

# 1945 March 26-April 1

## From Rags to Victory

### Girl Scout Troops To Make Collection Of Rags In City

"Any Rags Today" is the song of the day all over the United States as Girl Scout troops make ready to collect rags for the armed forces and war production plants, both suffering from shortages.

La Crosse housewives are busy cleaning house, and that fits into the picture of the two national collections which are to be made during the first two weeks of April. Clothing is sought for destitute millions in Europe. The army, navy, marine corps, coast guards, Panama Canal, maritime commission and War Shipping administration are clamoring for more and more rags.

The two collections asked for by the government fit together well. La Crosse citizens are asked to remember that the Girl Scouts, who will be calling at the homes, are collecting rags only. Because these cannot be placed on the curb or outside, because of possibility of rain, housewives are asked to cooperate with the Girl Scouts by getting their discarded rags bundled and ready as soon as possible.

Girl Scouts can only work daylight hours after school and on Saturdays. As the rags must be at central depots and ready to be picked up on April 14, the girls will not have time to make repeat calls. There are only 431

Scouts to call at the 10,000 and more homes in the city.

Each troop has been assigned a definite section of the city and will have a central depository for rags. Some of the calls must necessarily be made early next week, if the troops are to make the rounds in the time allotted.

Mrs. R. J. Kraft has supervision of the Girl Scouts, who are cooperating with the Y's Men's club, who will pick up the rags April 14. Further information may be had by calling Mrs. Kraft or the Girl Scout office.

*La Crosse Tribune, 1945 March 27, page 4*

In 1953, Tony Bennett recorded a popular song, written by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross, entitled "Rags to Riches." It begins: "I know I'd go from rags to riches, if you would only say you care."<sup>1</sup>

In April 1945, residents of La Crosse could show they cared about the war effort by the simple action of donating cloth rags. The armed forces and war production plants did not have enough rags for wiping, cleaning, and polishing equipment and machinery.<sup>2</sup>

Attorney Charles B. Varco was the chairman of the rag collection drive, and Mrs. R. J. Kraft supervised the Girl Scouts who picked up the rags. They took rags made of any fabric and of any size. Smaller rags were used by the paper industry. The only caution was to bundle oily and greasy rags separately from the rest and to place all bundles under cover so they would not be rained on before they were picked up. Collection started on April 2, 1945.<sup>3</sup>

This effort was planned somewhat like a military operation. Various Girl Scout troops were assigned specific sections of the city. All the collected rags were brought to central locations.<sup>4</sup> This was called "the biggest job the Girl Scouts have tackled." The YMCA Men's Club also assisted.<sup>5</sup>

They even collected materials that one would not think of as a rag. These included old mattresses, "felt base floor coverings, roofing, mattress cotton and upholstery pads, burlap bags, hats and any type of straight wool felt, manila rope and twine, cotton rope and string, besides all clothing materials." The rope and twine could be used to make insulation for electrical wires, "parachute flare papers, gasket papers for airplanes and tanks, identification tags," as well as many other items.<sup>6</sup> Rags could be used to make blankets and bandages.<sup>7</sup>

Because there was a clothing drive going on at the same time, Mrs. Kraft emphasized that the Girl Scouts were not involved in that collection; they were only picking up rags.<sup>8</sup>



—Tribune Photo  
Troop No. 15, Like All Girl Scout Units in the City, has worked hard to make a success of the challenge they accepted to collect rags for salvage and wiping purposes for the government and military forces. Any last minute calls for heavy bundles will be received at the Girl Scout office up to noon Saturday. Arrangements will be made to pick them up. Left to right, the Scouts are Dolores Capicotto, Jeanette Funke, Alice Engelhard, Annah Lu Simonson and Janet Arnet. The troop leader, Mrs. Milo Ramlet, reports 16 members in the troop, which was organized last October. The troop's rag collection up to Thursday noon averaged more than 60 pounds per girl.

*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 April 13, page 11

Girl Scouts collected donated rags after school and on Saturdays until the middle of April 1945. The YMCA Men's Club had four trucks to take the donations to be weighed on the city scales. Then the rag donations were taken to salvage dealers who loaded them on railroad cars for shipment.<sup>9</sup> More than 11 tons of rags were collected in the city, even before the last remaining collection depot was weighed.<sup>10</sup>

West Salem Girl Scouts conducted a rag collection drive the first Saturday in May 1945.<sup>11</sup>

The Girl Scouts and the YMCA Men's Club may not have become rich from salvaging rags, but they did show that they cared.

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### Sources & Notes:

<sup>1</sup> "Rags To Riches" by Tony Bennett, *Genius.com*, accessed 2020 March 27, <https://genius.com/Tony-bennett-rags-to-riches-lyrics>.

<sup>2</sup> "Girl Scout Troops To Make Collection Of Rags In City," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 March 27, page 4.

<sup>3</sup> "Rag Campaign Planned Here," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 March 28, page 2.

<sup>4</sup> "Rag Collecting Starts Monday," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 March 30, page 4.

<sup>5</sup> "Girl Scouts Will Start Rag Collection In City On Monday," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 1, page 12.

<sup>6</sup> *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 April 1.

<sup>7</sup> "Salvage-Recycle," *The World War II Home Front In Summerside Prince Edward Island*, accessed 2020 March 27, <http://www.wyatteritage.com/homefront/salvage.asp.html>.

<sup>8</sup> "Girl Scouts Collect Rags," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 12, page 17.

<sup>9</sup> "Collect Nine Tons of Rags," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 16, page 8.

<sup>10</sup> "Rags Total 11 Tons," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 April 23, page 4.

<sup>11</sup> "Town Topics," *The Nonpareil Journal*, West Salem, Wisconsin, 1945 May 3, page 1.