fertile

spot, and if we did not wish to buy the products of their farms because we already had more food than we could consume, they would build self-contained communities and live joyfully and well.”<sup>15</sup> In essence, the need for these refugees to become self-sufficient was continuously iterated by the NER.

Acheson expressed the importance of the NER of avoiding any “ostentatious parade of American wealth.”<sup>16</sup> At the same time, it is clear that improving the fate of the civilians in the Near East would have been beneficial for America. Acheson’s classic liberal views are evident in his explanation for the establishment of the Salonika old-clothes industry in the late 1920s. In his view, the sending of used clothes to Salonika, removed a useless surplus on American markets. Those who contributed were financially able to replace it with new clothing. This stimulated business in America and in Greece. This would not only restore the self-confidence of the refugees, but would provide an opportunity for them to receive training in various trades. Ultimately, discouraged men and women would be rehabilitated, something that was evidently beneficial to the American donors. Acheson’s central point was,

When you take away a person’s self-reliance and his self-respect his manhood decays, and that the preservation of these virtues is as important as the preservation of life itself ... It was not textbook theories, but the bitter experience of realizing what happened in places where refugees were fed in idleness and contrasting the results with other places where the refugees had to shift for themselves because no one could or would help them, that gradually convinced our practical, kindly executives that emergency relief should be given for the shortest time possible and then only in exchange for value received ... feeding alone, when there is no permanent cure in sight, it is like building a bridge off into space.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Recipients of NER Aid: (Christian) Refugees and Children**

NER relief workers distinguished between two recipients of aid: Christian refugees and children. The NER programs for adult refugees were discontinued after 1924 due to a lack of funds. When the NER undertook the responsibility of bringing the children out of Turkey, it endorsed the “obligation to develop these foundlings into useful citizens, both for



the sake of the children themselves and for the sake of the countries that had given them refuge.”

The NER focused on programs for children, especially orphans.<sup>18</sup> The NER’s action in this field demonstrated the continuity between the NER and missionaries’ ideal of “training these parentless children for leadership in an intellectual and social renaissance in the Levant.” The NER called upon several “experts,” including McAfee who operated in the region of Kavalla (Greece). McAfee established a plan that consisted of placing both Armenian and Greek teenagers in peasant homes as student farmers. He or a member of his staff visited homes. When they found the type of home they wanted, a boy was selected and taken into the home. According to Acheson, good ordinary people turned these orphans into hard-working citizens. These “student farmers” were placed under a one-year contract. They worked for room and board, and were given a small piece of land to cultivate. “The crop from that bit of land was probably the first thing in all the world that was completely their own.”<sup>19</sup> As Acheson noted, “these boys took root themselves, they became part of a community as they shared its hopes and fears.”<sup>20</sup> The NER’s plan of moulding the new leadership in the Near East combined innovation and tradition. For instance, in adherence to local traditions, McAfee assisted in matrimonial practices, which consisted of selecting the brides, interviewing the parents, and arranging the details for eight new ventures in matrimony. We have not found any report or general assessment of this program in the NER documents. McAfee’s ambitious schemes seem to be an exception rather than the rule.

### **From Relief to Rehabilitation**

George Stewart was hired by the NER to assess the work carried out in the Near East. He wrote that an “emergency phase,” which ended by 1925, had characterized the NER programs since the end of the First World War.<sup>21</sup> In early 1925, the NER Executive Committee asked Stewart to write a report, which would be part of a set of reports intended

to help the Board decide how to reshape the organization, now that the emergency relief phase of its work was over.<sup>22</sup> It is interesting to note that the organization sought to assess and evaluate their activities in the midst of their relief operations.

When the organization found itself responsible for hundreds of infants, it concluded that “there was but one course of action open: that was to rush food, clothing, and medicines to the theatres of direct need.”<sup>23</sup> Although the organization’s leaders recognized that emergency relief was indispensable to rescue civilian populations and children, this was not what the organization had in mind in 1919. According to Stewart the Smyrna disaster in September 1922, closed “an epoch of relief work in Asia Minor.”<sup>24</sup> Following that event, which Stewart defines as a “holocaust,” it was no longer possible to maintain permanent work in that large section of Asia Minor. Consequently, all “minority peoples were soon on the roads which led to their three possible asylums: the Caucasus, including Armenian, now Russian territory; Syria; and Greece.”<sup>25</sup> Stewart’s report emphasizes the fact that during this period the emergency relief “directed policy of education, hospitalization, and spiritual culture was impossible. There were occasions when unusually fine achievements in these lines were accomplished, but in the main, refugee conditions forbade the best that could have been done in settled conditions.”<sup>26</sup> It was only since 1924-1925 that the NER started to give

19,000-odd children . . . daily bread and education the best that Christianity in America has to offer in the way of training, medical care, and spiritual leadership. This period may be called the period of consecutive training.<sup>27</sup>

The main training activities were: agricultural, shop training, rug-making, dressmaking, fine needlework, nurse training, academic studies, college training, and spiritual culture training. It was during that period of “consecutive training” that the NER became aware of additional needs of the children, such as the elimination of chronic and contagious diseases like favus, trachoma, and tuberculosis for example. The organization also realized that there was a specific need to train blind and deaf-mute children. In the conclusion of Stewart’s report, the

ultimate aim of the NER is revealed, “to graduate every child into a Christian home as a member of that family.”<sup>28</sup> The NER set up a system to try to locate the relatives of children or persons who came from the same locality who might see fit to take a child in as a member of their family.

### **Back to 1919-1920: The NER and its Cooperation with other American Organizations in Transcaucasia**

After the 1918 armistice, American soldiers organized relief in Transcaucasia, a region which included Georgia, the newly-born states of Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Northern Anatolia. This region was devastated by four years of war, massacre, disease and starvation, and the influx of Ottoman Armenian refugees from Turkey into Russian Armenia. It was also severely affected by refugee-related diseases such as cholera, typhoid, dysentery and typhus.

According to Acheson, with the opening of the Black Sea ports, American organizations and friends of the Armenian people entered the Caucasus. They reported that 200,000 people were starving and that \$12,500,000 was needed to keep the population alive for the next six months. Acheson wrote that private relief funds could not meet such a crisis unassisted, so an appeal was made to Herbert Hoover. Reconnaissance surveys by trusted, impartial observers (officials from the United States army and the British intelligence office) concluded that 330,000 refugees needed help at once, and that adequate help would cost over \$12,000,000.

Between January 1919 and July 1920, the total relief disbursed in Armenia and the Caucasus was valued at \$28,785,426. American agencies joined hands to meet the crisis. The American public gave \$500,000 through the Red Cross, and over \$10,000,000 through the NER. A Congressional relief appropriation provided 50,000 tons of food valued at over \$10,000,000 through the ARA. The NER cooperated fully with the ARA, and more

specifically with the European Children's Fund (ECF). The latter was a sub-branch of the ARA whose main objective was to take care of European children.<sup>29</sup> In a document dated November 13, 1919, the ARA claimed that the ECF regarded feeding the children as the most important feature of its relief work, one in which the future of the children was taken into consideration. The NER fully shared that idea. This accounts for one of the reasons for which the ARA-ECF and the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE), the predecessor of the NER, cooperated and worked together in Transcaucasia.

The ECF asked the Commonwealth Fund (CF) to assist in this matter by providing a supplementary meal each day for Armenian children for a period of three months beginning on December 1, 1919. After that time, the ECF expressed hope that the political situation in the Near East would have developed sufficiently to determine a "mandatory for Armenia (sic!)," and that it would then be possible to "work upon a program of reconstruction with the responsibility for the carrying out of that program definitely fixed." The CF agreed to appropriate \$750,000 to the ECF for the purchase and transportation of food for the relief of Armenian children, for a period of three months, beginning on December 1, 1919.<sup>30</sup>

The feeding program of Armenian children that was carried out by Colonel William Haskell started in late 1919. Haskell wore a double hat in the Caucasus. He was the Allied High Commissioner and the head of the ARA. Haskell's mission included a feeding program, a program of medical aid, and one of sending clothing. He and his men, mostly military, managed the entire operation. Two of these men are mentioned in the documents of Paxton Hibben and Colonel Rhead, who was second in command to Haskell.<sup>31</sup> U.S. Army officers who had been demobilized in 1919 were in command of this operation, and were re-commissioned for this purpose. ACRNE relief workers were already in the region and when the ARA-ECF asked the CF to appropriate \$750,000, the ARA and ACRNE joined forces, and the ARC also participated in this joint venture. The NER undertook full responsibility for

food transportation charges and for the care of parentless children. It was estimated that this would cost \$500,000 a month.

The report Haskell wrote in April 1920 mentioned that the CF's donations enabled child feeding operations until the first of August 1920, when "Armenia should be self-supporting if she ever will be." Haskell's report had to show that the CF's money had been spent in the best possible way. He emphasized that the child feeding idea had a distinctive advantage in the preservation of home life. Haskell did not conceal the political purpose of the mission. In his view, a direct relation between hunger and Bolshevism existed, and therefore the child feeding work would have an effect upon the political life of the country. According to Haskell, the average worker drifted towards Bolshevism as he saw the prospect of supporting and maintaining his family becoming more and more difficult.<sup>32</sup> Documents at the RAC do not reveal the extent to which relief workers were aware of or shared the political purpose of their mission.

On August 10, 1920, Turkey and the Allied powers signed the Treaty of Sèvres, which sanctioned a new Armenian state. This treaty gave President Wilson the task of delineating the frontiers between Armenia and Turkey. On November 22, 1920, Wilson allocated 87,000 square miles of the provinces of Erzurum, Van, Bitlis, and Trebizond to Armenia. In that same month, the Turkish army launched an attack on the Armenians at Kars. In the meantime, Russia assisted by Azerbaijan, mobilized troops and sent a note to the Armenian government demanding free passage of troops across its territory, renunciation of the Treaty of Sèvres, and the severance of all relations with Allied powers. The Armenian government refused, hoping that the Allies would come to its rescue, but no help came and the Armenian armies were defeated. The government was finally compelled to make a calamitous peace with the Turkish forces, one that left Armenia with little more than one-fifth of the area allocated to her by President Wilson. This treaty also left Armenia with an almost

indefensible boundary line and scarcely enough land to support its greatly augmented population, due to the fact that Armenian refugees had fled from their ancestral homes. Within a few months, the threat of further Turkish aggression resulted in the absorption of Armenia and Georgia into Soviet Russia.

It soon became obvious that Armenia and Georgia could not resist Communist infiltration from the north or defend themselves against Turkish invasion from the south. In order to avoid international complications, it was therefore necessary for Colonel Haskell, and most of his U.S. army officer staff, to withdraw from the Caucasus.

### **The NER-Caucasus Branch Feeding Operation**

The Haskell/Lonegran report on the child feeding supplies purchased by the CF begins with an overview of the child-feeding problem of the Caucasus, with particular reference to Armenia.<sup>33</sup> On September 10, 1919 the NER-Caucasus Branch took over general relief work, which had been carried out by the ACRNE and the ARA. Lonegran explains that it was difficult for the average native Russian Armenian to support a family and practically impossible for the refugee Turkish Armenian to support himself.

The way the report is structured demonstrates that Lonegran also belonged to the “modern” organizations that had adopted the scientific method of surveying the region before deciding how to allocate the resources. ARA, ARC and European relief workers proceeded in the same way and accurately surveyed the region where aid was supposed to be distributed. It was at this stage that inclusion and exclusion processes were established. In this particular case, the report did not say anything about Muslim populations and the devastation that these communities also faced. Instead, he expanded on the conditions of Armenian children.

The report explained that before the merger of the programs, ACRNE had set up orphanages, day-homes, and soup kitchens, while in addition to its large flour distribution program, the ARA established cocoa-kitchens for children in the town of Alexandropol.

These institutions were continued by the NER after its absorption of the programs undertaken by the ACRNE and ARA.

The territory over which the NER's Caucasus Branch extended its operations was divided into the districts of Batoum, Borjom (Akhalkalaki), Baku, Tiflis, Karaklis, Alexandropol, Kars, and Erivan. The boundaries of these districts were fixed by the central office in Tiflis (today's Tbilisi), and did not correspond to the political boundaries (at the end of the report a map indicates the borders of the various districts). According to NER sources, approximately two million people resided in what was formerly known as Russian Armenia and what was known in 1919 as Armenia. Approximately 300,000 were refugees from the Ottoman Empire who might ask for repatriation when boundary lines would be definitely fixed. In early 1920 the NER thought that this issue would be solved quickly. The report provides some statistics but it does not say much about the living conditions of non-Armenian populations.

According to the NER, 1,300,000 were Armenians; 65,000 Georgians, Russians and Greeks; 537,000 Tartars; 61,000 Turks; 75,000 Kurds; and, 38,000 Izides. For food relief purposes, the Armenians had been classified by the NER as follows:

Russian Armenians:	467,761
Armenian Army:	30,000
Refugee Russian Armenians:	58,300
Native Poor Russian Armenians:	365,665
Refugee Turkish Armenians:	284,974
Refugee Oriental Armenians:	39,300 (not coming from the Ottoman Empire)
Refugee Turkish Armenians from Van district:	6,000
Orphans:	35,000
Total:	1,296,000

Barclay Acheson talked about "old camps" where "once self-respecting, industrious people were rapidly becoming self-pitying parasites." He admitted that at that time, because of the humanitarian emergency, none of the NER advisers, and certainly none of the NER workers knew what to do. The road to a "constructive cure" was difficult. There was concern that the

orphans would become a generation that risked “the loss of initiative, inventiveness and self-reliance—a danger inherent in the lock-step discipline of institutions.” It was at that time, and because of the 1919-1922 experience, that Acheson became increasingly aware that “unthinking generosity might do as much harm as good.”<sup>34</sup> The situation in the Caucasus and elsewhere for that matter, presented itself as a precedent to improve the medium-term programs the NER undertook after 1923. Furthermore, it was in the early 1920s that the NER became aware of how difficult it was to persuade Americans to support constructive work.

Take the refugees out of those squalid camps—Acheson wrote—and put them into pleasant villages, and the melodramatic tragedy that the public loved would be gone. Empty those barracks-like orphanages and place the children with simple, kindly, but crudely primitive foster-parents, and the satisfaction that both an individual and a nation derive from playing God disappears. We would lose the fiction that these children were going to modernise the Near East and the sob-stories that arouse emotions and raise money.<sup>35</sup>

Acheson was acutely aware that people would be more inclined to donate money for tiny tuberculosis victims on the verge of death. As he put it, “They might even give enough to build a new hospital. But if that same audience were asked to give a fraction of that amount to prevent children from ever contracting tuberculosis, the appeal would fall on deaf ears, because the appeal lacked the same emotional component.”<sup>36</sup>

In 1919-1920, before talking of rehabilitation, the NER’s priority was to save orphans and to provide them with food. The NER had a similar approach to the ARC’s which consisted of the use of “modern” and scientific methods. In fact, the NER followed a strict caloric diet or daily menu of three full meals per day, which was prepared under the supervision of the director of the orphanage of the district, an American field worker (no further information on these people is available). This diet was balanced in accordance to the principles in *Medical Bulletin no.2*, dated November 30, 1919, and prepared by the Medical Relief, Third Section, of the NER.



The NER opened cocoa kitchens for children in the various districts. The ARA and Save the Children Fund adopted this method in many other European countries, including Russia during the 1920s famine. The NER also opened soup kitchens for children whose parents belonged to the native poor of various districts, or to the refugee class. As for the cocoa kitchens, the report does not indicate whether this solution was *ad hoc*, why it was adopted, and what plans had been discarded. On February 29, 1920, the NER was operating a total of forty-seven soup kitchens in which 46,707 children were being fed. In certain localities, such as Alexandropol or Erivan, where large numbers of refugees were concentrated in camps or barracks, tea or cocoa and bread were issued in the morning and evening in addition to the noon meal described. In this case, however, certain work, such as road repair, building construction, etc. was required of the refugees. This was not an exceptional requirement, and it was because the concept of self-help shared by all Western humanitarian organizations which believed that idle and apathetic refugees could become socially dangerous people.

In connection with the NER public dispensary the NER opened milk stations for nursing mothers, newly born children and pregnant women. The applicant in each case was subjected to an examination by the dispensary doctor, who prescribed the formula for milk to be issued. Children up to the age of three years were received in these stations. The principal recipient of this relief was the mother, not the child. The NER principles were similar to those enforced by the ARC and the ARA in many European countries. Once again, the document does not indicate if these ideas had been previously enforced in a domestic context in America or if they had been previously enforced by missionary institutions in the Near East before the war.

The NER hospitals were conducted for children, destitute inhabitants, and refugees. In the larger districts, such as Erivan, Kars, and Alexandropol, the children's hospitals were

operated separately from those of adults. In other districts, certain wards were reserved in the children's hospitals for adults. The document does not specify how local populations perceived this division. In all of the NER orphanages there were small infirmaries, which formed a part of the orphanage itself and received mild cases for a short period of time. Medical relief was extended to the child, as well as the adult population at large, through the NER free dispensaries or clinics where patients were fed and clothed. The daily average of these cases was over 5,000.

Orphanages	82	20,824 Children cared for Daily
Soup Kitchens and Cocoa Kitchens	47	46,707
Milk Stations		
Orphanage Hospitals	7	400
Orphanage Infirmaries	23	4,000
Public Dispensaries	80	2,000
	44	1,000

The second part of the report deals specifically with the distribution of the CF supplies and shows how important accountability was for the donor and the organization in charge of the operation. This donation ensured the expansion of the above-mentioned activities to the "maximum degree." The distribution plan after the CF donation concerned over 70,000 children, including those who were not in orphanages. It began when the ship *Chincha* arrived at Batoum at the end of February 1920. The unloading operations were secured by the NER and were completed on March 2, 1920.

The third part of the report focused on the expansion of the child-feeding program. By the spring of 1920, the plotted curve of the orphanage curve showed that the peak had been reached. Many parents removed their children from the orphanages, and all destitute children had been received into them. In the district of Alexandropol, Kars, and Erivan, very few children, if any, were now seen on the streets. There was evidence in Tiflis that some parents used children to beg for money-making purposes. An effort to take these children into the orphanages was met with violent opposition on the part of the parents, but the general

condition of the child population throughout the districts was a satisfactory indication of the work the NER had carried out during the winter months. The report does not say how the NER relief workers attempted to persuade the parents not to send their children out to beg. The use of the term “violent opposition” signals that relief workers must have encountered various difficulties, which are not described in the report. Of course, the report which was intended for donors, emphasized success stories, such as a story in which local populations, or the parents of the children lack agency. No mention is made about the visits of parents to orphanages, and it is not explained why children with living parents were sent to orphanages and how often parents could visit them. The report also had a rather unclear explanation of why Armenian children were prioritized.

The work of child feeding has received considerable exploitation in the Republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan as a result of the Commonwealth supplies. It was impossible heretofore to feed even to a limited extent the children of nationalities other than Armenian in those countries, as the only stores at the disposal of the NER were those purchased and destined for Armenia or for the Armenians. The work is now being carried out on a comparatively large scale in those two countries.

The author of the report implies that Armenian children were given priority over all other children. The report does not say how many non-Armenian children needed to be fed nor does it expand on the conditions of non-Armenian children. The term “exploitation” might refer to criticism by the Georgian and Azerbaijan authorities with respect to child-feeding programs, although this is mere speculation on our part.

The final chapter of the report was devoted to the “full value” of the donation by the CF. The author claimed that by August 1, 1920 the physical development of the children was steadily ameliorating. According to the report, the important effect of the feeding from a medical standpoint was already evident. The number of children in the hospital had already declined and was expected to decrease further. The report ended by stressing:

The child feeding work has added immeasurably to the prestige of the United States of America with the people of the Caucasus. It is planting the seed of certain American ideals and standards in the Near East which may later germinate into healthy growth with general benefit to the country at large. The appreciation of these people is almost ostentatious, even at the present time, but the real gratitude for this donation can only become fully expressed at that later date when the present child generation will form the manhood and womanhood of these newly established republics.<sup>37</sup>

The general report was followed by a medical report compiled by the NER's Caucasus Branch. The report expands on sanitation and preventive measures. Once again, experience gained by the Caucasus branch would be relevant as far as the preventive health programs and health education programs of the NER and NEF were concerned.

In a report, McAfee also wrote about the possibility of exporting some of the practices and expertises that were being acquired.<sup>38</sup> For instance, many doctors became specialists.

McAfee wrote the following regarding a group of girls in the Caucasus:

They had had four or five years of training. We graduated these girls into hospitals that were often military hospitals. One item was missing which was a great phase of American development. This field which we had neglected was the great field of the visiting nurse. How to get this idea over was a problem; this idea of preventing disease instead of curing it. We took two or three of our best girls into a clinic in one village. Doctors visited periodically. We put two or three other girls in another clinic. We told them they were serving the human race in one of its most noble capacities—that of preventing disease. We had these girls come into the hospitals and tell the others what was being done. The whole psychology of school changed because we had turned the spotlight on an even greater field of service.<sup>39</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The position of the NER with respect to so many other organizations active in the aftermath of the First World War was that it purported Christian values through its humanitarian workers, the majority of whom were missionaries. These humanitarians shared an American version of the older European "*mission civilisatrice*" with other American secular relief workers. As was the case with many other "modern" Western humanitarian organizations, the NER underpinned its professional management, its efficiency, and scientific methods in carrying out relief operations. Despite its faith-based origins, the NER

shared a sense of superiority to secular organizations, and at the same time bridged traditional Christian values and the tools of modern humanitarianism. The NER also sought to ensure self-reliance in the refugees and other individuals to whom its relief was granted.

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Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Erwin Levold, Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>1</sup>Shaloma Gauthier, Ph.D. student and Research Assistant; Francesca Piana, Ph.D. student and Research Assistant; and Davide Rodogno, Associate Professor, are currently conducting a research project funded by the Swiss National Fund for Scientific Research tentatively entitled: *From Relief to Rehabilitation: The History of International Organizations' Humanitarian Programmes on Behalf of Civilian Populations in the Aftermath of the First World War*.

<sup>2</sup> Sarah Miglio's report, p. 3 and RAC, NER, Box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chapter V, pp. 11-12. The NER, as a corporate body, consistently emphasized the emergency character of its work, and with one exception, its Board of Trustees carefully avoided commitments that involved continuing responsibility. It was chartered by Congress for the purpose of receiving what the public chose to give. Therefore when there was a forty-seven percent reduction in receipts, as was the case in 1924 and 1925, it obeyed the instructions of its constituency and reduced its expenditure by about one-half.

<sup>3</sup> This archival report will not trace the history of various American relief committees who were active on behalf of the Armenians during the First World War. Barton's hagiographic account of the NER provides some details on the period between 1914-1919, as well Peter Balakian's, *The Burning Tigris: The American Genocide and America's Response*. New York: Harper Collins, 2003; Jay Winter, editor, *American and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2003; and Charles Laderman's ongoing doctoral thesis, "The Hopeful Processes of Civilization': Woodrow Wilson and an American Mandate for Armenia."

<sup>4</sup> As of 1913.

<sup>5</sup> It would not be correct to claim that European humanitarian organizations kept a greater distance from national governments than American organizations. For instance, British organizations such as the British Red Cross, who were close to the British government and various members of the British political elite, were on the boards of several humanitarian organizations. The same can also be said as far as the International Red Cross Committee relations' with the government of Switzerland is concerned.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Watenpugh, "The League of Nations' Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920-1927." *The American Historical Review* 115: 5 (December 2010), pp. 1291-1314.

<sup>7</sup> Balakian *op.cit*, Ronald Grigor Suny, *Looking Toward Ararat: Armenia in Modern History* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993; and more recently Ann-Marie Wilson's doctoral thesis. See Wilson's article "In the Name of God, Civilization, and Humanity: The United States and the Armenian Massacres of the 1890s." *Le Mouvement Social* 227 (April-June 2009), pp. 27-44.

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<sup>8</sup> Evidence of this difficulty is to be found in the ICRC archives.

<sup>9</sup> Miglio, in her footnote number 12, page 19.

<sup>10</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, typewritten manuscript tentatively entitled *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, 1940, chapter V, page 15 (hereafter V-15).

<sup>11</sup> This is an argument the research project intends to develop further. For the time being this is little more than a guess based on a preliminary reading of the ABCFM papers on various missions in Turkey during the 1920s.

<sup>12</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, typewritten manuscript tentatively entitled *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, p. I-9 and p. I-10 (introduction); Acheson defines himself a “professional humanitarian”, at p. II-3.

<sup>13</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, McAfee, Notes on Salonika, 1937.

<sup>14</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, McAfee, Notes on Salonika, 1937. A similar project was set up in Palestine for Arabs. The British director of education for Palestine accepted paying the salary of fifteen school teachers, presumably American, and the NER put them in an agricultural school for one year. “They were put out in charge of fifteen schools and we supervised them and in five years we had trained seventy-five teachers. The whole village would get out and clean things up. A law was passed requiring all normal schools teachers to take this course before graduation. The fact that the Jews were there and growing better crops and the war had shown people better conditions. There was a new receptivity in Palestine. We built on the land that had been harrowed by these experiences. What makes the Near East hopeful is that it has all been harrowed and plowed anew by the war.”

<sup>15</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chapter V, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chapter V.

<sup>17</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chapter V, p. 20-23.

<sup>18</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chapter VI, p. 8. “Of the 30,000 children moved out of Turkey, 18,000 were taken to Greece. In round numbers, these were half Armenian and half Greeks. The remaining 12,000—mostly Armenians—were added to those already concentrated in Syria. In September 1923 when the child migration was still in progress, the NER listed its child dependents in all areas, that is, including southern Russia and Persia, and found that it had 40,747 Armenian children in its orphanages. In addition there were 7,768 Greek children, 6,897 Bedouin, Tartar, Russian, Jewish, and Turkish, and 850 Syrian children, making a grand total of 56,262 depending on America for food, clothing, and education. Statistics for May 1922 show 5,558 additional children, which graphically illustrates the coming and going that went on continually for years, a turnover caused by the seasons, the arrival of new groups, or the discharge of others to relatives or to self-support. After the child migration ended, over 13,000 children remained in the Syria-Palestine area and they were scattered from Aleppo to Jerusalem. Most of them were taken to the larger cities, like Damascus and Beirut, although the small places, such as Sidon and Nazareth, also had their quotas. They lived in buildings purchased or rented and then renovated and equipped at America’s expense. Only two per cent of the children were over sixteen years of age, and these were mostly retained in the orphanages as helpers. Nearly four per cent were under four years of age, and over eighty per cent were fourteen years of age or under.”

<sup>19</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chapter VI, p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, B. Acheson manuscript, chapter VI, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> RAC, NER, Box 133, Report by Dr. George Stewart. Vickery to Dodge, October 21, 1925. In a letter to Cleveland Dodge, Charles V. Vickery, the general secretary of the NER explains that this report was one of several documents that would be presented to members of the survey committee previous to the meeting of the Committee scheduled on November, 18, 1925. The title is *Report to Survey Committee of the Near East Relief*, hereafter Stewart Report.

<sup>22</sup> RAC, NER, Box 133, Barton to Dodge, April 8, 1925. “We estimate that within about five years from now most of the children will be discharged from our orphanages either through becoming old enough to leave or by being placed in the care of some family. In order to take plenty of time in making decisions, as well as to show all possible consideration to our large staff of workers, we are anxious at this time to adopt a program for the future of the work.” A Survey Committee was set up and included: Paul Monroe (Columbia University), Stephen P. Duggan, Dr. James Vance, Bishop James Cannon, Dr. John Mott, Dr. R.R. Reeder, Dr. John Finley, Dr. Wickliffe Rose, Cleveland

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Dodge, Otis Caldwell, and Reverend George Stewart. Initially B. Acheson was in charge of the actual making of the survey.

<sup>23</sup> RAC, NER, Box 133, Stewart Report.

<sup>24</sup> RAC, Box 133, Stewart Report.

<sup>25</sup> Some future historian of the NER, Stewart noted, would record the distinguished conduct of many of the NER personnel, many of whom were the sole protectors in charge of units of destitute and homeless children ranging from a few hundred to six thousand. It is true that after 1922 many humanitarian organizations discontinued their operations either for lack of money or because they were not as equipped to carry out educational and/or vocational programs as the NER. However, the NER was not alone nor were its programs unique. The Quakers in Syria, the League of Nations through the Refugee Settlement Commission in Greece, and the ILO on behalf of the Armenians carried out humanitarian work alongside the NER. Stewart's report fails to critically examine the support and role played by missionaries as relief workers and the asset that missionaries represented for the NER.

<sup>26</sup> RAC, Box 133, Stewart Report.

<sup>27</sup> RAC, Box 133, Stewart Report.

<sup>28</sup> RAC, Box 133, Stewart Report.

<sup>29</sup> The ARA-ECF was an "independent organization, responsible not directly to the American government but to its Chairman, Directors, Members and American contributors." See London office to New York, November 19, 1919, Walter Lyman Brown, Director for Europe to Rickard of the ARAECF in New York, ARA European Operations, Box 7, Folder 1, Hoover Institute Archives, Stanford University.

<sup>30</sup> RAC, Commonwealth Fund (CF), Series 18: Grants; Box 12, Folder 119, docket number 158, presented to the directors, November 13, 1919. The documents of this box describe in detail how the CF donation was distributed.

<sup>31</sup> The final report on the operation was written by Lieutenant Colonel Lonegran, Assistant Chief of Staff, prepared under the direction of Haskell. The documents do not clarify if Lonegran was also a NER relief worker. A list of the personnel of the NER-Caucasus branch dated October 29, 1919 is to be found in RAC, NER, Box 133.

<sup>32</sup> RAC, CF, Series 18: Grants, Box 12; Folder 119, docket number 158, presented to the directors at a meeting on June 26, 1920, entitled: American Relief Administration. European Children's Fund. Haskell's report is to be found in the RAC, CF, Series 18: Grants, Box 12; Folder 121.

<sup>33</sup> RAC, CF, Series 18: Grants, Box 12; Folder 121.

<sup>34</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, typewritten manuscript tentatively entitled, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, pp. III-25 and 26.

<sup>35</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, typewritten manuscript tentatively entitled, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, p. III-26.

<sup>36</sup> RAC, NER, Box 132, typewritten manuscript tentatively entitled, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks*, p. III-26.

<sup>37</sup> RAC, CF, Series 18: Grants, Box 12, Folder 121.

<sup>38</sup> RAC, NEF, Box 132, McAfee Material, "On Fighting Disease," typewritten, undated.

<sup>39</sup> RAC, NEF, Box 132, McAfee Material, "On Fighting Disease," typewritten, undated.